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# CONTAGION

Si son de otro linage.

Cover illustration Goya, *Disasters of War* from *The Complete Etchings of Goya*, Crown Publishers, New York, 1962

# CONTAGION

IN MEMORIAM
ROEL KAPTEIN
1919-1996

$DO$

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## Editor's Note

*This volume of Contagion is the first under its new editor. Thanks, however, to the excellent and timely work of our advisory board and other referees, I can safely state that credit for the merits and interests of its contents are not entirely my own.*

*Lasting credit for the success of the journal remains with Professor Judith Arias of the Department of Foreign Languages at East Carolina University. Her unstinting resourcefulness and acumen brought the first three volumes into existence, and readers, contributors, and advisory board members remain in her debt.*

*Some of the essays in this volume are drawn from the wealth of presentations offered at the 6th annual meeting of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R) at Stanford University in June 1996, whose topic was "Ethic Violence in International Perspective." Others were submitted by interested scholars from around the world whose work bears on René Girard's mimetic model of human behavior and cultural organization. The journal remains open to submissions from authors in all academic disciplines and fields of professional activity who recognize in the fact that human desire is mimetic—that it imitates other desires and frequently leads to conflict in rivalry for mutually designated objects—a fruitful basis for exploring human interaction.*

*The title page of the journal bears a dedication to the memory of Roel Kaptein, who was a founding member of COV&R and whose life richly exemplified its aspirations. Because he was a prodigious scholar, a tireless lecturer, a keen therapist, and a dynamic participant in conflict resolution, notably in Northern Ireland, Roel's work was a model in its own right for both the academic and pragmatic endeavors of COV&R members. As his book* On the Way of Freedom *(Columba Press, 1993) eloquently testifies, he was a man of unshakable religious faith and of equally firm conviction about the explanatory power of the mimetic hypothesis, its capacity to open new horizons for freedom in human relations. The clarity, simplicity, and inveterate good cheer that Roel brought to every encounter, personal and professional, spread enduring rays of hope for genuine human understanding that the pages of this journal can only wish to increase.*

*The editors wish to express sincere thanks to the Mellon Humanities Fund of the College of Arts and Sciences of Loyola University Chicago for its continued financial support for the journal and Loyola's Center for Instructional Design for its generous assistance. Special thanks are due to Patricia Clemente, Administrative Secretary of the Department of Modern*

*Languages and Literatures at Loyola, whose formidable energy and multiple skills have shepherded every stage of the journal's production.*

# MASCULINITY AS VIRILITY
# IN TAHAR BEN JELLOUN'S WORK

Lahoucine Ouzgane
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> To be a woman is a natural infirmity and every woman
> gets used to it. To be a man is an illusion, an act of
> violence that requires no justification.
>
> (Ben Jelloun, *The Sand Child*, 70)

In the last ten to fifteen years, scholarly attention to gender issues in the Middle East and North Africa has been focused almost exclusively, sometimes obsessively,[1] on a quest to understand femininity: what it is and how it is made and regulated—with Muslim women's oppression, the everlasting question of the veil, and the practice of female genital mutilation receiving most of the scrutiny.[2] But while this attention—by female and male scholars—to the Muslim woman is indeed a salutary one,[3] masculinity in Islamic cultures has so far remained an

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[1] An international conference on Contemporary Issues in Islamic Studies (to be held in Virginia in November 1996) is soliciting papers in these categories: 1) Islamic Law: Theory and Practice; 2) Fundamentalism; 3) Women in Islam.

[2] As a parody of this preoccupation, Fedwa Malti-Douglas writes: "The Arab woman is a most fascinating creature. Is she veiled? Is she not veiled? Is she oppressed? Is she not oppressed? Were her rights greater before Islam? Are her rights greater after Islam? Does she have a voice? Does she not have a voice?" (3)

[3] Some of the most significant literature on this subject includes Leila Ahmed's *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992), a study of the development of Islamic discourses on women and gender from the ancient world to the present; Mamia Lazreg's *The Eloquence of Silence* (1994), a detailed analysis of the gender relations in Algeria from the precolonial era to the present; *The Veil and the Male Elite* (more commonly known in French as *Le Harem politique*, 1987) by

unrecognized and an unacknowledged category that secures its power by refusing to identify itself. There are as yet no studies that make Muslim *men* visible as gendered subjects and that show that masculinity (like femininity) has a history and clear defining characteristics that are incomprehensible apart from the totality of gender relations in Islamic cultures.

In this essay, I wish to consider masculinity as it is depicted in some of Tahar Ben Jelloun's major fiction. With more than twenty novels, two plays, and three poetry collections produced in the last thirty years, Ben Jelloun is undoubtedly the most prolific contemporary francophone North African writer. Though he had earned several important literary awards before, his rise to literary and public prominence began when he became the first African Arab writer to be awarded Le Prix Goncourt, France's most prestigious literary prize, for his novel *La nuit sacrée* published in 1987. Ever since, some of his works have been translated into fifteen languages (Daoud 62) and *The Sacred Night* has recently been made into a film. Some critics have even begun to refer to Ben Jelloun as a future Nobel Prize candidate (Ndiaye 48).

I will argue that in a world where the social has taken precedence over the religious, in a world where transcendence has given way to what René Girard describes as "mimetic rivalry,"[4] Ben Jelloun's characters are unable to know love as an "experience of transcendence" (Gans). As a consequence they  inevitably reduce masculinity to virility, a fragile attribute sustained only through repeated acts of violence. It is indeed possible to read masculinity in such a setting as a set of distinctive practices which emerge from men's positioning within a variety of social structures. In short, masculinity in Ben Jelloun's fiction is perhaps best

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Fatima Mernissi, an indictment of the way in which numerous Hadiths (or sayings by the prophet) have been manipulated by a male elite to maintain male privileges; Fatna Sabbah's *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious* (1984), a critique of the seemingly contradictory messages which the Islamic legal and erotic discourses imprint on the female body; and Fedwa Malti-Douglas' *Woman's Body, Woman's Word* (1991), a mapping out of the relationship of woman's voice in Arabo-Islamic discourse to sexuality and the body.

[4] Central to Girard's thought is the theory of "mimetic desire" elaborated in his first book *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (1961) and articulated throughout his other works. Girard maintains that desire is essentially mimetic, so that "two desires converging on the same object are bound to clash. Thus, mimesis coupled with desire leads automatically to conflict" (*Violence* 146).

understood as a *relational* construct shaped only by men's social power.


### The virile and the sterile man

In story after story, Ben Jelloun dramatizes the way in which virility emerges as the essence of Arab masculinity, collapsing the sex/gender distinctions so prevalent in Western discourses. In the story "Un fait divers et d'amour" from *Le premier amour est toujours le dernier* (1995), a happily-married man with three children, Slimane, a taxi-driver, is accused of fathering the child of one of his passengers, but "The doctors were categorical: Slimane could not be the father of that child. He was sterile. He had always been sterile" (58; my translation). His illusion of masculinity shattered, Slimane turns to alcohol and to spending the night in his taxi.[5] But though nobody in the story would believe her, I think there is some logic to the wife's thinking that she had never cheated on her husband and that her actions had been motivated by "love" for him, by her determination to make him happy in the eyes of his friends. In fact, at the beginning of the story, Slimane himself was full of praise for his "good" and "wonderful" wife, who had given him three beautiful children—a girl and two boys—and a great deal of happiness (56-57; my paraphrase). The wife's collusion, her willingness to let her husband maintain the illusion, suggests the only kind of (negative) agency available in such a rigid male structure.

"La vipère bleue" casts virility as a highly sought-after commodity, an ultimate object of desire among the men, but also as a magical power that cannot be contained.[6] Unable to bear her husband's unfaithfulness any longer, Fatima seeks advice from a well-known fortune-teller, only to be told: "Your husband ... cheats on you and will always cheat on you. He cannot help it.... He is endowed with great power. He gives women what other men cannot. It's as if he was born to satisfy all those women whom chance had offered to impotent men. His role is to repair the damages" (51; my translation). The fortune-teller's words point to a fetishization,

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[5] Slimane's life until that point—his going through and enhancing the norms of masculinity around him—and even his reaction to the incident recall Judith Butler's notion of performativity: "a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject" (95).

[6] Mark J. Justad notes that "The phallus has been, and continues to be, both revered and feared in patriarchal cultures" (364).

a fixation on virility that precludes a consideration of such feelings as vulnerability, connection, or empathy. Ali himself, the hypervirile husband, "who liked to drink, drive fast cars and steal other men's wives" (50), eventually falls victim to his over-identification with his penis.

*The Sacred Night,*[7] a sequel to *The Sand Child,* continues the simple but strange tale of a Muslim father in the city of Marrakesh who, feeling publicly humiliated, especially in his brothers' eyes, for having produced only seven daughters, decides to raise his next child (who turns out to be yet another girl) as a boy, then as a man. Ben Jelloun's story opens with Hajji[8] Ahmed Suleyman convinced that some heavy curse weighs on his life because, in a house "occupied" by ten women,[9] he lives "as if he had no progeny," thinking of himself "as a sterile husband or a bachelor" (9). The Hajji has thoroughly internalized his culture's rigid ways in which men *distinguish* themselves and are distinguished from other men: those who have not fathered sons are often deemed less than "real" men; they are seen as having failed to control their wives. Contrary to what Malek Chebel claims—"that the reputation of a Muslim man depends on the number of his children" (648)—Hajji Suleyman knows only too well that a "*son* was the only thing that could give [him] joy and life" (20). His "crazy hope" becomes such an "obsession" (20) that he is determined to "challeng[e] divine will" (20).[10] And when he happens to go to the mosque, instead of the ritual Friday prayers, "[he] would work out complicated plans to get out of this miserable situation" (19). As he himself admits to Zahra just before his death, "It was exciting to have evil thoughts in a holy place, a place of virtue and peace" (19). The Hajji's

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[7] The title is in reference to the twenty-seventh night of the month of Ramadan, considered the holiest night in the Muslim calendar, and also known as the "Night of Destiny." Its significance for Ben Jelloun functions on at least two levels: it captures the momentous nature of the father's decision to alter his daughter's destiny, and, some twenty years later, Zahra's father actually dies on such a night—a few hours after he has reversed his earlier decision: Zahra is now free to live, as a woman, for the rest of her life.

[8] "Hajji" is a title automatically acquired by any Muslim male ("Hajja" for a female) who has undertaken the pilgrimage to Mecca, thus fulfilling Islam's fifth commandment. In addition to its religious significance, the term carries a great deal of social capital.

[9] Fatna A. Sabbah points out that in Islamic "religious literature demographic disequilibrium in favor of the weaker sex—that is, a space taken over by women—is often tied to the images of hell and the end of the world" (108).

[10] In North African literature, the father is often depicted as a tyrant to his family and a usurper of Allah's role on earth. See especially Rachid Boudjedra's *La Répudiation* (1969), Mourad Bourboune's *Le Muezzin* (1968), and Driss Chraibi's *Le Passé simple* (1954).

dark desires and his perversion of the religious rituals speak his failure to sustain the public image of a powerful, virile man that his family and neighbors expect of him.

The relations between the Hajji and his brothers have in fact never been good—jealousy and rivalry nourishing a petty, silent war, kept alive by their respective wives whenever they meet in the hammam. Before Zahra/Ahmed's birth, the Hajji could no longer bear the "polite words," the "hypocrisy," and the mockery of his two brothers, who arrive at the house at each birth "with a caftan and earrings, smiling contemptuously" (9). As if to underscore the fact that his brothers' feelings find their legitimacy in the culture at large, the Hajji tells Zahra: "I have to admit that in the mosque, I began to have the same ideas, and in their [his brothers'] place I would probably have had the same thoughts, the same desires and jealousies" (19-20).[11] Even if the characters' social and family positions change, the structures sustaining the rivalries remain firmly in place because the men are unable or unwilling to relinquish their competitive desires.

The brother as a sexual rival is a powerful motif in Arabic and Islamic literature. While most readers of the tenth-century stories of *The Arabian Nights* will remember Shahrazad's world of magic woven into the fabric of everyday life, few will recall the originary scene, so to speak, the scene that goes to prove that sexual rivalry between the two kings constitutes the foundation of this collection of stories that have enthralled both western and eastern imaginations. When King Shahzaman, the younger brother, happens upon the unfaithfulness of his brother's wife, we are shocked by his reaction: "His face regained color and became ruddy, and his body gained weight, as his blood circulated and he regained his energy; he was himself again, or *even better*" (6; emphasis added). However, a few days before the incident, the younger brother had lost all will to live because his own wife had been unfaithful to him too, and "In his depression, he ate less and less, grew pale, and his health deteriorated. He neglected everything, wasted away, and looked ill" (4). To take a more recent example: it is possible to argue that in Nawal El Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile* (1974), the rivalry between the Mayor of Kafr El Teen and his

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[11] In his autobiographical work, *La Soudure fraternelle*, a series of reflections on his male friendships from the days of the Quranic school to the present, Ben Jelloun seems to accept the notion that one's brother can never be one's friend: "brother" and "friend" are separate categories (125).

brother, the government minister, drives the novel's entire plot. The first time we meet the Mayor, he is surrounded by his stooges: the Chief of the Village Guard, the Sheikh of the mosque, and the village barber—each trying to outdo the other in winning the Mayor's favour. But their efforts are in vain because he seems lost in his thoughts:

> All day he had kept wondering why the moment he had seen his brother's picture in the newspaper a feeling of inadequacy and depression had come over him. He knew this feeling well. It was always accompanied by a bitterness of the mouth, a dryness of the throat which turned into a burning sensation as it moved down to his chest, followed by an obscure and yet sharp pain which radiated outwards from his stomach. (11)

While the physical symptoms between the King and the Mayor are remarkably similar (they are both sick and depressed), to re-assert their potency, they and King Shahrayar will embark on exactly the same course of action—female sacrifice: the two kings will start their legendary rapes of virgins until Shahrazad comes onto the stage, and the Mayor will seduce twelve-year old girls until Zakeya, one of the mothers in the village, fells him with a hoe.

In *The Sacred Night*, the father's decision to alter the course of Zahra's life, to bring her up as a male, can be read as another sacrifice[12]—a symbolic burial of the female that harks back to *Al-Jahilia*, the pre-Islamic period when female infants were actually buried alive to spare their families (particularly their fathers) the risk of shame and humiliation. The Hajji's action constitutes a sin the significance of which can be understood only in a social milieu that defines masculinity as a series of performances for the (invisible) men who loom in one's imagination like strict judges of manhood. So when the midwife cries out, "It's a man, a man, a man....," the Hajji arrives "like a prince"[13] and on his

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[12] My use of the term "sacrifice" is different from the way Girard deploys it. For Girard, violence is "the heart and soul" of the sacred, and all forms of the sacred are founded on a scapegoating mechanism by which a group unites its members against a single victim. For me, female sacrifice is merely a continuation of violence in a culture that has established virility as its norm. No peace or order flows from such a sacrifice. Because Zahra is the central character, we are likely to overlook another major sacrifice in the novel: the father has no love or affection to show his seven daughters, his "unwanted offspring" (19).

[13] In *Sacred Performances: Islam, Sexuality, and Sacrifice*, M. E. Combs-Schilling points out that in Morocco, male potency is ritually associated with the social power of the King. See

face and shoulders can be seen "all the virility of the world! At fifty, he felt as lighthearted as a young man" (17).

But the Hajji is not the only person involved in this defiance of divine will and in a perversion of family bonds. For the other characters too, religion, having been stripped of its communal significance, has nothing to offer, or, at best, it is only a means for some immediate gain. Prayers become revenge tools or bargaining chips with God. Zahra's mother, who has submitted to her husband all her life, breaks her silence only once in the entire novel, imploring Zahra to pray with her and to ask that God grant her a chance for revenge against her husband. Later in *The Sacred Night*, when Zahra, still disguised as Ahmed, is called upon to lead the Friday prayer at her father's funeral, she explains why she enjoys taking her own revenge on a group of men whose sense of spiritual salvation lies elsewhere:

> As I bent down low I couldn't help thinking of the animal desire my body, especially in that position, would have aroused in those men if they had only known that they were praying behind a woman....
> (32)

The different religious rituals, having lost their power to structure the community's desires and hopes, are reconstituted into a convenient cover for the characters' real motives. In some cases, God is even invoked as a partner in crime. One night, on her way out of the village, Zahra is followed by a Stranger: "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate," he begins to chant, "Praise be to God, who has decreed that man's greatest pleasure lies in woman's warm insides" (56). He then proceeds with raping her. Thus, acts of absolute violence are rendered legitimate through Faith, and to prove their virility, some men—even in real life—will stop at nothing. In March 1993, in Casablanca, a Moroccan senior police officer was sentenced to death for the rapes, in the space of thirteen years, of close to five hundred women, including twenty minors (Soudan). Serial rapist Hajji Hamid Tabet had installed a hidden camera to record his exploits: before the rapes, he would often pray and give thanks to Allah. So as to sustain his image of his own potency, the Hajji—a family man with two wives and five children—would often watch

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especially "Chapter 10: First Marriage" ( 188-205).

his previous performances before he went out on his street prowls one
more time. Real life is far more brutal than fiction.

### Masculinism and homosexuality as other

When the spiritual has been subjugated to social considerations, men,
in Ben Jelloun's work, find their gratification in humiliating each other, or
humiliating the foreigner, whose masculinity must be erased, making him
the object of their sexual gossip. In short, the foreigner is constructed first
and foremost as the homosexual to be despised—as we can see in the
following scene from *The Sand Child*:

> [F]rom time to time [the people] mentioned the spread of male
> prostitution in the city; they pointed their fingers at a European
> tourist flanked by two handsome boys. People here love sexual
> gossip. They spread it all the time. (112)

Sexual gossip regulates the different categories of men, and through it, the
foreign male (like the native women) emerges as a sexual battlefield.
Projecting homosexuality onto the Other is meant to strengthen one's virile
status in the eyes of one's friends, but as Daniel Vignal has remarked, "For
the majority of Africans, homophilia is exclusively a deviation introduced
by the colonialists or their descendants; by outsiders of all kinds.... It is
difficult for them to conceive that homophilia might be the act of a black
African" (74-75). Malek Chebel, for his part, has observed that "Passive
homosexuality being despised, it's rare to find an Arab who will claim that
identity" (315). In Naguib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley*, Sheikh Darwish, a
former teacher of English who acts as the novel's chorus, explains that
"[Homosexuality] is an old evil. In English they call it 'homosexuality' and
it is spelled h-o-m-o-s-e-x-u-a-l-i-t-y. But it is not love. True love is only
for the descendants of Muhammad" (104).

But perhaps nowhere in North African literature is the association of
homosexuality with the colonial experience better captured than in this
central scene from Ben Jelloun's *With Downcast Eyes*, the story of a
young Moroccan girl's confrontation in Paris with the twin challenges of
exile and immigration. Born under the weight of the prophecy that the
salvation of her Berber community depends on her alone, Fathma decides
to return to Morocco to fulfill her destiny. But as we find out by the end
of the novel, true salvation cannot be expected from a woman. In this
scene, Ahmed and Mohamed, two old men are comparing stories of their
most cherished memories, memories they will be given a chance to relive

once in heaven. Ahmed describes a "wonderful" moment in his youth when Mme Gloria, the wife of his French supervisor, could not resist his North African "hot blood."[14] But Mohamed has a more compelling story, a story in which the rhetoric of nationalist discourse and sexuality are inextricably intertwined, but in which virility finally achieves its transcendent status:

> My sublime reminiscence is a simple tale of water and dignity.... In this country you can own acres and acres, but if you don't have water to irrigate them, your land is worthless!... In those days, it was the caïd[15] who doled out the water. But Abbas—that was our caïd, a wily, unfeeling little man—worked for the French colonials.... We had a good and fertile soil.... [and] enjoyed the blessings of God and nature. Until the night that Abbas, to please and serve his foreign masters, sent a band of henchmen to divert the stream... toward the land of the colonialists. (143-44)

When he is confronted, Abbas dismisses the villagers—including the oldest man in the village, Mohamed's father—as a "bunch of idiots." But Mohamed, barely sixteen and calm and clear-thinking in the midst of the political turmoil, will not be intimidated—as he explains to his friend:

> I am a religious man and I have nothing against prayers, but as you know, it wasn't with prayers that we drove out the colonials.... Abbas didn't like women. I knew that he received boys at night. He would leave his terrace door open. I knocked. He said, "Is that Nordine or Kamal? Get your ass in here, you son of a whore, you're late, hurry!" I moved toward his bed in the darkness. He was naked, on his belly. I climbed on the bed and pounced on him full force, planting my knife deep in his nape. (145-46)

When the village is rid of the tyrant, the water returns to its natural course, and for half a century, no one knows who has killed Abbas: "You are the

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[14] Some contemporary Maghrebian critics construe the relationship of the francophone North African writers to the French language in sexual metaphors: Abdellah Bounfour, for instance: "Le rapport à la langue française est un 'rapport d'adultère'; le français est 'une prostituée torturante et frustrante'; elle est aussi la femme d'un autre qu'on razzie" (921). Images of virility (stealing another man's wife) and their concomitant sexism are too deeply entrenched to be easily relinquished.

[15] "leader" in Arabic, equivalent to "mayor."

first person to know my secret.... Now I am going to give you a present: here is the famous little knife of liberation" (146). Mohamed has managed to restore to the village not only its water but its symbolic virility as well. However, the part of his story that interests him most, the moment that he would like to relive in Paradise, takes place later:

> The only part I want to relive is the day when the spring was liberated and the stream returned to our land. The children splashed water on themselves, the women, in sparkling dresses, danced along the edge of the stream, the men slaughtered an ox and sang with the women. It was an unforgettable day of festivities. I wept for joy... In the evening I went down into the valley and, for the first time, I found myself between the legs of a beautiful prostitute. She taught me what to do and didn't ask for money. (146)

The story raises questions about what it means to assume the armor of heroic masculinity. In addition to the prodigies of courage and endurance that seem natural to this kind of hero, Mohamed is not hindered by fears, scruples, doubt, or ambivalence. His "actions" represent the pattern of a virtuous and desirable masculinity, an ideal self, of the kind other men struggle for. And Abbas becomes the recipient of all that is negative; he becomes pure Other: the tyrannical oppressor of his people, a threat to the heterosexual order of the land, a usurper, treating his own people, his own race, as if they were an inferior race—all qualities that necessitate and legitimate his murder.

In the specific context of the two men swapping stories, the exercise is clearly one of sexual rivalry: Ahmed offers a conventional story of sexual conquest, but Mohamed—armed with the (phallic) power of a "very sharp knife," the kind used "for cutting up a sheep" (145)—manages the conquest of two virgins in one day, as if to suggest that violence qualifies one for sex. In this manner, virility emerges as the act of penetrating other spaces, other bodies.

### Masculine self as fortress
Few episodes in Ben Jelloun's work capture the way in which his male characters understand their relationship to their own bodies better than the dramatic story of Antar (in *The Sand Child*), another story of a woman disguised as a man, as a ruthless warrior chieftain and an exemplary man of legendary courage:

Sometime he would turn up veiled; his troops thought that he wanted to surprise them, but in fact he was offering his nights to a young man of rough beauty, a sort of wandering bandit... One night they fought, because, as they made love, she gained the upper position after forcing him to lie on his belly, and simulated sodomy. Though the man yelled with rage, she pinned him down with all her strength, immobilizing him, pressing his face into the ground.... He began to weep. She spat in his face, kicked him in the balls, left.... and never came back; the wounded bandit went mad.... (61)

Ben Jelloun offers us the spectacle of that most masculine of men, the soldier, elaborately arrayed, in transgression of gender fixities. But what is most striking about the incident is the way in which it dramatizes the precarious nature of masculinity, and the way in which the ultimate fear of the Arab male is physical penetration by another. The fact that Antar is actually a woman only redoubles the injury and the humiliation in a social setting contemptuous of the "passive" (the penetrated) homosexual.[16] One's sense of self, one's masculinity, is grasped through the territoriality of the body, through the perception of the body as a fortress that cannot be invaded by the Other. An invasion of this sacred space would amount to the dissolution of the boundaries of Self.

On the dust jacket of his latest collection of short stories, *Le premier amour est toujours le dernier* (1995), Ben Jelloun writes: "In my country, there is a rapture in the relationships between men and women. Within a couple, there is no harmony. Love is the reflection of a major violence" (my translation). My argument is that this rupture, this violence, exists among the men themselves and stems from the prevailing North African reduction of masculinity to virility. In turn, this reduction leads necessarily to an impoverishment of scope because such community bonds as affection, friendship, sympathy, solidarity, and fraternal love are systematically excluded from the interactions between men. So, contrary to what Ben Jelloun thinks, the struggle is not between men and women: woman is not man's true rival. But women—like a Zahra who is brought up as an Ahmed—are easily victimized, sacrificed because they are

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[16] This contempt is rooted in the culture's understanding of homosexuality: the "passive" homosexual is perceived as the one who "gives," who "surrenders" part of himself to another person who "takes."

invariably seen more as liabilities than assets in the men's sex wars.[17] As Slimane's wife in "Un fait divers et d'amour" aptly notes, "Dans ce pays, un homme n'est jamais stérile" (58). When masculinity is perceived and lived out only in terms of virile power, when love—experienced as "infinite care," or as "a reverence for what is vulnerable in time" (Gans)—is removed from men's understanding of sexuality, and when the religious and ethical structures of the society are ineffective, men in Ben Jelloun's fiction find themselves confronting the desolate world of what Girard has termed "internal mediation" where even the most intimate dimensions of life cannot escape from rivalry and violence. Amidst the dissolution of social and religious prohibitions, people are trapped in the circle or imitation/competition.

A huge international colloquium on love in Islam held in Paris in 1992 and attended by hundreds of writers and scholars from or of the Middle East and North Africa concluded that the region is currently going through a stage of dis-love: "un état de désamour" (Amzallag 35). Tahar Ben Jelloun's texts are indeed inseparable from their context.

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[17] For an analysis of women as commodity and merchandise, see Luce Irigaray.

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# MIMESIS AND EMPATHY
# IN HUMAN BIOLOGY

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> Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against
> the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy
> neighbor as thyself: I am the Lord.
>
> (Leviticus. 19:18)

> The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye
> be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if
> thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of
> darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be
> darkness, how great is that darkness!
>
> (Matthew. 6:22-23)

On the levels both of common discourse and scientific description, the concept of empathy has found renewed popularity. Like a bridge that spans disparate realms, the idea of empathy can reconnect neurophysiology with psychology and social theory, and reestablish the grounds for a natural concept of ethics. Specifically, it can connect mimetic theory with a possible basis in biology, since empathy seems to represent an extension of mimetic processes across the animal kingdom. For this reason, empathy/mimesis might be the grounds for a concept of ethics based on natural observation.

Drawn from a German term Einfühlung, which means "feeling into," empathy carries the concept of "getting into the feelings of someone else" (deWaal 79). As a medium for the formation of meaningful bonds and

sensitive associations, the concept of empathy has taken on, in popular discourse, the somewhat sentimental notion of sympathy. In the scientific description, however, empathy is seen as the highest human expression of a broader biological capacity for mimesis that seems inextricable from the very progress of the phylogenetic process.

Among the earliest life forms, organisms drew information from one another to pattern and coordinate such basic biological functions as reproduction and nurture. But with the increased complexity of multicellular creatures, new means of communication arose, making possible more flexible adaptation and sociability. Gradually the direct chemical coordination suitable for collectives or swarms gave way to richer and more individual communication between organisms of higher forms of differentiation.

The externally evident demarcation of the head region, with its organs of sensory perception and communication, evolved in parallel with internal cerebral structures capable of processing more complex impressions of the surrounding environment and coordinating greater freedom of motion. These vital powers of action and awareness in turn came to be governed, guided and integrated by an inner felt sense of need, goal or purpose. As Leon Kass says, "desire, not DNA, is the deepest principle of life" (Kass 1994, 48).

This quality of "inwardness" is paralleled by an equally complex differentiation and integration of the external "look" of the animal. This "look," which is the literal translation of the Latin root of our word species, is the result of a genetically determined plan as important as any internal vital organ. It provides the unity of form that reveals or selectively conceals the inner life of the organism. It communicates and coordinates vital information regarding sexual and other social interactions. This upward process of complex integrated organization of the "inner life" and the external action and presentation of self reaches its fullest expression in the human form. Along with upright posture and its freeing of the hands as tools of "gnostic touching," comes a reordering of the senses and a highly flexible, furless canvas of self presentation we call the face (Kass 1985, 287).

Upwards through mammalian evolution there is a progressive refinement of the structures of the face that facilitate active and increasingly subtle communication and penetration into the life of the other. With more than 30 finely tuned muscles of facial expression and vocal control, human beings are capable of a wide array of communicative

expressions of emotions and intentions.  Paul Ekman claims to have discerned more than 18 forms of smiling, each with a distinct meaning (66).

With upright posture came a retraction of the snout and bilateral stereoscopic vision.  Sight replaced smell as the prominent sense.  Whereas smell required direct chemical contact, and sound gave formless information, sight gave a knowing and accurate encounter with the form and unity of wholes.  Sight allowed rapid perception of objects and actions at distant horizons.  The detached beholding of sight allowed a deeper and more accurate apprehension of the reality of things; sight allowed insight.  The cerebral processing and storage of visual images allowed detachability of object from image and the emergence of imagination and its creative powers.  In coordination with vocalization through the fine muscles of the larynx, the capacity for imaging gave rise to symbolic representation and genuine communication.  These powers, together with the freed upper limbs and the "tool of tools," as Aristotle called the hands, allowed a freedom and flexibility that has its psychic equivalents in the open-ended desires and indomitable will of the human creature.  The omnivorous nature of our diet is paralleled by an equally omnivorous appetite of dreams and desires (Kass 1994, 70-74).

Notwithstanding the transcendent possibilities in our visions and longings, we are rooted in the biological processes and evolutionary echoes of our earthly origins, both physical and social.  In the quest for personal  fulfillment of these dreams and desires other human beings are both our companions and our competition.  More than any other single factor other human beings have been the shaping environment of our evolution.  Nowhere is this more evident than in our emotional contours and our capacities for empathy.

Emotions by their nature are dynamic and evanescent, difficult to define and more difficult to study scientifically.  Far from the notion of an unruly volatility on top of a more stable and noble reason, emotions define the very shape and significance of human life. They are the amplification systems of embodied being, the megaphones of meaning. Cognitive scientists speak of "hot" cognition, recognizing the inseparable role of emotions in the processes of perception, memory  and  judgment. They guide and give form to our developing identity and keep our lives on an integrated purposeful track.

Emotions have  their  evolutionary  origins  in  the  physiological processes of biological regulation. William James noted that the postural

and visceral changes in emotional states place the organism in a condition of readiness for action or response. The subjective feelings of emotions are evolution's later additions  in the service of the inner life of consciousness and purposeful desire. This inseparable psychophysical unity of manifest emotion  embodies the evolutionary experience of life's long history. Far from a private inner  language of being, it reflects survival  strategies  shaped by the physical and social parameters of our environment and shared with other members of our species, and indeed across life's larger process.

Charles Darwin was fascinated by the question of the universality of emotional expression. He argued that, like externally evident anatomical features, the physiological and subjective states of emotion reflect both phylogenetic progress and species specificity. This idea, though out of fashion for most of this century as we digested the bewildering diversity of ethnographic studies, has recently received support in the research of Paul Ekman. Looking at more than a dozen cultures, including an isolated preliterate culture of New Guinea, he found a nearly universal language of facial expression of the emotions of  anger, sadness, disgust, enjoyment and surprise. In addition he noted emotion specific physiological changes in both the central nervous system (CNS) and the autonomic nervous system (ANS). Furthermore, the very act of "voluntarily performing certain muscular actions generated involuntary changes in autonomic nervous system activity" (Ekman 64). For example, accelerated heart rate and increased skin conductance accompanied the muscle actions expressive of anger. Ekman's studies, along with reports of similar manifestation of emotions in other primates and early in human childhood development, are consistent with an evolutionary view of the expression of emotions. It is this shared quality of emotions, between individuals of the same species, and even across species, that makes possible the process of empathy.

And what an amazing capacity it is! Spanning the gulf between individuals, even of varied ages and circumstances, it provides the crucial bridge that allows genuine social existence and the emergence of entirely new possibilities in the evolving story of life.

Like consciousness of self, awareness of other people is so much a part of us that we rarely ponder the mystery of its mechanism. How does any creature know things beyond the borders of its subjectivity? How does any creature even recognize its own species?

The capacity for empathy seems to be the extension of more fundamental mimetic processes. Mimicry or copied behavior is common across the animal kingdom. Even animals with "minuscule brains compared to primates notice how members of their own species relate to the environment" (deWaal 71).

An octopus, watching another octopus trained to attack either a red or a white ball, "monitored the actions of the other with head and eye movements. When the same balls were dropped in the spectator's tank, they attacked the ball of the same color" (Fiorito 545).

> A female guppy courted by two males ends up associating with one of them while another female follows the entire process from an adjacent tank. When this guppy "voyeuse" is introduced to the same males to see which one she likes better, she follows her predecessor's choice. Lee Dugatkin, an American ethologist who conducted these experiments, speculates that female guppies rely on each other's assessments of potential mates. The I-want-what-she-wants principle that Dugatkin found had the power of reversing a female's independent preferences known from earlier tests. (de Waal 71)

Researchers note that the observing animal gains knowledge more quickly than through classical conditioning or trial-and-error learning (Dugatkin 261). It is easy to see how such an ability would serve an organism well. The process bypasses the struggle of discovery and taps the experience of another. It is almost a form of parasitism, an economy where the rewards are reaped without the risks. Both energy and time are saved. It seems like such an obvious strategy, and in fact is common in the animal world associated with certain categories of behaviors: reproductive choice, food selection and foraging (Whiten 276). Yet how it works is not at all obvious. How does the organism know to imitate only the successful strategies of others of its species? Possibly fixed action patterns are triggered by selective releasing mechanisms. (Like a chameleon that changes color to fit his surroundings, a stimulus may enter the eye and trigger a cascade of physiological changes and actions.)

With higher organisms, observational learning involves increasingly complex dynamics. Simple stimuli are experienced within a context of social circumstances. For example, a baby monkey may see the frantic fear reaction of his troop in the presence of a big black snake. Some form

of generalized emotional contagion seems to be operating, a more real sense of the feelings of the other.

But this stops short of the identification needed for the imitation required for cultural transmission. Extensive studies of monkeys have not lent support to their reputation for "monkey see, monkey do." Even the famous 'potato washing' story of the Japanese macaques[1] showed that there was an incomplete and extremely slow transmission speed of this very useful bit of "monkey culture" (Whiten 248). True identification seems to involve the capacity to make others an extension of self, to reach out mentally and make the situation of the other to some extent one's own. To at least a limited degree this capacity seems present in chimps. Consider the following account:

> [Viki] appropriated a lipstick, stood on the washbasin, looked in the mirror, and applied the cosmetic—not at random, but to her mouth. She then pressed her lips together and smoothed the color with her finger, just as she had seen the act performed. (Whiten 254)

To carry out such a mimicry seems to require picturing oneself in the actual place and actions of another—to adopt his role. But to truly know the reality of another, we must be able to enter into their beliefs, intentions, and subjective feelings.

**What mechanisms of mind could make possible such abilities?**

The emergence of complex social existence in primates appears to have been strongly correlated with a transition from an olfactory system of communication to a visual system. Vision allows faster and more sensitive signals than either smell or sound. In addition to the shift to vision, the neurologic control of the facial muscles also greatly improved.

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[1] A troop of Japanese macaques living on an island preserve was provisioned with foods which included sweet potatoes. The food was simply dumped on a beach and often became coated with sand. One young macaque discovered that she could rinse the sand off of the potatoes. This practice slowly spread to the others, the youngest first, then the older females, then the dominant males. This apparent cultural learning actually spread very slowly with less than 20% of the troop rinsing potatoes after three years. Furthermore, the practice may not have been actually acquired by observational learning, but may have been discovered anew by numerous individuals (Gould and Gould). It would be interesting to know if the behavior would have spread more rapidly if the first discoverer had been a dominant male.

It is interesting that lemurs, who use both olfactory and visual communication, are thought to have developed during the period of transition between smell and sight. It is revealing that while they do exhibit some facial expressions, they are limited in their range of facial variations by the attachment of their upper lips to their gums. More visually oriented primates, including ourselves, possess free upper lips that allow a much wider range of expression (Hwang 3). With the thinning of the facial fur, the face emerged as a canvas of communication. These key evolutionary changes, which have reached their highest form in our species, allow us to transform internal states of affect into external states of appearance.

Within thirty six hours of birth infants are able to discriminate some facial expressions and reflect them in the facial movements of their own brows, eyes and mouth (Sagi and Hoffman 175-6). But how does this work? How does the infant know it is a mouth it is seeing, and how to move its own mouth in imitation?

It appears that there is an innate ability to compare the sensory information of a visually perceived expression with the proprioceptive feedback of the movement involved in imitating the expression (Sagi and Hoffman 175-176). Taken together with the studies cited earlier showing that voluntary performance of muscular actions of emotional expression generated concurrent involuntary autonomic nervous system states, one can see the grounds for a genuine empathic resonance through facial communication.

Human beings have an astonishing capacity to recognize and remember faces. Unlike most objects, processed at the basic category level, faces are identified in their individuality despite the multimodal presentation of poses, angles, distances and illumination. Neonates preferentially turn to faces, and within days discriminate their mother's face from that of a stranger. Adults retain distinct memories of thousands of faces over long periods of time—as anyone who has gone back to look at their high school yearbook can affirm. Furthermore, we are uniquely sensitive to the dynamic changes and emotional expressions of faces. Special ensembles of cells in the brain respond only to faces. They discriminate not only identities, but also highly specific facial forms such as yawns or frowns. Some cells are specialized to decipher the relationship between gaze and body posture, signaling direction of movement and inner intentions. Other cells selectively respond to the

facial messages of inner feelings revealed in emotional expressions (Perret; Baylis 91-93).

In addition, one day old infants exhibit inborn empathic distress reactions at the cry of other newborns. They respond with vocalizations that have the same auditory marks of genuine distress (Sagi). Further, researchers have found that, at least in adults, vocalizations of an emotional character can generate the concomitant emotion specific autonomic nervous system changes.

These studies suggest an innate hard-wired connection between the sensory, motor and visceral components of emotions. They suggest a shared psycho-physiological state. And they may provide a solution to that most difficult of questions: how do we leap beyond our subjective solipsistic self into genuine society with others?

At the level of the infant, this problem might actually be posed from the opposite perspective, how do we develop a distinct identity and sense of self? One researcher cites the example of an eleven month old girl who, on seeing a child fall and cry "put her thumb in her mouth and buried her head in her mother's lap, as she does when she is hurt" (Hoffman 155).

Between the first and second year of life, however, children begin to crystallize a sense of self and other. They begin to recognize the differentiation of animate and inanimate beings and discover the inner mental world of private beliefs and intentions. With conscious identity comes awareness of the distinct identity of others. Indiscriminate emotional contagion gives way to cognitive empathy, a willed and knowing stepping into the role of the other. For instance, a twenty-one month child responded to his mother's simulated sadness by: 1) attending to his mother; 2) peering into her face to determine what was wrong (accompanied by verbal inquires); 3) trying to distract her with a puppet; 4) looking concerned; and 5) giving his mother a hug while making consoling sounds and sympathetic statements (Zahn-Waxler 114). With greater understanding comes greater perspective, but the basic tools of empathy remain in the service of the individual and social life.

Looked at from the perspective of evolution, one can imagine how such pattern and process developed. The special advantages for social existence are evident in the synergism and adaptive flexibility of a coherent community. While individual organisms may be able to exploit resources without competition, affiliation provides protective alliance, division of labor, and a longer childhood developmental period. It is easy to see how the somatic and psychological resource of empathy would

provide a powerful survival advantage. It binds the helpless infant to the mind of the mother and provides a direct line to the privileged information of inner states of desire and fear. Like a distilled pedagogy, it serves to entrain the developing child in the accumulated cultural values of its social group.

The most primary affections and affiliations are sustained biologically through inwardly felt positive pleasures and anxious emptiness. Both provide the grounds for fantastic extensions in the phenomenon of life.

Walter Freeman (121-123) cites the fundamental bond of sexual affection and the central role of the neuromodulator oxytocin in sexual orgasm. He points to its extended role in social life, promoting nesting and nurture and sustaining the bonds of mother and infant. He suggests that this most centrally social neurochemical may play a complex part in the unlearning and relearning that allows a dynamic community of common mind. He notes the underlying sexuality in common rituals of religious and political conversion, and points to the dissolution and realignment that promotes mimetic behavior.

Paul MacLean cites the negative power of separation anxiety and the crucial role of the separation call. He points to the conservative evolutionary history of this essential mother-child communication. As the most primitive and basic mammalian vocalization, the separation call sustains contact and prevents dangerous distance between the helpless infant and the protective parent. A sense of anguished isolation is recognizable in the emotional tone of its slow, sad descending note. MacLean suggests that the accompanying subjective state serves throughout life to sustain community, and that the neural basis of this may provide the negative affect of existential loneliness and unfulfilled longing. Studies have shown that morphine, acting at the cingulate gyrus, the neurologic locus of the separation call, blocks it in squirrel monkeys, apparently erasing its emotional impulse. MacLean suggests that the drug addict may be feeding a fundamental hunger of our social nature. He also speculates that this most primary mammalian vocal sound may provide the basic vowels for the community sustaining vocalizations of human language. The other fundamental sound, the consonant, is provided by the sucking sound made from the lips of the infant suddenly breaking contact with the nipple, a sharp clicking noise. "The [same] sound is made by the mother as an encouragement to the infant to resume nursing, whereas the infant emits the sound when searching for the nipple" (McLean 415).

Thus the basis of human language is empathic communication developed in the learning context of lactation's oxytocin-driven bonding.

These most fundamental biological mechanisms may intricately mediate the emerging flexibilities and open possibilities of human community. But, along with the positive powers of empathic cooperation, there is a dark side to empathy. Group life implies previously unimagined freedoms, but also empathic exploitation. The canvas of open communication provided by the capacity for empathy can be used equally well for cold deceit and calculated deception. Certain psychopathologies such as sociopathic personality appear to involve disruptions of the basic empathic process. It is interesting that oxytocin is now being tested as a possible therapeutic agent in these disorders. But beyond these obvious pathologies, the more "natural" struggle of life may engage these capacities for intimidation and dominance. Thomas Hobbes in Leviathan wrote "I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power that ceases only in death." Indeed, sociobiology maintains that ultimately all adaptations, including the empathic agencies of social life, must redound to the benefit of the individual through selective advantage in the proliferation of his genes. Such an imperative would hardly promote genuine acts of altruistic concern; rather the power of prestige is preferentially sought. Prestige is shorthand for status, and implies an unimpeded extension of self-will. Its psychological manifestation as pride is a biologically grounded subjective state. It is the opposite pole on the scale of empathy from the biologically based, subjective state we call love and its manifest altruism.

Altruism, as E. O. Wilson says, is "the central theoretical problem of sociobiology" (13). De Waal suggests that evolutionarily shaped empathy and its affectional and affiliative sociality may provide a basis for genuine altruism. MacLean, referring to the unity of the infant-mother bond, asks, "Is it possible that the misting of the eyes so commonly experienced on observing an altruistic act, is in anyway owing to a reciprocal innervation of mechanisms for the parental rescue and for crying represented in the cingulate gyrus" (415). E.O. Wilson goes on to say that the phenomenon of apparent altruism has not diminished in the scope of nature, but has increased and become "the culminating mystery of all biology" (362).

Both pride and altruistic impulse relate, though in different ways, to the most fundamental characteristics of human freedom: open-ended desire

and the will to dominate.[2] Pride and Altruism: the two poles on the scale of empathy. Pride and Altruism: it is interesting that, contrary to the assertions of sociobiology, people are willing to die for both, but will kill for only one. Altruistic empathy is far more than simple sympathy, it is a genuine communion in the shared identity of life, an alignment with the spirit of love. Is it for this that love took human form?

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[2] Consider in contrast Francis of Assisi who not only gave away all his worldly goods, but called his order the Friars Minor, the little brothers, taking the lowest position by choice.

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# THE MAN BLIND FROM BIRTH
# AND THE SUBVERSION OF SIN:
# SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT
# FUNDAMENTAL MORALS[1]

## James Alison

I would like to undertake with you a reading of a passage from the Bible, John Chapter 9. I hope that we will see this chapter yield some interesting insights in the light of my attempt to apply to it the mimetic theory of René Girard. I'm not going to expound mimetic theory for you: there is no shortage of books in which such expositions are to be found.[2] I'm just going to put the theory to work, with minimal recourse to technical jargon, in a reading from Scripture, hoping that it will be something like an exercise in publicity for the fecund use to which any of you might put mimetic theory. The reading will not be a simple commentary, but an attempt to experiment with the perspective of the reading. That is to say, we're asking "Who is reading this passage?," "With whom do we identify?" And the reason for this approach is to nudge us into beginning to raise certain questions of fundamental morals, how

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[2] For instance: R. Schwager, *Must there be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987); R. Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence: Paul's Hermeneutic of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); J. Williams, *The Bible, Violence and the Sacred: Liberation from the Myth of Sanctioned Violence* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroad, 1995)—this is the most accessible of the accounts.

we talk about them, or live them in a more or less coherent and convincing way. I can't promise you any great conclusions, because I'm only just beginning to get into this subject. For that reason, I'll begin by saying that what follows is somewhat experimental, and will end with a few hints as to possible future paths to follow. I should also begin by saying that my intention is not to cause scandal, but to provoke a discussion which allows a fuller way of living a Christian life. In this sense what I'm trying out is an attempt at a search for a theological method which I have not yet mastered and which, if developed, will, I hope, prove somewhat emancipatory for all of us.

### Miracle or theological debate?

Let us begin our reading of John 9. At first sight we have an account of a miraculous healing. It is the story of a man blind from birth who receives his sight from Jesus one Sabbath, and then of the consequences of this healing among the people who witness, or hear about, the matter. If the account were to be found in one of the synoptic Gospels, perhaps it might remain at that—there is no shortage of such stories. I have no doubt that in the background to the story we're dealing with an historical incident of a healing carried out by Jesus on a Sabbath. However, here the "miraculous healing" element doesn't receive much emphasis, nor does the Sabbath or rather, the matter of the Sabbath does receive a certain weight, as we will see later on, but with some very idiosyncratically Johannine touches. In any case, the purpose of this Chapter is determined by the debate about sin, sight, blindness and judgement within which it is set: these are the jeweller's artwork which show forth, and make sense of, the gem of the healing.

Let us look at the beginning of the story. Jesus sees a man born blind, and his disciples ask him: "Master, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answers them: "Neither this man nor his parents. He is blind so that the works of God may be made manifest in him." That is to say, the whole story which follows comes as an illustration of Jesus' answer to this question of his disciples.

Now, I think we've all heard this passage before, and we've probably heard the commentary that is normally made about it, which is that, in those days, people used to attribute moral causes to physical evils (like illnesses) or natural disasters (like earthquakes or tempests). Jesus would, then, be breaking with this tendency, proper to a primitive religious culture, even though still very present in our own society, and giving

instead a divine answer to the problem. Well, this interpretation, while partially correct, doesn't go to the heart of the matter, which seems to me to be much more interesting.

Let's look at the end of the story. We have the former blind man who sees Jesus, and, believing in the Son of Man, worships him. Jesus then comments:

> "I have come into the world for a judgement (or discernment), that those who do not see may see, while those who see will become blind." When they heard this the Pharisees who were with him asked him "Are we also blind?" Jesus answered them: "If you were blind, you would have no sin, but since you say that you see, your sin remains".

So the whole account has as its frame a discussion about sin. Blindness and sight come to be a way of talking about much more than questions of the health of the eyes. Jesus' final comment is simply enigmatic if we don't follow what has happened meanwhile. Now let us turn to see what has happened in between our two quotes.

### The account of an inclusion

What we have is something like two stories intertwined with each other, the story of an inclusion and the story of an exclusion. The story of the inclusion is easy. There was a man who had a defect: he had not finished being created, for when he was born he was lacking sight. This is not only to be excluded from a particular human good, but it is also, by being defective, to be excluded from a fullness of participation in Israel. His physical defect was also a cultic impediment, because only flawless people were permitted to serve God's cult as priests (just as unblemished lambs were needed for sacrifice). A son of Aaron, for example, a member of the priestly caste, could not officiate at worship if he had a physical defect. However, in matters social a purely ritual exclusion doesn't remain at the level of the merely physical. Since ritual has to do with the maintenance of the purity and goodness of the group, so a physical defect which implied a ritual defect also implied a moral defect. In this way, the disciples, as ordinary people of their time and circumstances, deduced from the blind man's physical state some kind of moral problem, whence their question: Who sinned that this man be born blind?

Now, please notice the route which the logic follows. The defect excludes; that which excludes from the group also excludes from the way in which the group makes itself good; whence it is deduced that that which

excludes has a serious moral cause. In this way, the result of the process, the fact of being excluded from the goodness of the group, is taken as a cause, and by cause, please understand, fault: *Who sinned?* This is, indeed, a certain sort of logic. It is an absolutely common logic, and we find it in diverse forms round about us without much difficulty: it's called blaming the victim. If someone is assaulted, she must have been doing something to provoke it; if black people have a low socio-economic status, it must be because they are really more stupid or lazy than others; if someone has AIDS, it must be a punishment from God for some form of deviant behaviour. And so think we all in some situations, above all when we're children, and totally dependent on our parents: if something bad happens at home, or our parents are quarreling, or alcoholic, or are getting divorced, then, in some mysterious way, the fault is ours. If we behave ourselves, making a promise or a vow to God, St Jude, or whomever, then everything will be sorted out. Psychologists call this sort of thinking "magic," and we all have to grow beyond it somehow.

Well, Jesus' attitude is far removed from magic thinking: not only is it far removed, but he gives us a lesson in the subversion from within of this mentality. He proceeds to carry out an inclusion. First he spits on the earth, and from the clay he makes a paste and anoints the blind man's eyes. Here we have a Hebrew pun, disguised by the Greek of the text. Clay is "adamah," and it is that from which God originally made "Adam," mankind, in Genesis 2,7. So, here, what Jesus is doing is the act of finishing creation. The man born blind had palpably not been brought to the fullness of creation, and Jesus finishes off the process by adding the missing clay. The blind man still does not see, and Jesus sends him to a pool where baths of ritual purification took place, and when he comes out, the blind man begins to see. Now, this question of the pool of Siloam is interesting, because it is normally interpreted as a reference to the waters of baptism, and I don't think that there's anything wrong with that, because Baptism is (or should be) the rite of inclusion *par excellence*. However, I think that what is important here is not the allusion to the rite, but to the inclusion: it is from his bathing in a Jewish pool that the blind man comes to be fully included in the Jewish people, and this is beautifully shown in the text. Up until this point the blind man has not said anything, he has not even had voice or name: he has always been a "him" or a "that one," recognized by his blindness and his position as a beggar. Even when he begins to see, people carry on talking about "him," until the moment when the former blind man interrupts to say *"It is I."*

From that moment on, they deign to speak to him, and address him as "you." At this point he does not know much about Jesus, for he has not even seen him, since it was only at the pool that he actually began to see. In the rest of the story we see the gradual process by which he becomes aware of who Jesus is. Under interrogation he says that Jesus is a prophet, a perfectly reasonable conclusion: it is as if one of us who received an important cure at the hands of somebody were to call that person a saint. The authorities doubt that he was originally blind, and seek other evidence to determine whether or not he had ever seen before, calling his parents, who point out that their son is an adult, and that he can answer for himself: another moment of inclusion, now he is an adult, and has the use of the word and responsibility for his actions. Since he knows that he has been cured, he becomes stubborn in the face of his interrogators: his replies get longer, bolder, and more obstinate. He had said that Jesus was a prophet, and of course the Pharisees produce the principal prophet to whom they subscribe: Moses.

> We know that God spoke to Moses, but this fellow, we don't know from where he comes.

At this moment the former blind man replies with a formidable lucidity:

> "Well, isn't that extraordinary, that you don't know from where he comes, when he has opened my eyes. We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but to those who worship him and do his will. Not since the dawn of time (ek tou aiônos) has it been heard that anybody has opened the eyes of a man born blind. If he didn't come from God, he could do nothing."

Now, please notice here an important grammatical game. The Pharisees use the word "we" to exclude the former blind man's "you": "You are his disciple; We are disciples of Moses."

That is to say their "we" is defined by contrast with "you." However the former blind man doesn't accept their game, but he answers in terms of an "us," counting himself in with the Pharisees:

> "We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but to those who worship him and do his will."

That is to say, he is debating in objective terms starting from the common ground of being a son of Moses, along with the Pharisees, and his position is very interesting:

> "Not since the dawn of time has it been heard that anybody has opened the eyes of a man blind from birth."

Please notice John's code: from the dawn of time means since the creation of the world. Only the Creator could carry out this act of finishing off Creation, and if Jesus did not proceed from the Creator, he couldn't have brought about this act of finishing off Creation. The former blind man has perceived the full meaning of the clay, the "adamah": in his person God was finishing off the creation of Adam. From a sub-person without voice or membership, he has come to be an included adult, and one who is, furthermore, a fine interpreter of the things of God. Shortly afterwards Jesus comes up to him, and asks him if he believes in the Son of Man. Since the former blind man has still never seen Jesus, he doesn't recognize the one who cured him. Jesus identifies himself, and the former blind man prostrates himself in worship before him. He has moved from a theoretical recognition that this man had to have proceeded from God in order to be able to complete the work of Creation, to a full recognition of God in his life. Now he is the complete human, what we would call a Christian: the two things go together. The Christian is one who recognizes that it is through Jesus that she is brought to the completion of her creation, and for this reason is progressively inducted, which means included, into the life of God, which is life without end.

### The account of an exclusion

Thus far the account of the inclusion. But we're only half way through the affair. There is also, and the two accounts are intertwined, the account of an exclusion. The blind man begins excluded. So far, no problem. He is merely an occasion for the curiosity of passers-by, allowing them to wonder about the mysteries of the moral causality of physical misfortunes. The established order has no problem with the existence of excluded people. Rather, as we will see, it depends on them. In the degree to which our blind man comes to be included, he provokes first curiosity, and then rejection.

Once cured, the former blind man is taken to the Pharisees. These Johannine figures immediately have a criterion by which to judge if the

cure came from God or not. The cure was carried out on a Sabbath, so it cannot come from God. Now the objection is more interesting than it seems. Of God it is said in Genesis that he rested on the Sabbath, after creating everything. So the commandment which obliges people to rest on the Sabbath is a strict injunction to imitate God. And the person who doesn't rest on the Sabbath is a sinner, because he is neither obeying nor imitating God (which comes to the same thing). Here too we see an element of John's code. In John 5 Jesus cures an invalid on the Sabbath, and the authorities reproach him for this. Jesus declares to them:

> "My Father is working up until the present, and I also work." (John 5:17)

The reply is rather more dense than it seems and constitutes a formal denial that God is resting on the Sabbath, as well as an affirmation that Creation has yet to be completed, and that for this reason Jesus carries on with his work of bringing Creation to fulfillment on the Sabbath. Now, back at John 9 we note that when the disciples asked Jesus at the beginning of the story who sinned that this man should have been born blind, he replied that neither he nor his parents sinned, but that:

> "He is blind so that the *works* of God may be manifest in him."

That is to say, for John the matter of the Sabbath, the healing, and the continuing of Creation go absolutely together. The cure on a Sabbath has as its purpose to show God's continued creative power mediated by Jesus. For the same reason, the reaction of the Pharisees is a sign of a profound disagreement with Jesus as to who God is and how God acts. Either the Sabbath serves to bring about a separation between those who observe it, and are thus good, and those who do and are not, and God is defined, which also means limited, by the Law. Or alternatively the Sabbath is a symbol of Creation still unfinished, and is an opportunity for God to reveal his lovingkindness to humans, and God is identified by his exuberant creativity.

Well, it is their realization that this is what is at stake that produces a schism among the Pharisees. For some of them:

> "This man does not keep the Sabbath; he cannot come from God."
> while for others:
> "And how could a sinner carry out such signs?"

Now the last thing that the Pharisees need has begun to happen: an internal division, which prevents them from taking joint action because there are two diametrically opposed positions in their group. What is the quickest way of overcoming this schism? While there is to be found a man who is incontrovertibly cured, the two possible interpretations of his cure, that it is from God, or that it is not from God (being instead the fruit of some diabolic deception), are bound to persist. And there is no way of resolving such a problem through reasoned discussion. So the problem of the cure has to be dealt with quickly by denying that it ever happened. If the man had never really been blind from birth, then neither has he been cured, and so there is no problem. So, they propose that there was no cure, and the parents of the former blind man are called so as to try to get out of them "the truth" about their son—that is, that he was not, and never had been, blind.

Well, imagine the reaction of the parents. They know full well that their son had been blind, and that now he is not. However the last thing that they want, they or anybody with a modicum of common sense, is to get caught up in the midst of a group of the indignant just who are showing signs of needing to vent their righteousness. So the parents limit their reply to a minimum: that their son was indeed born blind, and that they have no idea how it is that he now sees. They want to get out as quickly as possible from this potentially violent circle, so they dump their son back into the middle of it, but now with a new status: as an adult who will have to interpret for himself what has happened to him. So they manage to get out of the threat of being victimized by the group of the "righteous just" by offering their son in their stead.

The first attempt of the group of the Pharisees to get out of the problem by the way of unreality, the denial of the existence of the problem, failed. Now they'll have to get the recipient of the cure to remove their problem for them. They regroup for this new sortie, and call in the former blind man. At this point they adopt a solemn, judicial tone as befits serious men who must deliberate gravely with knowledge of legal matters. First they present the former blind man with their premise: that man (that is Jesus) is, without any shade of doubt, a sinner. So, they conjure the former blind man with the appropriate legal phrase "Give Glory to God,"

meaning: solemnly recognize this fact[3]. Please notice how they proceed. They were unable to recreate their unity by the most convenient means, which would be by the cure turning out never to have happened in the first place. They have to recognize that something did in fact happen. What is important now for them is to produce an unanimous and solemn agreement concerning the interpretation of what did in fact happen. It is as if they were to say: "You, keep your cure, since we can't get around the fact that you have been cured, but, please, recognize that the cure comes from an evil source. That is, it doesn't matter what has actually happened just so long as you agree with us as to its interpretation. In this way we'll manage to maintain our unity, and you too can form part of the group, you can enter into solidarity with us."

The former blind man responds with one of the most splendid lines of our religious tradition, and one which we should perhaps take much more seriously:

> "Whether he is a sinner or not, I do not know; the only thing I
> know is that before I was blind, and now I see."

That is to say, the former blind man shows a healthy lack of concern for the moral dimension of the issue, a sane agnosticism, and holds on instead only to what is incontrovertibly good: an evident change in his life. By showing this agnosticism he is, at the same time, refusing to participate in solidarity against the one who cured him. And that means he has refused to imitate his parents. They had left him in the centre of the circle, as a probable object of target practice for the righteous just. He could have done the same thing, saying of Jesus, "Yes indeed, he is a sinner". In that way he'd have managed both to get his sight *and* get out of the centre of the circle, leaving Jesus in his place as sole recipient of the group's ire, making himself instead a member of the club. In order to do this he'd have to give false witness under oath, for he has been solemnly conjured, but there's never been a shortage of people willing to give false witness if the occasion should merit it.

The former blind man refuses to cloak himself with the interpretation demanded by the group, so the group has to find another way out of the

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[3] The Johannine irony in the use of this standard legal phrase is exquisite, since it is precisely in refusing to call Jesus a sinner and in being cast out for his pains that the former blind man really does "Give Glory to God."

problem. Since, owing to his previous status as a blind beggar, he is ignorant, perhaps there was some hint in the concrete way in which the cure was carried out which might allow them to reach the desired interpretation. So they ask him once again what it was that Jesus had done. Perhaps in the description of the act something formally sinful might be detected which would allow them to interpret the act as a sin, now that they can't count on the helpful solidarity of the former blind man. They'd already heard the details before, but perhaps going over the evidence again some elements of witchcraft might be revealed, or anything which would allow them to say: "You see! He did something evil that something good might come, so the cure cannot come from God".

At this stage the former blind man begins to ridicule their ever more detailed efforts to produce a legal interpretation which allows them to maintain their unity. He asks them if they don't want to become Jesus' disciples themselves (after all, a close investigation of the procedure for carrying out a miracle could be motivated either by a flattering desire to imitate in order to do the same thing, or, as in this case, by the envious desire to get rid of the object of jealousy). It is this remark which produces the detonation of insults. Now, please notice that up until this point they haven't insulted him, and, if we were to take one of the group aside to ask him what they were doing, he would probably have explained that he sympathized with the former blind man. After all, the poor fellow hadn't done anything wrong: he was the victim of the evil of another (in this case Jesus), and doesn't understand the danger that he's in. The crux of the question is this: if he can only be persuaded to interpret what has happened to him with the certainty which they are offering him, then he will be safe, one of the group of the good guys. No problem. They are conducting this interrogation for his own good, and want, up till the last moment, to save him. It's only at the point where they perceive that the former blind man doesn't respect the sincerity of their efforts to lead him down the right path that they begin to mistreat him. That's when they perceive that, even though he isn't formally one of Jesus' followers, for he doesn't even know him, he's keeping himself independent of the group of the just and their opinions. And it is because of this that he becomes an object of mockery: "We tried to reason with him; we sought every possible opportunity to show him the right way to go, but he became stubborn in his error." From sweet reasoning they move to insult.

The first step in this process is their militant affirmation of their group's goodness and their security in their convictions: this is what

allows them to become united. The former blind man has managed to resolve their problem of dissension by allowing them to join together in insulting him. Before, they were unable to say "we" in a convincing way, because there were disagreements of interpretation in their midst. Now they can be united, producing a shining "we" by contrast with a well-defined "they":

> "You may be a disciple of his; *we* are disciples of Moses. We know for a fact..." etc.

While they are building up to an ever more rabid unity, in their midst the one who is about to be their victim, on whom they will discharge their wrath, is becoming ever more lucid, giving weighty theological arguments, more fitting for a doctor than for a beggar. The eye of the hurricane is a centre of peace and revelation while the expelling rage builds to fever pitch: the former blind man explains very clearly that the source of his cure can be deduced without difficulty. God would not have acted through Jesus if Jesus were a sinner, and of no one has it been heard that they could carry out an act of creation "ex nihilo" except God alone, whence it can be deduced that:

> "If this man did not come from God, he could have done nothing."

The logic is perfect, but we're beyond the stage where logic matters. The most explicit revelation happens in the tornado of expulsion. The "righteous just" are no longer interested in arguments: they've got what they wanted, which is to build up their unity as a group, and they move from casual insults to a straightforward description of the former blind man as absolutely identified with sin. Because of this he is a contaminating element, and they expel him.

Please notice how the thing works. It is not that they reach, independently, the conclusion that the man is absolutely sin, and then, after a long and mature deliberation, decide to throw him out. Rather, the mechanism by which they build their unity issues forth simultaneously in the description of the man as sin and in his expulsion. He couldn't be expelled if he weren't sin, and he wouldn't be sin if it hadn't become necessary to expel him. We're back to magical thinking: if someone is excluded, for example, because he's blind, then, somewhere there must be a sin involved. We've advanced not at all.

### The subversion of sin

Well, so much for the account of the expulsion. You will have noticed that the accounts of the inclusion and of the exclusion are not independent, but are interwoven, and the account of the inclusion occurs in the middle of, and in a certain sense provokes, the account of the exclusion. In the same way, the account of the exclusion produces and fulfills the account of the inclusion, for it is in the midst of the mechanism of expulsion, and while he is suffering it, that the former blind man comes to have a real clarity with respect to what has been going on, and who Jesus is.

Now, Jesus' final phrases about blindness and sight come to be a commentary about exactly this double account of inclusion and exclusion. In the first place Jesus says that he has come to the world to open a trial, or judgement, or discernment. Any of these words will do. This trial, or judgement, which is not realised until his death, constitutes the subversion from within of what the world understands by sin, and goodness and justice (John 16:8-11). Thus, beginning from his death these realities will be understood from the viewpoint of the excluded one, and not from that of the expellers. It is the innocent victim who is constituted judge, precisely as victim. Those who remain under judgement are those who thought that they were judging. The story of the man born blind thus has a rôle as a prophetic commentary on what is to happen to Jesus, and how what happens to Jesus is going to function. It is going to function as an element which makes it impossible for the righteous, the good, those who think that they see, to maintain for long their goodness by the exclusion of people considered evil, sinful, or blind. We're talking about the same mechanism as has made it impossible for the Argentine military to keep a tranquil conscience about what they did during the dictatorship, however many amnesties and indults they may have received. Because now, since a vague rumour about the death and resurrection of Jesus has been spread abroad, which is also the redefinition of who is just, and of God, in terms of the victim, it is not possible for them to cover up for ever their suspicion that their own victims, those whom they threw into the ocean from their airplanes, were innocent. In the long run nothing of the ideology of national security, nor all the arguments about the intrinsic perversity of communists, has managed to shore up their once militant belief that they were the good guys, and their victims the bad guys[4].

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[4] Or that they were "wheat" and their victims "tares" in the marvellously satanic interpretation of the parable proposed to one of the officers by a military chaplain of the time.

All of this means that, for Jesus, the double account of the inclusion and the exclusion is not simply an instance of something interesting, but is paradigmatic of the process of the subversion from within of sin. Let us look at it once more. The one who was blind came to understand who God is, how he works, how his creative vivaciousness continues desiring the good and the growth and the life of the person. And the blind man is purely receptive: he does nothing to earn or win his sight. He just grows in the midst of the mechanism of expulsion, holding firm to a basic sense of justice: one doesn't call evil someone who has done me good, nor does one enter into solidarity with those who want to call him evil. That's all. The expellers, for their part, grow, also, but in security and conviction of their righteousness, goodness and unity, in the degree to which the mechanism of expulsion operates through them. The result is sin turned on its head. Sin ceases to be some defect which apparently excludes someone from the group of the righteous, and comes to be participation in the mechanism of expulsion.

God has not the slightest difficulty in bringing to a fullness of creation the person who is in some way incomplete and recognizes this. The problem is with those who think that they are complete, and that creation is, at least in their case, finished, and for this reason that goodness consists in the maintenance of the established order by the means we have seen: goodness is defined starting from the unity of the group, at the expense of, and by contrast with, the excluded evil one. The righteous members of the group, thinking that they see, become blind precisely by holding on to the order which they think that they have to defend. Whence we glimpse the deeper meaning of the Sabbath in John's thought. The Sabbath is the symbol of creation not yet complete. Either we grab at it, making it a criterion for division between good and evil, in which case we are resisting God who is alone capable of bringing to being even the things that are not, without rest; or else we receive the creative goodness of God which carries us to plenitude. Sin is resistance, in the name of God, to the creative work of God which seeks to include us all.

Well, this subversion of sin seems to me to be much more important than it is normally reckoned. Please allow me to repeat its crystalized definition. *Sin ceases to be a defect which excludes, and comes to be participation in the mechanism of exclusion.* If I have taken such a long time to get to this it is because I wanted it to be evident that we aren't talking about an example of magnanimity, or liberalism, or lack of rigour, on Jesus' part, but about something much stronger. We are talking about

a profound theological exercise which is, exactly as a theological exercise, the word of God. This means that we are offered something very fundamental: not a law, or a moral exhortation, but the re-forging of the meaning of sin. For humans sin is one thing, and for God it is something else, which is not simply different from the human version, but its complete subversion from within.

What we are offered is, let me remark again, not a law, nor a fixed criterion, nor an explanatory theory, but a dynamic story, the story of an inclusion and an exclusion. And it is the dynamic story which constitutes the principle of judgement for the moral activity, which is to say, the activity of humans. Furthermore it is not something we can grasp, nor learn by rote, because it is a matter of the explicitation of a mechanism of involvement. This is what is important: the story itself acts as a subversive element. If this story is the word of God, then the word of God acts in our midst as an element which is continuously subversive of our notions of order, of goodness, of clear moral understanding, and so on. And moral life, far from being a going to the trenches in defense of this or that position of incontrovertible goodness, comes to be something much more subtle. Let's do a little investigation of this subtlety.

### From where do we read the story?

If you are anything like me, when you read the story of the man born blind, it is evident straight away that there is a good guy and some bad guys. That is to say, leaving Jesus to one side for the moment, there is the blind man, the good guy, and the Pharisees, the bad guys. What is normal is that all our sympathy is on the side of the former blind man, and our just despite is reserved for the Pharisees. In fact, that we should put ourselves on the side of the victim operates as something of a cultural imperative. And this cultural imperative can be very important: in fact, for any who feel themselves excluded, or treated as defective, by the reigning social and moral order, it is of incalculable importance to discover that this feeling of being excluded or defective has nothing to do with God, that it is purely a social mechanism, and God rather wants to include us and carry us to a fullness of life which will probably cause scandal to the partisans of the reigning order. Well, indeed, it seems to me that this cultural imperative is extremely important, and I know nobody who is not capable, in some way or other, of feeling identified with the victim in some part of her life. The problem is that this "being identified with the victim" can come to be used as an arm with which to club others: the victims become

the group of the "righteous just" in order to exclude the poor Pharisees, who are never in short supply as the butts of easy mockery.

Well, it seems to me that John 9 takes us beyond this inversion of rôles which it apparently produces. We find it, for cultural reasons which are, thank God, unstoppable, easy to identify with the excluded one, and difficult to identify with the "righteous just." But for this very reason it seems to me that this chapter requires of us a great effort, which I scarcely show signs of making, to read the story with something like sympathy for the Pharisees. When all is said and done, we don't pick up even a little bit of the force of the story until we realize what a terrible shake-up it administers to our received notions of good and evil. In a world where nobody understood the viewpoint of the victim, we would all be right to side with the victim. But we live in a world where almost nobody "comes out" as a Pharisee or a hypocrite, and it seems to me that the way to moral learning proceeds in that direction.

I've underlined how the story functions as a subversion from within of the notion of sin, and this is absolutely certain, and we must never lose this intuition. Well now: the process of subversion goes a long way beyond this. This is because the excluded victim accedes, thanks to this subversion, to the possibility of speech, and of talking about himself and about God. However, in exactly that moment, he has to learn to un-pharisee his own discourse. The very moment he accedes to the word he ceases to be the excluded one, and has to begin to learn how not to be an expeller. And this is the genius of morals by story, rather than by laws or virtues: in the story there are two positions: that of the victim and that of the expellers, just as in the story of the prodigal son there is the "bad" brother who receives forgiveness, and the "good" brother who never wandered, and does not know of his need for forgiveness. And we don't grasp the force of the story, nor its exigency as a divine subversion of the human, if we don't identify *with the two positions at the same time.*

I don't think that there's anybody here who isn't partially excluded and partially an excluder, in whom the two poles of this story don't cohabit. For, the moment we have access to the moral word, which is certainly the case at the very least for all of us who are receiving some sort of theological education, we can't grasp on to our "goodness" as excluded ones, but have to begin to question ourselves as to the complicity of our use of words, and above all our use of religious and theological words, in the creation of an expulsive goodness.

In this sense it seems to me that this is the key instruction of the New Testament with relation to moral discourse, and it is a doubly sacred instruction, for it is one of the surprisingly few places where Jesus quotes the Hebrew Scriptures with absolute approval; the key instruction for those of us who are trying to make use of the religious word in some moral sense, and there is no moral theology that is not that, is:

> "But go and learn what it means: I want mercy and not sacrifice."
> (Matt 9:13, quoting Hos 6:6)

Please notice that this is now no longer an instruction just for the Pharisees, but is, so to speak, the programme-guide for whoever tries to do moral theology. Being good can never do without the effort to learn, step by step, and in real circumstances of life, how to separate religious and moral words from an expelling mechanism, which demands human sacrifice, so as to make of them words of mercy which absolve, which loose, which allow Creation to be brought to completion. And this means that there is no access to goodness which does not pass through our own discovery of our complicity in hypocrisy, for it is only as we identify with the righteous just of the story that we realize how "good" their procedure was, how careful, scrupulous, law-abiding, they were, and thus, how catastrophic our goodness can be, if we don't learn step by step how to get out of solidarity with the mechanism of the construction of the unity of the group by the exclusion of whoever is considered to be evil.

### Transforming gossip into Gospel

I want to conclude with a tale which leaves me perplexed, a tale whose relevance to you is not immediately evident, for it is taken from a distant culture. However, it is one from which we can all suck out some nectar. I don't know if it has been news here in Costa Rica, but I'd like to consider the recent story of the Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna, in faraway Austria. The physical distance of the tale from all of our lives allows us to consider it with a certain lack of passion. I must say, for starters, that I do not know personally any of those involved in this story, and have no more information about the truth of the matter than that offered by the mass media, which doesn't always present either the whole story or its true kernel. That is to say, I'm nothing other than the recipient of a piece of ecclesiastical gossip, part, as I imagine us all to be, of that myriad troop of slightly flapping, reddening ears. For this reason nothing of what I say

can be understood as an attempt to work out the truth of what really happened, but instead is to be taken as an attempt to transform something sacrificial, the gossip, into the merciful, the Gospel. Let us see if I can pull it off; and of course this is only an exercise, and because of that is patient of any correction or development that you might like to suggest.

The details of the story are, apparently, as follows: not long ago a man of 37 years claimed publicly to have had sexual relations on several occasions twenty years ago with the man who is now the Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna. Twenty years ago, the denouncer was 17, and a minor, at least legally, though the discretion in the sexual behaviour of seventeen year-olds is in many cases greater than the law would have us believe. Twenty years ago the Cardinal didn't occupy his present position but was, if I'm not mistaken, a Benedictine superior. Well, either the accusations are true, or they are not. If the accusation is false, the moral question is pretty clear: the Cardinal is victim of a calumny, and the calumny is particularly devastating, because there is a certain prurient delight in all our societies when a piece of ecclesiastical hypocrisy is unmasked. A delight which, it must be said, is not entirely without its roots in passages of the Gospel like the one we have been studying, and is a delight that is not to be dismissed as simply evil. That is to say, I imagine that the first reaction of a good number of people was, as mine was, and against the presumption of the civil law, to suppose the guilt of the accused. And this is because it is no secret that the monosexual clerical world, like the monosexual military or police world, tends to propitiate an elaborately structured homosexual closet. The result of an accusation of this sort is, for that reason, particularly cruel, because it falls in terrain where people are strongly disposed towards believing it. That is to say, mud of this sort, once slung, almost always sticks, whether justly or not.

In the case that the accusation be false, the moral matter is, as I said, fairly clear. The Cardinal is a victim, and the accuser is a stone thrower. We would have to ask why the accuser threw the stones, whether through malice or mental disturbance. In any case, the matter would be how to treat the accused in a merciful manner without becoming an accomplice of his game. It may be that, when all is brought into the light, the result is the exoneration of the Cardinal and the trial of the accuser.

Now, let us imagine the contrary, without any attempt to know if it be true or not. Let us imagine that the accusation is true. A 37 year old man says that he sustained a series of sexual relations with a man many years his senior, and in a certain position of moral authority, twenty years ago.

When he says this, the accuser is not, as far as I know, making a particular thing of having been traumatized in his tenderest youth by this experience, far-reaching though its emotional consequences may have been. His motivation, apparently (and this is all through the professional gossip of the press) was that the Cardinal in his present position was sending gay people to hell from the pulpit, in the time-honoured way, by means of a pastoral letter. Against this ecclesiastical violence, the 37 year old reacted by revealing the hypocrisy of the discourse. Apparently four or five other men of a similar age joined in the accusation, saying that the same thing had happened to them at the hands of the same Cardinal, at about the same period many years ago. So, there is more than one witness, and the belief of the public inclines strongly to the probability that the accusations be true. Let us remember that if they are not, then ganging up with others to give a false witness leading to the moral lynching of someone is one of the most atrocious of crimes, one for which, in capital cases, the Hebrew Scriptures reserve the penalty of death by stoning. So, if the accusations turn out to be false, we would have to exercise ourselves as to how the merciful and non-sacrificial treatment of these proto-lynchers should be conducted. With luck, the Cardinal would lead the way, forgiving them for they knew not what they did.

However, let us imagine, as at least a part of the public has done, that the appearance of these people does not have as its end the gratuitous destruction of the Cardinal; nor is it a question of a bust-up between former lovers, one of those nasty fights that could happen to absolutely anyone, and are, by their nature, absolutely undecidable, and the less public they are in their consequences, the better for everyone. Let us imagine that that is not what it's all about in the view of the accusers, but rather the desire that the Cardinal, and ecclesiastical authority in general, stop throwing stones at gay people.

Now the scene changes somewhat. Suddenly the Cardinal is not the victim. Neither are those men who, when younger, were the recipients of his favours (and who have not, as far as I know presented themselves as "victims," in marked contrast to some of the cases of sexual abuse in the USA where the minors involved were very much younger). Suddenly the Cardinal stands revealed as an hypocritical Pharisee: that is, as someone who said one thing and did another. And here indeed, all our medium-rare, "anonymous," Christian instincts rise up triumphant: we understand the role very well; the Cardinal's role is the same as that of the bad guys in the stories about Jesus. And there is a certain glee in the whole affair. The

glee is even greater when we learn that the Cardinal, a very conservative prelate, was appointed by Rome as part of a policy of restoration of the "hard line" in Central Europe, to counter a certain liberalism attributed to his illustrious predecessor in the Archdiocese, Cardinal König. The whole affair seems absolutely typical of those ecclesiastical attempts, which are no less ridiculous through being so frequent, to "save" the situation by putting in some hard liner, who turns out to be much more divisive, and leads to much worse moral consequences in the long run.

Well, here we have to interrupt with some factual details, once again derived from the Press with I don't know what degree of reliability. The Cardinal kept silence for various weeks, refusing to comment on the matter. A few days later he was reelected, by a narrow margin, as President of the Austrian Bishops' Conference (and let us remember that, under those circumstances, a failure to re-elect him would have been read as an explicit vote of no-confidence on the part of his colleagues in the episcopate). The public protest was so great that, a few days later, the Cardinal published a note in which he denied the accusations formally and categorically, and resigned as President of the Bishops' Conference. A few days later a note emanated from the Austrian Government indicating that the Cardinal no longer exercises his post as Archbishop of Vienna, but has been substituted by one of his auxiliaries, who was named Co-adjutor with right of succession.

However, will the matter remain there? Of course we can imagine this story within the parameters of a typical inversion of the sort: "The one who seemed a bad guy turned out to be the good guy, and the upholder of goodness and public order was exposed as a hypocrite and a charlatan, so the story ended well." Certainly it is possible to imagine the story in this way, and to feel very Christian while doing so, with a firm backdrop for our feeling in stories like John 9. However, let us stop and think a little... Suddenly the Cardinal (who knows whether justly or not?) is left in the position of the excluded sinner. Suddenly he is the shame and mockery of all society. Who helps him? Who is on his side? Of course, if he is innocent of these accusations, then we are dealing with an atrocious injustice, and he has at least the consolation of a good conscience. However, let us imagine, with the public and the press, that he is not innocent. His situation is not less, but much more, atrocious. He has suddenly been marginalized by the ecclesiastical machinery that he thought himself to be serving. It is possible that in his interior he doesn't understand why these things happened to him, for, when all is said and

done, he may have done what is attributed to him, but has been to confession and received absolution. Why should these things now rise up and condemn him? Let us imagine also, that, as is probable in the case of a conservative churchman, he has a somewhat individualistic notion of sin: if he did those things, then they are quite simply his fault, full stop. Let us imagine also that he is not capable of taking any theological distance from the incidents by means of a little sociology, and that he doesn't understand the extent to which he has acted driven by the structure of a monosexual clerical caste where repressed homosexuality is very much present. It is a world where many people take part in some very complicated games in order to maintain appearances, going so far as to commit a great deal of violence against themselves and others, precisely through an inability to talk about the question in a natural and honest manner. And this "not being able to talk about the question in a natural and honest manner" turns out to be the "correct" line, upheld by the highest ecclesiastical spheres. Why should the Cardinal's moments of weakness be so severely punished, while those of so many others pass by unnoticed?

Those who now marginalize the Cardinal, including his ecclesiastical colleagues, have participated in a Christian-seeming "inversion" of the matter: the pharisee has been transformed into the bad guy. But have they participated in an authentically Christian *subversion* of the story? Subversion goes much further than inversion, because subversion keeps alive the same mechanism even when the protagonists change. Now, the bad guy, the victim in the centre of the circle of the "righteous just" is the Cardinal. For some people he deserves it. But, are we satisfied with that? Could it be that our gossip is to be transformed only into the Gospel of "he got his just reward"? I fear that, if we speak thus, then our justice really is no greater than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, who knew very well how to say about marginalized people, "he received his just reward," and who will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 5:20). Which of us has helped someone in such a ghastly situation as Cardinal Groër, former Archbishop of Vienna? Which of us has tried to identify with the "hypocrite," trying to understand the mechanisms which tie us up in hypocrisy, so as together to cut ourselves loose from them? Which of us has spoken out publicly, yet without hate, against the violence of the "ecclesiastical closet" which fuels a mechanism of covering up and expelling, and expelling to cover up, so strong that it is not simply a question of some vicious individuals, but of a structure which lends itself especially to this vice? And this structure means that the matter cannot be

talked about in terms of this or that sinner, who can be expelled or marginalized when they are discovered. It means rather that it is an exigency of a real moral theology that it stop and analyse the system which typically produces this vicious behaviour, to which far too many of its members fall victim, *whether as expelled or as expellers*.

Is there anyone in Oh-so-Catholic Austria who, instead of accepting the reigning terms of "goodness" and "badness," and rejoicing in the transformation of the "good guy" into a "bad guy" is going about the ungrateful task of trying to dismantle the whole system of hypocrisy by which we cover up and expel? Here, in Oh-so-Catholic Costa Rica, do we recognize our complicity in mechanisms that are similar, when they are not identical, and seek to understand the violent structure of our hypocrisy so as to go about creating ways off-the-hook for our co-hypocrites?

### Conclusion

I said at the beginning that this is only a first attempt to carry out a reading of John 9 in such a way as to allow us a sketch of an approach to moral theology that is somewhat removed from the moral discourse to which we are accustomed. I know very well that we are scarcely beginning. However, I'd like to underline this: what the Christian faith offers us in the moral sphere is not law, nor a way of shoring up the order or structure of the supposed goodness of this world, much less the demand that we sally forth on a crusade in favour of these things. It offers us something much more subtle. It offers us a mechanism for the subversion from within of all human goodness, including our own. This is the same thing as saying that the beginning of Christian moral life is a stumbling into an awareness of our own complicity in hypocrisy, and a becoming aware of quite how violent that hypocrisy is. Starting from there we can begin to stretch out our hands to our brothers and sisters, neither more nor less hypocritical than ourselves, who are on the way to being expelled from the "synagogue" by an apparently united order, which has an excessive and militant certainty as to the evil of the other. Let us then go and learn what this means: "I want mercy and not sacrifice."

# SEÑOR HIRSCH AS SACRIFICIAL VICTIM AND THE MODERNISM OF CONRAD'S *NOSTROMO*

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One of René Girard's more pithy definitions of mimetic desire reads: "The model designates the desirable while at the same time desiring it. Desire is always imitation of another desire, desire for the same object, and, therefore, an inexhaustible source of conflicts and rivalries" (*Double Business Bound* 39). The notation that desire is an "inexhaustible" source of conflicts hints at the political pessimism expressed more openly elsewhere in Girard's writing. In 1961, he said it like this: "Whatever political or social system is somehow imposed on them, men will never achieve the peace and happiness of which the revolutionaries dream, nor the bleating harmony which so scares the reactionaries. They will always get on together just enough to enable them never to agree" (*Deceit* 110-11). This is a Girard who, suspicious of political rhetoric, speaks with audacious cynicism even of democracy: "Who is there left to imitate after the tyrant? Henceforth men shall copy each other... Democracy is one vast middle-class court where the courtiers are everywhere and the king is nowhere" (*Deceit* 119). This Girard has remained consistent in his thematization of the impurity of all political compromises: "men are only capable of reconciling their differences at the expense of a third party. The best men can hope for in their quest for nonviolence is the unanimity-minus-one of the surrogate victim" (*Violence* 259). Girard's political skepticism seems to be a result of his conviction that arbitrary victims of violent unanimity are the "ingredient" in political thought that allows each community to be flattered by the illusion of its political innocence, the illusion of the justifiability of its violence.

Modern political thought cannot dispense with morals, but it cannot become purely moral without ceasing to be political. Another ingredient must therefore be mixed with morals. If we really tried to identify what this is we would inevitably end up with formulas like Caiaphas': "It is better that this man or those die so that the community may survive" (*Scapegoat* 116). Political institutions, in establishing power relations between dominant and subordinate people, always exercise force, violence (Beetham 47-48). A perfectly moral politics seems as impossible as a perfectly nonviolent politics.

Girard's refusal to plant his feet in the wet cement of any single political party's rhetoric is the outcome, in part, of his preference for a religious perspective on human affairs. The religious is his fundamental category of analysis; and religion in Girard's view is not an unenlightened form of belief to be superseded by political wisdom, but rather the fundamental mode of human social organization, the political only a secular displacement of it. I hasten to add that Girard's pessimism about political arrangements arises not from any stoical indifference to their victims, but rather from his respect for victims—a respect that is finally religious in character.

A related sub-clause of Girard's political pessimism is the incompatibility of mimetic theory and "identity politics," broadly defined so as to include nationalist or ethnic politics based on historical grievances and desires for vengeance. I have in mind here Girard's idea that the distinct identity of the surrogate victim is not strictly relevant to the effects of collective violence.

Violence belongs to all men, and thus to none in particular. It is futile to look for the secret of the redemptive process in distinctions between the surrogate victim and other members of the community. The crucial fact is that the choice of the victim is arbitrary (*Violence* 257). The stabilizing effects of political scapegoating thus depend on the degree of unanimity in the community's violence, not on the identity of the victim. The identity of the sacrificial victim is not essential in scapegoating; the essential in scapegoating is the unanimity of the collective violence itself (cf. *Violence* 84, 150). Perhaps because of this priority of violent unanimity over victim identity, Girard has measured his distance from specific political causes (*Scapegoat* 19-20). We must confront what I would call the formal equivalence of scapegoats. The arbitrary victim of a sacrificial political process may be anyone: scandalously rich or scandalously poor, aristocrat or vagrant, typical representative of a majority or a minority. A politics

informed by mimetic theory seems obliged not to privilege any particular category of victim. And inasmuch as a political group with grievances would claim for its members the status of "victim" only to mobilize vengeful blaming of its political opposition, that group's aims would seem incompatible with the implications of mimetic theory. The negative side of Girard's refusal to privilege particular categories of victim is a capacity in mimetic theory to alienate members of groups who have suffered persecution, by not giving to their victim status the kind of attention they believe it deserves. The affirmative side of the refusal is its opening toward a certain broad human equality: an equality of dangerous indebtedness, in that we are all beneficiaries of systems stabilized by victims of past violence; and an equality of dangerous susceptibility, in that we are all potential participants in future violence. The appreciation of that basis of shared debt and danger seems to be a first step toward the egalitarian politics mimetic theory allows.

Nonetheless, when one tests mimetic theory on particular cultural texts and situations, one must deal with representations of particular victims. Does the principle of the formal equivalence of scapegoats remain tenable when one attends to the status of a particular victim in a specific context? That is the question I explore here by means of a consideration of Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo: A Tale of the Seaboard* (1904), an English modernist novel of political violence set in the fictional South American republic of Costaguana. The sacrificial victim in this text is a character named Señor Hirsch, a Jewish hide-merchant who unluckily arrives in the Costaguaneran province of Sulaco when civil war breaks out. Hirsch is the one in the novel who substitutes for all others as *the* victim of the violence it both represents and contains.

### Conrad's *Nostromo* (1904) and political pessimism

The San Tomé silver mine, in the province of Sulaco in the South American republic of Costaguana, has been inactive since the late 1860's. The Costaguana government forces its owner Mr. Gould to pay extorted "taxes" on what the mine *could earn* in profits if it were being worked. This fiscal persecution destroys Gould's self-respect, and he dies a bitter man, having complained in long letters to his only son Charles Gould. Charles Gould is away in Europe studying the science of mining engineering. When his father dies, he proposes marriage to his beloved Emilia, tells her of his plans to defy the paternal prohibition never to re-open the mine, and wins her hand. The Goulds establish themselves in

Sulaco as dispensers of employment, recruiting labourers from the countryside.

The Goulds are pleased with the San Tomé Silver mine: it produces silver and the profits move north to one Mr. Holroyd, their American financial backer in San Francisco. But the freedom to work the mine requires political bribery. Gould finances the dictatorship of Don Vincente Ribiera; Ribiera's function is partly to place limits on the bribes Gould must pay. His chief representative in Sulaco is the dignified Don José Avellanos, an aging historian who has survived many brutal Costaguaneran regimes. Political violence erupts when General Montero, Ribiera's Minister of War, speaks with drunken bluntness at a luncheon on board a vessel in Sulaco harbour, held to celebrate the coming of the British-financed National Central Railway. Montero, inspired to rebel by a sense of his exclusion from the circle of friends around Gould, seems to be a monster of ambition. In 1889, one year after the establishment of Ribiera, civil war breaks out between the Monterists and the Ribierists (the allies of Charles Gould).

Charles Gould fears that his mine will be expropriated if the Monterists win the war. But he has guarded against that possibility by preparing to threaten to destroy it, lining every vein with dynamite. Martin Decoud, a representative of an old Sulaco family, returns from Paris to join the Ribierists. A young journalist, Decoud writes the Ribierist political newspaper. Rioting breaks out in Sulaco; pursued by rebel forces from the capital, President Ribiera comes stumbling into town on a mule. Nostromo, a Genoese sailor who manages the dockhands on the wharves of the O.S.N. (Oceanic Steam Navigation company), rescues President Ribiera from the mob, arousing the admiration of his employer Captain Mitchell.

Things come to a crisis for Charles Gould and his friends when victorious Monterist forces approach just as a fresh shipment of silver, a huge treasure, has come down the mountainside to the harbour. Decoud proposes that the Ribierists found a new republic by spearheading the secession of the province of Sulaco from Costaguana. American support for the new republic would require that the silver move safely to San Francisco and escape the clutches of General Sotillo, who is approaching the Gulf. Decoud, who wishes to found the Republic of Sulaco, joins with Nostromo, who wishes to earn fame by impressing others with his courage; Charles Gould and friends appoint them to remove the silver out beyond the Golfo Placido where it may be then transported by a friendly

vessel northward. It is on the lighter secretly commissioned to remove the silver that the victim Señor Hirsch stows away.

Decoud and Nostromo hide the silver on an island at the outer edge of the harbour, after suffering a collision with an enemy steamer which seems to knock Hirsch overboard to his death. Nostromo returns to Sulaco; he performs yet another feat of bravery, a dangerous overland journey to recall Ribierist forces that have gone by sea to Cayta. He succeeds; the troops return in time; the mine and the new independent Sulaco are saved. However, many have been hurt by the upheaval. Don José Avellanos dies under the strain. Decoud, left alone on the island with the silver, commits suicide. Hirsch is tortured and murdered. Civilians die. About a decade after the war, even though the mine prospers, labourers who work in its darkness are restless; rumours of rebellious disorder spread.

In the course of the civil war, Nostromo witnesses the deaths of his foster mother Theresa Viola, his friend Decoud, and the "man of Fear" Hirsch. Nostromo learns to resent the seeming indifference of the rich people who have exploited his services. He decides to steal the silver slowly, a few bars at a time—the silver which all believe was sunk in the harbour. On the island where the silver is hidden, Giorgio Viola comes to live with his two daughters, Linda and Giselle. Nostromo has long been intended for Linda; but he falls in love with Giselle, even when proposing to Linda. Old Giorgio shoots Nostromo one night, mistaking him for a rejected suitor of Giselle. Nostromo on his death-bed wants to confess to Mrs. Emilia Gould the secret of the treasure. She asks him not to confess. Nostromo dies with his good reputation intact, although we readers know the truth: his public career as a hero was followed by a private life as a thief, a bitter man isolated by self-punishing resentment.

As this summary suggests, Joseph Conrad certainly recognized the human capacity for contagious political resentment. Conrad's admirers have long celebrated his demystifications of the delusions of moral superiority that sustained the politics of European imperialism, and *Nostromo* in particular aims to demonstrate the futility of vainglorious political action.[1] Like René Girard, Joseph Conrad seems cynical about

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[1] In my view, the most convincing position on the specific political significance of *Nostromo* is the position taken by Jacques Berthoud in his essay "The Modernization of Sulaco" (1992). According to Berthoud, Conrad posits "the chief cause of civil disorder [as] the survival of the patrimonial state" in Costaguana. The patrimonial state is an "irrationalist conception" which "cannot establish political stability; for when the sacramental state has been vacated by its priest-king, it demands a successor, even when it is obliged to do so in the language of

political solutions to human suffering, a cynicism explained in part by Conrad's childhood suffering as a political exile sent to Siberia with his father, a Polish nationalist whose activism led nowhere (Meyers 1991). Conrad shows a contempt for "mob politics" in *Nostromo*, a contempt that resembles Girard's thematics of the persecuting mob in *The Scapegoat*. The treatment of mobs in *Nostromo* explains why Marxist critics, although complimentary of the novel's historicist breadth, always blame its politics for being not quite revolutionary enough (Jenkins 176; Jameson 270; Ryan 71; Bonney 237; Visser 3,8).

Despite these rough similarities of outlook between Conrad and Girard, the question of whether *Nostromo* belongs in Girard's notoriously selective canon of the great novels remains. What I have in mind here is Girard's distinction between texts that reveal the metaphysicality of desire and texts that only reflect it; and further, his related distinction between the hidden scapegoat *of* the text and the revealed scapegoat *in* the text (*Scapegoat* 119-20). Where a scapegoat is *of the text*, we detect a "hidden structural principle" excluded and covered up by it; the text must in this case be "defined as one of persecution, entirely subjected to the representation of persecution from the standpoint of the persecutor. The text is controlled by the effect of a scapegoat it does not acknowledge" (*Scapegoat* 119). Where the scapegoat is *in the text*, we have "the clearly visible theme" of scapegoating. In this case, the work "acknowledges the scapegoat effect which does not control it... [and] this text reveals the truth of the persecution" (*Scapegoat* 119). In what follows, I argue that *Nostromo* approaches a revelation of the metaphysicality of desire and the scapegoat mechanism, but reflects it only imperfectly. I argue further that accounting for Hirsch's specific identity as a man of fear and as a Jewish individual seems essential to our resisting the reciprocal violence that the text does not renounce—which accounting would seem to call into question the practical import of the notion of the formal equivalence of scapegoats. Joseph Conrad, more interested in shocking us with the scandal of primitive cruelty than in revealing our "equality" in violence and our dependence on the example of a suffering mediator, falls back on the insinuation that Hirsch is *fated* to die as the one victim in the place of many.

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republicanism or the rhetoric of equality" (151). Berthoud argues that in the novel Conrad is above all "concerned to exhibit the vacuity of constitutional, libertarian and populist language *in this context*" (151; my emphasis).

**Charles Gould and Señor Hirsch as king and fool**

Señor Hirsch emerges in the world of *Nostromo* at the end of a chapter set in the Casa Gould during a social evening, an evening that ends with a conversation between him and Charles Gould. Their meeting is constructed as if Charles Gould were a king (he is known by many as the *"rey de Sulaco"*) and Hirsch his court jester, his fool (on the fool as sacrificial substitute, see McKenna 179-181). That afternoon, Barrios and his Ribierist troops have been sent ceremoniously into battle from the Sulaco wharf. The citizens who gather in the Casa Gould gather in solidarity against the enemy Montero. Young Martin Decoud, courting Antonia on the balcony, mocks the vilification of Montero that animates the guests'conversations when he shouts the phrase *"Gran Bestia!"* into the room at the top of his voice. "Gran bestia" has been the theme of his newspaper propaganda, his label for Montero; although Decoud is aware that his newspaper's exaggerations promote mimetic hatred, the Ribierists who hear his cry of "Gran Bestia" approve of the angry sentiment. In preparation for the appearance of Señor Hirsch, then, we have an atmosphere of hatred (Decoud's courting of Antonia Avellanos, daughter of Don José, is tragically out of place). Conrad uses the metaphor of a swelling and receding "tide" to describe the party (189, 192, 199); Hirsch appears to be left behind by this "tide":

> And there remained only one visitor in the vast empty sala, bluishly hazy with tobacco smoke, a heavy-eyed, round-cheeked man, with a drooping moustache, a hide merchant from Esmeralda, who had come overland to Sulaco, riding with a few peons across the coast range. (200)

The mere fact that Hirsch is a man who does not know when to leave, unaware of good manners, draws the reader's sympathy away from him and toward Gould. His status as a merchant makes him a symbolic rival of Charles Gould: before the days of silver, the biggest trade in Sulaco was that in ox-hides and indigo. Conrad thus casts the merchant's small trade as that of an antiquated primitive, against Gould's magnificent business as one proper to an imposing captain of modern industry.

Primarily, though, Señor Hirsch is *afraid*. He is afraid for his business and his personal safety. Now that war has come to the land, he fears his labour will be wasted and seeks comfort from the figurative king of Sulaco: "A plain man could carry on his little business now in the country, and even think of enlarging it—with safety. Was it not so? He

seemed to beg Charles Gould for a confirmatory word, a grunt of assent,
a simple nod even. He could get nothing" (201). If the war threatens his
mine, so it must threaten Hirsch's stock: in his austere silence, Gould
shows honesty. With a comical dignity, Hirsch takes his little business as
seriously as Gould takes his big one.

> ...the silence of Charles Gould portended a failure. Evidently this
> was no time for extending a modest man's business. He [Señor
> Hirsch] enveloped in a swift mental malediction the whole country,
> with all its inhabitants, partisans of Ribiera and Montero alike; and
> there were incipient tears in his mute anger at the thought of the
> innumerable ox-hides going to waste... rotting, with no profit to
> anybody—rotting where they had been dropped by men called
> away to attend the urgent necessities of political revolutions. (203)

Conrad delicately balances conflicting implications of Hirsch's thought
here: the merchant's concern for the waste of his ox-hides when human
lives are about to be wasted seems monstrously mercenary (illegitimate),
but his frustration with the way "political revolutions" interfere with
economic prosperity remains analogous to the anti-political frustrations
of Charles Gould (legitimate). More ominously, Hirsch secretly curses *all*
the others in the Costaguana community, separating himself out as the
indifferent one from the many committed to the fight: Hirsch curses "the
whole country... all its inhabitants... partisans of Ribiera and Montero
alike." The scapegoat-to-be takes neither of the two sides. He falls
unwittingly as the mediator between.

Hirsch expresses fears for his bodily safety, telling Gould about a
strange meeting that occurred during his journey over the mountains.
Three strange riders appeared; two left the road, but one remained,
approached Hirsch, and asked him for a cigar: "'He did not seem armed,
but when he put his hand back to reach for the matches I saw an enormous
revolver strapped to his waist. I shuddered. He had very fierce whiskers,
Don Carlos, and as he did not offer to go on we dared not move'" (201-
202). Now Hirsch believes that this man was the legendary outlaw
Hernandez. Hirsch's two servants assured him that the man was the
famous Nostromo. This evening, Charles Gould also assures Hirsch that
it was Nostromo: "the round face, with its hooked beak upturned towards
[Gould] [had] an almost childlike appeal. 'If it was the Capataz de
Cargadores you met—and there is no doubt, is there?—you were perfectly
safe'" (202). Traumatized by coming so close to a man of violence, Hirsch

continues to confuse safety and danger, and persists in not differentiating the showy public Capataz from the enigmatic bandit Hernández (204; 381). Conrad's joke here marks Hirsch as a coward: we readers are meant to laugh at his cowardice, to share the common belief that admiration of violence is essential to the freedom of the manly man.[3] But the deeper joke is to be caught in the fact that Hirsch's perceptions, though distorted, dissolve something of the difference between legitimate and illegitimate violence. There is some incipient truth both in the fool's "swift mental malediction" and his blurring of the Capataz and the bandit. Hirsch fears Nostromo and Hernández *as if they were one and the same*; the violence of the outlaw and the violence of the local hero from inside the community are the same to him, as the Monterists and the Ribierists are the same. His attitude inadvertently points toward the levelling effects of violence.

### Nostromo and Señor Hirsch as hero and monster

If Señor Hirsch is monstrous because he carries on as a man of fear, Nostromo, the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores, is a hero because he carries himself a man of courage. Nostromo belongs to the tradition of what Barry McCarthy has anatomized as the "warrior ethos," with its values of "physical courage...endurance...strength and skill... [and] honour" (106). This Nostromo performs spectacular feats of bravery, motivated not by altruism but by a candidly egoistic love for his own reputation. The pompous Captain Mitchell (his boss at the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company) often "loans" Nostromo to the Sulaco elite when they need things done, and Nostromo's performance of those tasks wins him fame. He guards Sir John the railway magnate through the mountains, delivers a message from the Ribierists to the shadowy Hernández, rescues President Ribiera from the mob, and succeeds in a desperate journey to recall General Barrios and his troops to Sulaco. But on his most difficult mission, the removal of the treasure from Sulaco one night during the war, Nostromo fails. Hirsch contributes to that failure, as the abject coward disturbing the smooth course of triumphant heroism.

How does Hirsch end up on the lighter loaded with treasure? Like Oedipus, the more Hirsch tries to flee the source of violence, the more he

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[3] Albert Guerard has suggested that "the novel's division of its humanity into the cowardly and the brave is certainly less conscious than some of is other polarities (skeptical-idealist, complex-simple, scoundrel-dupe) but possibly as important" (187). I believe that this division is *certainly* as important, fundamental to an understanding of the sacrificial status of Hirsch.

approaches it. When the rioting begins, he flees from his lodgings at the storekeeper Anzani's (in such a panic that he forgets his shoes), scrambling over walls and blundering into Sulaco's Franciscan convent. Hirsch lies down "in the midst of matted bushes with the recklessness of desperation... hidden there all day, his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth with all the intensity of thirst engendered by heat and fear" (271). In the evening, he ventures onto the streets, runs toward the railway yards and then toward the O.S.N. offices. "He crouched, crept, crawled, made dashes, guided by a sort of animal instinct, keeping away from every light and every sound of voices" (272). Hirsch finally hides away on the lighter; when men come and load the silver onto it, he overhears and understands but his "only idea at the time, overpowering and masterful, [is] to get away from this terrible Sulaco" (273). That Señor Hirsch should end up on the same cargo-boat loaded with the very treasure that has been acting as the magnet attracting the violence of the most violent men in the country is a terribly ridiculous irony: Conrad's plotting plays without compunction on his fearfulness.

Why is Hirsch such a coward? One reason is structural. Hirsch embodies mimetic panic, personifies in his very flesh the terror that the many non-warriors in Sulaco must be feeling during the rioting, fighting, killing and dying. It is as if Conrad has Hirsch possess in his one mind and body, in one private person, the totality of public fear let loose by the sacrificial crisis of the war. Second, the text posits a more properly characterological reason: the fearfulness of Señor Hirsch is constructed as an *ascribed* trait. We are informed that Hirsch is "one of those men whom fear lashes like a whip" (273). One of those, but not one of us. In a contrast between Captain Mitchell (who fears nothing, not even torture) and Hirsch, the narrator defines this coward's debility: "a certain kind of imagination—the kind whose undue development caused [his] intense suffering—that sort of imagination which adds the blind terror of bodily suffering and of death, envisaged as an accident to the body alone, strictly —to all the other apprehensions on which the sense of one's existence is based" (338). When Nostromo and Decoud have discovered the terrified stowaway, Decoud speaks of Hirsch as a *born* coward:

> Decoud thought that it was a thousand pities the wretch had not died of fright. *Nature, who had made him what he was,* seemed to have calculated cruelly how much he could bear in the way of atrocious anguish without expiring. Some compassion was due to so much terror. Decoud, though imaginative enough for sympathy,

resolved not to interfere with any action that Nostromo could take. But Nostromo did nothing. And the fate of Señor Hirsch remained suspended in the darkness of the gulf at the mercy of events which could not be foreseen. (274; emphasis added)

Conrad resorts to biological determinism because the easiest way to justify hatred of human "monsters" is to propose they were "born that way," which relieves us of any responsibility for their condition. This geneticism legitimates our contempt for Hirsch, suggesting not only that born cowards exist but also that they are incurable, beyond help. It helps to justify not only the indifference with which the characters in the novel treat Hirsch, but also our readerly contempt for him. After all, it is difficult to resist such an open invitation to despise a coward, is it not? We who sympathize with Nostromo, Decoud, Gould, Monygham—all of whom show courage—do not wish to identify with a victim who is a monstrous coward. Señor Hirsch becomes the sacrificial victim of the text primarily because he is monstrously fearful in a world where all men ascribe unanimously to a code of warrior values. To resist the persecution of Hirsch, we must resist the notion that cowards deserve "what they get" because of their inability or unwillingness to fight back, their failure to repay violence with violence.

Once we begin to resist the insinuation that Hirsch's cowardice is simply monstrous, the theme of Nostromo's being "feared and admired"— just as Hernández, with whom Hirsch confuses Nostromo, is "feared and admired" (191)—is complicated. Nostromo is admired because of his strength and skill, his generosity and charm. But he is feared because of his violence. As a representative of the fear of Nostromo, Hirsch embodies the people's fear of Nostromo—with a difference: Hirsch fears Nostromo but does not admire him. He fails to admire Nostromo because his fear swallows up any possibility of admiration: *the coward is monstrous because he fears violence without admiring it.* Admiration would imply a desire to be like the violent hero, to imitate him. But Hirsch does not court violence, he just wants to get away from it, to get away from Hernández, from Nostromo, from Sulaco. However absurd the scapegoat may thus appear, this exceptionality to the rule (everyone else *does* admire Nostromo) offers an ironic repudiation of those warrior values the heroes validate.

Conrad further situates Señor Hirsch in relations of rivalry with the hero by giving to him a spectral quality, by associating him with dreams, the realm of sorrow and death, and by having Hirsch shock and surprise

both Nostromo and the reader as a stowaway on the lighter and as a corpse
in the Custom House.  On the lighter, Nostromo thinks he hears a sound
of sorrow from somewhere in the silent darkness: "'I have a strange notion
of having dreamt that there was a sound of blubbering, a sound a
sorrowing man could make somewhere near this boat.  Something between
a sigh and a sob'" (262).  This noise is the murmuring of Hirsch, but at a
figurative level, it is the noise of sorrow as such, the background noise of
victims of the panic.  After hearing the strange sound again, Nostromo
confuses its true source with Decoud: "'What is it?  Are you distressed,
Don Martin?'" (269)—perhaps a prolepsis of Decoud's suicide.  Finally,
Nostromo realizes he is not dreaming, and they have an enemy, a
stowaway: "With lips touching Decoud's ear he declared his belief that
there was somebody else besides themselves upon the lighter.  Twice now
he had heard the sound of stifled sobbing" (270).  When Sotillo's steamer
has appeared into the Gulf and stopped nearby in the silent darkness,
Nostromo regrets not having murdered Hirsch: a mere whimper could alert
Sotillo to their presence, forcing them to sink the treasure and swim for
their lives.  The steamer and the lighter collide by accident; Nostromo and
Decoud work furiously to get the leaking lighter safely to the island where
they hide the silver; and  Nostromo returns to Sulaco, where Sotillo has
gone, leaving Decoud behind and telling him that Hirsch has drowned in
the collision (301).

    But Hirsch is not dead yet.  Conrad's narrator punishes Nostromo for
his overconfidence.  After sleeping for fourteen hours in a ruined fort,
Nostromo awakes and begins to ponder for the first time how he has been
exploited, begins to feel isolated and "betrayed" (411-18).  Conrad sets
him up to confront the spectral aspect of Hirsch again, this time in the
Custom House, to which Nostromo is attracted because of its two lighted
windows.

> He [Nostromo] climbed the stairs, then checked himself, because
> he had seen within the shadow of a man cast upon on of the walls.
> It was a shapeless, high-shouldered shadow of somebody standing
> still, with lowered head, out of his line of sight.... Twice the
> Capataz craned his neck [in the doorway]... But every time he saw
> only the distorted shadow of broad shoulders and bowed head. He
> was doing apparently nothing, and stirred not from the spot, as
> though he were meditating—or, perhaps, reading a paper. And not
> a sound issued from the room. (423-24)

Nostromo is annoyed by this shadow: "He wondered who it was—some Monterist? But he dreaded to show himself.... Devil take the fellow! He did not want to see him. There would be nothing to learn from his face..." (424). Doctor Monygham, who is devoted to Mrs. Gould, arrives, seeking Colonel Sotillo but finding Nostromo. Unafraid of being seen by Monterists, Monygham enters the room first; he tells Nostromo to follow him, not to fear (426). The shadow Nostromo has watched from the doorway turns out to be the shadow of a dead man who has been given the estrapade, a form of torture in which one's hands are tied behind one's back, and one is wrenched from one's feet. And the man is Hirsch, which bewilders Nostromo. Hirsch did not drown. Hirsch has been given the estrapade, and shot. Just as the sound of sobbing preceded the shocking discovery of a stowaway, here Conrad has the shadow of a reading man precede the sight of the dangling corpse. The image has terrible force. Conrad uses it to shock Nostromo and the reader together and at once: our experience of Hirsch is an experience of the unexpected, upsetting other.

Monygham and Nostromo now settle into a dialogue, by far the longest, most crucial dialogue in the novel, which ends with Nostromo's decision to agree with Monygham's pleas and to do one last thing for the "rich men" he is beginning to despise, that is, to undertake a desperate ride overland and bring General Barrios back to Sulaco. Throughout this dialogue in the Custom House, however, Conrad repeats allusions to the presence of the corpse of Hirsch, as if he were a third party listening to Monygham and Nostromo.

> Their flowing murmurs paused in the dark. Perched on the edge of the table with slightly averted faces, they felt their shoulders touch, and their eyes remained directed towards an upright shape nearly lost in the obscurity of the inner part of the room, that with projecting head and shoulders, in ghastly immobility, seemed intent on catching every word. (430)

This corpse is personified as if alive: "erect and shadowy against the stars... waiting attentive, in impartial silence" (452)—as if a dead man could wait, as if a dead man could pay attention. Then it seems to move: "To their eyes, accustomed to obscurity, the late Señor Hirsch, growing more distinct, seemed to have come nearer" (455; see also 456, 458, 461). The closest thing to a cry of pity for the victim is Nostromo's statement before his exit from the room: "'You man of fear!... You shall be avenged by me—Nostromo!'" (461). As Jacques Berthoud argues, Nostromo's

apostrophic "identification with a man who, as the embodiment of fear, had seemed [his] antithesis barely twenty-four hours before is a measure of the extent of Nostromo's transformation" (*Major Phase* 122). Nostromo has begun to change from man of honour to skulking thief of the silver, the same silver which, due to Hirsch's testimony, everybody believes has been sunk in the Gulf. When Nostromo says he will "avenge" Hirsch's meaningless death, he hints at his burgeoning intention to keep to himself the silver's location on the Great Isabel. He means that he will avenge Hirsch's death by *acting as if Hirsch had in fact spoken the truth* to Sotillo, by behaving (in the eyes of Monygham and Gould and the others indifferent to their victims) as if the silver had been lost. In resentful solidarity with the late Señor Hirsch, he will steal the silver, thinking of himself as, like Hirsch, a "betrayed" victim— Nostromo now believes that he and Señor Hirsch resemble one another, as victims of the political elite in Sulaco and its indifference.

### The last hours of Señor Hirsch and Conradian skepticism

The pattern most clearly inviting us to identify Hirsch as the scapegoat is the plot structure leading to his violent death. Colonel Sotillo interrogates Hirsch, but refuses to believe the stowaway's confused testimony that the silver has been sunk. After some days in Sulaco, Colonel Sotillo's patience wears out. His soldiers bind Hirsch's wrists together and throw the rope over a beam above, preparing to subject him to torture.

> Hirsch was jerked up off his feet, and a yell of despair and agony burst out into the room, filled the passage of the great buildings, rent the air outside, caused every soldier of the camp along the shore to look up at the windows, started some of the officers in the hall babbling excitedly, with shining eyes; others setting their lips, looked gloomily at the floor.
> Sotillo, followed by the soldiers, had left the room.... Hirsch went on screaming all alone behind the half-closed jalousies while the sunshine, reflected from the water of the harbour, made an ever-running ripple of light high up on the wall. He screamed with uplifted eyebrows and a wide-open mouth—incredibly wide, black, enormous, full of teeth— comical. (447)

The problem here is not to be located only in the pain and cruelty described, nor merely in the ironic graphicism of the panoramic detail.

The problem is crystallized in that adjective "comical," which belongs to Conrad's narrator and presents us with, to use Cedric Watts's phrase, "the notion that a man suffering hideous agony by torture can be regarded as not merely grotesque but positively comical" (78). The narrator here has allowed an ethically neutral "relish for the visually incongruous and absurd" to collapse into "a capacity to see the horrific as merely farcical" (Watts 79).[4] What is Joseph Conrad's purpose in permitting his narrator to describe Hirsch's face here as "comical"?

In wrestling with this juncture in the text, I have found helpful Eric Gans's statements on the modernist esthetic (188-206). Gans, one of the most powerful of Girard's collaborators, claims that modernism is an "esthetic of provocation" that sometimes gives way to the "terroristic intentions of the artist" (194). In modernism, "the artist can be permitted any indulgence because he stands above the inauthenticity of ordinary human relations" (192). We may read Conrad's audacious use of "comical" as an example of such modernist "indulgence," by means of which Conrad shocks us less with the suffering of Hirsch and more with the scandalous *indifference of the narrator presenting the scene*—which indifference is presumably more authentic than the bourgeois reader's sense of shock.[5] And why would Conrad wish his narrator to display such indifference, however ephemerally? He desires to produce the effect of scandal in his bourgeois readers. With that word "comical," the narrator may position *himself* as the equally powerful rival of all the agents of political cruelty symbolized by Colonel Sotillo. It is as if Conrad's narrator argues with the word "comical": yes, the brutal Sotillo may be indifferent to suffering, but I am capable of as much mastery; underneath my estheticization of this scene lies my indifference, which I betray by this word and which makes me a match for the absurdity of an indifferent universe in which the likes of Sotillo have the political power to torture

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[4] Watts continues: "The judgment seems to be so callous that we might well hope to delegate it as the implicitly reported thought of some brutal observer. But we are specifically denied such recourse. The text specifies that Hirsch is now 'all alone' in the room.... The narrator appears to be distinctly callous; yet the same narrator, in other passages of the book, had made clear his condemnation of man's inhumanity to man" (78).

[5] Conrad's narrator comments on Charles Gould's sorrow for his late father, the original model of desire in the story: "His personal feeling had not been outraged, and it is difficult to resent with proper and durable indignation the physical or mental anguish of another organism, even if that organism is one's father" (58-59). Sophisticated resignation to such a "difficulty" also is meant to be scandalous. It anticipates the indifference to Hirsch's anguish.

innocent victims. The moral indifference of a universe abandoned by God is the ultimate scandal here; it is the spectre of that putative indifference that Conrad has not relinquished as his model-obstacle.

Further suggesting that the romantic and post-romantic esthetics were less hostile to Christian morality than the modernist esthetic would be, Gans argues that romanticism was "limited by that feature of (post)romantic self-consciousness that Nietzsche devoted all his efforts to extirpating: the Christian-Kantian imperative of absolute reciprocity toward the Other" (200). Modernism, according to Gans, not only erases that limiting feature, but also rejects the (romantic) sense of originary guilt for originary violence:

> The modernist solution to the discovery of the guilty violence at the origin of culture was to posit the guiltless violence of a pre-cultural, prelinguistic human desire.... The scene of representation that [in the romantic esthetic] had been relocated in the individual had not for all that been fully desacralized; it remained the locus of universal communion, of universal desire—and of universal guilt. The modernists, in rejecting the guilt, learned on the basis of their predecessors' explorations to take the scene of representation for granted. (202)

It is this taking "for granted" of the scene of representation, along with the "rejection of the guilty violence at the origin of culture," that I suggest we might recognize in this scene of torture. Even torture becomes material for esthetic figuration, and the grotesque as formal mode of presentation is meant to justify, merely by estheticizing, the content of the doubly cruel dehumanization of Hirsch.[6] Conrad's narrator, in his audacious doubling of himself against those monstrous others responsible for the absurd history of political violence, in his seeming momentarily indifferent to that violence—the scapegoat Hirsch is used here as a symbol of meaningless suffering, "comical," not tragic, we must not care—the narrator dares, scandalously, to refuse "universal guilt." The narrator dares to reject the

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[6] "Modernism's formal panestheticism is far more radical than the romantic affirmation of the esthetic privileging of the self. Eschewing the romantic presumption of the natural communion of souls, the modernist confines mediation between individual and community to the forms created by the artistic elite. Rather than affirming the parallel between esthetic and ethical intuition, modernism takes the latter [ethical intuition] for granted as included in the former [esthetic intuition]" (Gans 191-92).

limits of the moral imperative that marked off previous esthetics from the modernist. The "comical" Señor Hirsch is not a reciprocal Other: we do not owe him moral equality. To believe his case can be helped is to assimilate oneself with the naive moralists, with the anti-estheticism of the bourgeoisie.

Hirsch's last gesture is as crucial to our understanding of his status as is the effect of the adjective "comical." The sun has set on the Custom House. He has been hanging in agony for hours. Colonel Sotillo enters the room from the balcony and demands that the prisoner confess (448). With a riding whip, Sotillo strikes the prisoner; Hirsch twists painfully on the rope.

> For a moment the rattle of his chattering teeth pervaded the vast, shadowy room, where the candles made a patch of light round the two flames burning side by side. And as Sotillo, staying his raised hand, waited for him to speak, with the sudden flash of a grin and a straining forward of the wrenched shoulders, he spat violently into his face.
>
> The uplifted whip fell, and the colonel sprang back as if aspersed by a jet of deadly venom. Quick as thought he snatched up his revolver, and fired twice. (449)

Hirsch spits into Sotillo's face, "violently." It surprises us that the coward has suddenly struck back. The near-unanimity of critical comment on this scene is worth noticing. Most critics agree that Señor Hirsch has at last acted like a man, redeemed himself, displayed some courage and thus become more fully human—by spitting in his persecutor's face and thus bringing his life to its end. Whether or not Conrad intended the action to stand as some finally liberating gesture, viewed from the perspective of mimetic theory, it hides the innocence of the scapegoat rather than revealing it. Certainly, we are relieved that his suffering is complete; but Hirsch "deserves to die" once more and only because (this time) he acts not like a coward but like a "man." He resembles Oedipus, agreeing with his own guilt. Conrad assimilates Hirsch in this final act to the very violence which has been his undoing.

Señor Hirsch's status as a Jew certainly contributes to his status as scapegoat. It would be inaccurate, in my opinion, to describe Conrad's text as one advertising the principles of anti-semitism, but I would agree with Cedric Watts: "As a whole, the characterization of Hirsch may... give the reader the uneasy feeling that Conrad's humanity has not sufficiently

resisted the easy option of a prejudicial stereotype" (87).[7] It is primarily his cowardice that makes Hirsch expendable, not his identity as a Jew. Rather than needing to pin wriggling to the wall any suspect biographical Conrad, we need, as Joyce Wexler argues, to recognize that "Conrad's career demonstrates that his rhetorical decisions were based on his conception of his audience" (217). On the other hand, it seems obvious that Conrad would have had more trouble creating the character to fill the terrible role Hirsch does fill if that character had been, say, an English merchant from Liverpool and a coward, or a Scottish merchant from Glasgow and a coward. Hirsch's distinct identity as a Jew made it easier for Conrad to *distance* his readers (the British readers of 1904 with their prejudices) from the victim—made it easier for him to limit their sympathy for the scapegoat (on British anti-Semitism at that time, see Holmes). Because of this, we may ask whether the idea of the formal equivalence of scapegoats needs qualification. When we speak of particular victims, as we do when we speak of the Hirsch the fearful Jew in Conrad's *Nostromo*, the distinct characteristics of the victim often seem impossible to overlook. What is certain is that Conrad's brilliant text falls into the tendency of persecution at its moment of greatest esthetic pressure. Conrad's narrator, in his rivalry with the cruelty of Colonel Sotillo, loses sight of the reality of the object —he loses sight of the victim and imitates the monstrous indifference of his political rival. This points to the fact that a novelist may show the collective violence that produces a scapegoat and thereby condemn the victimizers, *without* showing compassionate pity for the victim as such. Mimetic theory helps us resist the tendency to persecution in *Nostromo*; to locate Señor Hirsch as the scapegoat is to confront the fact that Conrad's novel remains bound to the ways of violence, that Conrad has found no way out of the politics of revenge.

René Girard has written: "Christian symbolism is universal for it alone is able to give form to the experience of the novel" (*Deceit* 310). And further: "Renunciation of a human mediator and renunciation of deviated transcendency inevitably call for symbols of vertical

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[7]For other discussions of Señor Hirsch as a Jew, see the study by J.A. Verleun, and Jeffrey Meyers' essay, "Conrad and the Jews" (1992). Meyers aims to offer "considerable evidence to oppose the prevailing view and to suggest that Conrad, for a man of his time and place, was astonishingly free of anti-Semitic prejudice. He was—for historical, familial, and personal reasons— essentially sympathetic to the Jews" (33). John Lester's book, *Conrad and Religion*, an otherwise helpful study, unfortunately has little to say on this question.

transcendency whether the author is a Christian or not" (*Deceit* 312). Such symbols of vertical transcendency are missing in the figuration of Señor Hirsch. John Lester has demonstrated how Conrad substituted an intensely religious devotion to his vocation as a novelist for the faith he quietly left behind during his formative years (7-40). Lester argues that *Nostromo*, among the novels, offers us Conrad's "most comprehensive consideration of Christian inadequacies" (77) even though in *Nostromo* "the inadequacy of non-religious materialism [i.e., political idolatry] shows itself in an even worse light" (155). Although Joseph Conrad in *Nostromo* exposes the futility of political idolatry, he can not reveal the metaphysicality of desire, because he has rejected the religious perspective except for its displacement in the modernist esthetic. Conrad is not one of those men who "condemn themselves by their despair," nor does he ever seem to have believed himself to be "condemned by God" (*Things Hidden* 247). Conrad aimed to substitute his own acts of compassionate esthetic creation for those acts of compassion which the Christian institutions of his time were failing (in his view) to perform. But one artist can not singlehandedly match the ferocious spectre of the political cruelty the artist knows to threaten human culture. Nor could Joseph Conrad quite vanquish the absent divine rival that *Nostromo* everywhere evokes. Behind the figure of Señor Hirsch we may sense the presence of other victims of real persecution—some may sense the presence of one other Victim—victims who, if more fully acknowledged, might have moved this great novelist toward a conclusion for Señor Hirsch different from that which *Nostromo* represents.

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# THE "JUSTIFIABLE HOMOCIDE" OF ABORTION PROVIDERS: MORAL REASON, MIMETIC THEORY, AND THE GOSPEL

## James Nash

> Our land will never be cleansed without the blood of abortionists being shed.
>
> <div align="right">(Shelly Shannon)</div>

The above quotation is taken, with permission, from a letter written to me by Ms. Shannon. A devout Roman Catholic, she is currently doing time at Federal prison in Kansas, sentenced to 31 years for shooting a famous abortion provider. I have also been in touch with Paul Hill, the former Presbyterian minister, who killed the Pensacola abortion doctor, John Britton. Mr. Hill has written extensively on how his Christian faith led him to what he calls the "justifiable homicide" of Dr. Britton.

The connection between this kind of religiously-justified violence and the work of René Girard is too obvious to be ignored. The violenct acts and rhetoric that polarize both sides of the abortion debate serve to illustrate our society's collapsing ability to distinguish effectively between "good" and "bad" violence (Girard 1972, 52-3). At the same time, the almost universal condemnation of the "religious" proponents of justifiable homicide confirms the Girardian claim that in cultures under gospel influence, "acts of violence that once endowed its perpetrators with religious and cultural preeminence radually begin to rob them of it" (Bailie 52-3). Finally, as we shall see, the incoherence of religiously-grounded efforts to condemn "justifiable homicide suggests that

contemporary Christianity is also having increasing difficulty in distinguishing "good" and "bad" violence.

But before exploring these issues I want to ask another question, one that will prepare the ground for the application of Girard's theory to abortion violence. What light can *moral reason* shed on the problem of the "justifiable homicide" of abortion doctors? Are there clear arguments which will convince any reasonable person it is wrong to kill abortion providers in order to protect unborn human life?

At first it might appear rather simple to produce such arguments —after all an overwhelming majority of Americans currently believe killing abortion workers is wrong, no matter where they stand on the morality of abortion itself. On the other hand, there is a danger that because the current moral consensus against this type of killing appears to be so strong, we may be misled into a false sense of security. After all, thirty or forty years ago there was little debate about the morality of homosexuality, pre-marital sex, or abortion itself. In fact, there are an increasing number of voices suggesting that violence against abortion providers *is* justified; the question has in fact divided the pro-life movement.

What I will attempt to show in what follows is that the arguments offered by moral reason against shooting abortionists are surprisingly weak. While there is little danger in the foreseeable future that anywhere near a majority of people will view this form of killing as "justifiable," there are, I believe, solid grounds to fear that "moral reason" alone is no longer strong enough to provide compelling arguments against abortion violence.

If ethical rationality cannot account for the moral revulsion most people feel at the shooting of abortion doctors, the ground is prepared for another way of *understanding and avoiding* this religiously—sanctioned violence. I am referring to René Girard's mimetic theory, and at the end of this article I hope to show how it can help us to understand both why some pro-life people have turned to violence, and how this response to abortion can be avoided. For if we come to doubt that moral reason alone can uphold the prohibition against "justifiable homicide," then perhaps we need to develop a different kind of reason, or different kinds of reasons. This will lead, finally, to reflection on some of the radical theological implications of Girard's thought, a dimension of his work which, in my judgment, is too often neglected.

Before going any further, I realize I must define what I mean by "moral reason." My use of this term is simply the common post-Kantian notion that if an action is truly immoral, one will avoid doing it not because of fear, custom or human law; rather one's actions will be guided by reason which is able to recognize a moral law as *universally* binding. To say the moral law must be "universal" is simply to affirm that any person in similar circumstances is bound by the same moral law as I am. Thus, if I claim that "human sacrifice is wrong," I cannot argue that it is morally acceptable if practised by non-Christian aborigines.

Therefore, this understanding of moral law lays claim to a reality more universal than specific religious beliefs or cultural milieux. It appeals to all of us, as human beings with the power to reason, and to distinguish right from wrong.

Anyone familiar with academic ethics, or even American culture, is well aware that over the past thirty years the status of this vision of "moral reason" has been in a sharp and steady decline. Alisdair MacIntyre, for example, has written extensively and persuasively on the "interminable character" (6) of contemporary moral debates, while Jeffrey Stout has argued that increasing moral disagreement need not *"compel* us to become nihilists or skeptics" (14). In what follows I will be arguing that we have already reached the point where the incoherence of the enlightenment version of ethical rationality is losing its power to give us convincing reasons why it is wrong to shoot abortionists.

### "Justifiable Homicide" and the abortion debate

Paul Hill, a former Presbyterian minister, and the Rev. David Trosch, a Roman Catholic priest, are probably the two most famous defenders of the "justifiable homicide" of abortion providers. Their arguments are basically the same, and I will attempt to summarize them briefly.

They begin with the premise that the unborn fetus is worthy of exactly the same respect and protection as born human beings. Since both civil law and Christian tradition sanction the use of even lethal force, if necessary, to defend ourselves and others from violent attack, it is incumbent upon us to defend fetal life in precisely the same way. In addition, Paul Hill makes generous use of sacrificial Old Testament Biblical passages, such as the story of Phinehas in Numbers 25, to support his view that God approves of his righteous and violent "zeal" for the unborn.

I think an analogy can help to make their point of view more intelligible, and I shall use one that was suggested to me in a brief article by a former colleague at the Catholic University of America (Grabowski). Imagine you are walking past a playground crowded with children. Suddenly a man with a gun walks into the middle of the school yard and opens fire, killing one child after another. If you are armed, should you not try to shoot the madman before more innocent children are slaughtered, even if it means killing him, and placing your own life at risk? Indeed, would it not be cowardly to fail to intervene in this situation? If you "killed the killer," most people would call you a hero. But if you do shoot this gunman, how are you different from Paul Hill? From a pro-life perspective, the only difference seems to be the age of the children you are protecting.

It is important to bear in mind that Paul Hill and Rev. Trosch are by no means alone in regarding the "pre-born" fetus as morally indistinguishable from "post-born" children: pro-life leaders routinely make this claim every time they say "abortion is murder." Nevertheless, for the most part these same pro-life leaders have condemned Paul Hill's actions.

If, like most pro-choice partisans, you see the fetus as not yet fully human, it is relatively easy to arrive at the conclusion that killing abortion doctors is wrong. However, there are two reasons why I want to focus only on *pro-life* arguments against justifiable homicide.

First, there is the issue of moral accountability. The killers of abortion workers come from the pro-life movement, and claim to be motivated by pro-life rhetoric. Clearly, therefore, leaders in this movement have a responsibility to show how and why this kind of violence does not, or should not, follow from pro-life convictions. If it can be shown that violence does indeed follow from their rhetoric or convictions, as many pro-choice partisans suspect, then we may ask pro-life leaders to alter their methods.

The second reason is more practical. For a moral argument against justifiable homicide to have any "cash value," it must be able to persuade a reasonable person that it is wrong to kill abortionists, even if this person regards the fetus as fully human. There are millions of Americans who consider themselves pro-life: if we cannot produce convincing reasons why such persons should not shoot abortionists, *there are millions of potential killers in our land.*

As a result, the many impassioned arguments against killing abortion providers offered by those who are pro-choice are essentially useless. These views will not mean a thing to the many Americans who affirm the human dignity of the fetus; and the "justifiable homicide" discussion will be in danger of becoming submerged in the interminable abortion debate.

Indeed, many who are pro-life believe those on the other side of the issue have lost all moral authority to condemn abortion violence. Robert George, an anti-abortion professor of politics at Princeton University, has a witty approach to this problem—but his wit also reveals the insidious mimetic temptation to which he himself has yielded. In an article which appeared in *First Things* for a symposium on "Killing Abortionists," George wrote:

> I am personally opposed to the killing of abortionists. However, inasmuch as my personal opposition to this practice is rooted in a sectarian (Catholic) religious belief in the sanctity of human life, I am unwilling to impose it on others who may, as a matter of conscience, take a different view. Of course, I am entirely in favor of policies aimed at removing the root causes of violence against abortionists. Indeed, I would go so far as to support mandatory one-week waiting periods, and even non-judgmental counseling, for people who are contemplating the choice of killing an abortionist. I believe in policies that reduce the urgent need some people feel to kill abortionists while, at the same time, respecting the right of conscience of my fellow citizens who believe that the killing of abortionists is sometimes a tragic necessity—not a good, but a lesser evil. In short, I am moderately pro-choice. (26)

Elsewhere in the *First Things* symposium, Hadley Arkes, the Edward Ney Professor of Jurisprudence and American Institutions at Amherst College, approaches the legal problem more analytically. His article reveals how difficult it is to fashion arguments about justifiable homicide that transcend the morality of abortion.

Arkes is worried about even discussing the case of Paul Hill. "Even with the most delicate hands," he writes, "we run the risk of fostering vast moral hazards—and creating perils for many innocent, earnest people—if we are willing to set into print a truthful discussion of this issue" (24). The reason for this is that the Supreme Court has now established, in the case of abortion, nothing less than a private right to use violence, for any

private reason, without the need to render any public reason for this choice:

> And now the rest of us are obliged to counsel the Paul Hills of the world that they may not make the same claim to the private use of violence, even when they are seeking not merely a private but a public end: the protection of innocent strangers. (25)

Note that Professor Arkes, like Robert George, is arguing here that by resorting to lethal violence Paul Hill is "making the same claim" to the private use of violence as the abortionists he claims to oppose. This "scandalous" "doubling" of the enemy is of course a fundamental point in Girard's theory of violence, one to which we will return later (Girard 1987 426).

Arkes closes his article with a chilling warning about the instability of the current consensus against the justifiable homicide of abortionists.

> [O]ur political men and women deceive themselves if they think that this issue can be quietened simply by being displaced to the periphery of our politics. They have not grasped quite yet that this issue can corrupt even parts of our law that do not seem connected to the issue of abortion; and it can be counted on, reliably, to generate a poison for our civic life that will not be abating. (25)

### Justifiable homicide and religious ethics

In the previous section I argued that there are good reasons to limit our focus to arguments against "justifiable homicide" that emerge from the pro-life side of the abortion debate. Doing so, however, raises an additional hurdle which a successful argument against "justifiable homicide" must face.

Opposition to abortion is generally, though not exclusively, informed by Christian religious belief. Yet, while I am limiting myself to pro-life arguments against the killing of abortionists, I am searching for an argument that will appeal to the common ground shared by all reasonable persons, regardless of religious belief or abortion views. Therefore arguments against "justifiable homicide" which rely on religious faith rather than moral reason will be of little use.

However, this will not, as a rule, pose any special problem. Fortunately, theologians and religious leaders, accustomed by now to centuries of secularism, rarely fashion moral arguments for public

consumption that rely exclusively on specific religious convictions (Stout 124). When they do rely on religious tradition, however, we must be careful to note that it is in order to defend a position which is quite acceptable to secular human reason in any event. What is so fascinating is that it is precisely this "secularization of religious ethics" which renders it virtually powerless to resist the logic of abortion violence.

To return to our basic question, both conventional religious ethics and civil law justify the use of force to stop our school yard psychopath. If it is right to use force to stop *him*, why, if you are pro-life, is it wrong to kill the abortionist?

In order to answer this question we will now take a look at the arguments developed by mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic religious leaders who are both against abortion and against killing abortion workers.

### The Nashville Statement of Conscience

"The Nashville Statement of Conscience," one of the most thoughtful and extensive considerations of the justifiable homicide argument, was published by the The Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention after a meeting in September of 1994. The committee responsible for the document was made up of six theologians, including two ethics professors; all six hold advanced degrees and either teach in Baptist Seminaries or work in other institutions associated with the Southern Baptist Convention.

The Statement is written from the perspective of "pro-life Christians...concerned about the possibility that some of our fellow pro-life Christian friends and colleagues will drift into an embrace of violence directed against abortion providers"(3). It is intended to be a moral analysis and rejection of the killing of abortion doctors, directed to any who will listen, but especially to fellow pro-life activists.

The document begins by stating that for Christians there is a profound presumption in favor of preserving life rather than ending it. I think most "reasonable persons," even without the benefit of Christian faith, would have little difficulty in sharing this presumption with the authors. We would, however, have run into trouble on this score if the document's authors had, like some Christians, embraced the "absolute pacifist" position, prohibiting the taking of human life under any circumstances. They note that such a position has been and can be based in the witness of Scripture, and that a thorough-going pacifism could ground a rejection of both abortion and the killing of abortion providers. "This point of view

would be coherent and consistent, and no further argument would need to be made" (6).

But while the authors are respectful of such a position, they believe the overall witness of Scripture, especially Romans 13, leads on the contrary to the conclusion that there are a small number of tragic circumstances when the taking of human life is morally justifiable. No doubt most non-believers also arrive at the same conclusion through the use of their reason.

The document next considers the moral and legal status of the act of elective abortion, since for those who propound "justifiable homicide," it is this which legitimizes the killing of abortion doctors. The authors take a very strong pro-life stand. They believe that the life in the womb, from conception to birth, "must be understood as human life in its earliest stages rather than as prehuman, nonhuman, potential, or any other less-than-fully-sacred kind of human life"(8). Thus, they are "compelled to consider elective abortion the killing of a human being"(8-9).

It is significant however that the authors do concede there is one situation in which abortion is justified. On the basis of the biblical principle that it is wrong for one to end a human life except in cases of self-defense, the authors believe abortion is acceptable in cases when the fetus poses a serious threat to the physical life of the mother. I will return to this point in a moment.

The Statement then takes up the real subject of the document, the morality of justifiable homicide. Four arguments are presented. Two of these, the claim that the killing of an abortion doctor is not justifiable as a form of capital punishment, nor as an act of violent civil disobedience, can be dispensed with easily, as neither Hill nor Trosch rely on such arguments in making their case.

The two other arguments offered by the Statement are more pertinent. There is first the traditional Christian position that "private citizens are permitted to use lethal force against another human being only if this occurs as an unintended effect of the act of defending oneself or another against an assailant's unjust attack." One may intend to stop an assailant, even if this results in death, but one may not intend to kill him.

This is an accurate and persuasive argument, rooted as it is in Christian tradition (Aquinas, ST II-II, q.64,a.7) and reflected also in our civil law. To return to the playground analogy, our hero would be justified in shooting the psychopath if his intention is not to kill, but to prevent him from continuing the slaughter. Of course, this may seem like ethical hair-

splitting in a crisis situation. It may be practically impossible to aim quickly and accurately in such a way as to maim but not kill the gunman.

Paul Hill has clearly stated that his intention *was* to kill John Britton, so his act does violate this very simple and traditional Christian moral precept, a precept which is also expressed in American civil law. We have here then a crucial moral difference between what Paul Hill did and our playground analogy.

But what about Shelley Shannon, who shot, and did not kill George Tiller? If she did not intend to take his life, but only to maim him, would not her actions be morally legitimate according to the "Nashville Statement of Conscience?" Indeed, does not the very argument that condemns Hill at the same time support the use of *non-lethal* violence, or unintentionally lethal violence, against abortion providers?

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the "Nashville Statement" does not consider this delicate issue, and yet can there be any doubt the authors, and most reasonable people, would find this kind of violence almost as repugnant as murder? To condemn the intentional killing of an abortionist without tackling the far more difficult case of intentional non-lethal violence is to duck the really tough questions of abortion violence.

The inner inconsistency which this evasion seeks to conceal is revealed from a different angle when we recall that the authors believe abortion itself can be a justifiable form of self-defense, when the mother's life is at risk because of the pregnancy. So the document argues it is all right to kill the fetus when it unintentionally threatens the mother's life, but it is *not* acceptable to kill abortionists who *do* intend to destroy the "pre-born."

Of course, to justify the abortion of the fetus when it threatens the mother's life, while condemning the killing, or even the maiming of abortion doctors who *do* intend the death of unborn life, is a position an overwhelming majority of people no doubt hold. But this argument is consistent only if gestational life is seen as having less value than those Paul Hill refers to as the "post-born." And yet the Nashville Statement claims it rejects this position.   On the contrary, the document faithfully repeats the rhetorical affirmation common to most pro-life groups: killing a fetus is the same as killing any other person. The authors insist, "Thus we are compelled to consider elective abortion the killing of a human being."

The second pertinent argument put forth by the Nashville Statement of Conscience only offers further proof that the authors do not really hold the destruction of gestational life to be morally equivalent to the killing of

those outside the womb. In his writings Paul Hill rejects the legitimacy of a government which has allowed thirty million deaths by abortion, and calls on others to do the same. For him it is as if the same number of babies had been slaughtered.

The Nashville Statement "rejects the argument that a government that allows legalized abortion on demand has of necessity lost its legitimacy," and that private citizens are therefore free to resist it "by any means necessary." At this point, a favorite analogy of the pro-life movement presents itself, viz., the Nazi Holocaust.

If, as the Nashville Statement itself asserts, gestational life is fully human, is not our government no more legitimate than that of Hitler's? The authors' claim that it is the people of the United States who, in fair and free elections, selected the leaders of our government who now are responsible for abortion on demand. But did not Hitler abide for a while the rules of democracy? Does following the rules of the democratic process guarantee the legitimacy of a government which permits the killing of millions of its people?

I promised to try to stay with the psycopath-in-the-schoolyard analogy. But if you are sincerely pro-life, is not the situation far graver than this analogy initially suggests? For the playground analogy presumes there is a government with a police force which would, if aware of the armed madman, intervene and stop the killing. In fact, to make the playground-killer situation conform to what is happening with abortion, the government, far from stopping the psychopath, would be actively protecting him—at times even paying his salary!

Is it not reasonable to argue that such a government has lost its legitimacy, no matter what lengths it has taken to follow the rules of democratic procedure? Does not the government's collusion with the psychopath make it *all the more urgent* for me to stop him, with force if necessary? The authors of the Nashville Statement do not believe so. And this again suggests that, no matter what they *say* about abortion, they really do not believe the fetus is fully human.

The Nashville Statement attempted to argue that one can affirm the full humanity of the fetus, and still oppose violence against abortionists, without recourse to the absolute pacifism which is so repugnant to most forms of secular reason. We have seen how and why the document fails: despite all the pro-life rhetoric, the authors have chosen to finesse the status of the fetus, in order to maintain the conventional prohibitions on shooting abortionists.

It is time now to see if recent pronouncements by teaching authorities in the Catholic Church have done any better.

### Roman Catholic responses to justifiable homicide
### i. Background

In some respects, the Roman Catholic hierarchy has taken a more consistent position, one which avoids some of the problems we have seen in the Nashville Statement. It has condemned the killing of abortion doctors, while at the same time maintaining its historic claim that *any* direct assault on the fetus is wrong, even to save the life of the mother. The Church holds it is an absolute and grave moral evil directly to take any innocent human life. What is interesting about this argument is that it does not rest on the claim that the unborn child is a fully human person.

In a recent encyclical entitled Evangelium Vitae, Pope John Paul II wrote:

> Furthermore, what is at stake is so important that, from the standpoint of moral obligation, the mere probability that a human person is involved would suffice to justify an absolutely clear prohibition of any intervention aimed at killing the human embryo. Precisely for this reason, over and above all scientific debates and those philosophical affirmations to which the magisterium has not expressly committed itself, the church has always taught and continues to teach that the result of human procreation, from the first moment of its existence, must be guaranteed that unconditional respect which is morally due to the human being in his or her totality and unity as body and spirit. (No.60)

Thus, the Church's position does not rest on the claim that the fetus *is* the same as a "post-born" person, but rather that it *ought to be treated* as if it were, from the moment of conception, because of the "mere probability" that a human person is involved.

Because the fetus is to be treated like a human person from the moment of conception, and because the direct taking of innocent life is always intrinsically evil, the Roman Catholic Church has a long history of not permitting abortion to save the mother's life, even if this would result in the death of both mother and child (Connery 225ff.) Some Catholic theologians, beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing to this day, have argued, like the authors of the Nashville Statement, that abortion in this situation ought to be permitted as a matter of self-defense, or as

accidental in some sense. But Church authorities, the Holy Office, and even Pope Pius XI in the encyclical *Casti Connubi*, have consistently condemned any direct abortion in order to save the life of the mother (Connery 292ff.).

While it is doubtful that a majority of Roman Catholic theologians would agree with this position, and even more unlikely that many lay people would follow it in practise, there is a merciless logic to the argument. It is undeniably a more consistent position than that enunciated in the Nashville Statement. Some of the problems we encountered there are absent here. We have finally here encountered an approach which, in moral terms, sees the fetus precisely as Paul Hill does.

It is significant that this absolute prohibition on killing is due only to "innocent human life." It is morally permissible to take the life of the unjust. Elsewhere in this encyclical John Paul II upholds the Church's traditional position on the right to self-defense, even if this may mean the unintentional death of the unjust aggressor (Nos.55-56). In addition, while the Pope expresses the hope here that capital punishment will become increasingly rare, "if not practically nonexistent," he does not hold it to be, like abortion, always intrinsically evil.

But how then does the Church repel Hill's argument? The Roman Catholic hierarchy, like the Protestant authors of the Nashville Statement, does not permit itself the "easier" solution provided by absolute pacifism. If the fetus really is to be treated as if it were fully human, and if the Church permits lethal force in the defense of life, on what grounds can the killing of abortion doctors be condemned?

### ii. The case of the Rev. David Trosch
The Catholic Church has its own "justifiable homicide" theorist, the Rev. David Trosch, who differs from Paul Hill only in that he has not actually killed anyone, at least not yet. However, Father Trosch has become, according to Gustav Niebuhr of *The New York Times*, "the most public theoretician" for the radical fringe of the anti-abortion movement (*NYT*, Aug. 24, 1994, A12).

It is not necessary to examine his arguments in detail, because they differ little from Paul Hill's. Indeed, Father Trosch, who was removed from his post as pastor, has become a "good friend" of the former Presbyterian minister since the killing of Dr. Britton: Hill successfully petitioned the court to allow Trosch to attend his trial. Trosch also signed

a petition, circulated by Hill, stating that "all godly action" to defend innocent life was justified, "including the use of force."

Father Trosch is a priest in the archdiocese of Mobile Alabama, and in the Catholic tradition it is the job of the local ordinary, in this case Archbishop Oscar Lipscomb, to discipline rebellious priests. This is precisely what the archbishop has done, depriving Trosch of his status as a teacher of the church, stripping him of his faculties to function as a priest, and removing him from his office as administrator of a parish. Lipscomb has said no one should be fooled into thinking that "Father Trosch's views on killing abortionists have been anything but repudiated by me, his bishop, and through me by the Catholic Church" (273-278).

Archbishop Lispscomb delivered an address on abortion violence in 1994 at a meeting of more than 200 Florida diocesan and parish pro-life leaders. Here he brought to bear on Father Trosch's position the full weight of the Church's moral tradition and his own ecclesiastical authority. It is time to take a look at what he said, to see if he has done a better job than the Nashville Statement at showing how moral reason can condemn "justifiable homicide."

In order to do this, I think it will be helpful to return to the analogy of our schoolyard gunman who is in the process of shooting one child after another. In his address, Lipscomb begins by observing that the Catholic Church has a strong presumption against any kind of "vigilantism." However, he also concedes, "our tradition does recognize the possiblity of cases in which even a private individual would be justified in using force to defend innocent human life." Presumably this would include shooting our schoolyard psychopath. Nevertheless, Archibishop Lipscomb argues that "the present [abortion] crisis differs radically from the attack of one or more unjust aggressors against one or more innocent persons." Killing an abortionist, he believes, is simply "not a proportionate response" to the evil of abortion in our country.

What is original in Lipscomb's use of moral reason to discredit "justifiable homicide" is his effort to connect the killing of abortionists with Catholic "just war theory." The Catholic tradition has a long history of using moral norms and rational analysis to justify, in extreme cases, the violence of states. In his address Lipscomb argues that the same principles which govern the use of violence by states must guide the individual who would use force against an unjust aggressor.

This seems fair: Hill and Trosch envision their struggle as a kind of holy war, and they have frequently used World War II and the Civil War

as analogies for the current situation.   Since both men believe killing abortionists is in conformity with Christian teaching, it stands to reason that "justifiable homicide" must be able to meet the conditions of this typical marriage of the Christian religion with human reason: the defense of violence known as the "just war."

Quoting from the dicussion of just war in the recently published *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* Lipscomb mentions three conditions which must be met to justify the killing of abortionists.  First, all other means of putting an end to [abortion] must have beeen shown to be impractical or ineffective.  Second, there must be serious prospects of success.  Third, the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated.

Lipscomb does not engage in a detailed analysis of his three criteria. What is startling is how he avoids condemning the shooting in moral terms.   His argument is essentially pragmatic: he focusses almost exclusively on the second just war condition, the prospect of success. Because there is still such a high degree of tolerance for the evil of abortion, "the only successful solution is...to change hearts by witness to the truth of every human life and the love God intends to accompany it... Violence will only serve to deafen ears and harden hearts."

He offers an additional practical objection to this kind of violence. One who kills an abortionist cannot even be certain he has stopped the abortions planned for that day, since those seeking abortions may go elsewhere to have them.

Let us return to our schoolyard analogy.  We have been assuming all along that the psychopath is working alone, and that by shooting him, or even killing him, we will stop the slaughter in a definitive way.  But this killer differs from the abortionist in that the latter is only the paid agent of a third party, the mother seeking the termination of her pregnancy.

What Lipscomb is suggesting is that for the two cases to be truly similar, we need to imagine the man with the gun as the paid assassin of a vast, legal terrorist conspiracy.  Shooting the gunman will not put an end to the terrorists, as the very same children will be in danger because of some future terrorist act.  We must convert the terrorists, not kill them.

What are we to make of this argument?  The claim that the schoolyard psychopath cannot be seen as operating alone for the analogy to abortion violence to work seems quite reasonable, but it comes at a price.  For now, while we might agree that shooting the terrorist will not forever put an end

to terror, we still are in no position to say that shooting him *is morally wrong.*

We might rather have to admit it is "ineffective," possibly even "counter-productive" as Lipscomb argues. But this is a prudential argument about the best means to adopt, and a far cry from the moral outrage felt by most people at the death of Dr. Britton. Moreover, many people would quarrel with Bishop Lipscomb that the best way to handle terrorists bent on murder is with persuasion. It is certainly not how the U.S. government handles the problem.

Once the argument is reduced to a discussion of whether killing abortionists will be successful or not, we are in many ways right where Hill and Trosch want us to be. They can read Lipsomb's address as an invitation to redouble their efforts at encouraging others to acts of abortion violence. "Nothing succeeds like success." Can anyone doubt that if every abortionist in the land feared for his or her safety, the number of abortions would decline quite abruptly? Many pro-choice advocates worry this is already happening. Were the Nazis or the southern slaveholders convinced by loving witness, or force of arms? People use violence, because, at least at one level, *violence is effective.*

Archbishop Lipscomb can repudiate "justifiable homicide," he can discipline Father Trosch, and he can claim that the killing of abortionists is "counter-productive," harmful to the pro-life cause. But is it harmful to the fetuses about to be aborted? Given the Church's position on the full humanity of the fetus, and its continued support for the use of violence to defend human life, what Lipscomb cannot do is to fashion a rationally persuasive argument that violence in defense of the unborn is always morally wrong.

If on the other hand, one is inclined to agree with Lipscomb that retaliatory violence is counter-productive here, the question arises, why is it not counter-productive everywhere? Why is it that in defense of unborn life we must be absolute pacifists, but not when it comes to defending other forms of life? The difficulties raised by these questions points again to the collapsing distinction between "good" and "bad" violence (Girard 1972, 52-53; Bailie 52-53).

Perhaps in recognition of this problem, the archbishop adds a specifically religious argument. "For those of us who are Christian believers, there is an even greater resource for our witness to life." Jesus Christ taught us to have a "profound preference for nonviolence over

violence." He did not even allow his followers to use violence to defend his own perfectly innocent life.

This is, in my judgment a far more fruitful line of argument. But this is the road to absolute pacifism, a position the Catholic Church has not embraced for some time. Moreover, to the extent that this argument is based on faith in Jesus as the model for how to be human, we are "out of bounds" as far as secular reason is concerned.

### Conclusion

Our examination of the "justifiable homicide" problem has revealed a number of questions and problems, which I believe can only be resolved in the light of Girard's mimetic theory.

The first difficulty revealed in our analysis is that moral reason, as we have defined it, is powerless to defeat the arguments for "justifiable homicide," so long as abortion is defined as murder, and so long as one accepts the legitimacy of using violence against unjust aggressors.

When Girard's mimetic theory is applied to the "justifiable homicide" problem, it can reveal both what is going on and why. At the most shallow level the failure of pro-life Church leaders to provide convincing arguments against justifiable homicide reveals pro-choice advocates are quite right: to call abortion "murder" in the present situation is itself an invitation to more murder. This kind of rhetoric is the first step down the road of mimetic scapegoating. We know it has in fact led some to that scandalous betrayal of the Gospel message: religiously justified violence.

Moreover, it ought to be possible for the pro-life movement to abandon the "murder" rhetoric, as our analysis has led us to question how many pro-life leaders really do regard abortion as precisely the same thing as murder. One can, after all, regard abortion as always or almost always wrong, without equating it to murder. In fact, I believe it now *must* be seen as something other than murder, in order to repel the mimetic contagion. The Catholic Church's claim that the fetus *ought to be treated as if it were fully human* may suggest a way to uphold the dignity of unborn life without the murder rhetoric.

An understanding of mimetic theory can offer an explanation of *why* some religious and pro-life leaders are tempted to scapegoat abortionists with "murderer" labels, even if they do not really believe it: in order to unite Christian communities divided and confused by the perplexities of modern life. By doing so, these leaders may believe they can re-create the

unanimity of their factured communities at the expense of the victims they have identified.

Girard's theory can also be applied to the advocates of "justifiable homicide." Paul Hill and all those who argue in favor of killing abortionists are imitating precisely what they profess to despise.

Finally, even the judicial system has been infected by the "mimetic contagion": Hill has been sentenced to death. If he is executed, will radical pro-lifers be deterred or provoked from more violent mimesis?

And yet, by "condemning" the "murderous" and self-serving rhetoric of pro-life leaders, and all those caught up in this vicious circle, have we not fallen into the same mimetic trap we are criticizing? Our analysis must take us beyond these moralistic conclusions, if we are to avoid the kind of accusatory self-righteousness which is, as we have seen, only the first step down the endless road of mimetic violence.

What is so remarkable about the case for "justifiable homicide" is that it confirms the most radical *theological and ecclesiological* claims of Girard's theory. In my judgment this theological dimension of Girard's work is too often overlooked. It is, I believe, essential to make this theological connection in order to have a chance at escaping the accusatory mimetic trap, a trap which may ensare practitioners of Girardian theory just as easily as any one else.

Girard makes a theological claim about the essence of Jesus' message. It is this: Jesus' life and death revealed that using religion to justify violence is always an unjust *human* activity that has nothing at all to do with the divine will (Girard 1987, 429). What I want to focus on however are the *ecclesiological and moral* consequences of this message, i.e., what it says about the Christian Church.

What follows from this understanding of Jesus' revelation is that *any* time the Christian Church justifies violence, it has *betrayed* Jesus' Gospel and slipped back into the domain of sacrificial religion (Girard 1987, 181ff.). Now it is easy to detect such acts of betrayal when we look to the past. Inquisitions, witch trials, and crusades are obvious examples, examined from a safe distance. What is so remarkable about the "justifiable homicide" controversey is that it reveals for us precisely where the remaining sacrifical elements in Christianity are hidden, as well as the *lethal consequences* of maintaining them.

What we have seen is that *any* defense of violence, even to repel an unjust aggressor, when combined with accusatory judgments equating abortion to murder, can lead to homicide "justified" by God. The "just war

theory," the "legitimate right to self-defense," even moral condemnation, in fact all the efforts of human reason to avoid the radical demands of the gospel *never to retaliate* are powerless to stop the mimetic contagion: they just keep things going. The only way to stop, is to stop.

If Girard is correct, the consequence of Jesus' revelation must be the definitive renunciation of all violence, "without any second thought" (Girard 1987, 137). It appears this must include self-defense: Jesus is to be the mimetic model. Our analysis of justifiable homicide confirms this. Christian opposition to abortion is not a recent phenomenon; it can be traced back to the *Didache*, a second century collection of Christian teaching, where we read: "You shall not kill the fetus by abortion, or destroy the infant already born" (*Didache*, 2,2, Tr. J.A. Kleist, S.J., quoted in Connery 36). But what we have seen is that the only way now to hold together the historic Christian reverence for unborn life with the defense of *all* human life, is to cleanse the religion of all its remaining sacrificial artifacts.

What Girard's theory suggests, and our analysis confirms, is that the renunciation of all forms of violence, even all anger, has nothing to do with an unrealistic "Christian idealism." Without the stabilizing force of sacrificial structures, the slightest slip can lead to violent death—in the name of God.

The Christian insight is that the destruction "even" of unborn fetuses, a practise which human reason can perhaps almost justify, is not only wrong in itself, but it places us on the road to ever greater violence. However, it is a paradox worthy of the Gospel that now this difficult and demanding insight can no longer be safeguarded, further violence cannot be avoided, so long as there is the slightest trace of sacrificial religion in Christianity. We have seen that unless and until *everyone* is committed to a thorough-going pacifism, even naming abortion "murder" leads to more murder—in the name of the Christian God.

I am well aware that to claim Christianity demands the renunciation of all forms of violence, even in defense of human life, raises enormous practical and moral problems; even to consider these difficulties lies beyond the scope of this essay. Where, for example, does this leave us with repsect to our school ground gunman? How do we stop the slaughter non-violently? However, it seems to me the only two alternatives to the total renunciation of violence are even more impossible for the Christian tradition. Because if one maintains the legitimacy of using violence in defense of life, one must either abandon completely the ancient Christian

claim that unborn life is sacred, or justify the slaughter of abortionists.

One is reminded of Jesus' advice to remove the log from one's own eye, before asking to take the speck out of a brother's (Mt 7:4). Perhaps more to the point are two verses which form part of the Sermon of the Mount in St. Matthew's Gospel (5:21-22). The words of Jesus, which might at first appear to be examples of mere high-minded Christian idealism or "Semitic hyperbole," are, I believe, quite literally true:

> "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire."
> (R.S.V.)

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# THE LETHAL NARCISSUS: HEIDEGGER ON SACRIFICE/SACRIFICE ON HEIDEGGER

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At the end of *Jargon of Authenticity*,[1] the biting irony of Adorno's critique reaches the level of indignation on two occasions; both of these occasions concern the topic of sacrifice. This indignation is easy to explain if one considers the principal aspects of the Adornian theory of sacrifice as formulated in *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*.[2] According to Adorno, sacrifice assumes a modern rational value when it emerges as the secularization of ritual sacrifice along two lines of evolution: 1) the intra-subjective and 2) the inter-subjective.

1) Ritual sacrifice evolves into internalized sacrifice in the form of individual renouncement and self-discipline, namely as the intra-subjective modality withstanding the temptation of reverting to indifferentiation as the undifferentiating subordination of the ego to its instincts. The Sirens epitomize this threat. That is why they are Ulysses' enemies.

2) Ritual sacrifice is, however, also secularized in inter-subjective terms, insofar as it is transformed—according to Adorno—into rational exchange, that is, it changes from metaphysical exchange with divine entities into physical exchange of objects among human beings alone.

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[1] T. W. Adorno, *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit. Zur deutschen Ideologie* (130, 132-133).
[2] Horkheimer & T. W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*(50-87); Cochetti, *Mythos und "Dialektik der Aufklärung"* (181-186).

Adorno's indignation towards Heidegger arises from the fact that Heidegger highlights in positive terms precisely the residual mythical aspects of secularized sacrifice, and not the rational ones. Intrasubjectively, self-discipline as the sacrificial ability of the individual to resist and renounce urges entails a rational value insofar as it is functional for the self-preservation of both the individual and the community.

Now, Heidegger does not even consider this aspect of sacrifice. Instead, he esteems endurance in the face of Worry (*Sorge*) in itself as Being-for-death (*Sein-zum-Tode*). In Adorno's view, this implies the eventual yet cogent consequence that the endurance of pain in itself during the agony which precedes death would evolve into the most authentic moment of *Dasein*. This is precisely the mythical-ritual residue which has passed through the filter of secularization and which still reverberates with the original blood-practices of initiation rites and ritual torture.

Analogously, on the inter-subjective level, Heidegger judges the exchange aspect of secularized sacrifice—the sacrifice of an individual for his community or cause—to be a negative value. Consideration of the reasons, the specific ends, and the gains and losses of such a sacrifice is precisely what ought to be forgotten if the sacrifice in question is to have any value.

Adorno's indignation is easily explicable when one considers two contexts: (i) the anthropological-evolutionary, and (ii) the historical-political.

(i) In the first context, the death of the individual in the service of a particular cause, which is not subject to *a priori* rational scrutiny, still retains an echo of an irrational predetermination which is mythical-ritualistic in nature.

(ii) The second context is Nazi Germany. In the face of this background, even Heidegger is, in this respect, unable to argue in defense of specific Nazi ideals beyond the generic need to simply pursue the collective survival of the nation at war.

### Paradox and dilemma of death

It is this inability to produce an argument that opens a way for the primacy of sacrifice for its own sake: a sacrifice being unaware of any calculation of gain and loss which might not only lessen its intrinsic value, but also its very performance. The most interesting aspects of Heidegger's attitude towards sacrifice should not, however, be considered on the basis

of its pitiful political implications, which cannot be amended, but rather on the basis of the theoretical and historically symptomatic character of his examination of death. In this respect, I believe that the Girardian mimetic theory affords decisive clues for a coherent interpretation.

In the chapter entitled "The Possible Completeness of Dasein and Being-for-death" (*Das mögliche Ganzsein des Daseins und das Sein zum Tode*) in *Being and Time*, Heidegger considers the paradox of death:

> As soon as *Dasein*, however, "exists" in such a way that simply nothing of it is missing, it has already become one with its no-longer-being-there. The removal of the lack of being means the destruction of its being.[3]
> The achievement of the completion of *Dasein* in death is at the same time the loss of the being of the Presence.[4]

The realization of everyone's life is thus not death, but his or her own death. In point of fact, death is always specific to each of us, always relative exclusively to him or her who dies.

Death is therefore simultaneously the completion of *Dasein* and the elimination of its being:

> Death is the most authentic possibility of *Dasein*. Being for this possibility discloses for *Dasein* its most authentic potential; its main concern is that of the being of *Dasein*.[5]

Death is then at once the elimination of *Dasein* and the realization of its most authentic potential, the end of Life and its most genuine core:

> Death does not "belong" indifferently just to its own *Dasein*, but claims it as an individual. The unrelatedness of death, in its being understood as anticipation, isolates *Dasein* with itself. This

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[3] Sobald jedoch das Dasein so "existiert," daß an ihm schlechthin nichts mehr aussteht, dann ist es auch schon in eins damit zum Nicht-mehr-da-sein geworden. Die Behebung des Seinsausstandes besagt Vernichtung seines Seins (236).

[4] Das Erreichen der Gänze des Daseins im Tode ist zugleich Verlust des Seins des Da. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (237).

[5] Der Tod ist *eigenste* Möglichkeit des Daseins. Das Sein zu ihr erschließt dem Dasein sein *eigenstes* Seinkönnen, darin es um das Sein des Daseins schlechthin geht (263).

isolation is a fashion of making the "There" accessible for
existence.[6]

Death is thus what defines *Dasein* best, insofar as death better than
anything else isolates it, and, as a consequence, the "There" (*Da*) of
*Dasein* reveals itself.

On the other hand, the extreme isolation of *Dasein* in the process of
dying is also, in a sense, its opposite: as a matter of fact, from the
perspective of *Dasein*, its own death represents the negative epiphany of
the Whole.

From the perspective of the dying *Dasein*, everything ceases to exist
with it. True, the Whole which does not actually cease to exist may deeply
concern the dying *Dasein* even more than its own destiny. And yet *Dasein*
is only able to exhibit its concern while still alive. From its viewpoint, as
soon as it dies, everything else also ceases to exist.

This means that the most extreme isolation of *Dasein* coincides with
its most extreme integration into the disappearing Whole. Thus death
presents itself as the paradoxical epiphany of the bond between *Dasein*
and the Whole in the process of their common disappearance. In
Heideggerian terms, this epiphany may be interpreted as the meaning of
life as being-for-death. Now, to the extent that death affects *Dasein*
within the perspective of the dying *Dasein* itself, it is an incommunicable
experience. It is communicable only as the experience of the death of
others or of having been on the verge of dying, for example, in people
who regain consciousness after the heart has stopped and the like.
It is this incommunicability of one's own death that constitutes the core of
its meaning.

The death of others is communicable, yet its meaning is meaningless
as far as death, by definition, can only be experienced as one's own death.
If death makes sense, then its meaning concerns *Dasein* in such an
exclusive way that it is incommunicable, i.e., non-social. But in growing
communicable, namely social, death becomes as meaningless as the
extreme banalization of the chatter: "One dies" (*man stirbt*) is a semantic
non-sense mirroring the existential non-sense of death. In reality, it is

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[6] Der Tod 'gehört' nicht indifferent nur dem eigenen Dasein zu, sondern er *beansprucht*
dieses *als einzelnes*. Die im Vorlaufen verstandene Unbezüglichkeit des Todes vereinzelt das
Dasein auf es selbst. Diese Vereinzelung ist eine Weise des Erschließens des "Da" für die
Existenz (263).

always a specific individual who dies and never the "one" of "one dies." The dilemma of death lies in the fact that if, on the one hand, its meaning were fully grasped, one would then be incapable of communicating it precisely because of one's own death; if, on the other hand, the meaning of death becomes communicable, then it always proves to be that of the death of others or of one's own death, but from one's own perspective, namely while still being alive. Religion can be considered as a strategy to seek a solution to this dilemma.

### Religion and war as antidotes to the social gaps of death

In one respect, as a set of myths and rites, religion strives to make death communicable and to confer meaning on its communication, as the communication of the fact that one dies. Religion is therefore a means of bridging the social gaps of death through practices aimed at giving meaning to communications that are focused on death. In another respect, as a set of introspective disciplines meditative and ascetic in nature, religion attempts to sharpen and deepen the meaning of death within Dasein, namely within everyone's Being-there.

From this viewpoint, ritual blood sacrifice can phylogenetically be construed as one of the first institutions—probably the very first in chronology and importance—oriented towards conferring a meaning on the communication of death, thereby contributing to the socialization of death itself.

Now, one of the major consequences of secularization has been the de-socialization of death in the form of depriving of meaning those communications which primarily concern death.

The Heideggerian theory of death highlights, in this respect, three major social gaps concerning death within secularized environments. These gaps are precisely those which ritual blood sacrifice managed to bridge within non-secularized social systems.

(i) The "one" of "one dies" is the first gap. It is an expression of chatter, and it does not mirror a genuine event. The "one" is an idiom that in no way reproduces the actual event of death, but rather simply its inauthentic communicative neutralization. The sentence "one dies" substitutes verbally an impersonal or collective protagonist who does not exist as a real subject of death. The "one" is a fictive collectivity that dies in the mirror of an idiomatic construct. In ritual blood sacrifice, on the contrary, a real living being dies in the service of a real collectivity. The resulting

semantics implies real referents, albeit ones which do not coincide with those explicitly claimed by the relevant sacrificial ideology.[7]

(ii) The end of "Company" (*Mitsein*) or "Togetherness" (*Miteinandersein*) is the second social gap of death. Society forms the horizon for the company of every person. As long as an individual lives, he or she is always with somebody else. Company comes to an end with death which therefore represents a refutation of society. Society has for a long time attempted to refute this refutation by socializing death. Funeral rites have this intent. Funeral rites were originally accompanied by blood sacrifices as ritual killings in honor of the deceased.

In two ways, these sacrifices stressed the social assimilation of death by showing that death would not eliminate the company of the dead. On the one hand, inasmuch as they are killed, the victims imitate the new condition of the deceased: they become like him. On the other hand, insofar as they are sacrificed in honor of the deceased, the victims are addressed to him. The deceased is thus both "imitated" and "addressed." The disappeareance of funereal blood sacrifices is a sign of the desocialization of death, as far as it is a symptom for giving up the attempt to make use of death to communicative ends, namely to integrate death in the social system. The company strictly related to death then survives mainly while dying with and against others in war. As a consequence, war tends to monopolize the social regulation of company in death and to represent most impressively the socially acknowledged meaning of death.

From the Heideggerian perspective, the sacrifice of the individual in war is thus to be interpreted as the emancipation of the impersonal "one" to which the phrase "one dies" refers from the meaningless chatter, and as the realization of company in an authentically social form of dying: slaughter on the battlefield. Furthermore, war seems to make it possible to act as a stand-in for death as a secular version of the sacrificial paradox: in point of fact in war, one often dies replacing the death of others and, conversely, one often kills to substitute the death of others for one's own death.

(iii) The third social gap of death emerges out of the impossibility of standing in for death.

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[7] Girard, *La violence et le sacré* (chs 3 and 4) and *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (146-175).

To the possibilities of being of togetherness in the world belongs incontestably the ability of one *Dasein* to replace and to represent another.[8]

The ability to replace and to represent somebody else (*Vertretbarkeit*) is thus a feature of company and consequently of society. In point of fact, everybody can be replaced in society insofar as everybody plays roles which allow others to stand in for them; among these roles there is even that of being doomed to die. Dying instead of somebody else means standing in for him or her with regard to his or her death just as little, as occupying the role of somebody else means taking over his or her life. Dying instead of somebody else is not sufficient to save him or her from having to die, just as replacing somebody in his or her job does not generally mean taking his or her life away. Most replaced people do not commit suicide; they simply change one of their roles.

Nevertheless, death and life are not related symmetrically with regard to the possibility of arranging a stand-in or replacement. According to Heidegger, the peculiarity of death lies precisely in the asymmetrical position of death in regard to life when both are considered in the light of the replacement criterion.

If I stand in for somebody, I always replace him or her in only one or more of his or her roles, namely with respect to one or more aspects of the togetherness, even in the extreme event where the substitution will entail his/her or my death. A substitution symmetrical to this does not exist within the realm of death. I am unable to stand in for anybody in his or her death because death, unlike life, does not foresee roles, these being exclusive entailments of togetherness.

Strictly speaking, there is no togetherness or social being in death. And yet, in broad terms, there is something analogous to that in the form of ritual blood sacrifice and of dying in war. Typologies and modalities of death exist; roles in death do not. "Role in death" is a contradiction in terms. By dying, *Dasein* is alone with itself because its death is also the end of the possibility of being replaced. Ritual blood sacrifice attempts to conjure away, or at least to alleviate, the social gaps of death, striving to realize the paradox of a social death. The paradox does actually take place inasmuch as the dynamics of ritual blood sacrifice develop in the terms

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[8] Zu den Seinsmöglichkeiten des Miteinanderseins in der Welt gehört unstreitig die *Vertretbarkeit* des einen Daseins durch ein anderes (239).

described by Girard.[9] The sacrificial victim is capable of incarnating the "one" of the sentence "one dies," the togetherness of everybody and, finally, the ability to stand in for another in death. With the disappearance of ritual blood sacrifice, the social meaning of death survives in its most evident form in wars. Heidegger regards war as the most genuine and topical form of sacrifice.

### Sacrifice between utilitarian rationality and gratuity

Now, it is quite significant that it is precisely in connection with sacrifice as readiness to die in war that one can single out a dizzying vacillation in Heidegger's thought. Girard's mimetic theory can provide substantial help in understanding the very nature of such a vacillation.

In paragraph 47 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes:

> *Nobody can deprive the other of his death.* Somebody can, of course, "die on behalf of another." That always means, however, sacrificing oneself on behalf of the other "in a particular case." Dying in this way on behalf of somebody can, however, never mean that the other is thereby in the slightest relieved of his death. Every *Dasein* has to take dying upon itself at some time. Death is, insofar as it "is," essentially in every case mine.[10]

Sacrificing oneself on behalf of another is thus impossible, if the sacrifice literally means standing in for the death of the other. Substituting one's own death for that of the other does not mean relieving the other of his or her death, but rather simply being able to postpone it in a particular case (*in einer bestimmten Sache*), that is, on particular occasions and for particular reasons.

If, by means of my death, I could really stand in for the death of the other, then the value and meaning of my sacrifice would be infinite, as they would be derived from the eternity gained by my beneficiary. Since, instead, my sacrifice simply means the postponement of the death of the

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[9] *La Violence et le Sacré* (chs 10, 11); *Des choses cachées depuis la fondations du monde* (9-68).

[10] *Keiner kann dem Anderen sein Sterben abnehmen.* Jemand kann wohl "für einen Anderen in den Tod gehen." Das besagt jedoch immer: für den Anderen sich opfern "*in einer bestimmten Sache.*" Solches Sterben für... kann aber nie bedeuten, daß dem Anderen damit sein Tod im geringsten abgenommen sei. Das Sterben muß jedes Dasein jeweilig selbst auf sich nehmen. Der Tod ist, sofern er "ist," wesensmäßig je der meine (240).

other, value and meaning of my sacrifice are ultimately to be derived from
the circumstances and reasons that led to this postponement, namely from
that "particular case," which Heidegger emphasizes.

Now, it is curious that this extremely sober and non-pathetic
conception of sacrifice as the willingness of the individual to offer his or
her own life becomes inverted into its opposite in the postscript to *What
is Metaphysics?*.

It is the following passage that provokes Adorno's indignation:

> Sacrifice is indigenous to the essence of the event, in which being
> claims man for the truth of being. Therefore sacrifice tolerates no
> calculation, through which it is settled every time on the basis of
> usefulness or uselessness, no matter how low or high the ends have
> been set. Such calculation disfigures the essence of sacrifice. The
> addiction to ends confuses the clarity of the awe that is ready to
> endure anxiety in self-sacrifice, which has expected of itself the
> nearness to the indestructible.[11]

Here sacrifice counts inasmuch as it absolutizes itself, namely, relieves
itself from the consideration of precisely that "particular case" as the set
of circumstances and reasons for which the sacrifice should occur.

Why this reversal? Should we be content with the statement that it is
a contradiction to resort to the well-tried hermeneutic topos between
Heidegger as the dignified philosopher and Heidegger as the undignified
ideologist? This *passe-partout* topos is, however, less an explicatory
criterion than the object of a possible explication. To explain it, it would
be opportune to take a step backwards with regard to the sacrificial
scenario Heidegger has in mind in order to reconsider the mythical but not
fanciful background into which ritual blood sacrifice is imbedded.

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[11] Das Opfer ist heimisch im Wesen des Ereignisses, als welches das Sein den Menschen
für die Wahrheit des Seins in den Anspruch nimmt. Deshalb duldet das Opfer keine
Berechnung, durch die es jedesmal nur auf einen Nutzen oder eine Nutzlosigkeit verrechnet
wird, mögen die Zwecke niedrig gesetzt oder hoch gestellt sein. Solches Verrechnen verunstaltet
das Wesen des Opfers. Die Sucht nach Zwecken verwirrt die Klarheit der angstbereiteten Scheu
des Opfermutes, der sich die Nachbarschaft zum Unzerstörbaren zugemutet hat. (*Was ist
Metaphysik?* 45)

**Ritual blood sacrifice and its principal elements**

In ritual blood sacrifice, one can single out three main sets of elements: a) the killings themselves as producers of death; b) the accompanying ritual actions which are characterized by mimetic needs and attitudes; c) the mythical transfigurations which provide the narrative basis of the sacrificial actions. The Girardian theory has brought about a hermeneutic breakthrough by binding together these three sets of elements. The peculiar feature of this hermeneutic is the emphasis on the concept of mimesis which goes so far as to shape even the most intimate drives: desire and violence.

According to Girard (1972 chs 2,5), ritual blood sacrifice is a mimetic strategy aimed at blunting the upsurge of mimetic violence through the ritually controlled reproduction of the violence itself (12). Thus, blood sacrifice is regarded as an unconscious, but actual, evocation and repetition of an original act of violence which proved to be socially beneficial. The ritual is therefore regarded as a mimetic re-enactment of a previous killing, as a taming mimesis of that killing whose exact terms have been lost, although not the unconscious memory of it. The specific mimesis of the sacrificial rite principally concerns the killing: it is a killing which imitates another killing.

**Sacrifice as mimesis of a killing and mimesis of death**

Now, keeping in mind the Heideggerian consideration of the paradox of death, a further hermeneutic step is conceivable: the mimesis specific to ritual blood sacrifice can refer not only to the killing as death-giving, but also to death as such.

In other words, ritual blood sacrifice can be assessed not only in terms of pragmatics imitating other pragmatics, but also as pragmatics imitating its own telos as death itself. Ritual blood sacrifice may thus be considered as a form of killing that, besides imitating another form of killing, even imitates death itself to conjure away its social gaps, striving to release both death from its exile in the isolation of *Dasein*, and *Dasein* itself from its oppressive vacillation between meaninglessness and incommunicability in the face of death.

Ritual blood sacrifice should therefore be viewed also in terms of a mimetic strategy of death as such which attempts to make death communicable, that is, socially acceptable. In ritual blood sacrifice, death would imitate itself to help specific social systems rule themselves without plunging into the chaos of unrestrained mimetic violence.

Ritual blood sacrifice as "automimesis" of death should thus be regarded also as an autopoietic mechanism insofar as it sustains the survival and self-reproduction of specific social systems. Moreover, the "automimesis" of death reveals its undiminished paradox also in the secularized version of blood sacrifice to which Heidegger refers.

**The Heideggerian ethos of sacrifice as pseudonarcissism of death**

According to Heidegger, the most genuine characteristic of death lies in the fact that it does not allow stand-ins. If death were to imitate itself, it would somehow repeat itself. But if it repeats itself, it stands in for itself. Although death does not allow stand-ins, it somehow has to appoint a stand-in, as far as it imitates itself. All of this is paradoxical; nevertheless it does, in a sense, occur in the kind of sacrifice Heidegger has in mind.

To make this point clear, let us assume that *Ego* is prepared to sacrifice itself for the benefit of *Alter* in war. Since death does not allow stand-ins, it may be viewed as a form of radical literalness, as the strict adherence of the act of dying to its protagonist as *Dasein*. The sacrifice of *Ego* by substituting its death for that of *Alter* is then to be regarded as merely a provisional substitution which can only be justified "in a particular case," namely, after weighing the reasons for, and the circumstances of, the sacrifice itself.

What does it mean to sever the connection between the sacrifice and these reasons and circumstances, as required in *What is Metaphysics?* ? It means moving from the primacy of the authenticity of death to the primacy of the authenticity of sacrifice. The two primacies are in fact incompatible, just as the impossibility of appointing a replacement stands in contradiction to the act of standing in. In other words, Heidegger seems to sacrifice the primacy of death for the primacy of sacrifice.

The primacy of death meant in *Being and Time* the existential impossibility of substituting and representing somebody in his or her dying. Therefore, the primacy of death meant the irreplaceability of everyone's death , entailing that every Being cannot be replaced by another Being, but only by one death: its own. The primacy of death was hence just the opposite of the nihilistic-romantic (and fascist) idolatry of death, insofar as this mystifying transfiguration presupposes everyone's replaceability in the service of collective entities and ends. This kind of idolatrization of death is precisely what grows out of the primacy of sacrifice, as this develops in the 40s in *What is Metaphysics?* This

idolatry emerges as a "liberation" from weighing and computing reasons for and circumstances of sacrifice and as emphasis on its gratuity .

How does the shift from one primacy to the other become possible? It becomes possible because Heidegger falls prey to the attraction of the "automimesis" of death emanating from sacrifice, thus negating the primacy of death for the benefit of sacrifice as the living copy or surrogate of death. The value of the surrogate lies in socializing the surrogated death. An act of dying for which one ought to seek no reason and no circumstance, a pure sacrifice which is oblivious of its own causes, is a form of dying in closest conformity with its own ultimate paradigm, death itself. It is a form of dying which imitates death as such.

Forgetting oneself and the circumstances of and reasons for one's own sacrifice represents possibly the closest mimetic approximation to death as the image of what death is supposed to be for each *Dasein*: the absence of any image.

"...to die, to sleep, perchance to dream... ay, there's the rub," says Hamlet. The "rub" as the result of a death which would be different from the absence of images is felt to be too remote a possibility within secularized environments. Absence of any image is thus regarded as the model for death as the outcome of the last expected event for Dasein. The victim, who, oblivious of itself and the circumstances of and reasons for its sacrifice, hastens toward death, anticipates it by imitating through its forgetfulness the presumed essence of death: the absence of any image.

Furthermore, from the standpoint of somebody who is still alive, what better chance for self-reference would death have? Sacrificial attitude as self-oblivion has traditionally been perceived and evaluated as "pure" and "sublime." Such perception and evaluation is indebted to the narcissistic appeal-effect engendered by a peculiar self-referential mechanism (Girard 1978, 510-41). Sacrifice, as obliviously heading towards death, may be intended as a way of dying which imitates what death itself is supposed to be; or as a kind of "automimesis" of death on the eve of its actual occurrence in order to exorcize the occurrence itself. On the one hand, this exorcism is tantamount to making death "social," inasmuch as death appears in sacrifice to be released from confinement into *Dasein*. On the other hand, the exorcism entails the transfiguration of death as a death given to preserve or engender life. These two sides of the sacrificial exorcism of death lie at the root of the perception and evaluation of sacrificial self-oblivion in terms of "purity" and "sublimity."

But (i) why should such an exorcism be attributed to a peculiar self-referential mechanism? (ii) Why should this mechanism be tied to narcissism? (iii) And, finally, why should this narcissism elicit attraction and even result in "purity" and "sublimity"?

(i) The exorcism stems from the mimetic nature of the self-referential mechanism present in the sacrificial attitude as a dying which imitates death. Death refers to itself insofar as hastening towards death as a sacrificial readiness to die is a way of "making itself similar" to death: a mimetic replica of death itself. As a "double" of death, sacrifice works as a "filter" or "protecting screen" interposing itself between life and death.

(ii) This self-reference, however, uncovers a mimetic property not only in relation to death but also to desire. Narcissus refers to himself inasmuch as he raises himself to the object and model of his own desire. This narcissistic self-reference certainly implies, as an epiphenomenon, automimesis as compliance with one's own model. Yet this is not the most peculiar and momentous element of narcissism as self-referential desire. This element instead consists of the contagious effect.

(iii) Narcissus, by displaying self-desire together with an apparently sovereign self-sufficiency, makes this desire worth imitating, thereby contagiously desirable. This prompts others to imitate Narcissus' self-referential desire in the sense of desiring Narcissus himself.

This mimetic desire entails mortal risks. Indeed, Narcissus' desire causes some of Narcissus' unfortunate lovers to kill themselves while he dies out of the "implosion" of his self-desire, as a consequence of the impossibility to merge into his own image. Narcissus' lethality implies, however, not only that the self-referentiality of desire may turn out to be deadly, but also that the self-referentiality of death, as a sacrificial attitude, may prove to be desirable, mimetically contagious in virtue of its narcissistic valency. If, on one hand, Narcissus represents the self-desire resulting in death, on the other hand, he mirrors death itself in its "automimetic," i. e., sacrificial dimension. Narcissus is indeed the most consequential sacrificer and victim: he rejects all of his lovers to surrender uniquely to his own image, thereby dying as the victim of himself. Narcissus is therefore prototypical also for the sacrificial dying which spreads around mimetic desire precisely inasmuch as such dying is structurally perfused with the narcissistic aura of self-reference.

Hastening towards death, neither asking for nor computing the reasons for dying, is tantamount to giving up every image but the image of death. Death thus grows into a lethal Narcissus. This lethality is not only that of

the model—death as a model for the way itself of dying—but also—keeping in mind the Girardian theory of narcissism as a pseudonarcissism—the lethality implied by the contagious dynamics of the sacrificial "automimesis" of death: (a) the "automimesis" of death prompts its victims to the idea of the desirability of such kind of dying; (b) this idea grows into the ideology of self-immolation which spreads mimetically; (c) "automimesis" of death becomes hence the transfigured paradigm of "purity" and "sublimity;" (d) the dying Narcissus thus metamorphoses into the sacrificial narcissism of death itself. In theoretical terms, Heidegger is one prominent victim of this lethal Narcissus.

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# MARCHING AND RISING:
# THE RITUALS OF SMALL DIFFERENCES
# AND GREAT VIOLENCE

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> What is really needed is the decommissioning of mind-sets in Northern Ireland.
> (*Report of the International Body on Arms Decommissioning: The Mitchell Report*, January 24, 1996)

The 1996 Orange Marching season brought a major setback to peace process in Northern Ireland. On the Garvaghy Road in the Drumcree community of Portadown, Protestants and Catholics displayed the mutual intolerance and intransigence for which they are notorious. Within each camp, a contagion of ill-will took hold, metamorphosing ancient malice into modern hatred. A volatile fog, toxic with recriminations and threats, descended upon the countryside. The battle-lines drawn at Drumcree energized other historical points of confrontation across the province. Just as the plucked string of a musical instrument sets the all the others vibrating harmoniously, so the cord struck in Portadown sounded the key to a counterpoint that seemed almost primordial. As the tragic notes of the final measures faded, a numbing silence enveloped a society once again stunned by the violence unleashed within its soul.

It was as if the North of Ireland looked at the prospect of peace and announced that it was not going to take it lying down. A strangely

irrational logic seemed to drive events. Viewed from afar, it never should have happened. Neither Protestants nor Catholics stood to gain anything of tangible value. Only in retrospect—from the finale once the standoff had energized every potential division backwards—do substantive political issues emerge. However, this collapsing of events obscures the interactive process from which this mishap arose and leaves the central and confounding mystery unsolved: how did a dispute about nothing so quickly become a conflict about everything? The answer to this enigma lies in the mimetic theory of René Girard.

Sinn Fèin Party Chairman Mitchel McLaughlin parsed correctly, but not insightfully, the social dynamics of this explosive situation. Shortly before the July marching season, he affirmed the right of Protestants to march. Nevertheless, he maintained, Catholics would tolerate no triumphalism. The problem is, of course, that Protestants don't march in the abstract. They march down specific streets, passing through particular communities, toward specified locations. Their Lambeg drums boom out a terrifying cadence. Their Bowler hats, black-thorn canes, and orange sashes shout a silent message for *all* to hear. Without triumphalism, an Orange march is simply a pointless stroll. It is nothing—a non-event, a momentous occasion that did not happen.

Orange triumphalism needs serious nationalist resistance to be more than ludicrous display of paranoid-driven pomposity. Orange "marching" must provoke a Catholic "rising." It has to find a contumacious partner before the mimetic choreography of *"not any inch"* can proceed. Only then can the thundering beat of the Lambeg drum transform the contestants into violent doubles, each captivated by a spellbinding obsession with the other. From the pounding rhythms spring forth entranced rivals who are much more than mere competitors.

Caught in a tragedy replayed thousands of times, Catholics and Protestants stare across the bloody boundary of small differences that separates them. Their opposition defines the mirrored sameness of their common *Irishness* as utterly alien. With melodramatic anticipation, both await the moment when violence seals off the expelled *other* and circumscribes the sacred realm of *our* metaphysical identity. Fully enshrined, the Protestants and Catholics of Ulster feel the fullness of their humanity. They are now complete, but sadly they are no longer whole.

> History is a weapon, a poker you keep in your pocket
> to beat the present senseless and so reorder its
> alignment to the past and justify present murder.
>
> (Kevin Toolis, Rebel Hearts)

Marching and drumming make an Orange parade. The practice first entered Ireland with the arrival of "King Billy"—William of Orange in 1690. His troops—the vanguard of Protestantism—marched to the cadence of kettle drums strapped to the backs of horses. When they routed the Catholic army of James II at the Battle of the Boyne, marching and drumming entered the lexicon of Protestant dominance.

When the Orangemen hit the streets, they take on the identity of King Billy's Protestant troops. They triumph over the Catholics in the communities through which they march. They claim the territory for the Union and for the Protestant community. Their deafening drums awaken Protestants to their victorious heritage and notify Catholics of their subjugated status. For there to be peace, Catholics must acquiesce to their defeat. If they resist, the Orangemen will smite them down just as King Billy did.

Catholics understand the symbolism of marching all too well. The fear and anger that it evokes comes deep from within their being. The thundering drums strain their tolerance beyond the breaking point. As they rise to the confrontation, the victims of past murders come to live within them. They step into the late eighteenth century—a past that is not dead and gone—when Protestants *marched* to murder Catholics and Catholics *rose* to murder Protestants. More is at stake than benign indignation can ignore.

### Chaos in Orange and Green

> I seen it before, before ever Ireland was divided, and
> in the twenties, and each time after that; and Ireland
> will never be at peace, or us and them stop fighting,
> till end of the world.
>
> (A Belfast Loyalist)

In Northern Ireland, they call it the "Troubles," an explosion of violence and death that has lasted over twenty-five years. This spate of

murders, bombings, and random killings has touched the lives of virtually everyone who lives there. It is perhaps only the most recent eruption of what is sometimes called the world's longest war—a turmoil begun centuries ago that is unmatched in the creative ways that it has spilled blood. By naming it euphemistically the Troubles, the Irish aptly express a disturbing insight: *no one is quite sure what all the violence is really about!*

The Trouble might never have happened if the upheavals in the last half of the eighteenth century had not taken Ulster in a sectarian direction. The crisis that originated in the linen triangle of County Armagh lasted about ten years (1784-1792). During these years, Mid-Ulster became the cauldron that produced one of the two ways—indeed, the overwhelmingly dominant way, the *Orange* way—that Northern Ireland Protestants would relate to Catholics from that time to the present.

The social and political milieu of this crisis had at least three dimensions. The first was the gradual relaxation of the penal laws that the Protestant Ascendancy had imposed on both dissenters (Presbyterians) and natives (Catholics) after James II's defeat.[1] In truth, these measures were nothing more than the standard way that governments throughout Europe controlled religious minorities. The difference throughout most of Ireland was that the "minority" was a staggering majority. The exception was Ulster, where the number of Catholics and Protestants was more or less equal. This demographic balance meant that, in the North, there were a substantial number of impoverished Protestants as well as Catholics. The only thing separating poor Protestants from their Catholic counterparts were the penal laws.

During the mid 1700s, Catholic "disloyalty" waned, and many eagerly put past grievances aside to reach better accords with their Protestant neighbors. Within the context of assimilation, the economic restrictions of the penal laws became counterproductive to the monetary interests of the Ascendancy (Wright 15). In particular, landlords could receive higher rents by leasing land to Catholics than Protestants. By the time that the Relief Acts of 1778 and 1782 removed the ban on Catholics' buying land

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[1] The Penal Laws prevented Catholics from "bearing arms, educating their children and owning any horse above £5 in value." Catholics also were prohibited from buying land or holding leases of more than 31 years length. Rent had to be at least two thirds of the yearly value of the land. Upon inheritance, all Catholic estates had to be divided equally between sons of the deceased, a provision that effectively carved all Catholic land-holding into economically unviable units. (Bardon 1992, 168-169)

and the stipulations concerning land inheritance, these practices had, by in large, fallen by the wayside. The people most adversely affected by these changes were the poor farmers and weavers of Co. Armagh.

The second factor in the growing crisis was the rising linen industry. This development completely transformed the agricultural landscape of mid-Ulster. The entire economic base of the society shifted from farming to weaving with north Armagh becoming the hub. In 1784, more than 15 million of the 49 million yards of linen produced in Ireland came to market within a 20-mile radius of Portadown. The total number of weavers in Armagh (16,000-20,000) approached the number of households (approximately 22,000) by 1790 (Miller 157).

As the loom became the mainstay of family income, many independent farmers—mostly Protestant—lost their economic footing and virtually disappeared. These farmers either made the transition to small scale farmer-weaver enterprises or became the landless employees of the larger master-weavers. The superior status that Protestant yeomen of North Armagh had traditionally held over Catholic tenants simply dissolved.

The final element was the rise of the Volunteers in the 1770s. The Volunteers were an unauthorized grassroots militia formed when the British withdrew the bulk of their troops to fight in the American colonies. Ostensibly, their purpose was to defend Ireland from a French invasion; however, the Volunteers also protected the Ascendancy from disgruntled Catholics. Called "the armed property of the nation," the ranks of the Volunteers numbered over 40,000 by 1779.

Before the century was out, divergent branches of Volunteerism would give birth to both United Irishmen and the Orange Order. However, it was the rivalry between Peep o' Day Boys and the Defenders of Co. Armagh that unleashed a reciprocity of spiraling provocations that eventually put all Ulster in crisis. As the confrontations escalated, each side came to embody what the other feared most. The seeds *nationalism* and *unionism* were sown and took root.

There is an additional factor that deserves to be mentioned. Between 1753 and 1791, the population of Ulster more than doubled (from around 600,000-700,000 to 1,400,000). This dramatic rise was the result of the general prosperity that the linen industry brought to the North of Ireland as well as from economic changes that encouraged earlier marriages. Had it not been for the high rate of emigration—largely Protestant, Scotch-Irish—to America, the increase would have been much greater. Certainly,

this rapid population growth created strains that exacerbated the tensions mounting in Ulster.

> I have got information from a friend...that there are many papists in the place where he lives, who have taken the oath of allegiance, having gotten long leases, and of course (they) must have arms to shoot sparrows from their grain, and not even that, but the perfidious Volunteers have taken them into their ranks.
> (Captain, Nappach Fleet, Peep o' Day Boys, 1785)

The initial showdown was over guns. Although Catholics were still prohibited from owning weapons, some landlords lent arms to Catholic tenants so that they might protect their crops from predators. Moreover, some Volunteer units had enlisted Catholics and had thereby issued them rifles. A wide-spread fear grew up among the Protestants most threatened by the breakdown of these penal law divisions. Because they were vulnerable to the advances of aspirant Catholics, they saw native/settler assimilation as encroachment. Furthermore, the landed gentry, whom they had served and whom they relied upon for protection, seemed indifferent to or, even worse, supportive of these developments.

As was often the case in rural societies, normal recreational activities—dances, fairs, markets, cock-fights, horse races—provided occasions for fighting. In these carnival-like settings, things often got out of hand as slurs grew into insults, and taunts recalled previous grievances. Frequently, there was a history of family antagonisms lying in the background. Simply put, a brawl was an expedient way to adjudicate a communal dispute.

Under these conditions, the administration of popular "justice" appeared very similar to the prosecution of a *feud* (Gibbon 56-57). People with close social ties banned together for protection in vengeance groups called *fleets*. Initially, sectarian identity played little or no role in the formations of these rural gangs—many fleets were mixed. Still, the sectarian divisions of the Armagh countryside gradually affect the complexion of each fleet until the situation became a tinderbox.

As the violence escalated, Protestants and Catholics organized larger defense leagues that became known as the *Peep o' Day Boys* and the *Defenders*. Soon, the Ascendancy became concerned that the situation was getting out of hand and started raising new companies of Volunteers

with the intent of enlisting the Peep o' Day Boys, thereby establishing some control over them.[2] However, the outcome of this move was quite different from what they had hoped.

Instead of combating each other in communal bands, the Peep o' Day Boys and the Defenders now confronted each other in large militia-like demonstrations that attempted to assert local dominance. Large assemblies of Defenders frequently gathered often at the celebration of traditional holidays—to intimidate nearby Protestants. For their part, Protestants used their training maneuvers to demarcate their territory. Their drilling and parading for public events were occasions for demonstrating their sovereignty. Draped with Orange insignia, they made a point of marching to Orange tunes through Catholics areas where Defenderism was strong. Often Catholics attacked these quasi-military demonstrations as a way of contesting the dominance they alleged. In this volatile atmosphere, any personal squabble quickly took on symbolic significance that overshadowed all localized aspects.

The "Battle of the Diamond" (September 21, 1795) marked a turning point. Although victorious, the Peep o' Day Boys realized that they needed a more formal structure. Taking the Defenders as a model—the mobilization they had mounted at the "Diamond" was impressive—they founded the Orange Order, pledging to defend "the King and his heirs so long as he or they support the Protestant Ascendancy" (Bardon 226). Ten month later, on July 12, 1796, Orangemen met publicly and paraded through the streets of Portadown. The institution of Orange marching was born in the city that would become known as the *Orange Citadel*. Over the next few years, the Orange Order grew rapidly and consolidated itself into the heart and soul of anti-Catholic Ulster.[3]

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[2] The name *Peep o' Day Boys* is a reference to the practice of surprising Catholics with daybreak raids in search of guns. However lawless these actions appeared, the "boys" saw themselves enforcing the penal laws that the Ascendancy had neglected to administer and, therefore, *acting legally* (Miller 1982, 182).

[3] In addition to combating Defenderism, the Orange Order also addressed the precarious economic position of many Protestants. Acting unofficially, the Order began a series of nightly raids for the purpose of driving Catholic tenants from the Co. Armagh. Targeted cottages were posted with notices inviting their owners "to hell or Connaught." In a two month period, they forced over seven thousand Catholics to flee Ulster. These attacks became known as the *Armagh Outrages* and were halted only when Dublin stationed troops throughout the countryside. Consequently, Peep o' Day/Defender type of feuding became a permanent fixture in the North of Ireland.

> You say it is the good causes that hallows even war?
> I say unto you: it is the good war that hallows any
> cause.
>                         (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra)*

The situation in Co. Armagh in the late eighteenth century displayed the classic features of a Girardian sacrificial crisis. First, the differences separating Catholics and Protestants eroded as the detrimental economic effects of the penal laws became more pronounced. Secondly, the growth of the linen industry set off a mimetic rivalry between poorer Protestants and aspiring Catholics. Finally, because the Volunteer movement had militarized countryside, the transition to a violent contagion was almost instantaneous. Protestants and Catholics became violent doubles as each increased the revenge sought by the next.

Had their mimetic violence fastened on a common scapegoat, the common identity favored by the United Irishmen might have come about. However, no external target emerged, and the mimetic violence remained focused within confines of their relationship. Protestants and Catholics began scapegoating each other, but neither had the force to expel the other from their midst. Both discovered a new and emerging unity within their increasingly polarized communities. Each embraced an existence founded not upon common aspirations—aspirations that had become entangled because they were common—but upon fear. Through their "sacred" violence, they had laid bare the mimetic core of their sectarian identities. To be a Protestant was to fear Catholics, and to be a Catholic was to fear Protestants—the infamous siege mentalities of Ulster.[4]

No society could survive a contagion of mimetic violence of this magnitude for long. Eventually, the need to constrain violence would ritualize the sacrificial exchanges between Catholics and Protestants. The pacification of Ulster was complicated by the fact that the scapegoat mechanism had produced not one common, assimilated community, but a deeply divided society composed of two warring sectarian groups. When the British attempt to introduce the transcendent, secular institutions of a

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[4] While the Protestant siege mentality is widely recognized, few realize that Catholics also have one based on the metaphor of invasion. Anthony Buckley and Mary Catherine Kenney note that it mirrors the Protestant almost exactly point by point. The principal difference is that the Catholic metaphor is built upon the rectification of grievances suffered in defeat. However, in all respects, they are mimetic doubles. (Buckley & Kenney 1995, 41-54)

modern state failed to stabilize the fractured social relationships, Ulster began adapting its legacy of rural feuding to emerging conditions of urban industrial capitalism (Gibbon 34-40).

The form that a feud takes is highly culturally dependent, and anthropological efforts to define it as a social institution usually end up describing the culture in which the feud is taking place. Nevertheless, two structural features of the classic blood feud correspond closely to conditions in Ulster's countryside. First is the lack of a strong centralized political authority (Evans-Pritchard 159). There are literally no effective mechanisms for criminalizing violence and revenge and, therefore, no transcending institutions that protect all citizens equally irrespective of their group (or clan) identities.

Second is the inability to sever relationships completely and go separate ways (Evans-Pritchard 161-162). A feud occurs when relatively equal social entities maintain a state of active hostility but remain fused together within some larger political unit. Neither side can win a decisive victory, and a full-blown fight to the finish would destroy both groups. Unable to win and unable to leave, they are caught by elastic bands that pull communities together and, at the same time, keep them apart as separate entities. Pushed and pulled by irreconcilable cycles of fission and fusion, they settle for alternating acts of deathly retribution.

The parallels to the situation in Ulster are obvious. The Protestants and Catholics of Ulster trusted no one but themselves. They could not defeat each other, and they had nowhere else to go. Furthermore, their relationship was rife with grievance and abuse. All conditions seemed ripe for a feud—except one. It would be around this anomaly that Ulster would significantly alter the traditional feuding pattern.

After the initial outburst of violence, feuds normally settle into ritualized exchanges of vengeance killings. First, one side strikes, then the other retaliates. Both sides know whose turn it is because people keep a running score. After launching a lethal attack, the culprits go on the defensive until their foes take a life in return. This rhythmic "taking turns" schema contains the violence at a level well below all-out warfare. Because Britain and the rising merchant class within Ulster considered this level of violence as counter to their economic interests, they exerted pressure to curb the violence further. Consequently, a more thoroughly ritualized form of feuding evolved—*Orange marching* and *Catholic rising*.

When the Orangemen march, they become the Peep o' Day Boys moving through the countryside looking for Catholics with guns. The drum summons them for roll-call. The Orange regalia is the insignia worn on the uniforms of the Volunteers. They reenact the formation of their proud identity. When the Catholics rise in defiance, they become the Defenders protecting their homes and livelihoods but also striking back in similar measure. Their stones and taunts are the weapons used by those who do not own a gun. A brave few take shots at the "Orangies" ducking around corners and fences as the Defenders popped in and out of hedges and bogs. They refuse the Orangeman respect but are not strong enough to suffer them the ultimate insult of *indifference*. Theirs is a courageous and indomitable identity.

Within this stylized drama lies concealed an element common to both ritual and the feud—fear. Girard's analysis of ritual uncovers the fear of unleashed retributory violence hidden at the heart of its reenactments. In the feud, the driving force is always honor, but it is an honor with an underside of fear (Boehm 58-63). Unless violent reprisal are undertaken, one's weaknesses are exposed and all is laid bare for the taking. *Marching* and *rising* emanate from the fear that Protestants and Catholics have of each other.

Perhaps now, it is possible to understand why it matters so much when so little seems at stake. *Marching* and *rising* are the way people deal with fears that would otherwise overwhelm them. *Marching* and *rising* conceal panic and fright under the guise of unionist and nationalist *virtues*. Without *marching* and *rising*, they would have nothing but unbridled violence to protect and sustain them. So they *march* and *rise* to maintain loyalist vigilance on the Protestant side and to pass on the republican ideal on the Catholic. What they really do is condemn the next generation to the same legacy of hatred and recrimination, assassination and murder, domination and rebellion that has cost this generation so much blood.

## The problem of a killing peace

> Anyone who isn't confused here doesn't really understand what is going on.
>
> (A Belfast Citizen, *The Times*, 1970)

The rituals of marching and rising doomed the people of Ulster to a life of what Frank Wright calls *deterrence relationships* (Wright). In deterrence relationships, fear and distrust become the principal modes of interaction, determining to a great extend all subsequent social and political dynamics. In the North of Ireland, the reciprocity of Protestant and Catholic fears—as well as their response to being feared—is almost palpable. It is precisely from this starting point that the people of Northern Ireland must begin their seat for peace.

In deterrence relationships, violence is *representative*. A person becomes a target because of *who* he/she is, not *what* he/she did. No violence has only private significance. When an act of aggression occurs, the first concern is the religion of the victim. The first question is whether it denotes an attack on the group. In an assault, the individuals involved *represent* the groups of which they are members, the actions taken *represent* group acts. As a result, each violent deed incriminates everyone.

Two aspects of representative violence are of great significance. First, it is not necessary that someone agree with and support the violence to become involved in it. A person becomes implicated the moment he/she understands what is happening and is frightened by it. No matter how much one despises violence, there is no escape from it. Like it or not, this person is in danger, and the only people providing protection are the same individuals who are the chief provokers of violence in the first place. As the violence escalates, so does the fear, and the more deeply entangled everyone becomes.

Secondly, since the whole group is held responsible for the actions of a few, people become type-casted by the worst atrocities committed. In the course of a normal day, a person meets and interacts with perhaps hundreds of unknown people. They are strangers about whom one knows nothing of any personal significance. As fear overtakes an individual, he/she learns that it is prudent to expect the worst and act accordingly. Nothing can refute the suspicion that, within every chance encounter, lurks a gruesome death. The parked car, the baby carriage, the package delivered—all are bombs! Moreover, it is not just a bomb, but the ghastly explosion that took so many lives last year. In his/her eyes, all members of the opposing group become hideous murderers.

These experiences and perceptions do not go away when violence subsides and calm returns. Within deterrence relationship, as Wright maintains, "The way things work during times of tranquillity is based on

the outcome of the last outbreak of violence" (Wright 7). The sides erected by confrontation do not easily melt into peaceful accommodation. Divisions created by fear remain submerged in "peaceful" times, but they are never far from the surface. Perhaps common sense can hope for nothing more than forestalling the violence. At least, the lull allows a tenuous co-existence that is preferable to the outbreaks of convulsive fury that threaten to engulf all. The ritualized practices of deterrence —*marching* and *rising*—divide the community into opposing sides composed of fear transfigured into hate, but they also constrain the violence that would otherwise murder and destroy.

> It is always the enemy who started it. Even if he was not the first to speak it out, he was certainly planning it; and if he was not actually planning it, he was thinking of it; and, if he was not thinking of it, he would have thought of it.
>
> (Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*)

Current theories of peace are not very helpful when it comes to Northern Ireland. Whether these theories focus on conflict or cooperation, they encounter serious difficulties when confronting the protracted violence of Ulster's deterrence relationships. A certain blindness attends the role that fear play in making conflicts intractable. Still, the core of the problem is conceptual, and the concept of an enemy provides the missing theoretical dimension.

In the *Concept of the Political*, Carl Schmitt elaborates a conception of the enemy that is instructive. For Schmitt, the notion of an enemy always connotes killing violence (33). The enemy is *other*, *different*, *alien*, and *strange* to the degree that no commonality exists between us and them. The breach is total, and this severance produces an entity of unmitigated threat. The preservation or negation of one's way of life is now at issues in every dispute. By definition, the enemy is a foe whose existence must be eliminated.

Schmitt's analysis identifies an entire class of conflict for which peaceful resolution is categorically impossible. Between enemies, every conflict is extreme. No disagreement is ever a matter for compromise or forbearance. If these alternative arise, then our opponent has ceased to be our enemy. Consequently, war is the most appropriate, indeed the only,

means of resolving a conflict because only war seeks "the existential negation" of the adversary.

Contemporary theories of peace overlook the implications raised by this insight. Whether a conflict erupts into violence is not simply a function of how volatile and acrimonious it has become. Violence enters the dynamics of a conflict only if the adversary is identified as an enemy. Consequently, violent disputes are not the extreme end of a single conflict continuum upon which all discord, according to its severity, can be placed. Instead, it is necessary to treat violent and non-violent conflict as two distinctly separate phenomena with the concept of the enemy demarcating the boundary.

Antagonisms generated between enemies defy the conflict resolution mechanisms that work so well in non-violent disputes. The principal reason is that the future survival of the parties is fundamentally at risk in any altercation. When the stakes concern matters of life and death, suspicion and skepticism replace more trusting and neighborly modes of interaction. Mediation tools and negotiation techniques cannot defuse the fear and distrust that are engendered, and peace remains illusive.

Theories that focus on promoting cooperation rather than resolving conflict fare no better. The working assumption employed here is that cooperation can bridge the gap—rupture in commonality—that attends enemy relationships. It produces mutually beneficial results, thereby replacing enmity with amity. Common sense and everyday experience would seemingly validate this intuition. However, there is strong theoretical evidence against making the claim that cooperation causes peace.

In *Rediscovering the Social Group*, John C. Turner argues that cooperation occurs only in the context of a perceived *we-ness* (34). In other words, the perception that *we* share commonality and association makes cooperative activities possible. However, according to Schmitt, it is precisely the perceived lack of any commonality and association that defines the enemy. Consequently, cooperation between enemies is a theoretical impossibility. While cooperation can unquestionably build upon ties of *we-ness* that already exist—and even expand them into new areas of interaction—it cannot create these bonds where they are completely absent. Because the social and political breach between enemies is total, cooperation as a peace-generating activity proves ineffective.

The concept of the enemy causes problems for peace theories that make either conflict or cooperation the fundamental axis of analysis. The reason lies in the mimetic features of enemy relationships. The dynamics that drive these interactions are *sameness, difference,* and *competition* (Volkan 37-39). Those familiar with the work of René Girard will recognize the elements of mimetic rivalry. The crisis that these dynamics produce moves toward resolution in the sacrifice of a scapegoat, and the peace that results is the product of this expulsion and death. In protracted, intractable conflicts, the scapegoat expelled is, of course, the enemy. Therefore, at the conceptual level, peace emerges from the negation of the enemy.

A curious paradox arises: peace may be less the solution for violence than the central motivation for violence. The vision of peace adhered to by the warring sides excludes the other side. The essence of this dilemma is the sacrificial derivation of peace. The mere presence of the enemy represents the negation of peace. Consequently, it is the desire for peace that drives the parties to eliminate each other. The creation of inclusive peace surfaces as the problem.

### The challenge of inclusive peace

> You make peace with your enemies, not your friends.
> *(Yitzhak Rabin)*

A detailed presentation of a theoretical framework for addressing protracted, intractable conflicts is well beyond the scope of this paper. An extremely cursory outline must suffice. The fundamental task is the creation of inclusive visions of peace in which the conflicts generated by deterrence relationships can be resolved. This undertaking is no easy assignment because the divisions are laced with so much violence that even first-steps seem impossible. Still, from Girardian perspective, two separate, but linked, operations appear essential: creating *transcenders*[5] and *transforming conflict.*

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[5] I borrow the term *transcenders* from Louise Diamond, the Co-Director of the Center for Multi-Track Diplomacy.

### Creating transcenders

> In the image of the enemy, we will find the mirror in
> which we may see our own face most clearly.
>                    (Sam Keen, *Faces of the Enemy*)

If the enemy is someone who was potentially one of us and from whom we have been separated by violence, then the first task is to re-establish the human bonds that once connected us. Very little research has been done in this area, and the available literature is virtually non-existent. The best way to proceed is through stories. Two from Northern Ireland are noteworthy.

In his Nobel Laureate acceptance speech, Séamus Heaney tells of a group of eleven workers who, on January 5, 1976, were returning home after a day's labor. Near Kingsmill in South Armagh, they were stopped by twelve gunmen at a bogus checkpoint. After they made them get out and line up, they asked if there were any Catholics in the group. There was one, who made a move to step out. A hand reached out to hold him back. The message was one of commonality, of "we-ness." It whispered: don't; we won't tell—you are one of us. However, the move had been made, and the Catholic stepped out. He would not put the lives of his fellow workers in jeopardy. It too was a demonstration of their common humanity. They told him to move away, and they gunned down the remaining ten Protestants. The men in masks were the Provisional IRA. The men are dead, but their gestures lives. Both are *transcenders* for those who reach across divisions of violence.

On November 8, 1987, Gordon Wilson and his twenty-year old daughter Marie attended the Remembrance Day in Enniskillen. The IRA had planted a bomb under the speaker's podium. When the explosion went off, it killed eleven people, including Marie, and injured sixty-three more. Wilson held his daughter's hand as she lay under piles of rubble. A few hours later, she died at the hospital. Only moments after he left her, he gave an interview to a BBC correspondent in which he pleaded for a cease-fire. In the midst of his loss and pain, he renounced revenge and called for peace. For years, he tried to meet with the IRA to express personally his desire for halt to the violence. He wanted to meet them as Gordon Wilson, father of Marie Wilson who had died. He wants to connect with those who had also lost family members. He was finally granted an interview on April 7, 1993. He felt that he failed when IRA

rejected his request. However, one can never be sure. Gordon Wilson was a *transcender*.

Transcenders are many things—people, actions, events, gestures, metaphors, dreams, and visions. In Northern Ireland, the non-sacrificial stories in the Gospels are central. The form is not important. It is the task they accomplish that is significant: *they connect what violence has severed.* Anwar Sadat's address to the Israeli Knesset in 1977 is an excellent example. Without changing his position is any substantial way, Sadat touched the Israeli people. Listen to metaphors, images, and emotions he used to link Egyptian and Israeli in a common "we-ness."

> I come to you today on solid ground to shape a new life and to establish peace....
>
> Any life that is lost in war is a human life, be it that of an Arab or an Israeli. A wife who becomes a widow is a human being entitled to a happy family, whether she be an Arab or an Israeli. Innocent children who are deprived of the care and compassion of their parents are ours. They are ours, be they living on Arab or Israeli land....
>
> You want to live with us, in this part of the world.
>
> In all sincerity I tell you we welcome you among us, with full security and safety. This in itself is a tremendous turning point, one of the landmarks of a decisive historical change. We used to reject you. We had our reasons and our fears, yes....
>
> Yet today I tell you, and I declare it to the whole world, that we accept to live with you in permanent peace based on justice....
>
> What is peace for Israel? It means that Israel lives in the region with her Arab neighbors in security and safety....
>
> Peace is not a mere endorsement of written lines. Rather it is a rewriting of history....
>
> This is Egypt, whose people have entrusted me with their sacred message. A message of security, safety and peace to every man, women, and child in Israel. I say, encourage your leadership to struggle for peace.
>
> So we agree Salam Aleikum—*peace be upon you.*

## Transforming conflict

> To make peace with an enemy, one must work with that enemy, and that enemy becomes your partner.
> (Nelson Mandela)

By definition, intractable conflicts cannot be resolved. Still, they can be transformed into tractable ones that are, in principle, capable of resolution. The only way to do this is to construct a context that includes the sacrificially expelled other. It is here that public peace processes play a crucial role.

The notion of public peace processes is associated with Harold Saunders, a US career diplomat with over twenty years of experience. Saunders often heard advisors argue that a particular situation was not "ripe" for settlement. Yet, he also knew that conflicts rarely ripen by themselves. It always takes someone working to change the relationship between the parties to "ripen" it. This person is always toiling behind the scenes to help the parties turn from an "us/them" to a "we" relationship. As he once commented: "Thinking as 'we' produces a recognizable shift in mental gears" (11).

Concerning the fear and distrust separating Arabs and Israelis, Saunders writes:

> The Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict—like other conflicts—has left few people without their own, individual world of pain. As I flew on the Kissinger shuttles, I saw pain at every turn and in every person, from the president and prime minister to each diplomat, soldier, lawyer, journalist, teacher, driver, chambermaid, husband, wife, mother, father, son, and daughter. Israeli and Arabs and members of the American Jewish and Arab-American communities became personal friends and shared their sensibilities, their fears, and their pain with me in rich human exchanges.... As I reached out on a human level in 1973 to Arabs and Israelis who had suffered in their own ways, I discovered the human bonds that draw together people in pain. (xii )

Recounting his first encounter with Golda Meir, Prime Minister of Israel, Saunders tells of her personal concern about his sense of grief and loss—his wife had just died the day before. It was the day when the causality figures for the 1973 War were announced in Israel, and Meir, full of her own hurt, took his hand and said, "I'm terribly sorry about your loss. I lost a lot of my people. I know how you feel." Saunders recounts: "Moving beyond the pain of individual loss, I realized that many of the highest obstacles to negotiation and peace could be found in the pain of

the human being involved. I discovered that those obstacles could be eroded by acknowledgment on each side of the other's suffering and by open acceptance of a common humanity" (xii).

The role that apology can play is also rich area for exploration. In *Mea Culpa*, Nicholas Tavuchis contends that apology is a way of owning the grievances that we have committed. In apology, we affirm the normative commitments that bind us together and that our misbehavior transgressed. We express more than remorse and sorrow; we also endorse a vision of what the relationship should be. We acknowledge that no excuse or explanation can cancel the harm we have done. This act of standing defenseless and accountable for the crimes we have perpetrated is in itself an declaration of the moral universe that we have pledged to honor. Apology ratifies our future membership in a common community that includes both ourselves as victimizer and those whom we have victimized.

While apology is often an interpersonal affair, one group of people can apologize to another. Although the dynamics are significantly different, collective apology retains the uniquely restorative energies that make individual apology so potent. It establishes a moral self-image in the social ambiance that is shared with the other group. In this way, the moral social bonds needed to reunite the parties are put into play. A future that is not the repetition of old crimes becomes a new and realistic possibility.

These suggestions do not exhaust the possibilities for transforming conflict. The essential point is that they give intractable conflict a new reference point—"we-ness." Numerous institutional configurations are plausible if they are constructed under a common "we-ness." Absent this, no solution is viable—no matter how ingenious, fair, or beneficial! This is the job of *conflict transformation*.

Northern Ireland has long succumbed to a senseless violence offering fresh quota of dead and wounded in commemoration of previous violence. If this framework can provide a vision of an inclusive peace that transcends the sacred violence that scapegoats Protestant and Catholic, it will have performed a monumental task. Perhaps Anwar Sadat captured best the dimensions to this undertaking when he stated: *"Peace is not a mere endorsement of written lines. Rather it is the rewriting of history."*[6]

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[6] Speech to the Israeli Knesset (Nov. 8, 1977)

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# THE VINE AND BRANCHES DISCOURSE: THE GOSPEL'S PSYCHOLOGICAL APOCALYPSE

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> Man is after something that cannot be possessed. . ..
> Man cannot "have" being, though he absolutely needs
> it for living.
>
> (Roel Kaptein)

The anthropological reading of biblical literature which Girard's mimetic theory makes possible sheds new light on many otherwise inscrutable texts. Prominent among these, due to its centrality as well as its elusiveness, is the prologue to the Gospel of John. For the author of this gospel, the "Word" who was "in the beginning," was "the light" without which humanity remained in darkness—whether it be the darkness of pre-human existence or the moral and mythic darkness of the sacred violence that accompanied hominization. Girard's work helps us realize that humanity generated its own crude forms of illumination precisely by periodically expelling this light. (A vivid symbolic expression of this is the reference to the "lanterns, torches, and weapons" with which the Roman cohort arrested Jesus later in John's Gospel.)

The Johannine Prologue conveys its message in an elusively universal yet specifiable idiom:

> The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the
> world. He was in the world, and the world came into being
> through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what

was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all
who did accept him, who believed in his name, he gave the power
to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the
will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. (1: 9-13)

The ontological theme of these verses deserves attention. If, as
Raymond Brown has observed, these verses constitute a "description of
the history of salvation in hymnic form," they also contain an
anthropological summary of the two, and only two, ontologizing
circumstances: the identification, respectively, with the victimizing crowd
and with the victim.

However occluded the illuminating *Logos* might have been prior to
revelation of the Cross, the Johannine prologue tells us that it was present
*from the beginning*. How? The most pertinent scriptural clue seems to
be the reference to Christ in the Book of Revelation as "the Lamb slain
from the foundation of the world," the innocent One whose victimization
finally broke open the seals on the scroll of human iniquity and, in the
process, unfettered that iniquity from its ancient restraints.

One of the great values of Girard's work is that it makes
anthropologically explicit what is poetically implicit in these scriptural
innuendoes, namely, the link between the Crucified One and all victims
slain "from the foundation of the world." Inasmuch as "the Lamb slain
from the foundation of the world" was what made the old humanity
possible and, in Christ, what brought the new humanity into being, the
third verse of the prologue of John's Gospel becomes anthropologically
intelligible:

All things came into being through him, not one thing had its being
except through him. (1:3)

Here the explicit claim that all things came to be through him needs
to be read in light of the verses that follow in the prologue, but which I
have quoted above. Doing so, we are led to consider the radical difference
between the crude and fallacious ontology the ancient sacrificial system
was able to underwrite by causing its beneficiaries to identify with the
victimizing crowd and the ontological renewal born of an *identification*
with the innocent victim—referred to in the New Testament as a dying
with Christ and ritualized in baptism. With equal subtlety, this verse
alludes as well to the ineradicable homology between these two forms of

ontological sustenance. "All culture is sacrificial," writes Eric Gans, adding:

> Culture covers a lot of ground, from bear-baiting to attending a performance of Saint Matthew's Passion, but whether we savagely revel in the victim's sufferings or identify with them in the depths of our soul, culture is the founded on them.

And so is the *being* of those involved in these two fundamental forms of identification. Corresponding to the moral difference between the ritual experiences to which Gans refers is an ontological difference—a difference precisely having to do with the "depth of one's soul," the truth of one's being.

The biblical God who creates space-time and materiality out of nothing, brings being out of non-being—first putting to shame and undermining the dubious and delusional ontology the "world" bestows on the basis of superficial comparisons and at the expense of its victims. An ontological *nihilo* comparable to the cosmic *nihilo* out of which the cosmos is created is prefigured in the call of Abraham, Moses, and the prophets—the call to leave behind all the cultural markers by which they had once known who they were. Was it not, in fact, the *kenotic* response of the prophets and psalmists to this call that cleared the way for their "coming to be" in a new God-centered way. In Romans 4:17, Paul invokes this theme by referring to the faith of Abraham, noting that the God in whom Abraham put his faith, "gives life to the dead and calls into being that which has no being"—or has no being capable of surviving the truth (of the cross).

What makes biblical discipleship unique is the confounding, relativizing and destabilizing effect it has on conventional forms of identity. Where the old sacred system is completely intact, the fact of belonging to the social unit and the act of cowering or worshipping before the culture's reigning gods are simply two aspects of the same thing. It is in the biblical world that these two come into tension. It is in the biblical world that one is called out of one's social envelope into the wilderness, there to meet the "I am who am" in self-surrender to Whom one is made new, born again, ontologically reconstituted.

The first response to this "call" to separate from the cultural envelope was the beginning of the humanity's extrication from the system of sacred violence which functioned to keep this call from being heard. Mercifully, the process of breaking down the cultural structures rooted in the old

system of sacred violence has been a gradual one. It is part of the bewildering uniqueness of the gospels, however, that they often telescope this process in a most astonishing way, making it thereby possible to close the New Testament canon without robbing its later beneficiaries of the light it would gradually shed on historical processes which the Gospel itself had set in motion but whose peculiar circumstances would emerge only gradually and in due course. In this regard, the "prophetic" feature of the biblical text—prophetic in the popular sense of foreseeing the future—is perhaps one that biblical scholarship has been too quick to disparage.

There are New Testament texts to whose deeper meaning we are only able to fully awaken when the historical process these texts unleashed has reached the stage at which their "prophetic" significance can be retrospectively appreciated. I want to quote and comment upon several texts and explore the ontological theme I feel is embedded in them by approaching them from the point of view of mimetic theory and in light of the ontological issues raised by Jean-Luc Marion in his *God Without Being*.

In *God Without Being*, Marion challenges the conventional theological assumption that beings who come to realize how ontologically dependent they are on God must therefore conclude that the source of their *being-ness* is a *Being* as such, a Supreme Being. Embedded in this assumption, Marion argues, is a philosophical objectification of the divine that leads to the   idolatry that haunts the theological tradition and leaves it vulnerable to its post-modern detractors.

It is not Marion's theological project that concerns me here, however, nor will I try to reproduce his Heidegger-like typographical cipher for it, God with the "o" crossed out. Rather, I want to think through the mimetic, ontological and psychological ramifications of his work, ramifications which seem to me to point toward an ontology of personhood that is at once profoundly biblical, completely resonant with Girard's understanding of the constitution of the person by and in the other, and related to the crisis of psychological insubstantiality from whose many symptoms our culture is now suffering.

Marion retains the bedrock biblical notion that God is the ground of one's being, but wants to locate the ontogenesis not in Divine *Being* shared from a superabundance, but rather in the Divine Self-emptying *Gift-of-being* given kenotically to the other with no objectifiable remainder. In passing, it might be noted that there is an echo of Marion's

analysis in the Buddhist scholar Masao Abe, who observes: "through unconditional love God abnegates Godself so completely that God fully identifies with the crucified Christ on the cross." Abe's analysis is informed by the same Heideggerian critique of Being, and just as Marion critiques the objectifiability of God by crossing out the "o" in God as Heidegger had crossed out *Sein*, so Abe crosses out the Buddhist term roughly equivalent to the Christian notion of *kenosis*, *Sunyata*. Though by centering his analysis on "gift," Marion brings out the love of God in a distinctive and authentically Christian way, nevertheless his analysis finds an echo in Abe's insistence that "the kenotic Christ cannot be fully grasped without a realization of the total kenosis of God" (41).

If anything, Abe brings out even more explicitly what is clearly implied in Marion's analysis, namely, that the recognition that the truth about God—that God is the Love that empties Himself so that the one(s) He loves might have being—is a truth that breaks in on humanity at the Cross. To speak doctrinally, it is at the Cross and on the Cross where the supreme act of kenotic self-giving occurs simultaneously in both the Father and the Son, an act of kenotic self-giving which Christians, by virtue of their new identity, are prompted by the Spirit of Truth to imitate. *Being*, from this perspective, consists in always *giving one's being* to the Other from whom one received it or to others for whom the gift is a standing invitation to participate in the self-giving economy of the "Kingdom."

At the cultural level, the Gospel not only undermines the archaic sacred system on which culture has always depended, but it also shows—in the life of Jesus of Nazareth—how to live without the sacred system. That there is a parallel at the psychological level, should not surprise us. For the Christian—the one on whom the Gospel has had decisive effect—it is the Cross that destabilizes conventional subjectivity by undermining the system of sacred violence on which it depends, and it is the Cross that reveals the self-giving truth about God—"self-giving" in both senses: the giving away of self and the bestowing of selfhood as a gift. The Cross is the key to both events. Therefore those most fully exposed to the revelation that destabilizes conventional subjectivity are exposed as well to the revelation of another kind of subjectivity, however enigmatic it might be as the "world" reckons these things.

The kenotic self-giving obedience of Christ on the cross reveals the God whose kenotic act was to take on flesh and die wretched and despised. Again, the *ex nihilo* of creation and the preliminary loss of prior

ontological substance that accompanies *metanoia* reveal, each at its own level of reflection, not an unmoved mover, but rather an endlessly self-giving gift of self. So much so, that in a Christian context, selfhood is oxymoronic. The key to Christian subjectivity is being *subject* to the Other. The true self is the giving away of the self to the Other and/or others. It is pouring out one's life, losing one's life in order to find it.

Marion finds special meaning in several Pauline texts dealing, as he insists, with ontological issues, among them this passage from First Corinthians:

> Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that *are not*, to reduce to nothing things that *are*, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. (1 Cor 1: 26-28; my emphasis)

As Marion points out, those who are not—the non-beings to whom Paul refers—are certainly not non-beings in the material sense. If by non-being Paul cannot possibly mean non-existent, he must be referring to the socially constructed forms of subjectivity whose cultural props Christians are called to renounce. "God," says Marion, "chooses nonbeings in order to annul and abrogate beings" (89). But this abrogation begins with the ontological abdication of those called to this task. "Be it done unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38).

As Marion notes, in an earlier reference in First Corinthians Paul noted that the wisdom of God confounds the wisdom of the world, or, as Marion glosses the passage, "drives it to distraction, 'distracts' it (1:20), as a magnet distracts a compass, in depriving it of all reference to a fixed pole" (90). This image of a magnet distracting a compass is an ironic one, inasmuch as the compass is designed to respond to a magnet in a way that gives the compass its social utility. But here Marion is imagining a magnetic force field that has a disorienting effect. To which we can add that the "fixed pole" of which the "world" is deprived by the revelation of the Cross is the violence of the Cross veiled in mythic justifications. Henceforth, resort to this age-old mechanism for curing social confusion will have the effect of compounding the confusion and further disorienting those it once served to unify, orient and pacify. The clearest textual echo of this in the New Testament, it seems to me, is the quintessentially

anthropological verse that speaks of the immediate aftermath of Jesus'
death on the cross:

> And when all the crowds who had gathered for the spectacle saw
> what had happened, they returned home beating their breasts.
> (Luke 23:48)

Read anthropologically, this verse contains the whole problematic of
cultural history in light of the exposé of sacrificial violence the Cross
accomplishes. The reference here to the crowds gathered for the spectacle
should be   appreciated for its anthropological, not just its social,
significance. The crucifixion of Jesus is the kind of spectacle that has
been the flash point for social gathering since culture began. It remains
so only so long as the participants and spectators continue to misrecognize
the event and interpret it according to some myth that justifies the
violence.    The Lucan leitmotif which functions to keep this
anthropological problematic in sight is the recurring reference to gathering
and scattering. "Whoever does not gather with me," Jesus says, "scatters"
(Luke 11:23).

The Passion recounts an episode of sacrificial or scapegoating
violence that has the opposite of its ordinary and intended effect. Rather
than bringing about a psycho-social consolidation, it dramatically loosens
the grip of the gravitational field at the center of which the victim dies.
The term Luke uses for the verb "saw" is a form of the Greek word
*theoria,* and it implies not simple seeing but rather what we might call
insight or sudden recognition. Exegetes remind us that the reference to
"beating their breasts" does not imply contrition in any specifically
Christian sense of the term. Rather it merely connotes moral and mental
confusion. As such, it marks the beginning of a scattering process for
which Luke insists the only sustainable alternative is the gathering of the
new community in disciplined identification with the Crucified One. As
for the gathering of that new community, immediately following the verse
that so succinctly telescopes the cultural diaspora the Cross precipitates
is a verse showing the embryonic Christian community, not yet gathering
to be sure, but standing its ground, resisting the dispersion:

> But all [Jesus'] acquaintances *stood* at a distance, including the
> women who had followed him from Galilee and saw these events.
> (Luke 23:49)

This passage captures in all its poignancy the moral ambiguity and cultural liminality of the incipient Christian community—and, by extension, that of all Christians at whatever stage they found themselves in the cultural dispersal, in the latter stages of which we are living. Inasmuch as it can help put the epidemic of psychological instability we now face into anthropological as well as scriptural perspective, the ontological and psychological repercussions of this liminality cries out for further elucidation.

Modest as it might have been at its inception, the relative social independence to which this verse alludes deserves to be noted. While the large crowd wanders off in confusion, the embryonic Christian community is able to remain standing in the midst of its even greater confusion, its attention still riveted on the stark and revelatory fact of an innocent victim who died forgiving his persecutors.

Faint and tentative as it is, this resistance to social contagion is a symptom of a social independence which was soon to flower into acts of courage and commitment which most of us today can hardly imagine, much less replicate. Over the course of the ensuing centuries, those living in cultures where the Cross was gradually becoming the central religious symbol experienced an increasing degree of social independence as a result of the weakening of the sacrificial logic which the Gospel was slowly bringing about. But this resistance to social contagion was not a strictly individual phenomenon, even though it made possible the relative social independence for which hoards of Western individualists would eventually claim personal credit.

Psychologically speaking, the modern age could be said to have begun at the moment when two things happened: first, a relative social independence became widespread enough to become the defining experience of those living in Western culture, and, secondly, this relative social independence was misinterpreted as autonomous individuality, whose indebtedness to the Cross and Christian revelation was no longer taken into account. G. K. Chesterton insisted that even minuscule mistakes in Christian doctrine would eventually lead to huge blunders in human happiness. In misconstruing the meaning of the growing social independence of those living in cultures under biblical influence, modernity made precisely one of those mistakes. The modern world's mistake was the myth of autonomous individuality.

So pervasive did this notion of selfhood become, that it is now the air we breathe. The Cartesian self—the psychological entity standing alone

and surveying the world with its narrowly rational and crudely empirical epistemology—has been until recently the unquestioned assumption of our world. Few stopped to notice not only that this notion of selfhood was preposterous, but that there was absolutely no biblical warrant for believing in its validity. Selfhood as the biblical tradition understands it is radically dependent. The social independence the biblical self enjoys is directly related to the degree of that self's dependence on the biblical God. That personhood is radically different from the snatching at distinction and self-reliance that passes for modern "personality." Citing a passage from the Gospel of John, Hans Urs von Balthasar remarks on how radically different Christ's being was:

> "It is the will of him who sent me, not my own will, that I have come down from heaven to do." ... The meaning of the Incarnation, of Jesus' manhood, is first borne in upon us as a not-doing, a not-fulfilling, a not-carrying-out of his own will.... [A]lways he is what he is on the basis of "not my own will", "not my own honor." (7:18)... If in him "having" were for one moment to cease to be "receiving", to become a radically independent disposal of himself, he would in that moment cease to be the Father's Son... It is indeed this receiving of himself which gives him his "I," his own inner dimension, his spontaneity, that sonship with which he can answer the Father in a reciprocal giving. (*A Theology* 29-30)

Few have summed up this situation better than Johannes Baptist Metz did when he wrote this of Jesus:

> Did not Jesus live in continual dependence on Someone else? Was not his very existence hidden in the mysterious will of the Father? Was he not so thoroughly poor that he had to go begging for his very personality from the transcendent utterance of the Father? (27)

Jesus may have been in a category of one—the *only* Son—b ut he was also the first-born of a new humanity, by identification with whom others can become "adopted" children of the God who was Jesus' source of being. Precisely as the one who was "one in being with the Father"—*homo-ousios*—Jesus is, in the words of William M. Thompson, "the source of human personhood, a plenitude of personhood" (136).

Though Jean-Luc Marion himself does not deploy it for this purpose, his reading of the prodigal son story in the Gospel of Luke not only stands on its own as a masterful analysis of the ontological ramifications of biblical faith, but it makes it possible to recognize in this famous parable an analogue for the experiment in self-sufficiency which the Enlightenment and Romantic self confidently inaugurated, and which postmodernists are now just as confidently deconstructing. In quoting portions of the prodigal son parable, it is perhaps worth noting that as rich in narrative interest as the story is, and as poignantly as it portrays human relationships, its parabolic—or, if you will, theological—purpose is to put into the narrative of human affairs the mysterious relationship between the biblical God, whom Jesus refers to as his Heavenly Father, and those dependent upon God, some of whom decide to "go it alone." The parable begins:

> Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living."

Marion begins his exploration of the ontological ramification of this familiar text with the Greek words translated here as "property," and "squandered." The Greek for "squandered" is *diaskorpizo*, meaning to "cut asunder," the root of which, intriguingly, is *skorpizo*, meaning to scatter. The Greek word here translated as "property" is *ousia*, a term which Marion describes as "the philosophical term par excellence." *Ousia* is derived from the past participial form of *eimi*, the verb to be (Vine 1100). The Latin vulgate translated this word as *substantia*, or substance, a synonym for "being." The issue at stake here has been cogently captured in what Henri de Lubac has referred to as the diminishing of "ontological density" in the modern world, a remark echoed by Gabriel Marcel when he lamented the loss of "ontological moorings."

The younger son in the parable has demanded his share of his inheritance, his *ousia*. The customs and laws of the time gave heirs some control over wealth which they were later to inherit. Such an heir might use his inheritance but not dispose of it; his exclusive right remained encumbered by family obligations during the lifetime of his father. The

son, an heir, already had the use of his inheritance, his *ousia*. What he is demanding is unfettered, sovereign, autonomous control. Writes Marion:

> The son requests that he no longer have to request, or rather, that he no longer have to...receive the ousia as a gift. He asks to possess it, dispose of it, enjoy it without passing through the gift and the reception of the gift. The son wants to owe nothing to his father, and above all not to owe him a gift; he asks to have a father no longer—the ousia without the father or the gift. (97)

The son soon exhausts his *ousia*, an eventuality that coincides with a famine, which Marion notes, "symbolically marks this dispersed dissipation —dispersed in a great 'region,' or rather *khora*, an empty and undetermined space, where meaning, even more than food, has disappeared" (98).

Reduced to groveling for sustenance and envying the swine he is hired to feed, he decides to return to his father's house and repent of his ways. Determined on this course, he rehearses the penitential words with which he will plead to be readmitted to his father's house, not as a son, but as a lowly hired servant:

> So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

The father's astonishing disregard for his important patriarchal social status would have been more obvious to Jesus' listeners than it is to us. All that these listeners could have expected, even from a loving and merciful father figure of the time, would have been a man who might wait with strained patience, holding his offended anger and admonitions in check until he has heard his son's apology. Here, however, the father forgets entirely his social status and makes a fool of himself running—sandals flying off, robes disheveled and losing in the world's eyes all "gravitas"—before having any indication of the son's remorse. The father's indifference toward his own "ousia"—his socially superior being—resonates with Marion's idea of a "God without Being," and the son in the parable is as unprepared for the father's abdication of his social prerogative and status as were Jesus' listeners. Having carefully prepared a speech rehearsed in an earlier verse of the parable, the son begins delivering it, only to be interrupted by his father, whose joy over his son's

return sweeps away his son's stiff attempts to mollify his father's righteous anger. Jesus' listeners' incomprehension would have been more or less that of the prodigal son's elder brother, who complains that his faithfulness and long-suffering have never been so rewarded. One of Marion's most impressive contributions to the ontological implications of this parable comes from his interpretation of the father's response to the elder brother: "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours." For which Marion offers the following reflection:

> The father does not see the *ousia* as the sons see it... Or rather, the father does not see the *ousia*, and indeed the term appears only in the speech of the sons... [For the father], goods, common by definition and circulation, are presented as the indifferent stakes of those who, through them, give themselves to each other, in a circulation that is more essential than what it exchanges. The ousia is valuable to him only as the currency in an exchange of which it can mark, at the very best, but a moment, an exchange whose solemnity of infinite generosity most often is masked by the title of property. (99-100)

Marion refers to the ontological exchange for which the "title of property" is the obscuring misconception. The real property claims to which Marion's rendition of the prodigal son story refers, however, is the property rights asserted with respect to selfhood itself, and it is the son's ontological "substance" (*ousia*) that is dissipated by his attempt to *have* it rather than *receive* it as a gift. As Marion points out:

> If the son dissipates his goods in a life of dissipation (Luke 15:13), *dieskorpisen*), the reason is not the sudden immorality of an heir seized by debauchery. The reason for the dissipation of *ousia* is found in a first and fundamental dissipation: the . . . abandonment of the paternal gift as place, meaning, and legitimacy of the enjoyment of the *ousia*. (98)

The prodigal son abandoned his *ousia* as gift in favor of an arbitrary and autonomous right to dispose of it as he chose, on his own terms. [1] The

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[1] Marion's reading of the prodigal son story is a vivid and poignant reminder that the contemporary world's shift from traditional (religious) structures to the fluid market economy (in political, intellectual, and moral affairs as well as in economic life), and the attendant commodification of desire, involves an inevitable spiritual dissipation whose wider and

historical analogue for this "cashing out" of one's *ousia* is the claim of individual autonomy, the vanishing plausibility of which is the defining psychological fact of our time. In words relevant to the contemporary psychological crisis as they are of the prodigal son story, Marion notes:

> Possession without gift, possession of that for which no on-going gratitude is due to its benefactor, such possession is doomed to "dissipation," to a gradual diminishing of its significance. All the more so is this the case when that which is so possessed in this way, shorn of its givenness, is one's very self. (100)

As I said, the ontological innuendo Marion brings out is a facet of the important Lucan theme of gathering and scattering—"Whoever does not gather with me scatters"—and the prodigal son's dissipation (*di-skorpizo*) suggests a more profound and ontologically significant form of the social scattering (*skorpizo*) whose onset coincides in Luke's Gospel with the death of Jesus on the cross.

The dissipation of which the Lucan parable speaks—what de Lubac referred to as the diminution of "ontological density"—is not, therefore, an inherent, natural, or inevitable phenomenon. Rather it is related, says Paul, to one's knowledge of the biblical God—whether that knowledge be the heavily occluded knowledge of which the pagans were capable, the demanding covenantal privileges which Jewish worshipers enjoyed, or the knowledge of God rooted in the revelation of the cross. For Paul, of course, this latter form of knowledge is the culmination of a revelatory history in terms of which, in widely varying degrees, Paul is able to understand both pagan and Jewish religious traditions. Paul's experience confirms, and his exhortations emphasize, what is implicit throughout the biblical literature, namely, that knowledge of God—in proportion to the power of the revelation on which that knowledge is based—has a relativizing and destabilizing effect on the socially constructed self, the self whose constituting other is the social unit brought into being by the generative scapegoating event and/or the cult idol born of that event.

On the other hand, of course, in the biblical world one's knowledge of God cannot be conceived in simple objective terms. For Christ and Paul,

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cumulative consequences are likely to be an analogue to the prodigal son's "famished craving." The spiritual and cultural consequences of this dissipation will in all likelihood, and in due course, far outweigh the real, but modest, benefits of a "market" that constantly deflects desire and defers the violence to which it would otherwise lead.

the prophets and psalmists, the God who is known is first and foremost the God who knows:

> O LORD, you have searched me and known me.
> You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
> you discern my thoughts from far away.
> You search out my path and my lying down,
> and are acquainted with all my ways.  (Psalm 139:1-3)

Being known *by* God is the true source of biblical subjectivity, the true ground of one's *being*. Since autonomy is a comforting fiction whose plausibility is vanishing, and since, in Sebastian Moore's words, sin is "seeing my life through other people's eyes," this "walking in the sight of the Lord"— subjectivity rooted in prayer—must no longer be dismissed as less realistic than its prevalent secular alternatives.

"Whoever does not gather with me will be scattered," says the Lucan Jesus, in a trope with strong echoes in the social scene which in Luke's Gospel accompanies the crucifixion, when "the crowds gathered for the spectacle . . went home beating their breasts." And so there is a biblical leitmotif suggesting that the revelation of the Cross has the same ambiguous effect at the subjective level that it has at the cultural level. The two are obviously inseparable, but the former has been given far less attention than the latter, and in light of the crisis of mimetic contagion that surrounds us, and the epidemic of psychological insubstantiality that it is producing, more attention needs to be paid to it.

As we know all too well, relying on the sacrificial system after the Gospel has begun to undermine its cultural efficacy is fraught with dangers. There are analogous dangers in clinging either to forms of selfhood that are rooted in the sacrificial system or to the myth of "autonomous selfhood," a myth made plausible by the relative social independence fostered by the biblical tradition. For, as noted above, in First Corinthians Paul asserts that the wisdom of God "distracts," according to Marion, "as a magnet distracts a compass, in depriving it of all reference to a fixed pole" (90). Marion amplifies on this text in a way that brings its contemporary psychological ramifications better into focus:

> To be distracted: to become mad or to have a screw loose, to
> become loose as an idle wheel or a pulley becomes loose, having

lost one's grip on reality, free from all actual hold on the axle: mad,
unhinged, hence out of true. (90-91)

One of the benefits of Marion's ontological analysis of the prodigal
son story is that it makes it possible for us to recognize how the story
anticipates and telescopes the historical phenomena that practically define
modernity and postmodernity respectively: the assertion of autonomous
individuality and then its psychological "dissipation," historical
developments which it is now incumbent upon us to better understand.
For, perhaps even more than the violence and social disintegration with
which we must now grapple, the waning of "ontological density" of which
Henri de Lubac warned may ultimately constitute our most serious long-
term crisis, the breeding ground for most of the others.

Obviously, the myth of autonomous individuality was a product of
what we call "Western" culture—the latter being simple shorthand for that
cultural consortium which has fallen most profoundly, and over the longest
span of history, under the influence of the Judeo-Christian religious
tradition, and the former being a misreading of the relative social
autonomy this influence made possible.

Somewhat arbitrary though it might seem, I suppose the obvious place
to begin thinking about the way the prodigal son story has worked itself
out in history is with Jean Jacques Rousseau, the figure who, more than
any other, personified the autonomous self and gave the Western world its
most romantic and compelling example of such a self demanding its
psychological and social sovereignty. More arbitrarily still, one might
begin with a comment from Rousseau's *Confessions* in which Rousseau
undercuts his whole project in two sentences that express the mimetic
dynamic in perhaps the most succinct and cogent way it has ever been
expressed. Speaking of his childhood and youth, Rousseau writes:

> My desires were so rarely excited and so rarely thwarted, that it
> never came into my head to have any. I could swear indeed that
> until I was put under a master I did not so much as know what it
> was to want my own way. (22)

If we regard Rousseau for the moment as the father of modern
Western "individuality," and if the above quoted remark can be seen as the
onset of Rousseau's colorful career as Europe's most famous individual,
then what that remark allows us to notice is that modern individuality
surfaces at exactly the moment when the mimetic crisis in the midst of

which we now live was producing its first clear symptoms, and it emerges first in those who suffered most from these symptoms. The undeclared "other" in the background of Rousseau's individuality was anyone who excites or thwarts his desire, but especially anyone to whom deference might be due—anyone who might occupy in some attenuated way the place the father occupies in the prodigal son story. In other words, the true dynamic underlying the individualist posturing that Rousseau so singularly mastered was resentment, for which the socially attractive guise was autonomous self-sufficiency. Ralph Waldo Emerson, the man most responsible for franchising Rousseau's self-absorption in America, bristled, as did Rousseau, at the influence of others, especially any others to whom it seemed necessary to subordinate oneself. As Emerson told the Harvard Divinity students in the summer of 1838: "Truly speaking, it is not instruction, but provocation, that I can receive from another soul." The masterminds of the individualist revolution, therefore, were those in whose lives the mimetic crisis was already having its distracting, dissipating, and destabilizing effects.

Emerson was reiterating the defining cliché of the modern world. Uttering this shibboleth in one of its myriad forms rapidly became the prerequisite for intellectual respectability, but its sing-song reiteration hardly qualifies as evidence of its plausibility. Moreover, it is the historical analogue of the prodigal son's demand to have sovereign control over his *ousia*, "to owe nothing to his father, and above all not to owe him a gift," and above all not if the gift were that of his very self.

Marion's reading of the prodigal son story brings its ontological and psychological implications into focus. I now want to sharpen that focus, or rather to put the psychological distress involved into high relief so that the more subtle forms of this distress might be more readily recognized. The characters in Virginia Woolf's strange and haunting novel *The Waves* exemplify today's psychological and ontological crisis as perceptively and alarmingly as one might wish. A few passages from the novel will serve to show what de Lubac's diminution of "ontological density" and Gabriel Marcel's loss of "ontological moorings" looks like in the flesh.

To begin at the beginning—where Rousseau and Emerson begin—with resentment at those toward whom deference seems due, there is a particularly telling scene that takes place in the chapel at a boys boarding school where the male characters in Woolf's novel are students. At chapel, the school's headmaster functions as chaplain. During one particular service, one of the boys, Neville, seated before the headmaster robed for

his religious duties, begins to feel what Rousseau must have felt when he
wrote that "until I was put under a master I did not so much as know what
it was to want my own way."

> "The brute menaces my liberty," said Neville, "when he prays.
> Unwarmed by imagination, his words fall cold on my head like
> paving-stones, while the gilt cross heaves on his waistcoat. The
> words of authority are corrupted by those who speak them. I gibe
> and mock at this sad religion." (25)

It is true, of course, that the words of authority are usually corrupted
by those who speak them, but mocking all authority is hardly an intelligent
way to rectify this  lamentable, if inevitable, fact. Virginia Woolf's eye
for the problematic at hand is keen indeed, for it was the headmaster's
"sad religion" which was the flash point for Neville's assertion of
autonomy. However Neville might have chaffed at the authority of the
headmaster *as* headmaster, it was *as* Christian chaplain and *in* the
Christian chapel that the idea of deference toward him became
unacceptable. It is no coincidence. The resentment in the background of
modern individualism, like the resentment in the background of post-
modern multiculturalism, is most intense when directed toward the
revelation that made each these projects both initially plausible and
ultimately unsustainable.

Neville renounces the mediation of the Christian tradition and the
admittedly clay vessels from which its wine is often poured, invoking by
implication his autonomy and individuality.  Virginia Woolf was too
careful an observer of mimetic effects, whose ravages she suffered
intensely, to let her readers be taken in by the empty romantic slogans
espoused by her characters.  No sooner does Neville declare his
independence than he seeks out the mimetic inspiration of someone in his
immediate social environment, trading, in Girardian terms, an external for
an internal mediator, bartering his religious birthright for an over-spiced
bowl of social stew.

> "Now I will lean sideways as if to scratch my thigh. So I shall
> see Percival. There he sits, upright among the smaller fry. He
> breathes through his straight nose rather heavily. His blue, and
> oddly inexpressive eyes, are fixed with pagan  indifference upon
> the pillar opposite... He sees nothing; he hears nothing. He is
> remote from us all in a pagan universe. But look—he flicks his

> hands to the back of his neck. For such gestures one falls
> hopelessly in love for a lifetime. Dalton, Jones, Edgar and
> Bateman flick their hands to the back of their necks likewise. But
> they do not succeed." (25)

Neville proudly emancipates himself from the mimetic suggestion of
the chaplain only to fall unawares under the mimetic spell of a fellow
student, whom he envies, as do his classmates, for his astonishing ability
to remain immune to mimetic suggestion! What the characters in Virginia
Woolf's novel allow us to see is how Western culture's prodigal
individualism no sooner demands its *ousia* than it begins squandering it,
diminishing all the while its ontological density.

The other characters in Virginia Woolf's novel are caught up in the
same mimetic crisis, and each is slowly exhausting his or her "ontological
density" as a result. One of the characters, Bernard, says:

> "I changed and changed; was Hamlet, was Shelley, was the hero,
> whose name I now forget, of a novel by Dostoevsky; was for a
> whole term, incredibly, Napoleon; but was Byron chiefly. For
> many weeks at a time it was my part to stride into rooms and fling
> gloves and coat on the back of chairs, scowling slightly." (192)

At least Bernard can still believe in his model. His desire survives.
Rhoda, another Woolf character, whose mimetic crisis has entered a later
and more desperate stage, has no model, no desire, and no real
subjectivity:

> "I have no end in view.... you have an end in view—one person, is
> it, to sit beside, an idea is it, your beauty is it?... But there is no
> single scent, no single body for me to follow. And I have no face."
> (97-98)

In her desperation, Rhoda expresses a need for a mimetic model for
which the myth of autonomous individuality has never accounted. The
example of Rousseau and Emerson show that this failure is far from
merely incidental to the romantic self. On the contrary, the romantic self
is born of the attempt to disclaim the need for such models. Given the
forms of mediation that came to dominate the modern world, such
disclaimers are understandable, but the disclaimers only became possible

(and necessary) once the mimetic facts they were disclaiming became palpable enough to require explicit repudiation.

In 1942 W. H. Auden taught a course at Swarthmore College entitled: "From Rousseau to Hitler," a title that surely must have seemed far fetched to many. Might not a parallel course be taught today entitled: "From Rousseau to the Underground Man"? For Dostoevsky's underground man is the literary summation of the resentful, self-loathing and nihilistic psychopathologies into which the romantic self drifts as it exhausts what de Lubac calls its ontological density. Today, symptoms—both mild and extreme—of this psychological withering are readily at hand. For purposes of illustration, I chose one, virtually at random: that of the American poet Sylvia Plath. It might at first seem that Plath's suffering, her desperation, and her eventual suicide represent something entirely too pathological and idiosyncratic to be of general interest, but think, if you will, of Andy Warhohl's famous quip about the modern world moving toward a situation in which everyone would get his or her 15 minutes of fame. That statement is obviously absurd, but it captures something essential about the psycho-social pathology of modern life. Analogously, Sylvia Plath's suffering, as extreme and ultimately tragic as it was, vividly exemplifies a much more widespread experience—the experience, in fact, that made it necessary a hundred years ago to invent modern psychology, and which today is making it necessary to call its core premises into question.

Once his psychological substance was dissipated, the prodigal son fell into despair, envying the swine he had been hired to feed. As a spectacular but nevertheless paradigmatic example of what the prodigal son's dissipation of his *ousia* looks like in the context of today's breakdown of psychological coherence, we have Sylvia Plath's dwindling sense of subjective coherence, of which she writes in her journal:

> I am afraid. I am not solid, but hollow. I feel behind my eyes a numb, paralyzed cavern, a pit of hell, a *mimicking nothingness....* I do not know who I am, where I am going... (59-60)

Whether using the divine name as a convenient expletive or is murmuring in her desperation a crude and unconscious prayer for deliverance, Plath writes in her journal: "God, where is the integrating force going to come from?" (61) But as Virginia Woolf's fictional character Bernard, at an earlier stage in the diminution of ontological

density, rushed to the bookcase for mediation of Shelley or Byron, in her more desperate need, Sylvia Plath turned to Bernard's creator. "Virginia Woolf helps," she writes. "Her novels make mine possible" (168). Plath's relief at having a literary model, however, is tempered by the thought of the model's fateful demise. "Why did Virginia Woolf commit suicide?" she wonders (61). Be that as it may, Plath writes:

> I felt mystically that if I read Woolf, read Lawrence (these two, why? their vision, so different, is so like mine) I can be itched and kindled to a great work... I cannot and must not copy either. (196, 199)

Here is the mimetic double-bind, the twin imperative: imitate and be unique and "authentic." This is a tension resolved in Christian spirituality (and where else?) by the *Imitatio Christi*, the imitation of One whose sole imitable desire is to imitate the kenotic self-giving of the One who sent him. In order to carry on the charade of self-sufficiency, the autonomous individual must submit to a rigorous discipline, an almost Buddha-like monitoring of his or her desire, lest tale-tale signs of imitation belie the whole effort. In truth, the desire to imitate may be the only desire properly speaking that isn't imitative; it is the affective sine qua non of human existence, the ultimate truth about a creature whose bedrock reality, to speak again in the biblical idiom, is having been made in the image and likeness of another. Once this desire has no truly transcendent referent, it will inevitably make idols of those whose social prestige it initially reinforces and eventually resents. As the fact of the idol's lack of true transcendence emerges, and the idol worshipper's (false) ontological moorings crumble, the erstwhile idolater must try to fashion some form of pseduo-transcendence out of whatever is at hand. Plath writes in her journal:

> There is nowhere to go—not home, where I would blubber and cry, a grotesque fool, into my mother's skirts—not to men, where I want more than ever now their stern, final, paternal directive—not to church, which is liberal, free—no, I turn wearily to the totalitarian dictatorship where I am absolved of all personal responsibility and can sacrifice myself in a "splurge of altruism" on the altar of the Cause with a capital "C." (59-60)

Pedro Morandé has observed: "the longing for unconditional self-giving, which constitutes the deepest vocation of the human heart, cannot be rooted out" (152). If that is true, then the only question is: how will this longing be expressed by those made desperate by a withering of their ontological substance? Such a one was Sylvia Plath. "Potential mystics, or mystics in the primitive state," said Henri de Lubac, "are scattered in the world. These, above all, are the ones who must be reached" (cited by von Balthasar 1991, 101). Surely, the Sylvia Plath who wrote these lines can be considered a potential mystic. Our world is full of them.

Jean-Luc Marion analyzes this problem in a way parallel to Girard's early distinction between internal and external mediation: he speaks of the difference between the idol and the icon, and their respective ontological effects. As Marion helps us realize, the secular, rationalistic contempt for and suspicion of idolatry is a weak and attenuated version of a much more robust and subtle biblical assault on idolatry. The problem is that the modern secular forms of anti-idolatry have as their only alternative the self-possessed self—on whose ontological reliability Enlightenment rationalists depended, about whose prodigious imaginative powers the romantics waxed poetic, and whose implausibility the postmodern deconstructionists have had a field day exposing. With no acceptable escape from the harsh glare of its own caustic critique, the modern aversion to idolatry remains fundamentally resentful; it draws its critical energy and sense of moral rectitude from the very idols against which it rebels.

In sharp contrast, Christian faith is both vigorously opposed to idolatry and mediated by the what Marion calls the "icon par excellence," namely, Christ, the icon of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). Oblivious of the difference between the idol and the icon, and of the human inability to live without one or the other, the skeptical and irreligious forms of anti-idolatry that dominate post-modern thought can only engage in endless spiral of deconstruction, one that enslaves those it liberates and is accompanied by the dissipation of ontological density (*ousia*) and evolving toward nihilism. Of today's skeptical anti-idolatry, Marion writes:

> The radicality of the detestation of idols puts into question the possibility of an icon... Each idol that collapses marks the necessity of an icon, but also the impossibility of ever seeing it...
> (114)

The detesting (resentful) glare of the iconoclast is spiritually
omnivorous, but the more successful it is in toppling the idols before
which it once prostrated itself, the more scandalized it becomes and the
more iconophobic. The iconoclast's monocular vision—the Cyclops of
postmodern deconstruction—grows impervious to the iconic gaze of the
Other, "the gaze that envisages me" as Marion puts it, the gaze which,
speaking biblically, is the source of ontogenesis, the ground of being. The
modern skeptic's scandalized gaze, says Marion, "is blinded by its very
lucidity" (115).

"There is nowhere to go," wrote Sylvia Plath. Her recourse to a "Cause
with a capital 'C'" was what the age of ideologies—which is now
ending—was all about. Post-modern perspectivism and deconstruction is
the last gasp of that dying age. Having no transcendent referent, and
bristling with resentment toward the non-transcendent models under whose
spell it so haphazardly falls, the modern self had no recourse except to
idolize its own individuality and self-possession. Before long, however,
the contempt for idols overtakes this latest and last of them. Marion
writes:

> Thus the alternative no longer consists in deciding between an
> external idol and self-idolatry, but between the icon par excellence
> and self-hate. (113)

Here is where the prodigal son story in Luke begins to resonate so
powerfully with the vine and branches discourse in the Gospel of John,
and where each takes on its greatest contemporary relevance. Read
against the backdrop of our present discussion, the discourse can be seen
to anticipate the "withering" destined to occur to those whose exposure to
the gospel has cut them off from conventional culture's ontological
assurances, but who have followed the prodigal path trailblazed by
Rousseau, Emerson and others whom Leo Braudy called the "warlocks of
individualism."

In the vine and branches discourse, Jesus tells his closest disciples that
he is the vine and his Father the vine grower. His heavenly Father, the
vine dresser, cuts away the branches that do not bear fruit and prunes
those that do. In both cases, the Father's act negates the status quo. The
discourse has apocalyptic ramifications, but not in the ordinary crude
sense. Jesus tells his disciples that they have already been pruned by

having been exposed to the Gospel's living word. Pruned as such, they have already forfeited their "natural" (cultural) form of existence, to which a complete and safe return is now impossible. At which he says:

> I am the vine,
> you are the branches.
> Whoever remains in me, with me in him,
> bears fruit in plenty;
> for cut off from me you can do nothing.
> Anyone who does not remain in me
> is like a branch that has been thrown away—he withers;
> these branches are collected and thrown on the fire,
> and they are burned. (John 15:6-7)

There are two initial points about this passage that must be made. The first is that the discourse is being spoken to Jesus' closest disciples, and its apocalyptic implications are directly and explicitly related to the prior "conversion"—albeit an inchoate one—which Jesus' listeners have already undergone. The dire consequence to which the discourse refers will befall those who do not *remain* in Christ, as branches already severed from their original source of sustenance wither and die if separated from the vine on which they have been grafted. To speak in contemporary psychological and ontological terms, it is those who have responded to the call of Christ who are in a precarious situation, risking nothingness ("cut off from me you can do nothing") should they "go it alone." They cut themselves off from an ontological mooring so subtle and mysterious that its indispensability might easily go recognized.

Given the specificity of these verses, however, their relevance should not be thought strictly limited to professing Christians. For the problematic to which the vine and branches discourse ultimately refers is one which, *mutatis mutandis*, confronts everyone living in cultures destabilized by the revelation of the cross. Whether the "vine" is Christ, in identification with whom a Christian conversion strictly speaking takes place, or, in a more general, generic and secular sense, it is the victim-as-such, in either case, its repudiation is both historically and ontologically perilous. The gospel text refers to this peril in a particularly powerful way, one whose contemporary ramifications are not far to seek.

> Anyone who does not remain in me
> is like a branch that has been thrown away—he withers;

these branches are collected and thrown on the fire,
and they are burned. (John 15:7)

To read this verse as referring to the wrath of a condemning God is to miss its immense anthropological, ontological and historical implications. There are, it seems to me, two major historical facts—precisely the two facts that define our moment in history—on which this verse sheds its astonishing light. The first is the withering of the form of subjectivity which, like the supernova phenomenon that accompanies the dying of a star, glowed so luminously for the Enlightenment rationalists and Romantic individualists. "It looks as if the self," writes Robert Solomon, "which had been raised to transcendental then cosmic status has now disintegrated into nothingness" (128). Here, of course, is an echo of de Lubac's concern for the diminishing of "ontological density" in the modern world. Of course, both of these references can be understood as addenda to the Gospel metaphor of the *withering* of those branches which, once cut off from their original source, can do (or be) *nothing* if they get separated from the vine/victim/Christ on which they were grafted.

The second and related historical phenomenon that so characterizes our age is the rise of collective violence—accompanied by mythic justifications of the most primitive kinds—whose sudden and unexpected recrudescence is forcing even its most determined champions to recognize the Enlightenment's moral and religious bankruptcy. Here, the relevant phrase from the vine and branches discourse is that, having been severed from their natural (cultural) sustenance, the withered branches are eventually collected and thrown on the fire. The relationship between the withering—or, if you will, the diminishing of ontological density—and the violent conflagrations that have characterized our age is one to which we may only now be awakening, but one which this text written at the end of the first century perceives with uncanny, if parabolic, clarity. Early in this century, William Butler Yeats was able to give expression to these two historical phenomena with these lines from "The Second Coming":

The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

What Yeats was less able to see was that what he here terms *conviction* is rooted in a community's unambiguous certainty regarding the moral wretchedness of its designated *convict*. What he did see was that the "best" no longer enjoyed the moral luxury of that conviction, while the

"worst" still did. Yeats' mistake—the misrecognition that lends post-modern deconstruction its moral plausibility—is that he thought of the two categories as political and moral opposites. With the help of the vine and branches discourse and Girard's mimetic theory, however, we are able to see the mutually intensifying relationship—at both the social and psychological level —between the lack of conviction and passionate intensity. The vine and branches discourse provides us with the parabolic lens for bringing into focus the linkage between both these phenomena, and for recognizing how each is a repercussion—at the social and psychological level respectively—of the "scattering" whose historical epicenter is the crucifixion.

We have unwittingly squandered our ontological substance by claiming for ourselves sovereign control over it and the unimpeded right to "spend" our lives as we choose. The secretly resentful determination to "go it alone," to "do it my way," is a recipe for squandering the gift of being, whose sole demand is our gratitude for it and our willingness to replicate the divine act of self-giving which constitutes the "deepest vocation of the human heart." As the ontologizing power of the old sacred system wanes, and as the autonomous individuality with which the modern world has tended to replace it succumbs to the mimetic hyper stimulation of contemporary life, the johannine metaphor of the withering branches grows more pertinent. Likewise, the lucan parable of the prodigal son. The Bible, as Andrew McKenna put it, knows us better than we know ourselves (201). We are the withering branches, the prodigal ones. If we make the homeward journey as the prodigal son did, we might find ourselves one day muttering words of prayerful gratitude such as those spoken by François Fénélon. Of God, Fénélon writes:

> There is nothing in me that preceded all his gifts and that could
> have served as a vessel to receive them. The first of his gifts, the
> basis of all the others, is that which I call my own "I": God has
> given me this "I"; I owe him not merely everything I have but also
> everything I am.... Everything is a gift, and he who receives the
> gifts is himself first of all a gift received. (cited by von Balthasar
> 1986, 152)

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# SCANDAL AND IMITATION
# IN MATTHEW, KIERKEGAARD, AND
# GIRARD

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Charlie Chaplin once entered a Charlie Chaplin look-alike contest, but his resemblance was insufficient for the first- or second-place prize. He finished third, and thus created a small scandal: the judges—experts on Charlie Chaplin—proved to be so inept that they could not recognize the genuine article[1]. The simple, mimetic entertainment of a look-alike contest can become more interesting when marked by a spirit of ironic play, which we may plausibly attribute to Charlie Chaplin, and it certainly becomes more interesting when marked by the scandal of inept authorities. Scandals have a way of attracting attention: we take notice, and often pleasure, when experts are shown to be fools. If, on the other hand, *we* are the experts, then we are likely to take offense and become embarrassed or uncomfortable, defensive or aggressive, humiliated or angry. Either way, we may be scandalized—at the actions of others or at the treatment of ourselves.

The Chaplin story suggests three observations about scandal and imitation, which must be understood together because they are necessarily related, one requiring the other. First, models (in this case, Chaplin as the object of imitation) may be transformed into idols, something fantastic or untrue that we are led to admire, desire, or worship. The movie idol Chaplin was sufficiently far removed from the actual human, Charlie Chaplin, that Charlie Chaplin finished the contest in third place. In the

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[1] The story, perhaps apocryphal, has been around for some years and reappeared recently in Barash (87), but it is not recorded in Chaplin's autobiography.

Hebrew Bible, idolatry is more extreme: the golden calf is an attractive idol because it can be seen, a fantastic improvement (it would seem) over an invisible God whose mediator has decamped. Instead of worshipping God, the Israelites worship their own desires, which are literally "dung-balls" in Ezekiel's graphic vocabulary. Whether the movement is from an invisible God named YHWH toward a golden calf or dung-ball, or from a movie star, who is usually seen as a large image on a silver screen, toward the movie-goer's fond, mental reconstruction of him, the process of idolatry leads humans to mistake the false for the real.

Second, imitation has different forms: in a look-alike contest, imitation will depend to some extent on the happenstance of physical similarity—the size and face should resemble Chaplin's—but it will also depend on clothing and movement. The entrant Chaplin must have had a significant advantage in size and face, but this advantage was obviously not decisive. Since he failed to win, we begin to wonder: Did he wear the right clothes and hat? Did he, consummate actor that he was, move like Charlie Chaplin or rather more like Buster Keaton? Did he, for the sake of his little scandal, fail to appropriate himself, so to speak; did he misrepresent himself in order *not* to win? Looking alike is one thing, but appropriating and representing are quite another.

Finally, imitation often involves rivalry, which leads to scandal: the Chaplin look-alike contest is a competition, a form of rivalry that involves winners and losers—that is the point of the contest. By entering the contest, Chaplin made himself an unfair obstacle to the other contestants. But if he tried to lose, by not acting like Chaplin, he became an obstacle to the judges, misleading them into the ludicrous conclusion that someone other-than-Chaplin looked more like Chaplin than Chaplin. The potential scandal is inextricably related to judgment and rivalry, however light-hearted it may be in this case. Like our ordinary contests, New Testament imitation raises the specter of competition: the Pharisee gives thanks that he is not like the poor man (he wins the competition for righteousness hands down, he thinks, and he is fundamentally persuaded that there *is* a competition); the disciples want to know who among them—the competitors—gets to sit on the right hand; and Peter maintains that, while other disciples may be scandalized, he will not be (he wins, they lose). All of these miss the point decisively: New Testament imitation requires the renunciation of rivalry.

The Chaplin contest is a humorous exemplar of the ordinary world: in it, imitation is the way to success, but scandal may break out if one party

constitutes himself or herself as an obstacle to any of the other parties, whether rivals for the prize or the judges of the rivalry. The exemplar, like the ordinary world, is the antithesis of what the New Testament refers to as the kingdom of God, but presence in that kingdom depends on these two related phenomena, scandal and imitation. What are they, and how are they related?

### Worldly and essential offenses

In the New Testament and the Septuagint, the root of our word for scandal, *skandalon*, means "stumbling block" or "offense." René Girard has resuscitated the *skandalon* for the twentieth century, using it as a "technical term" (as Robert Hamerton-Kelly has described it) to refer to the model-obstacle of mimetic desire. It is "an essential feature" of interdividual psychology, referring to the desirer's wishing "to be like and to conquer the rival at the same time" (Hamerton-Kelly 46, 134). Gil Bailie refers to "the highly flammable mixture [in Matthew 18] of envy, rivalry, jealousy, and resentment for which the word 'scandal' is a virtual synonym" (211). The *skandalon* of the Septuagint is usually idolatry, the forbidden worship of a material image, or, as Girard says, "the obstacle made divine" (*Things Hidden* 421).

Thus, in Matthew 16, when Peter rebukes Jesus, Jesus equates Peter, Satan, and the *skandalon*: "Get behind me, Satan! You [Peter] are a *skandalon* [stumbling block, hindrance] to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things" (16:23). This leads Girard to say that "Satan is the mimetic model and obstacle *par excellence*,...the violent principle underlying all forms of earthly domination and all forms of idolatry, who tries to divert toward himself the adoration that is strictly due to God alone" (*Things Hidden* 419). Similarly, Hamerton-Kelly says, "In Mark, 'scandal' means the same as Satan" (46). And Roel Kaptein, in glossing a phrase from the Lord's Prayer, refers to "the devil, who is the embodiment of the mimesis of desire, the stumbling block over which everyone who is without [God] falls" (118).

This scandal or offense has been called "the offense of the world" (Bosc 672); it is scandal of a supposedly autonomous individual, like Peter, or of a group, like the disciples, grounded in human desire and rivalry. It is the serious stuff that Chaplin renders comedic as he makes himself an obstacle to his fellow entrants or his judges. Peter is an obstacle when he tries to stop Jesus, the disciples when they argue among

themselves over precedence, the Nazarenes of his hometown when they try to kill him—all are Adversaries, embodiments of the satanic principle, activated by rivalrous desire, and therefore a stumbling block, or *skandalon*, to Jesus in the gospels. They set their minds on human things—engaging in natural human rivalries and violence—rather than on divine things.

The same is true in our ordinary scandals, except that there is often no non-rivalrous figure (Jesus) involved. For example, at the Seattle Opera House recently an animal rights group protested against animal fur coats as opera-goers entered the building. The protesters were scandalized by the mink-coated wealthy who, in their view, were obstacles to the rights of innocent animals. The fur-wearers and their spouses assumed a lofty, dignified, non-rivalrous pose as they walked by, but later privately denigrated the protesters as people with little economic or political sense. But one gentleman, whose wife was not wearing a mink coat, uttered his outrage directly to the mob (as he saw them), proclaiming that he now intended to buy his wife a mink coat just to make them mad. Resentment and anger breeds resentment and anger; rivalry begets rivalry that could lead to violence. In this case, no blows were exchanged outside the Opera House, though by the end of the opera the stage was littered with corpses. The dramas outside and inside were the fascinating, entertaining, and cathartic stuff of resentment, rivalry, scandal, and violence.

Thus the *skandalon* at work, as *offense* of the world, may be described as satanic, rivalrous activity. But in the gospels, this rivalry is not the only form of offense. There is another form of the gospel *skandalon*, which can be distinguished, though not separated, from "the offense of the world," namely, what Kierkegaard calls "essential offense," that is, the offense of Jesus himself as the obstacle or stumbling block (*Practice* 124). Both Paul (in Rom.9:32-33) and Peter (in 1 Pet. 2:4-8) identify Isaiah's stumbling stone—the "stone one strikes against," the "rock one stumbles over—a trap and a snare" (Isaiah 8:14-15) with Jesus. (In Isaiah, the stone/rock/trap/snare is YHWH.)

Jesus offends many in the gospel stories—the Pharisees, the hometown Nazarenes, the Romans, his disciples, and the crowd—and to some extent the offense may be seen as being much like the offense of the world, except that Jesus is a different kind of model-obstacle who does not get caught up in the reciprocity of rivalry. But in the essential offense, Jesus, not Peter or some satanic other, is clearly seen as the obstacle. And he *must be* perceived as an obstacle by the worldly Peter or the worldly

Nazarenes; otherwise, they could never know how radically different Jesus is from ordinary humans, how radically other the kingdom of God is from the ordinary world, how decisively transformed their own lives must be if they are to be followers or imitators of Jesus. If Peter does not encounter the possibility of offense in Jesus as obstacle, or *skandalon*, he cannot possibly be an imitator, nor can he have faith. He cannot walk along the way, following Jesus, unless he encounters the stumbling block in the way and does not stumble on it. Following in the way means not stumbling, but this is a way in which the model that one is following is easily—even naturally—perceived as an obstacle, causing one to stumble.

Why, one may reasonably ask, may not Peter skip the encounter of Jesus as obstacle, and simply accept the role of follower because it seems natural, desirable, worthy, pleasing, or good? I cannot pretend to give an answer that will be persuasive to all. Indeed, to assert that the follower of Jesus must first encounter Jesus as *skandalon* goes against much in some forms of Christianity, when Jesus is characterized only as a welcoming, loving, good mediator who could never be an obstacle to faith. Kierkegaard wrote a book to answer this question—*Practice in Christianity* (1850)—and it failed to persuade the Danish bishop that the enterprise over which he presided ("Christendom") and Christianity were radically different, even antithetical, realms. The failure led Kierkegaard to alter his writing project from indirect communication to outright attack on the Christendom that failed to acknowledge any possibility of offense in Jesus and therefore failed to receive the gift of faith.

For a full treatment of the essential offense, there is no better source than *Practice in Christianity*, still too little known, though Kierkegaard said of it, "Without a doubt it is the most perfect and truest thing I have written" (*Journals* 6: 6361). Jesus embodies the essential offense by being both (or either) too high and too low in relation to the individual who encounters him. Offense is not a doctrine or idea but rather one possible contemporaneous relation of the individual to Jesus.

1. The offense from Jesus being too high, or too lofty: When an individual encounters anyone who "speaks or acts as if he were God, declares himself to be God, "the individual may dismiss the person as crazy; otherwise, there are two choices: offense or faith (*Practice* 94, 97). So when John the Baptist sends his disciples to ask Jesus whether he is the one they have been waiting for, Jesus does not answer directly but rather tells them what he has done—all of which is potentially offensive—and then he says: "And blessed is anyone who takes no offense

[or, is not scandalized] at me" (Matt. 11:6; Luke 7:23). Jesus provides no direct communication—yes or no—and no evidence that insists on a yes or no answer; he states his actions and teachings and leaves the response—offense or faith—to John. John may be offended that Jesus claims too much—"the dead are raised[!]" (or even possibly too little--no sign of political or military triumph), or he may hear these words and respond with an affirmation: yes, he is the one we have been waiting for.

2. The offense from Jesus being too low: "When one who passes himself off as God proves to be the lowly, poor, suffering, and finally powerless human being" (*Practice* 102), he will most likely be an offense. Jesus' birth, life, and death were too low to make him appear to be a viable leader or Messiah in the expected sense. "'Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary?...' And they took offense at him" (Matt. 13:55-57). Before Jesus's ignoble death—crucifixion, like a common thief—he predicts to his disciples, "You will all become deserters" ("You will all be scandalized [*skandalisthēsesthe*]," Matt. 26:31), and his prediction—in spite of rivalrous protests to the contrary—proves correct. Kierkegaard's final example of the offense from lowliness is given in one brief phrase: "the whole Passion story" (105).

The gospels insist that Jesus is a *skandalon*, an obstacle, an offense of loftiness or lowliness; they insist that one who follows Jesus must first encounter the obstacle to their natural desires, their ordinary sense of reason or prudence or duties, and their notions of truth, since Jesus is a radical alternative to natural rivalry, rationality, and directly communicable truth. This alternative is also called the kingdom of God, and one reaches it by faith, by following a new way, by imitating the divine. Thus, "the guardian or defensive weapon of faith," Kierkegaard says, is "the possibility of offense" (*Practice* 105); without the offense, we have only a fantasy of faith. Jesus is a *skandalon* in order that the individual who encounters him contemporaneously (though perhaps two thousand years after the historical appearance) may be blessed, for "Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

William Blake well understood the contemporaneous and scandalous nature of Jesus:

> I'm sure This Jesus will not do
> Either for Englishman or Jew.
> ("The Everlasting Gospel," Blake 1965, 796)

Blake also expounded the useful notion of Contraries, which can help us grasp the relation between scandal, or offense, on the one hand, and faith and imitation, on the other (and also between faith on the one hand and imitation on the other, which I will return to). Blake's most famous Contraries are innocence and experience, explored in his *Songs* about these two "Contrary States of the Soul," but in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* he also mentions reason and energy, attraction and repulsion, and the prolific and the devourer as Contraries. "Without Contraries there is no progression," he says, meaning not progress in the usual sense but rather something like "productivity." Contraries are productive and creative principles and need to be distinguished from unproductive "Negations," where one term is privileged to dominate and negate the other.[2]

In the animal-rights episode, the protesters were scandalized by the fur-clad rich, who were only moderately scandalized, but their enraged sympathizer became sufficiently scandalized to threaten an action, by way of protest, that would further scandalize the protesters. Clearly, the various groups became imitators of their opposition; here, scandal and imitation were closely allied, certainly neither Contraries nor Negations. Likewise, when Peter is scandalized by Jesus' prediction that the disciples will be scandalized, he insists that *he* will not be, whereupon all the disciples say the same (Matt. 26:35): in their present scandal, they imitate each other.

However, if John the Baptist is offended or scandalized by Jesus's apparent claims to loftiness by his healings and proclamation, then he will clearly *not* wish to follow or imitate Jesus. If he is not offended, he will be blessed and have faith: Jesus is the one he has been waiting for. Faith

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[2] For Blake on Contraries and Negations, see *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plate 3, and *Jerusalem*, plate 10 (Blake 1965, 34, 151); H. Adams (5-9); and Frye (188-90). In applying these terms to Kierkegaard, I am drawing on the important distinction made by Eller (144-45) between a Kierkegaardian negation (either-or) and dialectic (both-and). In this essay, I use Blake's "Contrary" rather than Kierkegaard's "dialectic" in order to avoid confusion with the Hegelian dialectic. Kierkegaard's dialectic is not at all the Hegelian way of stable intellectual concepts leading to a synthesis. Kierkegaard's dialectic is never synthesized; its polarity "derives its dynamic precisely from the living and continuing tension between the two positives. . . . The goal of such dialectic explicitly is *not* to transcend or synthesize the dichotomy but to keep *both* poles distinctly in view through constant alternation, through the attempt at simultaneity, through the ever gaining and regaining of balance" (Eller 144-45n).

and imitation are now the Negation of scandal, and this negated scandal (this blessed state of not being offended by Jesus) is necessary for blessedness: one cannot *not* be offended unless one encounters an offense. But if a negated scandal is necessary for blessedness, the scandal is somehow, paradoxically, productive.

The productive element in scandal lies in Jesus as a Sign of Offense, to use Kierkegaard's term, even though Jesus is also, at the same time, the Object of Faith. To be the sign of something is not immediately to be the thing itself, and yet it is to bear a close and significant relation to the thing. Simeon says that the infant Jesus is destined for *sēmeîon antilegomenon*, that is, to be "a sign that will be opposed" (NRSV), or a "sign of contradiction"—"so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35). The sign of opposition (Jesus) will be productive of revelation but not of the substance itself of the revelation. For what is revealed may be offense, or it may be a blessing, faith. John may respond with either of the Negations, offense or faith. If John the Baptist is offended, then the offense is *in* John, not in Jesus. That is why we must distinguish between the sign of offense and the immediacy of offense itself. Jesus as the necessary sign of offense may be perceived by John as the stumbling block over which John might stumble. But this would not be simply a case of misperception by John. Jesus is genuinely offensive to the natural world and the kingdom of Caesar; he is genuinely a *skandalon* to the worldly John, an obstacle in his way, but he is not *only* that, because if John negates this scandal, he will be blessed. The sign points to a truth—that Jesus is an offense to the natural and worldly—but if this sign and the obstacle that it points to are negated, Jesus appears as something other: the Object of Faith.

Girard and others understandably want to reserve the term "scandal" for offenses of the world; unlike Kierkegaard, Girard does not use it to describe Jesus, since "Jesus has not the slightest tendency toward mimetic rivalry" ("Are the Gospels Mythical?" 31). But both would agree that Jesus does not desire to offend and that in fact he does. Girard writes, "When one man alone [Jesus] follows the prescriptions of the kingdom of God it seems an intolerable provocation to all those who do not; . . . his perfection is an unforgivable insult to the violent world" (31). The "provocation" and "insult" are offensive, but Girard's *seems*—"it *seems* an intolerable provocation"—points to the paradox of intention and contrary effect, of sign and contrary object, which, given the clash between

the kingdom of Caesar and the kingdom of God, and given Jesus's loftiness and lowliness, are necessarily present in an encounter with Jesus.

Not applying the term "scandal" to Jesus, as the essential offense, has the advantage of maintaining a clear distinction between the imitation of Christ, on the one hand, and scandal and mimetic rivalry—the offense of the world—on the other. Scandal is adversarial, diabolical, satanic; therefore, it is more than a little confusing to maintain that Jesus is an actual *skandalon* to the Pharisees—they are offended by him—and a potential *skandalon* to the Canaanite woman, whom Jesus insults but who is *not* offended (Matt. 15:21-28).[3] In such cases, scandal and faith are Negations; the one negates the other as opposite human responses. But when the possibility of offense and the possibility of faith are manifest in Jesus, as the sign of contradiction, they are Contraries.

Jesus does not want to offend, but it is in the nature of things (because mimetic rivalry is part of the natural world and of the kingdom of Caesar) that this embodiment of the kingdom of God might offend. Calling Jesus a *skandalon* seems to confuse the adversarial, satanic quality of the *skandalon*, but it clarifies the paradoxical, and Contrary, relationships between scandal and faith and between scandal and imitation. Furthermore, it is the language of the New Testament: "Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me [Jesus]" (Matt. 11:6); "And they [the Nazarenes] took offense at him" (Matt. 13:57); "the Pharisees took offense" at Jesus (Matt. 15:12); "You [disciples] will all stumble [take offense] because of me" (Matt. 26;31). For the author of 1 Peter, Jesus is "a living stone" from which "a spiritual house" may be built, *and* he is (quoting Isaiah) "A stone that makes them stumble,/and a rock that makes them fall" (1 Peter 2:4-8). Jesus again is a Contrary, Simeon's "sign of contradiction."

Scandal in all its forms (even in a look-alike contest) has a way of attracting attention. This is certainly true of the scandal of Jesus: he was a kind of magnet of offense in his own time, remains so in Blake, Dostoyevski (as in his appearance before the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov*), and the gospels (except when they are domesticated and robbed of their power as story). But the important attention aroused by Jesus is individual and revelatory: "the inner thoughts of many will be revealed," as Simeon predicts. Jesus as *skandalon* reveals what those who encounter him may never have known about their inner

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[3] I have discussed this episode in *The Scandal of the Gospels* (14-22).

thoughts, because this encounter forces them to a decisive crisis, the issue of which is offense or faith.

Given the insistence in the Hebrew Bible that the Israelites are to walk in the way of the Lord without stumbling, and the blessing promised in the gospels to those who do not stumble over Jesus, we may say that the biblical imperative is to walk upright in the way, to overcome obstacles, not to stumble, not to be offended. This is true of the model-obstacle in ordinary, worldly rivalry and envy and also of that different model-obstacle, Jesus, as essential offense. For example, with regard to the former, the recurring desire of individual disciples to be the greatest among them, and the corresponding desire of the other disciples to scapegoat those who attempt to be the greatest, are scandals that the disciples should overcome but do not (e.g., Matt. 20:20-24). Even Jesus's closest followers succumb readily to scandals, so compelling and natural are their rivalries and desires. It is about such scandals of rivalry and envy that Jesus says, "Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!" (Matt. 18:7). Jesus's potential scandals—his healings of the blind, the lame, the lepers, and the deaf; his violations of the purity laws; his consorting with lepers and tax collections—should not scandalize. But often they do.

### Matthew on negating the necessary scandal

If we read Matthew looking for ways to negate these scandals, we might first observe that Jesus himself does it by quoting Scripture—as in the temptation scene, where Satan is the *skandalon*, setting obstacles in the way of Jesus. But we see as well that Satan *promotes* scandal in the same way, quoting Psalm 91 to tempt Jesus to throw himself from the pinnacle of the temple and allow the angels "to bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone" (Matt. 4:6)—a complicated instance of the *skandalon*, Satan, using a text (the Bible) that wants to subvert scandals and using a passage in that text explicitly about scandal (the stumbling stone) in order to cause Jesus to stumble. But Jesus, quoting Scripture ("Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him,'" Matt. 4:10), does not stumble.

Additionally, we might read Jesus's Sermon on the Mount as a blueprint for overcoming scandal: you are blessed, and therefore not scandalized, if you are poor in spirit, meek, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker, or persecuted; if you

exceed the Law (in the "You have heard . . . but I say to you" passages), if you do not worry about your life, if you do not judge, if you strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, instead of the more natural striving for wealth, recognition, or power (Matt. 5:1-7:27). Matthew first shows Jesus dramatically overcoming the *skandalon* himself by referring to Scripture on listening to God, not testing God, and serving God (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10), then he presents Jesus's instructions to others about overcoming the offense of the world.

In the rest of his gospel, Matthew offers numerous, if sometimes difficult and even enigmatic, ways of overcoming scandal: by having faith (the negation of scandal) like the Canaanite woman, the hemorrhaging woman, and the two blind men, but unlike the Nazarenes; by learning what it means to say "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (9:13); by being wise as serpents and innocent as doves (10:16); by repenting; by doing the will of my Father in heaven; by listening (13:9) and hearing the word rather than being scandalized (as in the parable of the sower, 13:21); by setting your mind on divine things and not on human things (16:23); by forgiving your brother or sister from your heart (18:35); by not neglecting justice, mercy, and faith (23:23); by not committing violence on those who come in the name of the Lord (23:34) and by not trying to take the kingdom of God by violence; by putting the sword back into its place rather than using it (26:51). All of these constitute ways of not stumbling but rather of walking in the way of the Lord. However, all of these may be considered as glosses or elaborations on the words of Jesus to his disciples: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (16:23). Following Jesus, imitating him, and accepting the denial and suffering involved—this is central to Matthew's notion of overcoming scandal.

### Imitation in Girard and Kierkegaard

Although René Girard's writings have vividly and explicitly described how mimetic desire generates scandal, they also imply the importance of overcoming scandal through imitation. His most direct statement about the positive power of imitation is in an interview in *Religion and Literature*, where he says that he is not advocating "the renunciation of mimetic desire itself, because what Jesus advocates is mimetic desire. Imitate me, and imitate the father through me, he says, so it's twice mimetic. Jesus seems to say that the only way to avoid violence is to imitate me, and imitate the Father" (R. Adams 23). This is a development

of the idea of external mediation that is discussed briefly at the beginning of *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (9) and again in *A Theater of Envy* (315).

The nineteenth-century master of the *skandalon*, Kierkegaard, wrote a great deal about positive imitation. In the first essay of *Gospel of Sufferings* (1847), he poses the question, "What is involved in the concept of following Christ?" and the answer is: to be compelled to choose for oneself; to walk alone the way the teacher (Jesus) went; to have invisible help; to deny oneself; to be a servant; to avoid being admired and accept suffering from scorn and mockery; and to experience joy. No easy answers, these, including the last—experiencing joy. As Girard memorably puts it, "Between pure joy and a stone, we play it safe and choose the stone" (*Theater* 335).

In *Practice in Christianity*, Kierkegaard returns to the issue of admiration mentioned above. The imitator must cease to desire admiration for himself or herself but must also avoid the danger of admiring Christ as the model. Loftiness inspires admirers, but "the correlative of abasement and lowliness is: imitators" (237). Christ as "the prototype stands infinitely close in abasement and lowliness, and yet infinitely distant in loftiness"; "his whole life on earth, from first to last, was designed solely to be able to have imitators and designed to make admirers impossible" (238). Instead, the reverse has happened: in "the Church triumphant and established Christendom," Christ has acquired "admirers and not imitators" (237). Admiration is true and proper as long as one is not able, or does not want, to resemble the model, but it is dangerous in that "admiration turns to envy" (241); the model becomes obstacle. Thus, "it is a lie, deceit, is sin to want to admire in relation to Christ . . . instead of imitating him" (243).

In an essay entitled "Christ as the Prototype" in *Judge for Yourself*, and in his journal entries, we encounter another set of Kierkegaardian Contraries—another instance, as he says, of "essential Christianity always plac[ing] opposites together" (*Judge* 161). These Contraries are imitation and the gift of faith. I said earlier that faith and its activity of imitation are jointly Contraries of offense or scandal, and they do stand together in productive opposition to the essential offense. But they are also productive contraries of each other, not as antagonistic oppositions but as complementary oppositions. Imitation is what the follower *does*; faith is not what the follower achieves or earns but what the follower *receives*, as

gift, without which imitation cannot long survive.[4] In some mechanical sense, perhaps, one can imitate Christ (Hollywood-style, as actor) without being faithful, and by many accounts one can "have faith" without imitating Christ. But for Kierkegaard, at least, Christianity (as opposed to Christendom) requires the active, productive opposition of imitation and faith, precisely because of the necessary existence of scandal ("occasions for stumbling [*ta skandala*] are bound to come," Matt. 8:7).

In his journals Kierkegaard says, "Christ makes his appearance in the middle of actuality, teaches, suffers—and says: Imitate me; imitation is Christianity" (*Journals* 2: 1932). Thus, in a strict sense, imitation means suffering—specifically, dying to the world, being hated by humans, and living in poverty, contempt, and persecution, because to imitate Christ is to be an offense, a scandal, to the world. This is the requirement of Christianity, but it "is really the point from which the human race shrinks" and has indeed "been completely abolished, long, long ago consigned to oblivion" (*Judge* 188-89). Even so, imitation must nonetheless "be advanced, be affirmed, be called to our attention" (191).

We seem to be left with a requirement for Christianity that human nature shuns and that has been abolished; hence no Christianity. But Kierkegaard, who never claimed to be an imitator in this strict sense, also set forth another, more lenient account of imitation. In 1851 he wrote:

> Now I understand that imitation is not to be applied in this way [i.e., die to the world, suffer for the teaching, be hated by all men]; I understand that it is intended to keep order [i.e., the single individual in relationship to Christ (2: 1904)], to teach humility and the need for grace, to put an end to doubt.
>
> Then comes the reassurance and the blessedness—and then it would not be impossible for a man to be so moved by all this love and feel so blessed that it becomes love's joy for him to die to the world.
>
> Does there not come a moment when a man says: There really is grace; and imitation, as Luther says so superbly, ought not plunge a man into despair or into blasphemy. If that moment

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[4] From Kierkegaard's *Journals*: "I must now take care . . . so that I do not go astray by all too one-sidedly staring at Christ as the prototype [to be imitated]. It is the dialectical element connected with Christ as the gift, as that which is given to us ...." (2: 1852). In a later entry he speaks of "the reciprocal relationship between faith and imitation" (2: 1880).

comes, then, in spite of all its pain, imitation is a matter of love
and as such is blessed. (2: 1903)

Besides ordering the individual's relationship to Christ, teaching grace,
and ending doubt, another purpose of this lenient imitation is "to prevent
Christianity from becoming mythology" (2: 1906)—a project that has
distinctly Girardian overtones, since one of Girard's fundamental
distinctions is between mythology and Christianity, a distinction that has
a tendency to dissolve whenever Christianity moves back toward the
primitive sacred of mythology (*Things Hidden,* 423). Lenient imitation
is "imitation in the direction of decisive action whereby the situation for
becoming a Christian comes into existence" (2: 1908). It is the religious
venturing forth that produces collisions with the world.

Imitation cannot be practiced by a solitary individual trying to copy an
external model. The individual needs help, and this comes from the
Contrary of imitation: "Christ as gift—faith" (2: 1908). And because of
the gift, imitation is not accompanied by despair but rather comes as "the
fruit of faith" (2: 1908), "the glad fruit of gratitude" (2: 1892).[5]

Thus, when Kierkegaard says that "Christianity is a *believing* and a
very particular kind of existing corresponding to it—*imitation*; . . .
Christianity is a believing and an imitating" (2: 1880; SK's emphases), his
"and" describes a productive, complementary opposition that exists (in
negative terms) to negate the *skandalon* and (in positive terms) to bring
about the kingdom of God. The Negation of faith is offense; it is the
scandalized rejection of believing, the stumbling instead of walking in the
way. And "the very particular kind of existing"—imitation of Christ—is,
in Girard's terms, external mediation. This imitation is for Kierkegaard
the only defense against what he calls a "secularized mentality as far from

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[5] From Kierkegaard's *Journals*:
First and foremost, faith.
Next, *gratitude*.
   In the disciple in the stricter sense this gratitude is "imitation." But even the weakest
Christian has this in common with the strongest disciple: the relationship is one of gratitude.
   Imitation is not the law's demand that a poor wretch of a man must torture himself. No,
even Christ is against this kind of extorted discipleship. He would no doubt say to such a person
if he otherwise found gratitude in him: Don't be carried away, take your time, and it will come
all right; in any case, let it come as a glad fruit of gratitude; otherwise it is not "imitation." Yes,
one would have to say that such fearfully extorted discipleship is rather a perverted mimicking.
(2: 1892)

God as possible" (2: 1917), that is, an imitation within the temporal and worldly, which is part of what Girard calls internal mediation.

### Imitating the idol or the prototype

Charlie Chaplin's look-alike contest may be seen as a faint, comic analog of the earnest matter of transcendence through imitation. Although the look-alike contest consists of a group of people striving to imitate Charlie Chaplin, and Matthew's story consists of disciples and crowds striving to follow a spiritual prototype and teacher, Jesus, in both cases there exists an imperfect notion of who the model is. One model, Chaplin, is present at the look-alike contest but appears as an imperfect semblance of himself (or of the idol) and turns out to be, comically, not nearly as much of an obstacle to the other entrants as one would expect. The other model, Jesus, is present and unique; he is followed, but only up to a point, where he becomes a formidable obstacle, rejected by all, since all, even the disciples, are scandalized. Imitation Hollywood-style is relatively easy, but the imitator will be imitating an image or an idol, with admiration, which naturally evolves into envy and rivalry. Imitating the prototype is a difficult and unnatural undertaking; the imitator needs help, and even then it may appear to be too difficult. Admiration and judgment are easier, but both are radical errors: the task is not to judge, or admire, but imitate.

Kierkegaard has his own story of a striking look-alike event, but without the contest—and that is the crucial difference. He tells of a person going around in someone else's clothes and representing that other. The story becomes allegory: the person who awakens to a new day and dresses in another's clothes is like one "putting on Christ." But this dressing requires, first, appropriating Christ's merit through his gift and, second, being like him, imitating him. "You are to put on Christ," Kierkegaard writes, "put him on yourself—as when someone goes around in borrowed clothes . . .—put him on, as when someone who looks strikingly like another not only tries to resemble him but *re-presents* him. Christ *gives* you his clothing [the gift of faith, believing] . . . and asks you to *re-present* him [imitation]" (*Journals* 2: 1858; SK's emphases). Kierkegaard's story is the radical alternative to imitation Hollywood-style, which of course existed long before Hollywood and has never been confined to the west coast of America.

In the terms of the gospels, the follower who walks upright along the way, without stumbling, participates in the productive opposition of

receiving and representing. But any walker on the this way also runs the risk of stumbling, since the one who brings the good news, the gospel, is himself a "sign of contradiction," the Sign of Offense and the Object of Faith. Something like the opposition —receiving the gift of clothes and representing the giver of the clothes—appears in the interview where Girard speaks about positive mimesis. After saying that "mimetic desire is also the desire for God," Girard goes on to say this: "Wherever you have that desire, I would say, that really active, positive desire for the other, there is some kind of divine grace present" (R. Adams 25). There is, in short, a gift that complements the desire to imitate. And when imitation fails, as it did with the disciples, only the gift can make imitation possible again: "Divine grace alone can explain why, after the Resurrection, the disciples could become a dissenting minority in an ocean of victimization" ("Are the Gospels Mythical?" 31). This complementarity is not pursued by Girard to the extent that it is by Kierkegaard, and the echo does not suggest that Girard has drawn on Kierkegaard, who in fact is of little importance in Girard's thought. Both, however, draw on a common source, the gospels, where the *skandalon* and imitation stand in dramatic and dynamic relation to each other.

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# LABYRINTHINE STRATEGIES OF SACRIFICE:
# THE *CRETANS* BY EURIPIDES

Giuseppe Fornari

The application of René Girard's mimetic hypothesis demands drastic re-interpretation of the history of our culture. The denunciation of sacrificial violence performed first by the Hebrew Bible and then by the Gospels figures as an objective watershed in the evaluation of civilizations and historical periods. This new methodological and theoretical situation brings Girard's ideas into conflict with current trends toward relativism. The victim is the reality at the root of history, an extra-historical element that disrupts the circle of interpretation and confronts us as an absolute value demanding our commitment one way or another. The epistemological problems thus become one and the same with a frankly religious need. In an elegant and paradoxical way Girard's thought gives new, vital emphasis to the Christocentric interpretation of human history typical of patristic and medieval thought.

In this light, comparison of our Christian Western civilization with its Classical predecessor becomes crucial. For the Middle Ages Antiquity was not separate from Christianity but its *figura* (prefiguration), in a positive or negative way. Modern culture, however, starting from humanism and the Renaissance, discovered the historical dimension of Classical civilization with ever-increasing admiration until, finally, Neoclassicism set it as the great alternative to modern civilization. This tendency became openly anti-Christian first with the French revolution and then with thinkers like Nietzsche and Heidegger. The very identity of Western culture is determined by its varying attitudes toward Classical Antiquity and Christianity, to such an extent that the different periods in history could be subdivided accordingly. The comparison is like asking ourselves

what we would be without Christianity, or who we are and what Christianity is. The radical nature of these questions and the overall development of our culture therefore confirm Girard's radical, meta-historical model. Classical civilization is the inevitable touchstone for this trans-historical question of identity.

The comparison is fascinating and complex, and it cannot be dismissed simply by juxtaposing victimary awareness and blindness. Girard himself in *Violence and the Sacred* notes the profound investigation of mimetic violence in Greek tragedy and pre-Socratic philosophy.[1] Further research of my own into these aspects of Greek civilization confirms and widens the analysis, revealing a surprisingly varied and dramatic picture.[2] The most interesting discovery may be that the Greeks had already faced this question of meta-historical identity in relation to the victim. I have chosen Euripides' lost tragedy,the *Cretans*, to illustrate this: its highly original subject within the corpus of Greek tragedy and its symbolic richness fully justify its choice. The few remaining fragments, which are almost entirely reproduced here, provide enough material for analyses that are necessarily more limited but more complete in themselves and thus more suitable for a single essay. Besides, they possess high literary quality and do not deserve to remain the sole preserve of specialists.

## The tragedy of the labyrinth

Euripides probably wrote the *Cretans* before 430 B.C. The premisses of the plot are supplied by traditional mythical material. To demonstrate to his brothers that he has a divine right to the kingdom of Crete, Minos asks Poseidon to send a white bull from the sea for sacrifice. The god satisfies his request and Minos's power is confirmed, but he decided the bull is too beautiful to sacrifice. The wrath of the god is not slow to strike the king's family. Minos's wife, Pasiphae, falls in love with the bull and copulates with it. From this bestial union comes the Minotaur, the being, half-man half-bull, which is shut up in the labyrinth. Minos's non-performance of the sacrifice therefore causes a grave crisis on the island,

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[1] It could be said that the exciting comparison with Classical civilization is one of the inspiring forces of *Violence and the Sacred*. An analogous direction, as regards Virgil and sacrifice, is followed by Bandera in *The Sacred Game* (131ff). See also note 11.

[2] G. Fornari, *The Esoteric Knowledge of the Greeks: From Orphism to Tragedy. A Sacrificial Reading* (forthcoming).

jeopardizing the boundaries between man and animal. The monstrousness of the Minotaur represents the breaking-down of those differences that the life of the whole group depends on. We have here a symbolic representation of the crisis of the doubles or sacrificial crisis.

Mimetic theory allows us to fully understand this first part of the myth. Sacrifice is the basis of every organized community; around the sacrificial victim all the violence of the group can be released and become its opposite: the reconciliation that makes communal life possible. This comes about through the mechanism of substitution—the victim dying for all the community—which undergoes further development in the course of cultural evolution: the victim can in turn be substituted if his killing is postponed and his power appears too great to be violated with impunity. According to Girard, this is the origin of the figure of the king, whose function often approximates closely that of the priest. In the figure of the priest-king, the role of the sacrificial victim is split in two: the substitute victim is directly sacrificed, and the substituted victim, while maintaining his sacred role, becomes the authority presiding over the sacrifice. The community thus delegates the dangerous task of sacrifice to the priest-king, and keeps him in reserve as a victim, should the ordinary sacrifice be no longer effective, as may happen when the sacrificial delegation loses its effectiveness of some catastrophe strikes the group.

At the beginning of the Minos and Pasiphae myth, this sacrificial mechanism is jammed. The king refuses to perform his function and a sacrificial crisis hits the community, already indicated by the rivalry between Minos and his brothers. The myth reverses the causal relation: in reality the crisis renders the sacred king guilty and so restores him to his role as victim, while in the myth the sacred king appears as guilty, as in the Oedipus story. But, as the subject of a tragedy, the myth now is represented, i.e., put into a logically broader system where the myth is the language and the tragedy is the meta-language, in a way still to be defined. This transition could be defined as an objective logical feedback inherent in the very structure of theatrical representation, where rite represents itself and so becomes meta-rite, with inevitable cognitive connotations.[3] But if the meta-linguistic system of the theatrical work sets out to explain the elements of the underlying language, there is a deliberate cognitive intervention. Let us see whether this is the case with Euripides.

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[3] A more or less developed cognitive feedback exists in human cultures, but remains incomplete and insufficient in itself, as I hope this article will show.

The real subject of the *Cretans* is the management of sacrificial violence. All the fragments of the tragedy can be explained perfectly with this in mind. Let us begin with an initial fragment where Minos questions the nurse about Pasiphae's monstrous offspring. The first two fragmentary lines probably closed a narrative introduction.[4]

> thus it is useful to consult...
> I think this attack is due to the gods...
> *Minos* As I am her husband I want to know from you.
> [...]
> *Nurse* It is a mixture of bull and man, in double nature.
> *Mi.* I already know: but how is the body of the beast?
> *Nu.* It has human limbs (*harmoîs*) and taurine head.
> *Mi.* Is it then four-footed or two-footed?
> *Nu.* Double in its nature, and shaggy with black hair.
> *Mi.* Besides these, have you any other untold horrors?
> *Nu.* It has a bull face, but no tail.
> *Mi.* ...have you heard its voice?
> *Nu.* I heard a bellow, like that of a grazing ox.
> *Mi.* Is it given its mother's milk or a heifer's?
> *Nu.* Its parents do not take care of the monster at all.
> *Mi.* ....of rage....
> *Nu.* Others can perhaps, its parents are not allowed to do (*drân*)
> that.

The first two lines contain the themes developed by the plot as a whole: the serious attack from the sphere of the sacred, projected by the community outside itself ("I think this attack is due to the gods..."), and the necessity of seeking advice to deal with the crisis ("thus it is useful to consult..."). With great dramatic effect, the dialogue leads straight to the heart of the plot. Minos tries to identify the monster precisely, but its systematically double characteristics as described by the nurse evade every effort at definition. The description of the Minotaur underlines its composite and yet remarkably integral nature: its taurine head stands out, while the rest of the body is strangely described as made up of different closely-joined parts (*harmoîs*). Not only the man-beast relationship but

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[4] Greek text in R. Cantarella, *Euripide. I Cretesi* (19-20: F 2a; from the Oxyrincus papyri); the translations are mine. Two lines of the dialogue are lacking; other words difficult to decipher are excluded from the translation.

that between parent and child appears to be distorted ("Is it given its mother's milk or a heifer's?"). Minos's attempt to confirm his role ("As I am her husband") is therefore destined to failure. But this is not all. Minos's relationship with the monster is actually *identification*. Minos is the offspring of Europa and Zeus, who kidnapped her in the form of a bull. The monstrous duplicity is therefore of Minos himself. The Minotaur is his son, as the nurse seems to underline in her last two lines. The very name of the Minotaur identifies the king of Crete with the monster. Now, with the mythological theme of the double unfolding in all its complexity, the premisses of the plot become clear.

Minos does not want to sacrifice the white bull from the sea because it is a double of himself. The bull incarnating Zeus was white and carried Europa to Crete across the sea. In asking the sea-god to repeat the apparition Minos sought to confirm his mythical identity. The bull-Minos superimposition is perfect, and is made patently obvious by the new coupling of his wife with the bull. The sought-for identity now resolves itself in the multiple doubling of the sacrificial crisis. The duplication of the monstrous copulation gives rise to a physically monstrous double. This double in turn represents the duplication of the victim: Minos, potential monster, is replaced by the Minotaur, substitute monster. Only the sacrifice of the Minotaur or of Minos, son of the bull, could stem the multiplication of monsters. The periodical sacrifice of the king of Crete is attested by myth: every ninth year Minos went down into a cave on Mount Ida to receive the renewal of his mandate from his father Zeus.[5]

The victimary theory gives rise to these reflections, but their premisses, i.e., that Minos perceives the Minotaur as his double, are clearly present in the text. Euripides senses that the core of the problem is here. Through the tragedy the mythic character is made to reflect upon himself and his identity. For this very reason the process of symbolic substitution can no longer work like a well-oiled machine. Minos needs to sort out his ideas, with the help of experts, as the introduction seems to hint. These sacrificial experts are the chorus made up of initiates of Idaean Zeus. Minos summoned them, and we can imagine his questions centred on how to make the substitute sacrifice and avoid sacrificing himself in the doubles' proliferation of the crisis. Minos's sacrificial intention is clear

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[5] Frazer clearly understood the sacrificial meaning of this myth and its close connection with the myths of the labyrinth (see the chapter on "The Killing of the Divine King" in *The Golden Bough*).

from his last fragmentary response ("...of rage..."). The nurse's final answer "*Others can perhaps*, the parents are not allowed *to do* that") sums up the precise terms of the problem, only apparently qualified by "perhaps": for the killing of the Minotaur to be allowed, it must not be a violent reaction of its parents but an action decided by everybody, that is a sacrifice.

The verb used is *drân*, "to do" in a sacred sense, called by the Romans *sacrum facere*, to sacrifice. The *drama*, the tragic story that now unfolds, is the representational development of this *drân*, of the "things done" in a sacrificial sense (*drómena*).[6] In this fragment we are introduced to the sacrificial specialists, the initiates of Ida, the mountain where Zeus's cave lies. Understanding their identity will lead to further interesting problems.[7]

> Child of the Phoenician woman of Tyre, son of Europa
> and mighty Zeus, Lord
> of hundred-citied Crete,
> I came here, leaving behind the truly divine temples
> well-covered by the big beam of native wood,
> cut by the Chalybes' axe,
> and by the cypress glued with the ritual bull mixture (*taurodétoi kolle*)
> in exact joints (*harmoùs*);
> and leading a holy life, since
> I became an initiate of Zeus of Ida,
> and trying the way of life of the night wanderer
> Zagreus and the banquets (*daîtas*) of raw flesh(*omophágous*),
> and raising up the torches (*dâidas*) for the Mountain
> Mother  among the Curetes,
> I was purified and I took Bacchus' name.
> And with snow-white garments I escape
> the mortals' birth and without approaching
> the urn of the dead, I take care not to eat
> foods in which there was life.

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[6] Cf. J. Harrison (567-70).

[7] I follow the Greek text of G. Colli (I, 4-A15: 130-33= Porphyry, *De abstinentia* 4.19), except for l. 7 where I prefer the reading of A. Nauck (fr. 472 l. 7: 505); I also add the first three lines omitted by Colli. The same fragment is in R. Cantarella (F 3, 23-25).

Minos's descent from the bull is reaffirmed in the first words of the chorus, making it at once clear that nothing will effectively remove this essential ambiguity from the Cretan king. Moreover, the king's foreign origin is immediately recalled, a cultural difference underlining his potential role as victim. The cave of Ida is waiting for him. But the outstanding feature of the passage is the strange and apparently contradictory characteristics of the initiates of Ida. More than one commentator has seen these as literary effects contrived by Euripides, whereas, in reality, they are an anthropological and historical reconstruction that is truly scientific in approach. These initiates, who carefully avoid all meat ("foods in which there was life"), present themselves as ritually pure. Nevertheless, to achieve this, they took part in "banquets" of raw flesh, which the torches and the night wanderer Zagreus indicate as taking place at night. Besides, the noticeable wordplay on *daîtas* (banquets)/ *dâidas* (torches) seems to refer to ritual and symbolic meanings still to be explored. What are we to make of all this?

Let us begin with the archaic, almost archaeological detail of the wooden temples. They are covered by a roof of cypress wood held together with a ritual bull glue, which according to Jane Harrison was a mixture of bull's blood and mortar (481).[8] The roof timbers are joined "in exact joints (*harmoùs*)": *harmós* means "joining" in every sense of the word, and is the same term used to describe the composite body of the Minotaur. The sacrificial meaning is clear. The Idaean temples represent the community that can only be held together by the bloody bond of sacrifice. The wood supports this reading with further symbolic details: the roof beam is "of *native* wood (*authigenès*)," like the Cretans who defined themselves as autochthonous, descendants of collective divinities born from the Earth (*gegeneîs*); the cypress, for its part, was associated with death by the Greeks. The primordial Chalybes armed with axes and the Curetes, the warrior escort of the Mountain Mother, immediately evoke the threatening presence of those born from the Earth, the community. The passage becomes clear if we fit all these elements together into one picture, as the text invites us to. The conclusion is unequivocal: re-composition of the group implies the de-composition, the dismembering, of the monstrous victim, the Minotaur. The specular opposition is strictly physical: if Minotaur's body remains intact, the community's body will be

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[8]H.G. Liddell-R. Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon* translates *taurodetos* as "made from bull's hide," which still has a victimary meaning.

dismembered. The Minotaur must therefore be cut to pieces, an event the chorus specifically alludes to. The term *harmós* shows us the real *harmonía*, the sacrificial harmony that joins together all the pieces in the group.[9]

The banquets of raw flesh (literally "omophagic") refer to the rites of *omophagy* (from *omós*, raw), where the victim was encircled by the group and devoured alive. This completed the *sparagmós* or *diasparagmós*, the victim's dismemberment by the community, a subject Euripides returned to many years later in his masterpiece, the *Bacchae*. The Christian writer Firmicus Maternus provides reliable evidence of a Cretan rite where a bull was devoured in this manner (Harrison 484-85; Guthrie 108-9), while Robertson Smith quotes St. Nilus for an analogous rite among 4th c. nomadic Arabs, where the victim was a trussed camel. The description of collective paroxysm is most convincing: at its climax the camel is torn to pieces and devoured bones and all with incredible speed (Robertson Smith 338-39). In Crete the god of those who performed these rites was Zagreus, called the "hunter who takes his prey alive." In historical Greece it is one of the names of Dionysus, who is often incarnated as a bull. In the passage, the name *Bacchos*, taken by the purified initiates, makes it clear that Zagreus indicates Dionysus here. But Zagreus' victims, in whom the god was incarnated, were originally human. St. Nilus records that, whenever possible, the Arabs' victim was not a camel but a particularly handsome youth (Harrison 485-86). The real nature of the Greek rite is referred to in the myth of Dionysus and the Titans, who are also collective gods born from the Earth. They lure Dionysus with toys and then slaughter him. In the most common version they divide up and boil his limbs before eating them, but according to another version, evidently more archaic, they devour the child at once, which is omophagy. In the text, the pun on *daîtas* (banquets)/ *daîdas* (torches) seems to allude to this evolutionary sequence: raw flesh/ cooked flesh (with fire). The omophagical tearing apart is the origin of the torches and the community's ritual glue. The more archaic version of the Titanic myth is typically Orphic (Càssola 14). It therefore seems very likely that the initiates of Ida were followers of

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[9] Cf. Heraclitus: "The unseen harmony [*harmonie*] is stronger than the seen" (Diels-Kranz 22B54). The Latin *arma*, *artus* and the English *arm* come from the same root as *harmós* and *harmonia*; cf. Liddell-Scott, s.v. *ararisko*.

Orphism, since the Cretan Dionysiac rites were an important forerunner of the Orphic cult. Further explanation will confirm this identification.[10]

We know little about Orphism as a religious movement but there is a great deal of evidence for its presence throughout the Greek world and its great antiquity. Orphism puts the Titanic omophagy at the origin of the present race of men: when Zeus, Dionysus' father, realizes what the Titans have done he strikes them down with one of his thunderbolts. From their ashes men arise, who inherit the Titans' violent nature, but also a divine, Dionysiac part, since the Titans had devoured the divine child. To achieve salvation man has to purify himself of his Titanic part. Beginning with the initiation, purification is accomplished through a cycle of reincarnations (the wheel of births); the initiate's soul then flies to Heaven. The souls of the uninitiated were destined to everlasting punishment imagined as wallowing in mud and having to pour water into a bottomless pot. This tripartite eschatological outline (salvation/ an intermediate zone of expiation/ everlasting punishment) bears an interesting analogy with the traditional Christian conception of the after-life.

We are lead to conclude that Orphism had a sure intuition of man's origin from collective violence, an intuition that was still mythical but nevertheless profound. The details of the Titanic myth are so precise that they speak for themselves. This signal observation has significant theoretical consequences. Anyone wishing to test the validity of Girard's theory of the origin of man must take into account both the Hebrew-Christian tradition and, one way or another, Orphic anthropology. This automatically implies a comparison with Christianity as well.[11] Which is more important: their divergence or their continuity? Is it possible to trace a relationship between Christianity and Orphism? The subject itself increasingly raises such questions. More than ever we must wonder just who we are: a question that Euripides, through his characters, was the first to ask himself.

With the focus and precision of the greatest mimetic artists Euripides shows the central point of Orphism, the process of initiation-purification.

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[10] On Orphism and the connected rites see Guthrie, Harrison, Burkert (*Greek Religion* 296-304), and Dodds (155).

[11] The antisacrificial meaning of Orphism and the need for comparison with Christianity are stressed by L. Scubla, "The Christianity of René Girard and the Nature of Religion" in Dumouchel (161 and notes on 270-72). The present article, and my research, *The Esoteric Knowledge of the Greeks*, attempt this comparison while taking account of recent developments in Girard's thought.

This was based on the need to repeat the Titanic event and Dionysus' consequent resurrection, brought about in the myth by the intervention of Zeus who causes him to be reborn. An Orphic plate found in a tomb states that the believer must suffer Dionysus' passion (*pathein to páthema*) to be saved (Harrison 662). Orphism thus attempts a ritually controlled repetition of the origin, with double transference of the victim, seen first as a monster to be killed and then as a god to be worshipped. This repetition was based on the principle of the *sýmbolon*, a word indicating an object divided between strangers, who could come to recognize each other when the pieces fitted together. The different parts of the rite (*dromena*), the objects, and the pass-words were all *symbola* that had to be joined together in the *symbolon* of the god. The ritual use of the word, in connection with the term *harmós*, is revealing. The *symbola* process repeats the dismembering of the *sparagmós* in reverse order, up to the saving repetition of the Titanic murder, usually in the form of an animal sacrifice. This recalls the victimary etymology of *symbolon*: from the verb *sym-ballein*, the *throwing together* which enables the community to save itself.[12] Repetition of the foundation in this paradoxical but consistent way gives the initiate access to a new cognitive system and becomes spiritual re-foundation. There are certain indications that the Eleusinian mysteries were, in fact, the most important example of an Orphic initiation rite, or of a rite closely linked to Orphism. It is likely that an animal incarnating Dionysus was sacrificed at the climax of the Eleusinian initiation. At any rate, this sacrifice was recalled at Eleusis in a way that appears to us now as doubly "symbolic." This was the *árrheton*, "the ineffable", that is, the unspeakable horror giving rise to new life. The highest grade of initiate, the *epóptes* (the one who sees), experienced this when he received *éllampsis*, the final illumination underlined by torches and lastly fire.[13] A rite with an analogous structure concerning a Dionysiac goat (*trágos*) gave rise to the *tragoidía*, the song of the murdered goat and of the goat-men who identified with the animal by killing it (Calasso 54-55).

The full meaning of the images of the pieces forming the temples and the body of the Minotaur now becomes quite clear while the sequence

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[12] See the first meaning of the verb *symballo* in Liddell-Scott. This etymology further confirms Girard's ideas on the victimary origin of symbolic thought in *La violence et le sacré* (345-46).

[13] For a reconstruction of the Eleusinian rite see Burkert's *Homo Necans* (274-93) and *Greek Religion* (285-90), and Colli (92-115 and notes).

omophagy-vegetarian diet in the fragment is also fully explained. The final vegetarianism is attained *thanks to* the omophagical banquets. By escaping the dead, the initiates hope to break the cycle of reincarnations ("...I escape the mortals' birth..."). They are the "pure" ones but one should have no illusions about their purity, rooted as it is in the very violence they would like to disown. Euripides' critical aim is also revealed when, in typically outspoken fashion, he breaks the secrecy surrounding the Orphic repetition of the Titanic event: here it is explicitly named by the chorus. A member of a Greek audience initiated into Orphism or, at any rate, informed about the more archaic religious rites, could not possibly hear an expression like "omophagic banquets" without profound emotion. Distanced by its setting in the fabled past and in Crete at the confines of Classical Greece, the charge is rendered less scandalous and capable of being performed in some way. But the setting itself puts Orphism and the connected Eleusinian mysteries side by side with the archaic Cretan rites of Dionysus-Zagreus, which they most probably derived from. Euripides was thus sending out a coded message, evidently aimed at the small circle of intellectuals with whom he had close contact.[14] We may also recall in this respect that, according to tradition, he was the first person in Athens to own a private library. We are not dealing with a simple man of the theatre but with a man of culture and a thinker at the height of his intellectual powers. The cognitive representation of the initiates of Mount Ida therefore presupposes the existence of another category of initiates, those who can read the tragedy on two levels. The second level of reading requires the *symbola* scattered and hidden through the text to be joined together again with the "glue" of the sacrificial content. The correspondence between rite and meta-ritual representation is so close that it has to be deliberate. Since tragedy arose out of rites similar or identical to those performed by the Orphics, it seems plausible that Euripides wanted to reflect on the origin of his own art as well. The group of initiates he addressed and belonged to could identify with the initiates forming the chorus. In this way the question regarding the identity of those initiates became their own.

Minos evidently calls on the organizers of the omophagic banquets to deal with his child monster. The chorus's exact answer is unknown but, in any case, they turn down the request. The choice of the victim has still to

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[14]Girard reaches the same conclusion about Shakespeare in making a double-level reading of his works in *A Theater of Envy* (28, 38-39, 69-70).

be made but it is approaching dangerously close to the priest-king. The tragedy's meta-mythological representation blocks the mechanism of victimary selection. The *árrheton*, the secret centre of Orphic initiation and sacrificial foundation has now been named, in its own structural and symbolic function. From this viewpoint, the expression "banquets of raw flesh" appears as the cognitive centre of the whole tragedy: these banquets are like "torches" throwing light on the whole affair from within. Nobody wants to take on the task of sacrificing the monstrous child. There is no sacrificial glue to hold the community together. The knowledge of the initiates of Ida is shown to be impotent.

We must now analyse another essential figure in the story for further insights into the sacrificial logic and structure of the tragedy. This is Daedalus, the wise artificer of the labyrinth. Almost all parts of the tragedy relating to him have been lost; however, we can still consider him usefully on the basis of the traditional mythic material. Daedalus, the artist-artificer, makes amazing life-like statues (*daidala*) and is skilled in joining pieces of wood together with glue (*kolle*; see Frontisi-Ducroux 72, 90, 121), clearly the same glue used in the wooden temples on Ida. In origin, he is a ritual expert but he knows how to take the procedures regarding the *symbola* and the composition of the Minotaur and exploit them independently to his own ends. This makes him an artist, the man of *harmonia* in several senses. He thus appears as a transversal and ambiguous figure, half-way between the initiates of Ida and those the tragedy is intended for. A surviving fragment, where the speaker is probably Minos, refers to his elusive, unsettling nature: "You, the artificer, have done things not done by a carpenter" (Cantarella F9, 33). It is in this guise of sacred middleman, secularized priest, that he becomes the builder of the labyrinth in the myth. In Homer he prepares a space for a dance (*chorós*) to be performed by Ariadne—the daughter of Minos and Pasiphae.[15] The dance is the labyrinth dance, found widely in various cultures, where the dancers move in a spiral around some centre, an altar or a sacrificial victim, often a girl. After escaping from the labyrinth Theseus and the young Athenians he set free perform a dance taught him by Daedalus. This is the "crane dance" where the dancers hold on to a rope together and move around an altar repeating the movements made to get out of the labyrinth. It takes little imagination to see through to the origin

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[15] *Iliad*, XVIII: 590 ff.; Kerényi, *Nei labrinito* (56ff). For what follows, see especially Plutarch, *Theseus* 20-21.

of this labyrinth dance; its artistic "harmony" should not deceive us. Here we have the true origin of the tragic *chorós*: the community closing around the victim to kill him. The ethnological and mythic evidence regarding the labyrinth is so patently victimary in character that it needs no further comment. Thanks to Daedalus, Ariadne can help Theseus and the young Athenians escape from the labyrinth, only to be abandoned by them on an island where she hangs herself. The rope she uses is the same as used by the dancers, the same she used to help Theseus find his way out of the labyrinth. The pieces of this puzzle can be made to fit together in a *single* event, and so we find Ariadne killed at the centre of the labyrinth, later transformed into an island. At a very early stage, on Crete, the labyrinth probably became a cave where sacrificial rites and initiations took place, like the one on Ida. Finally, it became a building with an inextricable layout. However, the very structure of this final building repeats the primary source of the labyrinth: the victim. The intestinal meanderings of the labyrinth reproduce the victim's viscera. In Babylon, visceral archives were kept, with the intestines of sacrificed victims reproduced on tablets, for use by diviners. These images bear an amazing resemblance to the Cretan labyrinth. In Babylon, too, the intestine was called the "palace of the viscera" and interpreted as a representation of the after-life. It also became a mask, a horrific sacrificial concealment, as in the case of Humbaba, the demon enemy of Gilgamesh, whose face was formed from guts.[16] These correspondences could not be more indicative. The true *daidalon*, the deceptively life-like image set at the centre of the labyrinth, is the Minotaur, the dismembered victim reassembled with the glue of sacrifice and concealed by the more-or-less transfigured mask of its viscera. The first labyrinth is a corpse, while the thread of Ariadne is the line traced by the twists and turns of its guts.[17] Other victims are then sacrificed to the simulacrum of this corpse in the continual process of refoundation. According to Frazer, the Minotaur was, in fact, a bronze bull-like statue in which human victims were burnt.

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[16]Kerényi (34). The face of Humbaba is clearly visible in some archaelogical remains from the beginning of the II millennium B.C., now in the British Museum.

[17]The theme of labyrinthine viscera might well be present in the *Cretans*: in a passage of the *Art of Love* probably deriving from Euripides' tragedy, Ovid describes Pasiphae who sacrifices some heifers out of jealousy and then seizes their viscera between her hands as a sign of triumph (*Ars amatoria*, I, 320 and 322); see also Cantarella (T 6, 16-17 and 48-49).

Daedalus, builder of the labyrinth, is thus a very special character, leading straight to the archaic Greek wise man, creator of material and mental images, who can solve enigmas, reading past, present and future in the victim's viscera. Daedalus provides the model for the wise man, who possesses a *mental labyrinth*, while the physical one is only its consequence. He guards the map of the *symbola*, the symbolic and cultural forms emanating from and converging on the victim. The *daidalon*-victim's mask of viscera becomes the viscera-mask of Daedalus's brain, the living labyrinth conferring on him the prestige and vulnerability of the deified victim. Daedalus is a further transformation of the priest-king, a particularly precarious one since political forces might make a substitute victim of him at any time. However, the Greek wise man is not a priest or member of a centralized power's dominant caste, as was the case with the great civilizations of the Near East. He appears as a wanderer with no close links to any one sacred centre in the distinct and varied patchwork of the Greek cities. In fact, Daedalus reaches Crete as an exile from Athens, where he had brought about the death of a rival inventor, his nephew *Pérdix* (=partridge), by causing him to fall from the Acropolis. This nephew is obviously a double of Daedalus himself.[18] Unlike his oriental counterparts, whose only defence is a strong *esprit de corps* which, however, confines them to the strictly ritual sphere, the Greek wise man can flee from his role as victim and offer his services to another city. This "outcast," serving no particular master, therefore develops his own rules for survival and a new awareness of his independent role. The Greek wise man is a victim who gets away by force of cunning. This gives raise to his extraordinary spirit of initiative that sets him apart and leads to the distinct developments of Greek civilization. Trapped by the Cretan king's persecutory counter-strategy, Daedalus is doomed to become the vicarious victim of the labyrinth, as was once the common fate of artificers and architects. But, in both myth and tragedy, he refuses to resign himself to this fate and escapes from the labyrinth through the stratagem of the wax wings, a development of his skill in glueing different pieces together. Daedalus resorts to the animal metamorphoses of the sacred and to the sacrificial symbol of flight (hence the cranes and the partridge), but he takes them apart and re-assembles them in a creative fashion. Sacrificial

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[18]According to another version, his name was Talos, which was also the name of a bronze giant who resembled a bull or the sun and burnt foreigners alive: in Frazer's interpretation, this is a clear reference to a bronze image of the Minotaur to which human sacrifices were made.

substitution is used and directed to escape from sacrifice. The Daedalian mental labyrinth shows itself as a potentially formidable tool for manipulating reality. The ultimate consequence of Daedalus's meta-ritual daring is man as pilot and astronaut attempting to conquer space. Nevertheless, in the end the ritual laws prevail. The Greek cities, no less sacrificial for being polycentric, are the real labyrinth of labyrinths from which there is finally no escape. Icarus, another of Daedalus's doubles, crashes to his death like *Pérdix*. The sun which melts the wax of his wings symbolizes the centre of the labyrinth, often described as luminous. In spite of the artificer-wise man's skill in manipulating sacrificial duplication, it boomerangs on him. His second-stage initiation proves to be no less ambiguous and ineffectual than that of the the Orphics.

Although the material directly available to us is scanty, it is clear that the character of Daedalus in the tragedy must have developed significantly: the true nature of wisdom is a central theme in Euripides' art, and he is the very archetype of the wise man. Just from a comparative analysis of the mythic tradition, he emerges as possessing the greatest knowledge possible within the story. His mental labyrinth makes him the meta-linguistic figure *par excellence*, the only character who is, so to speak, meta-labyrinthine. In historical, logical, and symbolic terms he comes to resemble the author. Daedalus, the expert in the *chorós*, is a sacrificial artist just like the tragedian. But before we can understand the sense of this functional affinity we must follow the development of the action on stage.

Pasiphae now appears, as the conflict reaches its climax. Judging from the longest surviving fragment, she must have been one of Euripides' most extraordinary female characters, joining a gallery of exceptional heroines. It seems that the substitute victim has been found, for Minos has already decided to kill her. Pasiphae is doomed to die in the labyrinth, like her daughter, Ariadne.

> *Coryphaeus* In effect, nobody else would, I think, have dared as much.
> And you, sire, think
> how you can free yourself from misfortune.
> *Pasiphae (to Minos)* Even denying everything, I could no  longer convince you:
> it is now quite clear how things stand.
> If I had offered my body to a man
> procuring some furtive sexual pleasure for myself,

I would rightly have appeared wanton.
But now—because a god's attack drove me mad (*emenámen*)—
I am suffering; and it is an involuntary misfortune,
wholly inexplicable. Why, indeed, looking at that bull,
was my desire stung by this indecent obsession?
Was he perhaps beautiful to see because of his apparel
or because of his tawny mane? Or a dark light shone
in his eyes, and his beard darkened his face?
It wasn't exactly beautiful, for me, the aspect of such a lover!
And so, desiring to couple with him,
I slipped beneath.... the moving heifer's hide.
And not even to make my husband....
of sons. Why then did I go mad (*mainómen*) with this obsession?
It was his daemon that filled me as well with misfortune,
and above all it was him....
because he did not sacrifice to the sea-god, as he had promised to
do, the bull that appeared to him.
Therefore Poseidon came against you
to do justice; and so he threw himself on me.
And now would you cry out and call the gods to witness,
you who did this and disgraced me?
I, who gave birth to him without any blame,
concealed the god's stroke,
while you, most wicked of men, evidently thinking to show fine and
honourable things to your wife
proclaim the thing to everybody, as if you were not involved. [19]

The myth itself is now speaking through the character's mouth.
Pasiphae is no simple victim. As the coryphaeus says, she is the woman
who has done what no woman has dared to do. The first connotation of the
character is indomitable courage, but the further implication is that what
she has done only brings out into the open a desire common to all. As the
woman's name itself indicates (Pasiphae=the Shining One), she is a figure
of revelation, bringing to light a horror that normally remains concealed.
She shows no shame for what she has done, nor hypocritical scruples
about calling things by their right name. This is a woman who will not be
silent, who will see things through to the end, with her husband no less
than with the Minotaur. With the strength born of despair, Pasiphae

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[19]Cantarella (F 4, 26-29). The rest of the fragment is quoted in the two passages that follow.

recounts her coupling with the bull, frankly and with a sense of offended dignity. The repulsive and monstrous nature of what happened to her demonstrates her innocence. The monstrousness consists not so much in the sexual relationship as in the fact that she falls in love with the bull. Pasiphae herself exploits the psychological absurdity of this to show that her will cannot be implicated. However, this is not the real subject-matter. Falling in love is only the psychological modernization of a more primitive state, divine possession, repeatedly referred to here by a technical term, the verb *mainesthai*, meaning madness caused by a god, such as befell the Maenads; in short, the contagious frenzy that gripped those participating in a collective sacrifice. In this sense, what the woman felt reveals what everyone feels without daring to admit it. But even Pasiphae's audacity hesitates to come to such a conclusion. At first she does not wish to see what is concealed by this collective frenzy, what she felt must remain "inexplicable." This is a last, vain attempt to preserve the secrecy of the *árrheton*, the unspeakable horror. However, nothing can now hold back the revelation: in reality Pasiphae is compelled to go on continually repeating what happened to her, as if hypnotized.

The phases of the coupling become clear when read in an historical and sacrificial key. To satisfy the desire quite literally possessing her, Pasiphae has a wooden heifer constructed and covered with a hide. Inside this, she is able to get the bull to mount her. Once more, the constructor of the heifer is Daedalus, the artificer whose works are not those of a carpenter, the sacrificial artist who becomes the accomplice of sacrificial duplication to escape his own destiny as victim. What is being described here is the *hierós gamos*, the sacred coupling that undoubtedly took place within the labyrinth, at least in some variant of the rite or at some stage of its evolution. The same coupling of a god with a mother-goddess was repeated or re-evoked at Eleusis, followed by the birth and sacrifice of the divine child. The Mountain Mother of the Idaean initiates thus represents the archetype of Pasiphae herself, who was in fact an old Cretan divinity. In ancient times the sacred coupling must have ended with the killing of the goddess-woman, Ariadne or Pasiphae, both Cretan names indicating the light shining at the centre of the labyrinth, probably the fire used to burn the victims. The killing of the monstrous child of Ariadne-Pasiphae, also called *Asterios*, the Starry One, develops the same symbolism. The wooden heifer-construction corresponds to the Minotaur-*daidalon*,

composed of the wooden pieces of the Idaean temples.[20] Pasiphae inside
the heifer also recalls the rites cited by Frazer where the victim was burnt
alive inside a bull-like statue. The Daedalian building, with its contents,
proves to be an extraordinary symbolic and historical compendium of
sacrifice. Here the light of revelation coincides with the gloom of death
that is already burial. Daedalus's life-like statues, his harmonious works
of art are dead victims transformed into simulacra, first made of wood and
finally of metal and stone: statues, tombs, temples, and other buildings.
The entire labyrinth is nothing less than a single petrified, frozen
dismembering.

Pasiphae is so terrified by the sacrificial circle about to close in on her
that she tries to use divine possession as a final symbolic concealment
uniting her to the group's shared religious values. She has already tried to
avoid danger, hiding her perverse love and then the birth of her monstrous
child, but now Minos has revealed everything, an action symmetrical to the
author's revelation of the omophagic banquets. The *árrheton*, the
concealed centre of the labyrinthine foundation, is no more. As a last
resort, Pasiphae continues the work of demystification, directing it against
Minos himself. As in a tragic game of hide-and-seak, each tries to avoid
the vacant function of victim, shifting it onto the other.

> You then have ruined me, because the fault is yours,
> I am suffering because of you. Then, if you want
> to kill me on the sea, kill me: you are really an expert in murderous
> acts and massacring of men.
> And if then you yearn to feed on my raw flesh (*omositou*),
> go ahead: don't neglect your banquets.
> But I, free and innocent,
> shall die, to pay for a guilt that is yours.

In these lines Pasiphae resorts to irony with growing intensity.
Meaning the opposite of what she says, this represents a final attempt to
say what there are no longer words for, a last paradoxical expression of
the sacrificial concealment. The woman desperately wants to live, so the
concluding phrase expresses what is now a dream: herself, free and
innocent, casting blame back on the other. The verb "I shall die" contains
the final impossible irony, backfiring in reality on the person who can no

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[20] According to some scholars the Daedalus's heifer was probably made of cypress from
Mount Ida (Cantarella 49).

longer escape dying. The supreme irony, connoting the opposite of what it denotes, is none other than the sacrifice itself.

The circle seems to close: the crisis caused by the bull from the sea is followed by the death in the sea of the bull-king's wife. But with Pasiphae's last desperate move, the revelation is complete: Minos himself takes part in the banquets of raw flesh. Thus he too is an initiate of Ida, an Orphic adept, in a word, one of the "pure". The omophagic banquets show themselves for what they are, a continual repetition of human massacre, perpetuating violence in the most atrocious fashion. When viewed objectively, taking part in these rites under the illusion of purifying oneself is an act of hypocrisy. The Orphic procedure by *symbola* is frustrated by the mere fact of being represented. This criticism is not made from an Enlightenment viewpoint, since Euripides appears perfectly aware of the need for refoundation. The failure of the Orphics is tragic precisely because it has no alternatives. Every wisdom regarding refoundation meets with disaster: the wisdom of the Orphics, Daedalus's suspect wisdom, and the substitute strategy of the priest-king. In an act of belated revenge, Pasiphae's countercharges undermine Minos's substitute refoundation. With his strategy laid bare, he can only react with impotent rage, prepared for rather than held back by the Coryphaeus:

> *Coryphaeus* To many it is clearly a question of misfortune.... don't give way to rage, sire.
> *Minos (with irony)* She has spoken, then! ...and she cries out!
> *(to his guards)* Hurry: set an armed guard on her.
> Seize this wicked woman, so that she may die worthily,
> she and her accomplice: within the palace
> lead them away...
> where they may no longer see heaven's vault.
> *Cor.* Wait, sire: this matter is worthy of
> reflection: a ruthless man never acts on good advice.
> *Mi.* It has already been decided that the punishment is not to be deferred.

Minos's irony now shows itself to be pure violence. The Orphics' feigned purity gives way to a much more convincing ferocity. The woman condemned with Pasiphae is her nurse who must have been her ally, like Phaedra's nurse in the *Hyppolitus*, where Phaedra is another double-daughter of Pasiphae, devastated by a forbidden love. The two women are dragged away within Minos's palace, which in reality coincides with the

labyrinth. The term used to indicate the building corresponds to those used in a further fragment, which enables us to understand better the outcome of the clash between the two characters. It is a short sequence where Icarus calls on the Cretans to free himself and Daedalus from the labyrinth:[21]

> *Icarus* Come, Cretan sons of Ida,
> take up your bows, hasten here,
> and surround the palace.
> And may the virgin Diktynna, lovely Artemis,
> search throughout the building with her hounds.
> And you, Hecate, daughter of Zeus, raise
> with your hands the blazing double torches,
> and light the way for us.

The symbolic identification of the Idaean initiates with the lynching community ("Cretan sons of Ida") now appears to be complete. The labyrinth, that the Cretans must surround, thereby regains its original nature as the persecutory space: the hounds, identified with the Maenads, are an obvious metaphor for collective violence. The Mountain Mother is first transformed into Artemis, the moon goddess of the hunt whose Cretan name was *Diktynna* (from *diktyon*, net), and then into Hecate, goddess of the night and of the Underworld, often represented as a hound, and linked to Orphism and Eleusis. The torches, an attribute of Hecate, become two-fold, to show the prevailing of the doubles crisis, and the enlightening coming from it ("light the way for us"). For Icarus these torches will indeed appear in the form of the sun rays as a light revealing his death, as the character seems to foresee in another fragment: "Should I fall into the wet sea abyss/ how shall I escape, winged as I am?" (F7, 32-33). Icarus and Daedalus like Pasiphae and the nurse are a duplicated victim, and thereby bound to remain ineffectual. This is precisely what the Coryphaeus charges Minos with ("a ruthless man never acts on good advice"): the ruthless man is not the one who performs the sacrifice, but rather the one who multiplies it by doing it inefficiently. Minos's haste to carry out the sentence on his wife is a vain attempt to fill this disastrous symbolic vacuum. The Coryphaeus's mild manner should not deceive us: there is only one wise decision Minos could make—to sacrifice himself—like many other characters in Euripides. We do not know how

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[21]Cantarella (F 5, 31, from Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1356 ff.); on the authenticity of the fragment, see Cantarella (80-81).

the tragedy ended exactly but it appears clear from the myth and from what we have seen so far that it concluded with the total defeat of all parties concerned. The community shows its true face, Icarus crashes into the sea before his father's eyes, Pasiphae probably dies or kills herself; in any case, the sacrificial refoundation sought by Minos is not achieved.

### The system of tragic ambiguity

What cognitive conclusions can be drawn from the *Cretans*? The analysis of a Greek tragedy is necessarily complex because it is fundamentally a system of doubles multiplying to infinity, making the task both fascinating and dangerous, requiring us to select only those elements that reveal—clearly or with reticence—their true origin. Tragedy itself invites us to do this, just when it seems to be defying our efforts at interpretation. While resisting theoretical definition, its multiplicity of forms and interpretations belies the unity it proclaims at every turn. This unity practically defines its exegetical history. Over the centuries the problem of tragic unity has been much discussed and much misunderstood and, in fact, is none other than the problem of the unnameable centre all converge on and all want to hide, the problem of the unity of the victim and of who will occupy the victim's place. Nothing so well as tragedy seems both to confute and confirm the ideology of a text's infinite possible interpretations. The tragic text is the translation into words, into artistic *symbola*, of Daedalus's mental labyrinth. We must now draw a map of this labyrinth: at its centre we shall find *someone*.

Tragedy is a *system* of characters, involved with one another in the collapse of their mimetic relationships. It follows that no single character in the tragedy can be *right* in claiming to fulfill the system as a whole and, equally, in so far as each is an effective part of the system, none can be *wrong*. The system's undecidability is total, which is to say that it is impossible for the characters to get out of it.[22] In defeating the others each character defeats himself, just as in asserting himself he asserts the others too. Just as the crisis of doubles becomes a logico-cognitive crisis, so the application of the principle of non-contradiction amounts to a sacrificial resolution, but here there can be no effective foundation, because the sacrifice amounts to destroying the initial system. Minos and Pasiphae fail

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[22]On the collapse of mimetic relationships see Girard, *Things Hidden* (299 ff); on the undecidability of tragedy see his *Theater of Envy* (197) and *La violence* (204-05).

because, in the final analysis, they get what they want: Minos finds the substitute victim and Pasiphae demonstrates her husband's wickedness. Their very success is the cause of their downfall. The final sacrifice, far from concealing this, only serves to reveal it. The Minos-Pasiphae system breaks down and along with it the entire system governing the event. In a word, the meta-language of the tragedy is a meta-crisis of the doubles, tending consistently towards the catastrophe. However, this extraordinary meta-linguistic reproduction of the sacrificial crisis contains in itself the clues to its own history, that is to say its own limits.

The character system, in fact, develops from the chorus's collective function, in its turn developing from the members of the group dividing up the parts, the *symbola*, of the victim. The dismembered part (*meros*) of the victim's body taken by each member becomes, by way of the *chorós*, the theatrical part and fate (*moros, moîra*) of each one of the characters. Cognitive feedback and violent concealment are combining in this function of symbolic sorting-out. The tragic chorus is both a character and the description of the characters; it is persecution becoming meta-language and meta-language reverting to being persecution. In other words, it is a meta-language that fails to constitute itself fully as such, remaining logically involved in its own origins: a real fluctuating and unstable meta-persecution. In its ambiguity, the chorus thus expresses not only the structure of tragedy but also of human symbolism itself, where violent concealment becomes knowledge and vice versa. In this lies the cognitive and aesthetic value of the parts assigned to the chorus, and also their deceptive role as "Daedalian" works of art. As a result there is a rapid evolution of the chorus in Classical tragedy: on one hand, it tends to confirm the group's foundation; on the other, as a character, it inevitably contributes to the system's destructive centrifugal impetus. Thus in the works of the three great tragedians, we can observe a gradual weakening of the anonymous, collective aspect of the chorus but its increasing involvement as a character. The final crisis is reached with Euripides. His *Bacchae* well represents the final outcome of this study: in this work the chorus revers indirectly to being the lynching comunity, through its doubling in the group of Maenads who tear Pentheus to pieces. The last symbolic coverings are not removed, but by means of this revealing duplication the audience could become aware of the ineffectiveness of the foundation affirmed in violent language by the chorus and that this violence was rooted in themselves. For those capable of understanding, the initiation Euripides offers is no longer in the least consolatory. Catharsis,

which has yet to be theorized by Aristotle, is obstructed even before it is formulated. Euripides is the most anticathartic of the tragic authors and for this very reason the most modern and the greatest.

Euripides had already brought the chorus firmly back to its original function in the *Cretans* with the revelation of the omophagic banquets. The Orphics' failure appears as the failure of this essential function of tragedy. The Orphic initiates fail because they succeed in appearing aloof from the violence of events; their wisdom shows itself as deceptive and conniving when it manages a precise description of the characters' errors. Minos himself is revealed as an Idaean initiate, and the whole Cretan community as directly descended from the ritual violence represented by Ida. These comments have much larger implications, not only for Orphism and tragedy but for Greek civilization as a whole. The *Bacchae* make clear though indirect reference to the Peloponnesian War then ravaging Greece, proof that Euripides' reflection was quite deliberate. His unmasking is profound, apparently total. There still remains one mask, the mask of the artist teacher of the *chorós* dance and builder of the labyrinth, the author's own. Where exactly *is* the author in all this?

In itself the character system is strictly impersonal, in the sense that it has no transcendent voice, no direct narrator. This is what might be called the principle of *tragic impersonality*, where the author's presence is only felt, if at all, within the system of representation, without affecting its nature. This amounts to saying that the representation is possible precisely because the author in the first place has no solutions to the problems posed by the tragedy. As the basic function of the system he cannot really identify with any of his characters, but as a part of the system he cannot avoid it. For this reason the limits of the contradiction inherent in the tragic system and its hidden centre are to be found in the author himself. In the end, his ambiguity and complicity are no different from Daedalus's. Just as Daedalus escapes from the labyrinth built by himself and dies in flight as Icarus, his son and sacrificial double, so the tragic writer appears to escape from the *horizontal* labyrinth of the events engaging his characters only to remain imprisoned in the *vertical* labyrinth of his own position, so that he must always err and die with his own creations. Having given life to Icarus and brought about his death, the Daedalus-author suffers the same fate: his characters are his substitute victims, his doubles, and finally his executioners. This cognitive and moral situation is repeated over the centuries and not only in literature. The system is neither mask nor labyrinth but a function generating masks and

labyrinths. There is no limit to the number of works produced by the paradox of tragic ambiguity, but by themselves they can only emphasize their contradictory structure, a further labyrinth of labyrinths from which there is no escape. Euripides' references in the *Cretans* to the meta-labyrinthine art of tragedy show how far he was already aware of the problem. This great tragedian has no answers for us but only questions, disturbing enigmas whose very value lies in their apparent insolubility. These are not only the enigmas of Greek culture but of human culture as a whole.

Like Orphism with its repetition of the Titan massacre, tragedy with its character system has no effective alternatives to the closed universe of violence. The meta-linguistic function of these representational and ritual systems is never truly complete but fluctuates in an unsteady and contradictory fashion. The founding violence is profoundly intuited but never transcended. Our difference in respect to the ancients does not derive from a distinction, that taken by itself could become Manichean, between those who know the victim and those who do not. Rather, the difference lies in a profound and embarassing resemblance: possessing knowledge so terrible that it offers nothing but destruction. Greek tragedy teaches us that it is not enough to see the victims in a partial way: we need to root out the secret mechanisms leading to victims, the victimary function concealed within us that can produce doubles in unlimited numbers. The victim *concept* or *representation* is not enough, therefore, because the victim is not a *theory*—from *theoreo*, I watch, a sacrifice or a dramatic performance, as the case may be—nor the still sacrificial view dependent on rules and schemes which it enables us to use while remaining unharmed. The victim is not a work of art nor a philosophy nor, in the final analysis, a theology, since he requires no images or concepts but a total commitment on our part; we, victims and executioners, must engage the deepest part of ourselves without compromise. This is a total commitment to love both victims *and* executioners, where love is understood as the unconditional, unlimited power to forgive. Only thus can we reach the real, true victims, down to the last victim, the enemy always concealed behind our visions, explanations, and distinctions. Without the fire of charity these remain convenient simplifications, sacrificial barriers.[23]

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[23]Girard's conception therefore exists as a theory only in the particular formulations that can be given of it (and that can, of course, be diverse and have special functions); but its root is the

As long as we reject the Gospel message or interpret Christianity as an ideological shield to make ourselves feel better or "purer," there is nothing to differentiate our position structurally from tragedy's character system or from the Orphic cult. The fact that we possess a cognitive tool unknown to the Greeks does not mean we have the right to think ourselves better than they and the same is true in regard to non-Christian cultures. Christianity's power of penetration has not been its particular cultural identity but its capacity to redeem the *whole* history of man, summing up and surpassing all its sacrificial forms. This is the real spiritual meta-language that can describe and go beyond the language of violence. The resemblances to Orphism, partial in the extreme but unquestionable, demonstrate this capacity of the Christian message to utilize the human symbolic and religious dimension from within, to harness its genetic force, in a sort of resurrection not of bodies but of cultures. This explains the prodigiously rapid spread of Christianity in the pagan world, absorbing the living force of its symbols and customs.

Greek culture was awaiting the revelation of an infinite love to push back the frontiers of its sacrificial awareness. The genius of Euripides penetrated close to this truth in *Iphigenia at Aulis*, his last, incomplete tragedy. Here, only one character, the old slave, is implicitly excluded from the tragedy's hellish circle. In his weakness, this social pariah is alone in refusing the logic of violence that leads the others characters to sacrifice Iphigenia. But the poor old man remains a powerless onlooker: political interests, collective violence, and pitilessness prevail, in a view so bleak it takes the breath away. This character acts as a silent spokesman for the tragedian at the end of his life. In this last work, Euripides, the author who is both executioner and victim imprisoned in his labyrinth of labyrinths, speaks to us in the only way now left to him: the tragic irony of silence. Thus, without knowing it, he prefigures the only message that could show the way out of the labyrinth, the Cross's message of love, the anti-labyrinth that dissolves man's sacrificial symbols from within.

Translation by Keith Buck in collaboration with the author.

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radically Christocentric interpretation of the Gospel message to be found most completely formulated in St. John's Christology. In this sense, Girard's anthropology serves as a means of rediscovering the living centre of the Christian revelation in all its force.

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