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Editor's Note

*As has been past practice, the editors of **Contagion** continue to select for referee process papers from the annual meetings of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion. The present volume contains some of the revised proceedings from the 2002 Colloquium at Purdue University on "Judaism, Christianity, and the Ancient world: Mimesis, Sacrifice, and Scripture" as well as from the 2003 Colloquium at the University of Innsbruck on "Passions and Economy."*

The volume also contains articles submitted directly to the journal for consideration. We continue to welcome manuscripts from authors in all academic disciplines and fields of professional activity which bear on René Girard's mimetic model of human behavior and cultural organization. Future volumes will also include a section for Notes and Comments, allowing for responses to previous essays and discussion of texts and issues relating to interests of the Colloquium.

We wish again to express our thanks to Patricia Clemente, Administrative Secretary of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Loyola University Chicago, for her resourceful vigilance in seeing the journal through to its timely production.

THE SCANDAL OF ORIGINS IN ROUSSEAU

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University of West Georgia

To speak of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and scandal is not difficult. Immediately one thinks of his relationship with Mme de Warens, his lover and his beloved *mama*. Most of his works upset some group or another—other intellectuals (the *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*), the Genevan authorities (the "Dedication" the *Discourse on Inequality*), the Church (*Emile*)—the list could go on and on. In this article I would like to turn away from our usual use of the word scandal and look more deeply at the connection between Rousseau's system and the theological or, more properly, the biblical notion of scandal.

This notion is obscure. While no one would deny its importance in the New Testament, trying to develop a coherent "theory of scandal" from the various usages in the New Testament has proven difficult.¹ To give only one example of the problem, Christ crucified is proclaimed as a scandal (1Cor 1.23) and yet the Christians who follow him are forbidden to cause scandal to others (1Cor 8.9), especially the younger and weaker.

¹ For a basic understanding of the biblical notion of scandal the following titles are helpful: G. Stählin, *Skandalon: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte eines biblischen Begriffs*. (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1930), as well as his article "Skandalon, skandalizo" in *Theologisches Wörterbuch des Neuen Testaments*, ed. Kittel and Friedrich, 7: 339-58; J. Calvin, *Concerning Scandals* (translation of *De scandalis*, 1550) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); H. Bintz, *Das Skandalon als Grundlagenproblem der Dogmatik*, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969); D. McCracken, *The Scandal of the Gospels: Jesus, Story, and Offense*, (NY: Oxford UP, 1994); J. Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes* (NY: Crossroad, 1998) 140-146; G. Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (NY: Crossroad, 1995) 207-210; R. Girard, *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*, (éditions Grasset et Fasquelle, 1978) especially 573-592.

The most successful attempt at bringing coherence to the various elements of scandal has been carried out in the various works of René Girard.² His basic insight was to see in biblical scandal an inchoate theory of human desire. Girard calls this desire "mimetic" or desire that one receives from another. This type of desire leads to scandal. It is here that the connection with Rousseau becomes evident. The famous literary theorist T. Todorov states: "the 'mimetic desire' of Girard is only another name for the *amour-propre* of Rousseau" (Todorov 38). For his part Girard defines the *skandalon* (that which causes the scandal) in the following way:

It is not an obstacle that just happens to be there and merely has to be got out of the way; it is the model exerting its special form of temptation, causing attraction to the extent that it is an obstacle and forming an obstacle to the extent that it can attract. (Girard 1987, 416)

Rousseau's analysis of *amour-propre* as that which excites without satisfying, seduces without delivering, and promises without fulfilling, parallels Girard's analysis of mimetic desire as the doomed-to-be-frustrated reaching for the *scandalon*.³ Thus, I am arguing that in his various works Rousseau is developing the conceptual possibilities of biblical scandal.

While there would be many ways of showing this structural parallel between Rousseau's thought and biblical scandal, I will concentrate on a reading of the "Preface" to the *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755), in order to show that this work is structured by scandal. It is structured by a human desire that seeks what is unattainable and renders the object unattainable in the very seeking after it. More concretely, I shall argue that in the "Preface" Rousseau is able to reduce the question about the origin of inequality "to its genuine state" only

² See the work cited above as well as his more recent *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*.

³ Rousseau's definition of *amour-propre* makes its connection with offense (another translation of the biblical word for scandal) quite clear. Speaking of man in the primitive state he remarks: "For the same reason [that he is not capable of making comparisons] this man could have neither hate nor desire for revenge, passions that can only arise from the opinion that some offense has been received; and as it is scorn or intention to hurt and not the harm that constitutes this offense, men who know neither how to evaluate themselves nor compare themselves can do each other a great deal of mutual violence.... without every offending one another." This quote is taken from the note explaining the distinction between *amour de soi* and *amour-propre* (91).

through a careful construction of the text around a relationship between being scandalized and being able to see (13).

We will analyze this "Preface" in order to allow two things to emerge. First, we will see how discourse about origins is grounded in scandal in two related ways. First, Rousseau understands the problem of origins as a problem constituted precisely by its insuperable methodological difficulties. It is an intellectual scandal. Secondly, this intellectual scandal is the necessary condition for thinking about origins in the way that Rousseau does.

After its "Epistle Dedicatory," the *Second Discourse* has a "Preface," a "Notice on the Notes" and an "Exordium." Apparently it is not an easy task to begin to speak about the beginning of human society. In fact it is impossible. Perhaps the reason why Rousseau judges that this "most useful" of all human knowledge is also the "least advanced" is due to the fact that it cannot be begun (13). In these methodological considerations Rousseau does not resolve this problem of beginning; he deepens it. Rousseau clearly places this quest for knowledge of the origin of human inequality in the philosophical and hermeneutical world by his opening reference to the inscription on the temple at Delphi. This inscription is "more important and more difficult than all the thick Volumes of the Moralists" (13). Particularly in these methodological considerations but also through the whole of the *Second Discourse* Rousseau will show the reader that this knowledge is both desirable and yet unattainable. The word we choose to use for this peculiar combination of attributes is "scandalous."

The First Half of the Question: The Origin of Inequality

The "Preface" is constructed in two parts that correspond to the two parts of the question posed by the Academy: the question of the origin of inequality, and the question of whether this inequality is authorized by natural law. In each part scandal, in distinct but related forms, plays a decisive role. In both parts the same pattern emerges. Rousseau indicates the scandal involved in the very question, he gestures toward that which is easy to see, but then uses scandal to open up that which is more difficult to see. He concludes by stating in each case that his are the only means for resolving the difficulties in the question. He concludes the whole of the "Preface" by saying that, in following this path, one will gain a vision of how the things that seemed destined to cause misery actually serve our happiness. In effect he offers salvation by means of scandal.

The first form of scandal in the "Preface" revolves around the methodological impossibility of the problem. The origin of inequality is undecidable.⁴ This methodological impossibility opens up two roads. The first road takes us to those things that are easily perceived, and Rousseau goes far enough down this road to provide a clear answer to both halves of the question posed by the Academy. Rousseau does this, not in order to resolve the question, but to show that to go deeper into the question, the reader must share scandal with him.

Rousseau accepts that the question posed by the Academy is "one of the most interesting that Philosophy might propose," but he himself raises an objection to it that will remain unanswered. It is a question of sight, a question of vision:

For how can the sources of inequality among men be known unless one begins by knowing men themselves? And how will man manage to see (*voir*) himself as Nature formed him, through all the changes that the sequence of times and things must have produced in his original constitution, and to separate what he gets from his own stock from what circumstances and his progress have added to or changed in his primitive state? (13)

There follows the famous comparison with the statue of Glaucus, a comparison taken from the *Republic* of Plato, but which Rousseau uses to heighten the undecidability of the question. Starobinski notes Rousseau's enigmatic use of the image and asks:

Has Glaucus's face been eaten away by time? Has it lost forever the form it possessed when it first left the hands of the sculptor? Or has it merely been encrusted with salt and algae, beneath which the divine physiognomy preserves its original shape, with no loss of substance? (Starobinski 1988, 16)

Starobinski holds that Rousseau cannot decide between the contradictory answers (Starobinski 15). Instead Rousseau deepens the enigma and makes

⁴ This term has been made current through the work of Jacques Derrida. One can consult the "Preface" by John P. Leavey to the English translation of Derrida's *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, for a helpful discussion of this concept. I would like to emphasize that I am using the concept to indicate that it occupies a place that is both impossible and yet necessary for the system.

clear its necessary yet impossible or scandalous character. The difficulty that Rousseau points out is actually two-fold. Not only does the problem seem to invite question-begging in that one would need to know in advance the original human constitution in order to pass judgments on what is "his own" or what is original and what has been added on or changed. But "crueler," and therefore more scandalous, is the very structure of the human condition. The more knowledge that the human species accumulates, especially when the knowledge concerns its own history, the further it moves itself away from its primitive state and deprives itself of the means of acquiring this knowledge; "so that it is, in a sense, by dint of studying man that we have made ourselves incapable of knowing him" (12).

Although he does not use the word, Rousseau is describing the scandalous situation, devoid of its religious context. The very means, which are to bring us toward what we desire, form simultaneously a barrier or obstacle to the object.⁵ We become more obsessed with and more blocked from the object with each step we take. One can either enter into the process itself, which is a form of being scandalized without, perhaps, explicit knowledge of this, or one can stand apart and realize what is going on and be scandalized at the human condition itself.

In developing his argument Rousseau seems suddenly to change tact and instead of giving up an impossible quest, he solves it. He states that "it is easy to see (*voir*)" that the first origin of differences distinguishing men is in the successive changes of the human constitution. In other words, the human species possessed at its beginning an animal equality but various physical causes would have changed an individual while the others remained longer in their original state. Rousseau is clearly answering the Academy's question here because he echoes their wording and not his own: "And such was the first source of inequality among men" (12-13).⁶ The first part of the Academy's question has been answered.

And yet this version of the Academy's question is not the true one. Rather the true question has to do with "what appears...so difficult to see (*voir*)" (13). Rousseau makes his intent clear when he states that he does not seek to resolve the question. Resolving the question of the origin of

⁵ Recall Girard's description of the *skandalon* quoted above.

⁶ Rousseau changed the wording of the Academy's question from the "source" to the "origin" of inequality. While I cannot find any consistent difference in his usage of these two terms, he may have done it to help distinguish these two forms of the question, that which is easy to see and that which is more difficult.

inequality would be to slacken the tension, to dissolve the scandal. Instead, Rousseau will seek, by means of conjectures,⁷ to clarify the question and to reduce it to its "genuine state." To repeat, its genuine state is undecided. The human condition is to live in the desire of this knowledge without ever really consummating this desire. Rousseau wants to have people to live with this contradiction rather than escape from it. The question's genuine state becomes the reader's genuine existential state. This is the scandal-inducing state outlined above: each step toward resolving the question only serves to increase the difficulty. Desire increases while the possibility of fulfilling that desire decreases. Rousseau tells us that "others," those who come after him and grasp the logic of scandal, will have no difficulty in going "farther on the same road" (3.13). Outdoing Rousseau in anything is rarely an easy task, but traveling on this road, going deeper and deeper into the realm of scandal, is not difficult, because scandal provides its own energy. Scandal is not so much a state as a process and a process that begins to take on a life of its own.

Still, Rousseau tells us, it will "not be easy for anyone to reach the end" of this road. In fact, we must conclude that the end is ultimately unattainable. This is the road to the state of nature, to our origin; the road, whose end is its beginning. A beginning, from which we move away insofar as we approach it. The end this road never reaches is not, at this point, named by Rousseau. He does not tell us where we are going. Rather, he defines it by means of an activity. One will have reached the goal when one has separated "what is original from what is artificial in the present Nature of man" (13). And yet this act of separation is clearly an art, a making or re-creating of what once was natural, thereby destroying the natural. This is "no light undertaking" precisely because it is a contradictory one and yet it is also "necessary" (13). An understanding of the task as both necessary and yet impossible, that is, as scandalous, allows us to understand why the as yet unnamed state of nature is described as a "state which no longer exists, which perhaps never existed, which probably never will exist" (13).

To reduce the possibilities of interpreting this sentence to the alternative of historical existence or non-existence of the state is to impoverish ourselves. Certainly one can argue in the spirit of Leo Strauss

⁷ See Hulliung (52-75). Hulliung gives an excellent account of the intellectual motivation that underlies this type of thinking about origin. "Ultimately what the philosophes wanted to unearth was the origin of religion, buried under the ignorance and fear of natural forces so characteristic of primitives and children" (54).

that censorship can induce a form of writing in which small disclaimers take on large significance.⁸ But the truly great writers that Strauss analyses used this challenge not simply to conceal the truth but to reveal it in its concealment. Rousseau was one of these great writers. It is not such a straightforward problem that one could conjecture that if the ecclesial and civil authorities had been more tolerant, then Rousseau would have clearly stated, "yes, indeed, this is the historical truth." The fact that he says the opposite—"The Researches which can be undertaken concerning this Subject must not be taken for historical truths..."(19)—should not be dismissed as a rhetorical posture. The fact that a few lines later he affirms in unambiguous language the historical nature of the enterprise: "O Man,...here is your history...," (19) should not be ignored. Perhaps Rousseau has something to teach us about the nature of the historical, especially when that history precedes history as such.

What I am suggesting here is that Rousseau is beginning to develop the methodological consequences of his "ontological scandal" (Starobinski 1976, 93). The activity that he is undertaking, separating what is "original from what is artificial" has ontological consequences in that it reveals "a state which no longer exists, perhaps never existed, which probably never will exist" (13). Take away the "perhaps" and the "probably" from that sentence and you are left with a state of nature that is either a simple fact or a mere fiction. As fact it will simply be part of "our present state" and so will not allow us to judge that state. As fiction it will simply be other than our present state and so will not allow us to judge correctly. But for Rousseau we need to have "precise Notions" about this state "in order to judge our present state correctly" (13).

Rousseau's response to the methodological challenge he himself has posed is to present yet another challenge:

What experiments would be necessary to achieve knowledge of natural man? And what are the means for making these experiments in the midst of society? (13)

* Here I am arguing against the position taken by H. Meier both in the introductory "Essay" to his excellent edition of the *Discourse* and to his development of this position in his article entitled: "The *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men*: On the Intention of Rousseau's Most Philosophical Work." The interpretation by V. Gourevitch in "Rousseau's Pure State of Nature" is much closer to the position I am outlining here.

The question is not raised in vain.⁹ Rousseau's response to this question is the *Second Discourse* itself. The word translated here as "experiments" can also mean "experiences." The experiment/experience needed to achieve the knowledge of natural man is the experience Rousseau had on the way to Vincennes, the experience he renewed in the forests of St. Germain, where he conceived of the *Second Discourse*. The means for making these experiments is reading a new kind of writing: the *Second Discourse*. Rousseau is convinced of the uniqueness of what he has done.

These researches, so difficult to conduct and so little thought of until now, are nevertheless the only means we have left to remove a multitude of difficulties that hide from us knowledge of the real foundations of human society. (13)

That these researches are the text of the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau makes clear in the concluding paragraphs of the "Preface." It is his own study of "original man, of his true needs, and of the fundamental principles of his duties" that is the "only good means" that will remove the difficulties concerning the true foundations of the body politic and will teach us to respect those foundations (15).

The Second Half of the Question: Natural Law

When we move into Rousseau's treatment of the second part of the question, i.e., whether the inequality is authorized by natural law or not, we find that the scandal now becomes explicit. Up until now he has expressed it indirectly through his description of the methodological problems confronting the person who undertakes to understand human origins. Now he writes: "It is not without surprise and scandal that one notes the little agreement which prevails on this important matter [i.e., natural right] among the various Authors who have discussed it" (13). The force of this double negative, "not without surprise and scandal," is stronger than it might first appear. Rousseau is not simply asserting that scandal necessarily accompanies one's thoughts or that it is a necessary by-product from this

⁹ It is worth noting that in his own answer to the question Rousseau is signaling a move away from the practical proposal he made in the *First Discourse*. There he suggested that enlightened Princes allow the truly wise a place on their councils and in their counsels (cf. 22). Here he admits that such cooperation "is hardly reasonable to expect, especially with the perseverance or rather the succession of enlightenment and good will necessary on each side to achieve success" (13).

lack of agreement. Rather he is saying that without scandal one cannot think the way that he is proposing. Scandal in this, its second form, is the necessary condition for the possibility of this kind of thinking. While it is still on the methodological level, it is directly concerned with language.

The source of Rousseau's scandal is the lack of agreement among authors and "serious Writers" (13). It is a scandal about and mediated by language. Language is what ultimately makes the split between appearance and reality possible. Here we have a particularly egregious case. Each defines "the [natural] Law in his own fashion" (14). And yet the natural law is precisely what should mean the same thing to everyone. Still, they do manage to achieve a kind of spurious unity in this disagreement.

So that all the definitions of these learned men, otherwise in perpetual contradiction to one another, agree only in this, that it is impossible to understand the Law of Nature and consequently to obey it without being a great reasoner and a profound Metaphysician: which means precisely that men must have used, for the establishment of society, enlightenment which only develops with great difficulty and in very few People in the midst of society itself. (14)

Rousseau's scandal destroys this agreement and reveals the viciousness of the circle. Thus, the scandal, which was caused by the lack of agreement among writers and philosophers, not only exposes this lack of agreement concerning the definitions of natural law, it also reveals these writers to be trapped in the same scandalous circle.

Thus, and again, Rousseau turns to what can be clearly seen:

All that we can see (*voir*) very clearly concerning this Law is that, for it to be Law, not only must the will of him who is bound by it be able to submit to it with knowledge; but also, for it to be natural, it must speak directly by Nature's voice. (14)

Nature does not scandalize. Its meaning is clear. Law in itself does not scandalize, if it comes from nature, if it is spoken by nature's voice. Human language scandalizes in that humans can use the same word to mean different things.

In order to deepen the second part of the Academy's question, it is not enough that Rousseau be scandalized by the way language operates. He has

to scandalize the reader, and he does this by drawing a conclusion from what he has clearly seen. It is a scandalous conclusion borne of a scandalous situation. Rousseau says: "Leaving aside therefore all scientific books..." (14). His reason is that they impart a vision, but it is not a vision of nature; "they teach us only to see (*voir*) men as they have made themselves" (14). Rousseau is going to impart a different vision, and these kinds of books will only interfere. They will be obstacles. I call this conclusion scandalous because it has the two characteristics of necessity and impossibility. As the "therefore" in the quote indicates, this sentence is a conclusion, a necessary conclusion of Rousseau's scandal at academic writing. It is necessary to turn away from these books. At the same time it is impossible to leave aside all scientific books, since the book we are reading is such a one.

Rousseau provides an answer to the second half of the Academy's question, much the way he provided one for the first half—provisionally. Rousseau meditates¹⁰ and thus he perceives in the human soul two principles that are anterior to reason. One is self-preservation and the other is a form of natural pity such that we are reluctant to see any sensitive being suffer. These principles enable Rousseau to answer the second half of the question. Every person is naturally equal to the other in the sense that "as long as he does not resist the inner impulse of commiseration, he will never harm another man or even another sensitive being, except in the legitimate case where, his preservation being concerned, he is obliged to give himself preference" (15).¹¹ The second half of the Academy's question has also been answered.

But Rousseau concludes that "this same study of original man," which he has conducted in these few page of the "Preface," is "the only good means one could use to remove those crowd of difficulties which present themselves" (15), meaning the answers he has so far provided have only

¹⁰ The use of this particular word here is another example of the way in which Rousseau is undercutting his own thought. According to Rousseau's famous dictum: "...I almost dare affirm that the state of reflection is a state contrary to Nature and that the man who meditates is a depraved animal" (23). Naturally the "almost" weakens the statement, but the fact that Rousseau deliberately uses the word is meant to create a tension in the text.

¹¹ Swenson states that "the passion of pity would seem, in some measure, to represent the social within nature and the natural within society" (100). This is as true as far as it goes, but ultimately pity represents the sympathy for victims that Rousseau needs in his system and yet has made difficult to include due to his rejection of the Scriptures. Thus, it gets brought into the state of nature to function "*as if* it were an instinct" (102).

succeeded in making the difficulties clear. These difficulties present themselves concerning the deeper question, Rousseau's question, a question not to be resolved but to be considered in its genuine state: the question of "the origin of moral inequality" (15).

Rousseau ends the "Preface" by promising to deliver us from scandal. First, he makes clear that if we will join him in looking at human society "with calm and disinterested attention (*regard*)" we will be scandalized by what we see (15). We will be shown "only the violence of powerful men and the oppression of the weak: the mind revolts against the harshness of the former; one is prompted to deplore the latter" (15). The realities that scandalize are mediated to us by a language in which they are "called weakness or power, wealth or poverty" (15). One has to look more closely and then one will learn a new language: the language of blessing. Instead of seeing as the scandalized person sees, namely, that the intended good results in evil, we will see something new.

By considering what we would have become *abandoned to ourselves*, we ought to learn to bless him whose beneficent hand, correcting our institutions and giving them an unshakeable base, has prevented the disorders that must otherwise have resulted from them, and has created our happiness from the means that seemed likely to heighten our misery. (16; my emphasis)

This passage not only implies a clear reversal of the scandalous situation as characterized in the *First Discourse*, in which the means that seemed likely to cause our happiness in fact create our misery. It also means that the starting point and method of Rousseau is a consideration of what has never existed and could never exist: humanity abandoned to itself. To move out of superficial scandal, the scandal at a coarse expression in a play by Molière (*Final Reply* 112n), by means of scandal is possible at the price of looking at ourselves as being outside of the economy of sin and grace, salvation and damnation. Rousseau gives up the often hypocritical scandal that the Christian takes at public sins, but he replaces it with a much deeper, more significant scandal. The scandal expresses itself negatively in Rousseau's vision of the human as incapable of sin. I intend this to be understood theologically. For Rousseau humans can be weak, or even evil; they may lapse from virtue, or they may become bloodthirsty and cruel. The whole gamut of human depravity is allowed by Rousseau, except the act of infidelity toward the One who created the person. And yet this is the way to learn how to bless the beneficent hand. The meaning of the last sentence

quoted above is ambiguous. One can read it as referring to God, especially since Rousseau has mentioned "what divine will has done" shortly before and uses a quote referring to God to end the "Preface." But Rousseau is not asking us to consider what God has done, in fact, he is asking us to do the opposite. He is asking us to consider what would have happened had God abandoned us to ourselves. Then we will learn to bless Rousseau, whose task it is to correct our institutions and give them an unshakeable base, to prevent disorders and to create our happiness out of the very means that seemed likely to heighten our misery. It will not be the last time that Rousseau puts himself in the place of the Almighty.

Although the word "scandal" is only used once in the entire "Preface," we have seen how it is in fact the basis of the entire text. The impossibility of ever reaching the origin that we desire, combined with the necessity of desiring it, should be characterized as scandalous. Further, the words which we have to use to describe the state of nature are unstable in their meaning and lead only to further attempts at explanation with more words that are equally unstable is yet another scandalous fact. It leads Rousseau to set aside the scientific books that he needs in order to reach the state of nature.

Conclusion

Even with the narrow focus and limited aim of our inquiry, I believe that the implications are profound. Any attempt to understand Rousseau's thought in a comprehensive way must come to grips with the theological context within which it operates. Rousseau's thought is thoroughly religious, even and perhaps especially when the topic is not. This is true not only in the sense that he saw religion as having a necessary role in the functioning of society, but in the deeper sense that Rousseau takes up various religious concepts and transforms them, even as his thought is transformed by them.¹² In line with this, I think we can begin to see the outline of a new way of characterizing Rousseau's relationship with Christianity. To put it as pointedly as possible, there are two extremes of interpretation regarding Rousseau and Christianity. No one occupies either extreme and yet I think that expressing the problem in this way helps to clarify the parameters in which the various interpretations occur. One could hold that Rousseau, while proclaiming himself a Christian, clearly rejects its central dogmas. He does this in order to avoid the ecclesiastical

¹² Patrick Riley gives a good example of this in his *The General Will Before Rousseau: The Transformation of the Divine into the Civic*.

authorities. Ultimately he failed here and was condemned by the Archbishop of Paris and the Faculty of Theology at the Sorbonne. In any event, he was not, and he knew himself not to be a Christian. At the other extreme would be the position that holds that Rousseau's varied professions of faith are sincere and should be accepted as such. Indeed, the rejection of the dogmas is a slight matter. Rousseau's version of Christianity is the true one. I think that these parameters are misplaced, misplaced because we do not yet grasp the centrality that the rejection of Christianity plays in Rousseau's system. Rousseau did not suffer this blindness. He rejects Christianity, but he rejects in such a way that his whole system is built upon this rejection. Scandal forms the system. Were Christianity to suddenly disappear from the earth, Rousseau's system would disappear along with it. Rousseau uses his theological scandal, i.e., his scandal at the forgiveness offered in the Cross, to reject the Cross and in so doing he finds himself constantly brought before that which he has rejected. Thus, the *Second Discourse* becomes an attempt to offer an alternative account of human origins. But it is always an alternative to that which was rejected. Rousseau's alienation from Christianity is a form of dependence upon it.

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MATERNAL COMPASSION IN THE THOUGHT OF RENÉ GIRARD, EMIL FACKENHEIM, AND EMMANUEL LEVINAS

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Like empathy, compassion is a word that seldom occurs in the writings of René Girard,¹ who prefers to answer to Martin Heidegger's "anxiety" [*Die Sorge*] before death by speaking instead of a "concern for victims" [*le souci des victimes*].² Maternal compassion does enter Girardian analysis directly, however, in his discussion of the biblical good harlot, a compassionate mother whom Girard calls "the most perfect *figura Christi* that can be imagined" (1978, 241). In this paper I focus on the neglected theme of maternal compassion in the writings of Girard, letting them enter into conversation, first, with Emil Fackenheim's reflections on the plight and actions of Jewish mothers during the Holocaust and, second, with themes sounded in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. I argue that maternal compassion is actually central to Girard's understanding of the unveiling of the victimage mechanism, because it sees goodness in the very life of every potential victim, regardless of what that person has done *or is capable of doing*, simply because he or she exists, has a face. The "innocence" of every victim is reducible to the innocence of the infant, because an infant within a sacrificial system can substitute for every other possible victim. The infant and, even more, the unborn bring us back to the very origins of life, to the Creator. There

¹ On empathy and Girard, see my "Sainly Mimesis, Contagion, and Empathy."

² See James William's comment on this topic in René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (177, note 4). The *locus classicus* for Martin Heidegger's "anxiety" is his *Being and Time*, sections 39-42.

is, as Plato asserts and Levinas reminds us, a "Good beyond being" that, on a transcendent plane, constitutes the "innocence" of every human being that lives, protesting against any one's murder.

To illustrate the triangulation of desire, the rivalry of doubles, the mimetic crisis, and its possible outcome in victimage, René Girard turns to the famous biblical story of the judgment of Solomon in 3 Kings 3:16-28. In that story two women, two harlots, approach the king, each claiming to be the mother of a single, living infant, over whom they are fighting. "The symmetry is obvious," Girard writes, "and it represents the very essence of human conflict" (1978, 238). Unable to determine the truth of the case on the basis of their conflicting testimonies, the wise king tests them by proposing a sacrificial solution that parodies distributive justice. He decides to cut the baby in half, giving each woman an equal share, the symmetrical division of the victim mirroring the symmetry between the litigants. "The Latin word *decidere*," Girard notes, "mean etymologically to divide by the sacrificial knife, to cut the throat of a victim" (1978, 238).

The proposed sacrifice is averted because its horrific promise of an equal apportionment of parts of the baby's body—a sameness that would confirm the two as doubles—reveals a significant difference between the two women. According to the usual reading of the passage, one of the mothers, having (either deliberately or accidentally) killed her own baby by smothering him, lacks any genuine love for the other woman's infant. As Girard explains, "The only thing that counts for her is *possessing what the other one possesses*. In the last resort, she is ready to accept being deprived of the child as long as her opponent is deprived of it in the same way.... All that counts is her fascination with her hated model and rival" (1978, 239). The other woman, however, filled with yearning for the life of the child to whom she has given birth, reveals herself to be its true mother by renouncing her maternal rights in a passionate plea: "I beseech thee, my lord, give her the child alive, and do not kill it" (3 Kings 3:26).

Commenting on the passage, Girard characterizes the values of the false mother as sacrificial, those of the good mother as anti-sacrificial. With reference to the child whose fate hangs in the balance, the distinction is clear enough. The true mother begs for the baby's life, whereas the false mother is ready to see it killed, its body divided before her eyes. But is the true mother sacrificial with respect to herself in a way that the false mother is not? The latter question gives Girard pause. The true mother, after all, sacrifices her right to her baby. "We could even say that she puts herself forward as a sacrifice," Girard admits, because "she risks her own life" in

opposing the king's judgment (1978, 240).³ When she speaks, after all, she cannot be sure how her words will be interpreted, since her sudden renunciation of her claim could signify an admission of an original lie.

Girard's imaginary scenario points to an ambiguity in the text and another possible interpretation. What if the "true" mother, who gives up any claim to the child, is in fact the "false" mother, whose own infant has died through an accident during the night? Traumatized by this loss, she has desperately taken another woman's baby in place of her own. Confronted by the threat of the king to kill the second infant, she recoils from a repetition of the infanticide, strives to prevent the king's bloody mimesis of her own action. She acts to spare the child's life and thereby atones for the accidental killing of her own baby; through renunciation of the living child, she begins to come to terms with the loss of the infant who has tragically died. She refuses to cause another mother a mourning, a grief, a bereavement comparable to her own.

Whatever happened (and the text refuses to tell us), the mother who pleads for the child's life is a "true" mother in her attitude, in her maternal compassion and self-sacrifice. The king in his wisdom has discovered the one who is worthy of the infant. Girard answers his own doubt in terms of the good mother's motive, in which there is no suicidal death-wish:

She wishes to go on living to take care of her child. But she is ready to renounce her child for ever, even to renounce her own life if necessary, *in order to save his life*. This is her only motive and there is nothing "sacrificial" about it....The good harlot agrees to substitute herself for the sacrificial victim, not because she feels a morbid attraction to the role, but because she has an answer to the tragic alternative: kill or be killed. The answer is: be killed, not as a result of masochism, or the "death instinct," but *so that the child will live*. (Girard 1978, 241-242)

The biblical story, in fact, pointedly opposes any putative death wish with a different kind of instinct, a maternal compassion, a yearning for the

³ Girard echoes the theme of the self-sacrificing mother in a rare comment on the pro-life, pro-choice controversy: "The debate over abortion, for example: whether we are for it or against it, we always have to choose our side in the interest of the 'real victims.' Who deserves our sympathy more—the mothers who sacrifice themselves for their children or the children sacrificed to contemporary pleasure-seeking and 'self-fulfillment'? There you have the question" (2001, 176).

child's life that arose out of the mother's very body. In the Douay translation of the Vulgate we read: "Her bowels were moved upon her child" (3 Kings 3:26), the son she had carried within her womb and to whom she had given birth. Emmanuel Levinas notes that "*Rakhamin* (Mercy), which the Aramaic term *Rakhmana* evokes, goes back to the word *Rekhem*, which means uterus" (Levinas 1990, 183).⁴ Closely identified with the child, the true mother shares its threatened status as a victim and refuses to abandon him. That refusal takes the ethical form of a renunciation of rights, a self-denial that distances her from the baby she loves, whose life she would preserve even at the price of her own.

The story does not explain why maternal compassion is operative in one woman and not in the other. Both women are mothers of infants. The good harlot is presumably the biological mother of the living child, but the false mother was equally related to her own baby boy, upon whom she lay, smothering him during the night. The tale points to the physical bond between mother and child as a source of compassion. Such a bond clearly does not in itself account for the disparate choices of the women, however. Biology is not destiny to that degree. Nor does maternal compassion in itself decide the fate of the child and its mother. The king must give a ruling.

The tale of the judgment of Solomon dramatically presents alternative sacrificial and non-sacrificial solutions to a mimetic crisis. Girard speculates that Solomon's decision to spare the child and award him to the true mother illustrates a strong historical movement in ancient Judaism away from human sacrifice, especially child sacrifice (1978, 239). In this story from the Book of Kings, the child does not die as a substitute for the archaic king-victim; rather, the life of the child, preserved by Solomon's wise decree, confirms both the king in his rule and the kingdom in peace. The tale reworks elements from the story of Moses, whose infant-life under a death-sentence was spared through the maternal compassion of two "mothers"—Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted him, and his own mother, who assumed the lowly role of a nurse, renouncing her mother-rights (Exodus 2:1-10). By contrast, the myth of Oedipus begins with an attempted infanticide by a father-king, who exposes his newborn son in order to preserve his own life. Oedipus, who becomes an unwitting king-killer, then later a king himself, and finally a scapegoat—the blinded victim

⁴ On Levinas's philosophic use of this etymology, see Claire Katz, *Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine* (131-132).

expelled from plague-stricken Thebes—was always already an outcast and physically marked as such by the ankle-wounds he received as an infant, when he was bound and exposed.⁵ In mythic, sacrificial societies, the victim is either an infant (the most defenseless and expendable of victims) or someone who has survived infanticide in order to die later as a king or king's substitute (Girard 1978, 51-57).

In the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, the ancient link between child sacrifice and a threat of deposition to the king gains classic expression in the story of King Herod's slaughter of the innocents. Jesus lives to be crucified as an adult because he first survives an attempted infanticide, from which he and his parents escape by flight into Egypt, the foreign land from which he returns as a stranger to his own people. The narrative of the slaughter of the innocents ends with a haunting quotation from the prophet Jeremiah, which gives quintessential expression to the maternal compassion that joins the fate of mothers to that of their slain children: "Then was fulfilled what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, 'A voice was heard in Rama, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children, and she would not be comforted, because they are no more'" (Matthew 2:18).

Jewish philosopher Emil L. Fackenheim brings that same verse to bear upon the experience of Jewish mothers and their children during the Holocaust (1990, 73-74, 80-82). "One characteristic action of the Holocaust world," he notes, "was the most painful possible murder of Jewish babies, conducted, whenever possible, in the hearing or sight of their mothers" (Fackenheim 1982, 212). He cites the testimony, given at the Nuremberg trials, of a Polish guard at Auschwitz: "Women carrying children were [always] sent with them to the crematorium. The children were then torn from their parents outside the crematorium and sent to the gas chambers separately. When the extermination of the Jews in the gas chambers was at its height, orders were issued that the children were to be thrown straight into the crematorium furnaces, or into the pit near the crematorium, without being gassed first" (Fackenheim 1990, 86). A survivor of Ravensbrueck reports that the Nazi endeavor to destroy Jewish life at its very origins extended into the mother's womb: "In 1942 the medical services of the Revier were required to perform abortions on all pregnant women. If a child happened to be born alive, it would be smothered or drowned in a bucket.

⁵ On the marks of physical infirmity, such as the "swollen foot of Oedipus," that are characteristic of scapegoats, see Girard (1978, 122-123).

in the presence of the mother. Given a new-born child's natural resistance to drowning, a baby's agony might last for twenty or thirty minutes." (Fackenheim 1990, 86; my emphasis). Torturing the mother through the torment of the baby, they punished two crimes at once: "Jewish birth and giving Jewish birth"—a "conjunction of birth and crime" that Fackenheim calls a "*novum* in history" (1990, 87). After the Holocaust, he insists, Jews and Christians can never read the passage from Jeremiah about "Rachel weeping for her children" (Jeremiah 31:18) without recalling the compassion of Jewish mothers for and with their children: "There is a *novum*. Never merely peripheral for Jews, the weeping Rachel has moved into the centre...a Rachel weeping for children who have not returned, nor will ever return, from the land of the enemy" (Fackenheim 1990, 74).

The situation of pregnant Jewish women and of Jewish mothers during the Holocaust raises now, as it did then, a host of ethical issues. Since pregnant women and mothers with infants were always among the first to be killed, "orthodox rabbis, considering the situation, permitted abortions despite the stern Halakhic opposition to the practice" (Fackenheim 1982, 216). Why then, Fackenheim asks, "did even a single pregnant Jewish mother refuse an abortion, give birth to her baby, and show the energy and ingenuity to conceal it for a day, a week, a month?...What hope was there to save [their children] from the buckets or the flames?" (1982, 216). To this question, Fackenheim suggests two answers: the first, a "no" to the Nazis; the second, a "yes" to life, existence, and the infinite responsibility it entails.

The Nazi attack on the Jewish people aimed at their complete degradation and extermination. As Fackenheim explains,

"From the Nazi point of view, the ideal 'solution' of the 'Jewish problem' was wholesale Jewish suicide, but only if preceded and motivated by Jewish self-loathing...extreme enough to lead to Jewish suicide." (1982, 210).

From this perspective, the Nazis failed miserably, for their Jewish victims, "so long as they were still able to choose at all,...chose life much rather than death, and loathed (or despised) their persecutors rather than themselves" (Fackenheim 1982, 211-212). Expressed in Girardian terms, they refused to desire the desire of the Führer, to appropriate his hatred for themselves, to imitate the actions of their killers by killing themselves and their babies.

This "no" to the Nazis was accompanied by a "yes" to life, their own and their babies. Whereas the Nazi persecution of pregnant mothers aimed at inducing them to kill their babies in a vain attempt to save their selves, most Jewish women chose instead to live the life of their children and to die their death with them. They, in effect, imitated their children, making their will to live their own. "Jewish babies, like all babies, are incapable of self-loathing or suicide," Fackenheim observes (1982, 212). As such, they represent a kind of pure life-principle that simply wants to live, to grow, to realize potential. To ally oneself with the unborn, with the infant, with the young child, and to imitate their desire to live was for the mothers to live in hope; it was to stand at the furthest possible remove from the desire of the enemy, who wanted them to despair and to kill. "It is natural for women to want to give birth, to love their children even before they are born," Fackenheim writes, and one's "will" cannot oppose something so rooted in "nature." "In the mothers," therefore, "we have touched upon an Ultimate" (1982, 216-217).

With this comment, Fackenheim begins to think about a topic that is central to the thought of Emmanuel Levinas: namely, what are the things that limit choice and, therefore, "freedom," as it is commonly understood? Posing the "most traumatic" question of all, Fackenheim writes: "One would wish to ask about the children, unable to choose, and hence unfree to choose martyrdom.....One would wish to ask, too, about the mothers wanting to die in their children's stead but denied this choice" (1982, 286).⁶ Pursuing a similar line of light, Levinas finds a lack of freedom, defined as choice, even in the case of a death-defying courage, which would seem to realize a "total independence of the will," because "the acceptance of death does not enable me to resist with certainty the murderous will of the Other," who desires my death (1969, 230).

For Levinas, true freedom is always already limited and bound, because there is something prior to freedom, namely, responsibility to and for the Other. In this regard, he concurs with Martin Buber, who writes in *I and Thou*: "In the beginning is the relation.... The prenatal life of the child is a pure natural association, a flowing toward each other, a bodily reciprocity"

⁶ Fackenheim draws parallels between the Holocaust and the life of Christ, to suggest that the freedom of Jesus would have been severely reduced, had he been among the Jews persecuted by the Nazis and tortured in the camps. In a footnote he relates the suffering of Jewish mothers, unable to substitute themselves for their children, to that of the Virgin Mary, standing beneath the cross: "In the light of the Holocaust, a renewed future Christian emphasis on the person of Mary seems a distinct possibility" (1982, 286).

(76). Defining the "self" as "the very matrix of relations," Levinas calls attention to "the evocation of maternity" in this metaphor, which suggests "the proper sense of the oneself": "The oneself cannot form itself; it is already formed with absolute passivity. In this sense it is the victim of a persecution that paralyzes any assumption that could awaken in it, so that it would posit itself *for* itself" (1998, 104). Instead, it must posit itself for the Other. The child, carried in a mother's womb, is always already an "other" mother, a maternal being, responsible to and for the Other: "The oneself has not issued from its own initiative....It is bound in a knot that cannot be undone in a responsibility for others... In the exposure to wounds and outrages, in the feeling proper to responsibility, the oneself is provoked as irreplaceable, as devoted to the others, without being able to resign, and thus as incarnated in order to offer itself, to suffer and to give" (1998, 105). Defining "maternity in the complete being 'for the other' which characterizes it," Levinas describes the self that labors to put the Other first as giving birth to itself through a recurrent "contraction" of the ego (1998, 108).

"The expulsion of self outside of itself is its substitution for the other.... Is not that what the self emptying itself of itself would really mean?" Levinas asks (1998, 111). Girard sees the Christ-like mother substituting herself for the child, risking a death-sentence for herself in order to save the infant condemned by Solomon's judgment. Fackenheim focuses on the desire of Jewish mothers during the Holocaust to be able to substitute themselves for their children, to die in their stead, to assume an ultimate responsibility for their life and death. Levinas extends that maternity to include a responsibility for the persecutor and killer: "To undergo from the other is an absolute patience only if by this from-the-other is already for-the-other....In the trauma of persecution, it is to pass from the outrage undergone to the responsibility for the persecutor, and, in this sense, from suffering to expiation for the other....There is substitution for another, expiation for another" (1998, 110-111, 125).

Whereas Girard's analysis of the victimage mechanism emphasizes the tendency to substitute another person for oneself, loading the Other with guilt, even to the point of human sacrifice, Levinas stresses the opposite process: the substitution of oneself for the Other and the responsible claiming of the Other's guilt as one's own. "The uniqueness of the self is the very fact of bearing the fault of another.... The more I return to myself, the more I divest myself, under the traumatic effect of persecution, of my freedom as a constituted, willful, imperialist subject, the more I discover

myself to be responsible; the more just I am, the more guilty I am.... No one can substitute himself for me, who substitutes myself for all" (1998, 112, 126).

This, however, is not the end of the story for Levinas. Even as Girard traces the chain of sacrificial substitution back from the adult king to the infant, whose guilt consists in deeds uncommitted but predicted, Levinas imagines the weight of guilt and responsibility that presses upon the just person as leading him to discover at the "hither side" of himself an alterity that is an original innocence, a pure passivity that has been created *ex nihilo* (1998, 113-114). "Impassively undergoing the weight of the other, thereby called to uniqueness, subjectivity no longer belongs to the order where the alternative of activity and passivity retains its meaning," Levinas writes (1998, 118):

In the absolute passivity of being a creature....the self, the persecuted one, is accused beyond his fault before freedom, and thus in an unavowable innocence. One must not conceive it to be the state of original sin; it is, on the contrary, the original goodness of creation....The antecedence of responsibility to freedom would signify the Goodness of the Good; the necessity that the Good choose me first before I can be in a position to choose, that is, to welcome its choice. That is my pre-originary *susceptiveness*. It is a passivity prior to all receptivity, it is transcendent. (1998, 121-122).

This extreme Levinasian passivity, I argue, is at the heart of the maternal compassion that the philosopher likens to birth pains and the suffering of persecution. Not only does it require one to substitute oneself for all the others, bearing their responsibility and their guilt; but it also defines every victim as good and innocent, if not in deed, then in its sheer existence as a creature of God. Innocence thus understood is absolute, not relative. It gives a new way to understand the Girardian dictum: for every victim in a sacrificial system, an infant may be substituted.

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VIOLENCE, ANARCHY, AND SCRIPTURE: JACQUES ELLUL AND RENÉ GIRARD

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This essay will examine the personal and social consequences of sin, Biblically defined, and will contend that Christian faith necessitates a rejection of the secular political order. Exploring and contrasting the thought of René Girard and Jacques Ellul, we will demonstrate that Girard's mimetic theory supplies crucial theoretical underpinnings for Ellul's theology. Ellul, in turn, sequencing the Biblical narrative somewhat differently, provides Girard the more biblically consistent content of the life of faith.

The ethical content of the life of faith is a continuation of the salvation narrative inaugurated in Genesis 1-2, incarnated and perpetuated in Israel and later, the Church, the universalized community of the Abrahamic blessing. The historical content of this faith demonstrates the incompatibility of political power with freedom in Christ. The Church's ill-fated attempts to maintain an authentic practice of faith while legitimizing the secular order are exposed by the Biblical critique of power. While the growth of the global state has made a total withdrawal from the political order inconceivable, it is precisely its utter domination today that makes critical continued defiance by the Body of Christ.

Original Sin

Girard observes that when the snake first appears in the Genesis account of the Fall, it is already in conflict with God, opposing him as a jealous rival. Eve is enticed by it to covet divinity, to covet what belongs to God—the knowledge of good and evil—and to herself become God's rival (Girard 1965, 182). Her imitation of the serpent's covetousness forms "an alliance of two against one" (Girard 2000, 171-185), and God is

expelled from the relationship. The contagion of metaphysical desire, or mimesis, soon claims Adam and what began as a relationship of obedience without conflict between God and human beings is forever changed. An acquisitive mimesis turns antagonistic and rivalrous (Girard 1978a, 95). When called to account for her disobedience, Eve blames the snake. Adam in turn blames Eve, implying that God is himself at least partially culpable: "The woman whom *You* gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate" (Gen 3:12, emphasis mine).

In the Biblical account of human origins then, rivalry with God produces rivalry between people. Girard argues that although conflict must inevitably lead to violence, here "God takes the violence upon himself and founds humanity by driving Adam and Eve far away from him" (Girard 1978a, 142). God's banishment of the first humans only mirrors the expulsion implied by human collusion with the snake.

"Now we know that covetousness is the crux of the whole affair," Ellul writes, "since sin always depends on it. 'You shall not covet' (Ex 20:17) is the last of the commandments because it summarizes *everything*—all the other sins" (Ellul 1985, 101; see also Girard 1999, 7-12). Prior to the Fall, Adam and Eve are not required to choose between good and evil. "All that counted was the relation to God and its expression in action" (Ellul 1976, 51). Here Ellul understands freedom as obedience to God's commandments *within the context of a relationship with God*. Independence from God is mere slavery: "Adam seeks to liberate himself from the limits which God has set for him and in so doing he enters into rivalry with other forces and becomes subject to sin" (Ellul 1976, 49). The knowledge that Adam and Eve covet and usurp from God is "the power to *decide* on one's own *what is good and what is evil*" (Ellul 1985, 96n, emphasis Ellul's). Consequently, human morality is of the order of the Fall, and Girard concurs: the ethical always derives from victimary unanimity (Girard 1978a, 236), in this case the rejection of God.

For Ellul "covetousness is equivalent to the spirit of power or domination" (Ellul 1985, 101)¹ and "no society is possible among people

¹ "Sin is a break with God and all that this entails. When I say that people are not good, I am not adopting a Christian or a moral standpoint. I am saying that their two great characteristics, no matter what their society or education, are covetousness and the desire for power.... René Girard has fully shown what the implications of covetousness are" (Ellul 1991, 20). Also note Ellul's humble confession: "I do not pretend to be able to unveil things hidden from the beginning of the world" (7).

who compete for power or who covet and find themselves coveting the same thing" (Ellul 1991, 20). Civil order between rivals in the Genesis pre-history can only be founded on blood. All the elements of the violent origin of civilization are present in this text. Cain murders his brother and rival, Abel, becoming the founder of the first city. The threat of contagious violence is described by the multiplication of Cain's murder into a seven-fold revenge, which becomes his descendant Lamech's seventy-seven-fold revenge, so that by the time of Noah violence engulfs the world. The acceptability of Abel's blood sacrifice is read by Girard as an adumbration of the sacrificial protection on which all social order will be founded: the violence of all against all will be kept in check by the ritualized violence of all against one. For Girard, Cain represents the chaotic mob in the grip of a violent frenzy, uniting against a single victim, a scapegoat. This unity achieves a real peace and allows for the development of all that is collectively termed civilization.² In the emergent order legal codes address that which must be prohibited to maintain that peace, and ritual describes the action by which it was first secured (Hamerton-Kelly 1987, 93). For Girard the fundamental character of ritual is re-enactment of the immolation of the victim (Hamerton-Kelly 1987, 107),³ as it is this act that first brought concord out of chaos. Culture in all its expressions, the arts and sciences, every mode of communication, is seen as having as its *fons et origo* the same ritualized coaxing of order from disorder.⁴

Arguing in a similar fashion, Ellul represents the first city as founded on Cain's rejection of God, specifically his offer of protection against vengeance,⁵ and his choosing instead to create his own protection by the city. The city "expresses the attempt to exclude God, to shut oneself off

² "For years now we have been playing the scapegoat game. It has a profound source, as Girard has recalled...the possibility of universalizing it is the exclusive work of television, the radio, and the press. These attach the label and thereby justify whole nations and each and every individual" (Ellul 1989, 59).

³ Compare: "We all know, obviously, the close link between religion and violence...The psychological reasons for this have been a matter of question... The fact that Christianity, the revelation of the God of love, could have so changed...sets one thinking...Religion *always* produces violence. When violence comes first, it requires the appearance of a religion" (Ellul 1975, 9).

⁴ Compare: "Human society is based on the creative violence which has engendered individual consciousness as well as social order" (Ellul 1971, 246).

⁵ Ellul's is the more literal reading of Gen 4:15: "And the Lord said to him, 'Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.' And the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him."

from him, to fabricate a world which is purely and exclusively human" (Ellul 1976, 39). Such an exclusively human world is necessarily founded and maintained through force,⁶ which is legalized and ritualized:

In its origin law is religious. This is confirmed by almost all sociological findings. Law is the expression of the will of a god; it is formulated by the priest: it is given religious sanction, it is accompanied by magic ritual. Reciprocally, religious precepts are presented in juridical garb. The relationship with the god is established by man in the form of a contract. The priest guarantees religion with the occult authority of law. (Ellul 1960, 18)

The civil or secular order is understood as founded on violence and maintained by force.⁷ The clear implication is that what humans esteem as "law and order" is established by a crime, and is therefore fundamentally *unjust*. Inasmuch as the founding murder is *arbitrary* violence, there can be no authentic *justice* in the city.⁸ The victim upon whom the city is founded is innocent, and what is believed just is itself only the legitimization of an unjust order, the illusion of justice serving to suppress all consciousness of its criminal origins. In the city "justice" can only mean that the victim of arbitrary violence is also given credit for the establishment of (temporary) peace (Girard 2000, 185). Justice comes too late for the victim, but is timely enough for the consciences of the perpetrators, for whom the ensuing peace confirms the correctness of the original division. Still, the memory of the victim is never effaced and he becomes with time a sort of god, a sacred being who is simultaneously, mysteriously malevolent *and* benevolent. The deification of the victim and the ritualized re-enactment of the crime establishing peace serve to suppress from memory the malevolence of the perpetrators and the victim's innocence. The legal system is thus revealed as a religious phenomenon and its charter becomes

⁶ "Every state is founded on violence and cannot maintain itself save by and through violence" (Ellul 1969, 84).

⁷ No distinction can be made between force and violence: "It is shortsighted, both politically and spiritually, to say that there is a violence which liberates and another which subjugates. All violence is a crime before the eternal" (Ellul 1971, 151). Compare Girard: "The illusion that there is difference within the heart of violence is the key to the sacrificial way of thinking" (1978a, 266).

⁸ Legal execution, for example, is only ritualized violence (Girard 1978a, 173).

the seal of our bondage to the secular order (Girard 1993b, 137). Ellul writes:

Why, after all, does one obey the state? Beyond factors that may be understood and analyzed, not everything can be accounted for, as in the case of the soul that the scalpel cannot find no matter how close the analysis. The residue is a spiritual power, an *exousia*, that inhabits the body of the state. (1986, 175)

Society of Technique and the Sacrificial Order

The Biblical narrative confirms the necessity of law in a fallen world—social, moral and physical laws that govern every aspect of life but which are all forms of the same necessity. "From the moment when Adam separated himself from God," Ellul writes, "when his freedom was no longer love but the choice between two possibilities, from that moment Adam moved from the realm of freedom into the realm of necessity" (Ellul 1984b, 134).

The immediate relationship of the Garden is broken in the Fall, disrupting the relation between humans and God, between man and woman, and between man and nature. No longer in the fellowship of love with God, humans are subjected to the laws of necessity, and begin to learn and master them, altering their world according to these laws. They adopt means of mediation in their approach to one another. Cain's descendants are read by Ellul as inventors of these mediating techniques—the domestication of animals, music-making, and the fashioning of tools to subdue nature. These means are derivative from the first successful technique mentioned in the Genesis account, Abel's blood sacrifice, which serves as both a screen between humanity and God and an approach (Ellul 1984b, 132).⁹ Girard too, sees that the sciences and arts, and every form of human communication have their origins in ritual violence (Girard 2000, 171-185).

⁹ "Recently we have witnessed the appearance of a new interpretation grill presented by René Girard....Rather than presenting merely another interpretation, Girard gives us a genuine method. Since it fits no ideological canon, I feel certain it will never attract notice or be taken into account by biblical scholars" (Ellul 1988, 86n). Also: "Concerning the contrast of two themes, pollution and debt, I must underline, as a point of comparison, Girard's much more profound interpretation with respect to the sacrificial and nonsacrificial reading of biblical texts. But Girard's approach involves no socioeconomic infrastructure that would permit a Marxist interpretation. The sacrificial interpretation springs from more fundamental facts about human beings and society!" (87n).

Once the connection between ritual and culture becomes clear, the truly religious nature of all human civilization is made plain. The denial of sacrificial origins for the arts and sciences is an indication of the veiled and veiling character of ritual violence. Suppression of the knowledge of its origins enables human culture to flourish.

The Biblical revelation, then, by unveiling the sacred violence at the heart of religion, poses a threat to human society. The demythologizing effect of revelation undermines the sacred structures of our world. Girard sees the progressive influence of the Biblical revelation in the now universal concern for victims and the growing inability of persecutors to impose their own perspectives on others by fiat. "Centuries were needed to demystify medieval persecutors," he writes, "a few years suffice to discredit contemporary persecutors" (Girard 1986, 201). This does not mean that our world knows less persecution or violence, only that the myths that once protected the persecutors and blinded people to the innocence of their victims have been eroded by the demythologizing power of the Biblical revelation. The world becomes "increasingly apocalyptic" (Girard 1996, 274), as time wears on, for without "sacrificial protections," without a means of limiting it, humans are faced with a global deluge of violence. By unveiling the violent foundations of human society, the Biblical revelation robs it of its means of maintaining order. After the proclamation of the innocence of sacrificial victims the violent order can only be maintained by a denuded will to power. Girard observes that because of the Biblical revelation, we save and, paradoxically, produce more victims than ever before. This latter result is the meaning of Christ's warning, "I did not come to bring peace but a sword" (Mt 10:34). Both results are evidence of the "unrelenting historical advance" of Christian truth in our world (Girard 1999, 174).

Ellul also traces the historical desacralization of religious forms accomplished by the Biblical revelation, including the desacralization of "Christian religion" (Ellul 1975). But he contends that the primitive sacred has been replaced by a modern sacred, a secular religion whose myths are Progress, Work, and Happiness, and whose ideologies include Nationalism, Socialism, Democracy, and Capitalism.¹⁰

¹⁰ "The myth of progress as man's seizure of history in order to make it serve him is probably the greatest success ever brought off by a myth. The myth of work as an affirmation of man's transcendence and everlastingness in the face of, and in relation to, history; the myth of happiness as the joy of participating in a glorious time, which is outside the time in which

For Ellul, this "desacralization permitted the development of technology and the unlimited exploitation of the world" (Ellul 1986, 143). In *The Technological Society*,¹¹ he argues that the modern world is increasingly dominated by Technique: not merely technology, but the collection of means—political, economic, scientific, etc.—by which humans utilize and master nature and one another. The Society of Technique is concerned above all with efficiency, and elevates means above ends. The magical nature of primitive ritual has been replaced by the conscious design of social engineering (Ellul 1971b, 259). The worldwide domination of the State, which centralizes and integrates all of the various techniques, is creating a global concentration camp in which individuals are valued only for the "role" each plays in the proper functioning of society. Humans no longer control the means but are controlled by them. When technical developments become possible, people are no longer able to ask whether they ought or ought not be pursued. If it can be done, it will be done, and if, for example, the development of nuclear energy and weaponry creates unforeseen environmental and human consequences, the hope is always expressed that future technical progress will at last propose a remedy. Technique always advances according to its own intractable logic.

Where Ellul sees Efficiency as the defining goal and characteristic of the global society, Girard argues that it is precisely the "the concern for victims...[that] dominates the total planetary culture in which we live....The world becoming one culture is the fruit of this concern and not the reverse" (Girard 1999, 178)¹² The ineluctable advance of the Biblical revelation renders "new" myths incapable of survival.¹³ He considers the principle

we now participate, hence both a reality and a promise at the same time— all that appears to be at the very heart of these creations of the modern consciousness. In truth, it is all simply the mythical response to the person in the new situation" (Ellul 1975, 112).

¹¹ *The Technological Society* was first published in French in 1954, the same year that Heidegger's 1949 lecture "The Question Concerning Technology" was first published. The two reach many of the same conclusions.

¹² "The analogy between the terms 'global' and 'universal' is misleading. Universalization has to do with human rights, liberty, culture, and democracy. By contrast, globalization is about technology, the market, tourism, and information. Globalization appears to be irreversible whereas universalization is likely to be on its way out. At least, it appears to be retreating as a value system which developed in the context of Western modernity and was unmatched by any other culture" (Baudrillard 2003).

¹³ "Even if some totalitarian system were to control the entire planet tomorrow, it would not succeed in making its own myth, or the magical aspect of its persecution, prevail" (Girard 1986, 201).

challenge to the Biblical revelation today to be a kind of "false concern for the victim," the political appropriation of concern for the victims that turns the accusation of victimization against Christians and against the Biblical revelation itself.¹⁴ The result is that the status of victim is eagerly sought, since it is deemed a position of power and a source of political capital. Consider, for example, the debate over abortion rights framed on both sides as concern for the victim.

Ellul, too, sees that the great secular metanarratives since the Enlightenment had been largely discredited. Of Kant and Hegel, he writes:

It was wonderful to set forth an attractive outline of history and its development, but what a fraud, what a swindle, when the only decisive result was the relentless strengthening of the State, the very place where man should have concentrated all his forces to prevent such a thing. (Ellul 1973, 278)

The same can be said, of course, for Marx, and a host of utopian dreamers since, Christian and otherwise. The history of the twentieth century is an especially cluttered graveyard of capsized myths of progress and new world ideologies run aground. Most of those that made serious claims on the age in which Ellul lived and wrote are little more than historical curiosities today. But even today, in the global-capitalist aftermath of the last century's ideology wars, Ellul's analysis tolls true:

Capitalism has progressively subordinated all of life, individual and collective—to money. Money has become the sole criterion for judging man and his activity...money, the source of power and freedom, must take priority over everything else. This belief is well supported on the one hand by a general loss of spiritual sensitivity (if not of faith itself) and on the other by the incredible growth of technology. Money, which allows us to obtain everything material progress offers (in truth, everything our fallen nature desires), is no longer merely an economic value. It has become a moral value and an ethical standard (Ellul 1984a, 20).

¹⁴ "The other totalitarianism...does not oppose Judeo-Christian aspirations but claims them as its own and questions the concern for victims on the part of Christians.... (It) does not openly oppose Christianity but outflanks it on its left wing" (Girard 1999, 180 emphasis Girard's).

Recent years have witnessed the rise and fall of the "Information Age," with its promise of decentralized power and freedom for individuals through the supposed egalitarianism of the Internet. The vastly increased technical power of the State to house and reference information on the lives of individual citizens, the rabid proliferation of electronic surveillance and identification systems since the early nineties, to name just a couple of recent "advances," have made such short work of this craze that it was scarcely uttered before it was dead in the water. Ellul is again prophetic: "Technical aggrandizement of the state is the only condition under which a contract between state and individual is possible" (Ellul 1965, 309).

Genesis 1-2, Contingency and Chaos

The seeming inevitability of a world dominated by political power has left humanity very little room to hope for a different social reality. In a world where freedom is limited to "freedom of choice" between good and evil, law or chaos, "the true is a moment of the false" (Debord 1983, 9).¹⁵ The exigencies of life within the Society of the Spectacle make it difficult to imagine any action one might take that would not merely strengthen the present order.

We have demonstrated the close connection between the Fall and the foundation of the state. In the same sense that justice within the secular order is strictly relative, so virtue within the state, too, has use-value only as the personal legitimization of secular power. The personal and the social consequences of the Fall cannot be abstracted from one another: the external secular power is maintained by those who have internalized its constraints and its justifications, while secular power "reinforces human sinfulness and conceals our fallen character from view" (Milbank 1987, 209).

The Genesis narrative places the birth of secular morality (the knowledge of good and evil) before the violent foundation of the civil order, implying that political domination or sovereignty is an external manifestation of the internal rejection of God. Rivalry with God leads to

¹⁵ "In 1964 I was attracted by a movement very close to anarchism, that is, situationism. I had very friendly contacts with Guy Debord, and one day I asked him bluntly whether I could join his movement and work with him. He said that he would ask his comrades. Their answer was frank. Since I was a Christian I could not belong to their movement. For my part, I could not renounce my faith" (Ellul 1991, 3).

rivalry among people and a violent contagion of all against all checked only by the violence of all against one. It is thus the civil order emerges.

However, morality or civic virtue is *also* the internalization of the coercive peace of the secular city. As the sacrifice of a scapegoat stills the chaos of unrestrained social violence, so morality is the (violent) inhibition of the supposed chaos of the passions. Ellul writes, "The more complex and refined civilization becomes the greater is the 'interiorizing' of determinations. These become less and less visible, external, constricting and offensive. They are instead invisible, interior, benevolent, and insidious" (Ellul 1976, 41). This interiorization of the political order manifests itself in asceticism, a heroic self-restraint of the passions, and personal enforcement of moral law. As with the "exchange-relations of arbitrary power," freedom is granted only as a concession of power, and a certain mechanical and repetitive peace is imposed; self-denial and the repression of desire produce an artificial calm but never succeed in uprooting the unruly passions.¹⁶

On both the social and individual levels, then, fallen humanity *seems* constrained by only two options: "law and order," or chaos; morality, or depravity. Girard writes, "We cannot postulate the existence in man of a desire radically disruptive of human relations without simultaneously postulating the means of keeping this desire in check" (Girard 1977, 218). John Milbank, following Augustine, argues instead that "desire" is not *necessarily* "radically disruptive of human relations." Primeval chaos is an element of the myth that sustains the civil order. Equally tenable, he argues, is the postulation of an already existing hierarchical order justified and maintained with the help of the myth of a chaos always threatening resurgence. The mythical chaos is feared, yet idolized and celebrated in violent spectacles, e. g., the ultra-violence of Hollywood films, or the public spectacle of American football (Milbank 1987, 208-9; 1991, 394-5).

Following Milbank's argument, if the passions are thought to be an interior disorder brought to order by the interiorized sacrificial order of "fighting virtue," then the notion of a chaos of desire might be just a "mythic" element of the internal coercive order. This is not to say that people are naturally "good" and that removal of personal and social

¹⁶ "Augustine is then able to show that all Roman virtue is a merely relative matter because it is only possible within a circle bounded by arbitrary violence: a circle however, which more and more recedes from view as time goes on and political coercion assumes more and more 'commuted' and legally regular forms" (Milbank 1987, 221; cf. 208-9).

restraint will produce an ideal society. We merely point out that the absence of alternatives to "law and order, or anarchy" is precisely the enslavement of humanity to the "knowledge of good and evil" described in the Bible. We are concerned in this essay to demonstrate that the Biblical narrative insists on a "third" way beyond law, beyond morality, beyond chaos.

Girard convincingly traces the violent origins of the secular political order, but what seems less clear is the shape the way out of this order might take. We contend that by ignoring the narrative priorities of the Biblical text Girard makes it difficult to recover the form anti-sacrificial practice takes. Girard privileges the Fall-Cain narrative over the Genesis 1-2 narrative, so that the sacrificial order he so clearly identifies takes on a predetermined quality. Given the covetous nature of humanity, the resulting sacrificial order of Cain is inevitable. However, the Biblical sequencing is the more ontologically correct. Adam's Fall obviously implies a fall *from* something, and the prior condition is described for us in Genesis 1-2.

Ellul, too, contends the creation story describes an origin fundamentally different than foundational violence. Genesis 1-2 illustrate "no relationship of exploitation, utilization, or subordination," but rather a "directing which nevertheless leaves the other intact" (Ellul 1984b, 131). God's word, the power of creation, is not an intellectual analysis that divides and separates, but the language of union and love. Adam's naming of the animals is no mere technique in the Ellulian sense, but "the continuation of the word of God" (131). Christian tradition often places the expulsion of Satan from heaven between days one and two in the creation account, but such an expulsion is not in the Hebrew text. Creation emerges from what is "formless and void," not by violence but by the word of God (Girard 2000, 183-4).¹⁷ The later insertion of Satan's expulsion into the creation narrative may be the result of a "sacrificial reading" of the Hebrew Scriptures¹⁸ via a sacrificial reading of the Gospels, the work of Christian

¹⁷ Following Michel Serres. Girard traces in the distinction between void and matter the violence of expulsion, or purge.

¹⁸ "The Old Testament is far from being dominated by sacred violence. It actually moves away from violence, although in its most primitive sections it still remains sufficiently wedded to violence for people to be able to brand it as violent without appearing totally implausible" (Girard 1978a, 268).

exegetes who fundamentally misunderstood the Gospel revelation (Girard 2000, 171-185).¹⁹

Genesis 1-2 describe an "immediate relationship of love and knowledge" (Ellul 1984b, 128) among those who are different: God and humans, man and woman, humankind and nature. Adam and Eve "needed to follow no method, to apply no technique, because there was no force to exert, no need to fulfill, no necessity to overcome" (129). There was "no protocol or sacrifices" (129) because there was no disorder, only order. Genesis 1-2 argue that the sacrificial mechanisms Girard identifies as maintaining law and order do not *necessitate* a primeval chaos from which order emerged. The hypothesis of an original, divine order prior to the Fall denaturalizes the sacrificial order of Cain; the creation story insists "it didn't have to be this way," and announces, *from the beginning*, the existence of a different way of life. Moreover, the seventh-day creation of the Sabbath marking Jewish practice signals that the Jew-Gentile distinction is not incidental but *inherent* to the "other way of life" embodied in Israel and later, the Church (Soulen 1996, 118). The record of God's original intentions for humanity and creation contextualizes all of the Biblical narratives, up to and including the Gospel revelation. Biblical salvation is not a *return* to Eden, but rather the *inclusion* of the individual into the narrative inaugurated in Genesis 1-2.

Narrative and Idiom

No mere hypothesis of freedom, the Scriptures insert the individual into the narrative itself—the continuing historical embodiment of the divine revelation in time and space. The Gospel revelation is then first received by members of a community not unfamiliar with its themes. We have mentioned the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel. The Biblical authors consistently recast preexistent mythologies, adapting them in the spirit of their particular concerns and inverting the relationship between victims and persecutors (Girard 1978a). In fact the Hebrew Bible brims with demythologizing reversals of sacred narrative. The book of Job, perhaps the oldest of the Hebrew texts, depicts persecution from the perspective of a victim who protests his innocence, refusing the accusations of

¹⁹ "Grace excludes sacrifice. Girard is quite right when he shows how basic sacrifice is to humanity. There can be no accepted life or social relation without sacrifice. But gracious grace rejects the validity of all human sacrifice. It ruins a basic element in human psychology" (Ellul 1986, 159).

his interlocutors, and is at last vindicated by God. The story of Joseph and his brothers previews the self-sacrifice of Christ and the Father's forgiveness in Judah's offer to substitute himself for Benjamin and Joseph's compassion for the brothers who once victimized and expelled him (Gen 37-50). The Exodus of Israel from slavery in Egypt identifies the community of faith as those who have been set free from bondage to the pagan political order and not merely as those who are free by nature or divine right. The story of Solomon's judgment (1 Kgs 3:16-28) between two prostitutes depicts the judgment of God in favor of she who would sacrifice herself to save another, and against the one who preferred the violent sacrifice productive of victims. The binding of Isaac (Gen 22:1-19), David's penitential Psalms (Ps 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143), Isaiah's songs of the Suffering Servant (Is 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12), the story of Jonah—each in its own way contravenes and reverses the mythic pattern of the secular order.

The revelation of the Hebrew Scriptures is then numerously recapitulated by the Gospels. "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill," Jesus tells those gathered for the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:7). Conversion implies a concomitant break with the pagan narrative, and the reaffirmation of Hebrew Scriptural revelation. Jesus is called "the second Adam" (1 Cor 15:45), and is represented as taking up the cause of immemorial victims, beginning with "righteous Abel" (Mt 23:35). The creation story begins with a social order radically differentiated from that later inaugurated by Cain, an order historically preserved through the descendants of Adam. Cain kills Abel, but Seth replaces Abel. Violence floods the earth, but Noah and his family escape. Abraham is called out of a pagan culture to become the father of faith for all the world. As a consequence, Gentile converts to the Christian faith are deemed "grafted in" to the historical embodiment of the Biblical revelation, forming an organic unity with Israel and not merely as having superseded it. The Jewish followers of Jesus are not called out of Israel as from a pagan political order, but to a restoration of a way of life consistent with Torah and with the counter-sacrificial practice established by Abraham.

Akedah and the Counter-Sacrificial Gospel

The counter-sacrificial revelation of the Hebrew Scriptures begins in the Genesis prehistory but takes a radical turn when God calls Abraham into a relationship with himself. The epidemic consequences of the Fall are

here opposed by an act of divine and world-historical conciliation. Where Adam and Eve are evicted from the Garden, Abraham is led by God to a promised land (Gen 12:3). Flouting the one, modest prohibition in paradise the first humans seize for themselves the right to decide good and evil. Abraham is found on Mount Moriah submitting to God's demand of something monstrous, an obedience beyond morality. Abraham will inaugurate the historical reversal of the Fall, with the promise in Genesis 12:1-3 that this "other way of life" would be offered to all the world.

Abraham's obedience to God's demand for the sacrifice of his son Isaac (the Akedah, or "binding" of Isaac) stands at once for the reversal of human rivalry with God and of God's expulsion of humankind from his presence. Abraham reestablishes a relationship with God based on obedience and submission. His descendants are the continuing incarnation of this relationship. God gives a son to Abraham with the promise that Isaac will be the vehicle of blessing to Israel and the nations. Abraham's future and the fulfillment of God's promises to him turn on Isaac, so that his offering of Isaac is an offering of his own very hope and life, a return to God who initiated the gift.²⁰ Obeying God *for no other reason than simply to obey*, Abraham repudiates the pride of usurpation and Adam's grasping after divinity. He renounces the rivalry of Adam and Eve and refounds submission as the model for human relationship with God. For his part God recapitulates the avowal of Genesis 12:1-3, enlarging it to incorporate Abraham's obedience (Gen 22:15-18).²¹

The prohibition against murder in the Noachide laws and the condemnation of Cain's fratricide argue against the view that the Akedah is a mere polemic against murder or human sacrifice. Furthermore, the tacit approval of animal sacrifice earlier in the Genesis text by Abraham, Noah, Abel and even God himself when he covers the man and woman with animal skins

²⁰ The New Testament confirms that Abraham's offering was not a *disinterested* sacrifice, but that he also expected a return of Isaac: "(Abraham) considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead: hence, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back" (Heb 11:19). The idea of return can also be seen in God's offering Christ in response to Abraham's offering of Isaac.

²¹ "And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, 'By myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice'" (Gen. 22:15-18).

in the Garden renders the deflection of violence from human to animal victims inessential to the meaning of the Akedah. Similarly, Torah's prohibition of child sacrifice²² makes the Akedah superfluous as a condemnation of the practice.

Neither Abraham nor Isaac was divinized in Israel, nor were they found guilty of any crime, arguing against the Akedah as an instance of the ubiquitous sacred violence. Although God intervenes at the last moment to prevent Abraham from immolating his beloved son, it is not because God is himself bound to a higher moral law. The Hebrew Scriptures know nothing of "natural law" or a set of universally valid ethical claims independent of God's command. Isaac is liberated from his bondage and rescued from death by the offering "God will provide for Himself" (Gen 22:8) the self-offering of God in response to Abraham's obedience. Abraham and Isaac are rescued from obligation to the sacrificial order of Cain and freed from the slavery of sin. All future sacrifice in Israel will recall both their forgiveness and the high cost of liberation.²³

Abraham's obedience to God is mirrored and magnified in Isaac's obedience to Abraham. Isaac takes the form of the victim in the Akedah. Israel is identified with Abraham in his radical obedience to the commandment of God, but is further identified with Isaac as the innocent victim. Even though Abraham's hand was stayed against Isaac, Jewish tradition credits Abraham for the sacrifice of his son. Similarly, although Isaac is spared, it is as though he had been immolated, and he becomes a "resurrected" sacrifice. Where Israel is described as a priestly nation in identification with Abraham, the high priest of the human race, it is likewise a nation of living sacrifices through Isaac.²⁴ After the Akedah, God

²² "The Lord said to Moses, 'Say to the people of Israel, Any man of the people of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, who gives any of his children to Molech shall be put to death: the people of the land shall stone him with stones. I myself will set my face against that man, and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given one of his children to Molech, defiling my sanctuary and profaning my holy name. And if the people of the land do at all hide their eyes from that man, when he gives one of his children to Molech, and do not put him to death, then I will set my face against that man and against his family, and will cut them off from among their people, him and all who follow him in playing the harlot after Molech'" (Lev 20:1-5).

²³ One tradition puts Isaac's age at 37 at the time of the Akedah. The reasoning is as follows: Sarah was 90 years old when she gave birth, 127 years old at her death. When Abraham told Sarah what he had been commanded to do, Sarah dropped dead at the thought: 127-90=37.

²⁴ Paul may also allude to Isaac: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your

incorporates identification with the victim into the divine promise of Genesis 12:1-3.

We see then that "all social structure, the entire scapegoating machinery, is revealed as delusional, a delusional quality we are not permitted to see fully unless we observe the victim 'after death' so to speak" (Goodhart 2001). It is the resurrection of Isaac that converts Abraham. Isaac's "apparent resurrection is the subjective correlative of something most objective and real, (Abraham's) renunciation of (Adam's) bad desire" (Girard 1990, 218). The innocence of the victim upon which Cain founded the first city is forever revealed *for Israel* in the resurrection of Isaac, and the people of Israel become the incarnation of the Akedah revelation.

The Levitical sacrifices prescribed by the Torah have meaning to the extent that they participate in the meaning of Isaac's self-offering, and are offered in the spirit of Abraham's self-sacrificial obedience. The nature of the Levitical sacrifices—innocent animals, kosher and un-blemished—strengthens the identification with Isaac as innocent victim. The insistence that the sacrifices be offered only on Mount Moriah, the present day Temple Mount, underscores the physical connection between the Akedah and the Levitical sacrifices. The Temple sacrificial system contemporizes the Akedah in Israel's history. God's revelation is thereby preserved until the coming of the Messiah when revelation is proclaimed to the entire world. The Levitical sacrifices are of a qualitatively different nature from those practiced among the nations for the temporary expulsion of violence, pointing back in time to the Akedah and forward to the Messiah's sacrifice.

Careful analysis of the later prophetic critique of sacrifice reveals they were directed at sacrifices without repentance and not at sacrifices as such. The prophetic critique condemns sacrifice that has renounced the spirit of the Akedah and has become instead a mere imitation of what mimetic theory terms the single victim mechanism. However, alongside the many prophetic passages condemning sacrifices (see Mic 6:6-8; Is 1:10-17; Jer 6:20; Hos 5:6, 6:6, 9:11-13; Amos 5:21-25), stand many extolling the virtue of obedient sacrifice and predicting the triumphant return of faithful

sacrifice in Israel.²⁵ The prophets are here seen to condemn sacrifice to the extent that it does not partake of the meaning of the Akedah revelation.

The Gospel revelation is that Jesus entered and brought to light that dark place in our culture where we accuse and execute innocent victims to relieve our own confusion, violence and sin. The heart of the single victim mechanism is dark because its true nature is concealed, as it must be in order to be effective. The veiled reality of this mechanism finds a parallel in the holiest place of the Temple, set apart by a veil, and the Gospels record the rending of the veil at the moment of Jesus' death, and the revelation of that dark place by the light of truth. Israel, of course, always knew what was going on behind the veil in the Temple, even if the revelation remained mysterious in its effects: when the veil was finally removed, the mystery of the Akedah was exposed to all the world. The Gospel revelation is a mystery, but it, too, is a mystery patified. The once-secret knowledge of the single victim mechanism is now forever brought to light: the Akedah was the Gospel announced to Israel; the Gospel is the Akedah for the nations.

In his life, death, and resurrection Jesus Christ echoes and confirms all of the great realities of the Akedah: self-offering, obedience, identification with victims, and salvation from the sacrificial order of Cain. In his perfect

²⁵ "It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills: and peoples shall flow to it, and many nations shall come and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths'" (Mic 4:1-2); "And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, every one who keeps the sabbath, and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant--these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (Is 56:6-7); "But if you listen to me, says the Lord, and bring in no burden by the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but keep the sabbath day holy and do no work on it, then there shall enter by the gates of this city kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their princes, the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city shall be inhabited for ever. And people shall come from the cities of Judah and the places round about Jerusalem, from the land of Benjamin, from the Shephelah, from the hill country, and from the Negeb, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, cereal offerings and frankincense, and bringing thank offerings to the house of the Lord" (Jer 17:24-26); "For thus says the Lord: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn cereal offerings, and to make sacrifices for ever" (Jer 33:17-18).

submission to the will of God and self-sacrificial love towards all Jesus embodies positive mimesis, mirroring and magnifying Abraham's, and amplifying the blessings of the Akedah from Israel to the nations, as promised in Genesis 12:1-3. Christ's resurrection fulfills the meaning of the Akedah and announces the counter-sacrificial revelation to all the world.

The relationship of interdependence between Israel and the nations is ultimately intrinsic to God's revelation to the world. God's invitation goes out from Israel to all the families of the earth to embrace the self-sacrificial character of the innocent victim and to join the family of God in submission and obedience to God. The differentiated unity of the Akedah and the Gospel mirrors the divinely intended and enduring relationship between Israel and the nations. The localized Temple sacrifice is universalized in Christ. The temporary sacrifices of Israel are made eternal in Christ. It is in this sense that Christ has come to *complete* the Torah, by the universal extension in time and space of the Biblical revelation and the inclusion of all people across history in the family of God.

Torah and Law

Israel is the continuing incarnation of the salvation of Abraham out of the existing political order and his passage from the compulsory morality of the Fall to the freedom of obedience to God's commandment. The story of Joseph marks the transition from Abraham to Israel in the Biblical narrative. Here the elements of the divine revelation are all clearly discernible. Joseph's brothers covet his favored status and conspire against him, selling him into slavery. The brothers are then forced by famine many years later to seek aid from the Egyptian government, of which Joseph is now second in command. Joseph insists that the brothers bring Benjamin, the youngest son and now his father's favorite, in exchange for assistance, at which point his brother Judah volunteers to take Benjamin's place. Joseph, moved by his brother's offer, forgives his brothers and the family is reconciled. Even so, his brothers' initial jealousy and their expulsion of Joseph result in their descendants' eventual enslavement in Egypt. Giving in to covetousness and rivalry brings the family into the bondage of the pagan political order of Cain. Self-offering and forgiveness mark the way of redemption.

Israel is the community then of the Exodus from Egyptian captivity. The Passover lamb refers to the lamb of the Akedah "which God will provide for Himself." It signals redemption from slavery and forgiveness for sin. Having been liberated, the Israelites are able to respond to the

Torah given by God, not as to a legal document, but as to the commandment spoken by God to a people who freely answer.²⁶

Their liberation exposes the sacrificial order of Cain as well as the content of the "other way of life" God intends for Adam, Abraham, and his descendants. God does not deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt only to obligate them again under a contractual serfdom. The heart of the Torah is the Levitical sacrificial system that incarnates the salvation and conversion of Abraham and Isaac. The Levitical sacrifices describe God's forgiveness of sins not in the simple stroke of an accountant's pen, but at the cost of bearing one another's burdens. The Ten Commandments define a way of life free from rivalry with God: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me"; and free of conflict among people: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's" (Ex 20:1-2, 17).

Girard points out that the Torah contains prohibitions that subvert prohibition (Girard 1978a, 155). The Torah offers prohibitions like those resulting from sacred violence, yet also contain prohibitions that controvert ritual prohibition, e.g., "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lv 19:18), which precludes covetousness, interrupts rivalry, and obviates prohibition. In fact the Torah regularly upsets the secular order of exchange relations: the seventh day Sabbath depreciates the brutal necessity of work; the seventh year redemption of slaves and rest from cultivation of fields undermines the compulsion to exhaust nature and other people as if they had only utilitarian value; the prescriptions for fasting and tithing challenge the determination to consume and to possess.

Salvation in Christ, the "living Torah," is salvation out of the pagan political order into the Jewish familial order, conversion from the coercive legalism of the Fall into the freedom of obedience to God. Again, Jesus did not come to destroy the Torah and the Prophets, but to fulfill. St. Paul's "all things are lawful" (1 Cor 6:12) does not contradict the correct practice of the Torah.²⁷ Rather, the same freedom beyond morality originally attributed

²⁶ The well-known tradition that God offered the Torah to all peoples, but the Israelites were the only ones who responded and accepted, indicates that obedience to the Law was not *imposed* upon Israel, but rather freely given.

²⁷ The ongoing formation of halakhah testifies to the Jewish understanding of Torah not as a disembodied and absolute document, but as a living word from God to be constantly re-

to Adam before the Fall is reestablished by Abraham, offered to Israel in the Torah, and extended through Christ to all the world. The offer of grace has been extended from Israel to the nations, and those who respond are grafted onto the tree, Israel.

Fallen humanity by long habit and a stubborn blindness garbles the radical nature of this liberation, inverting it to fit the sacrificial pattern inherited from Cain. It is precisely this misapplication of the Torah Jesus condemns in his scathing indictments of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and others who make "the commandment of God of no effect" (Mt 15:6).²⁸ The individual is not set free by God only to submit to slavery under the political order. "Legalism" is a common term in American evangelical circles referring to a kind of sham obedience that seeks to appease an unforgiving god. Unfortunately, legalism is often attributed to the Torah, from which, it is argued, Christ has set us free. The perversity of this reasoning is exposed by putative "Christian Values" that erect a new legality while suppressing their pagan origins by scapegoating the Torah. Compelling Jewish converts to eat pork as proof of their renunciation of "the Law" provides us an especially egregious and risible instance of this tendency from early church history. No less uncomprehending are modern American efforts to legislate Christian morality (prayer in schools, abortion, the debate over posting the Ten Commandments in courtrooms), as if the Christian revelation consisted, like the secular order it oppugns and reverses, in the "restraint of beasts," those afoot in society at large and lurking in oneself.

appropriated and renewed. Halakhah corresponds to the relative Christian ethics Ellul ceaselessly championed that would prevent examples of relative ethics or halakhah from the New Testament from becoming ossified into absolute law. An example would be Paul's instructions concerning female headdress and behavior in the community of Christ-believers, which were apparently important issues in certain early congregations but have little relevance today beyond a general need for order within the community. Like Christian morality, halakhah had a propensity to become legalistic, and it is this legalistic misinterpretation of Torah, not the Torah itself, that Jesus condemns.

²⁸ "The mythical mentality can take (the Gospels) and construe them mythically, but quintessentially they are the destruction of myth." The complicity in the condemnation of Jesus on the part of the Jewish people, who were in possession of the revelation of the Hebrew scriptures, indicates that the Biblical narratives, including the Gospels, can be misconstrued (Girard 1996, 281).

Salvation and Conversion

The concealed and concealing nature of the secular order is its strength. The innocence of the victims of arbitrary violence is denied and the unjust foundation of law and order suppressed. A godless and self-righteous morality is masked by the appearance of false gods of violence whose anger must be continuously appeased.²⁹ The individual is deceived and self-deceiving, both a victim of and a participant in the structures that enslave him. Salvation for the individual consists then in the overcoming of personal "legalism" and deliverance from secular power,³⁰ but emerging from the obfuscations of the sacrificial order requires the intervention of something or someone from outside of its closed system.³¹

The Biblical stories are mythic in form yet subvert myth. From Abel onwards, they reveal the innocence of the victims of sacred violence and take their side, disrupting the victimary unanimity upon which the proper functioning of the sacrificial mechanisms depend. In the Gospels, God himself takes the form of the victim and suffers the predictable and fatal outcome of his encounter with the secular order. By unveiling the complicity of myth and ritual in the maintenance of an unjust order, the Biblical narrative decodes mythology and desacralizes the gods and rituals of the violent sacred.³² It is only in terms of its own truth that the Bible can be interpreted, while at the same time it deconstructs all other mythologies. Milbank observes:

The relationship of the Biblical narratives to the pagan myths is necessarily asymmetric: the former could not be critically read through the latter because it belongs to the mythic grammar to conceal and not to expose arbitrary and fundamental violence. The latter can be critically read through the former because the Biblical narratives constitute and renew themselves through a

²⁹ "Humans have always found peace in the shadow of their idols, that is to say, of human violence in sacralized form" (Girard 1978a, 255).

³⁰ "Salvation is precisely, *out of* this political domain which constantly reproduces 'original sin'" (Milbank 1987, 220).

³¹ "Rehabilitating the victim has a desacralizing effect" (Girard 1978a, 153); also, "If the first Christians managed to secede from the mimetic consensus, it was not their own strength that did it, according to the Gospels, but God's own Spirit...he dismantles the consensus against the victims" (Girard 1993, 350).

³² "Behind and beyond the myths one discerns the sacred of which they are an expression. It is by a kind of geography of the myths that one can discover the axes of the sacral world" (Ellul 1975, 121).

breaking with sacrificial violence which exposes its social reality (Milbank 1987, 213).³³

Both the political order and the legalistic consciousness of the individual are the result of the original sin, rejection of God. The Biblical narrative represents a break with and an exposure of the secular order. It then invites the individual to make that same break.³⁴ This break, or conversion, involves an identification with the victim and the simultaneous disavowal of complicity with the murderous mob.³⁵ The individual emerges from the mob when he takes the side of the victim *against* the violence of the political order³⁶ and *against* the coercive morality of the Fall. "The proclamation of the Gospel implies, for the liberation of the person to whom it is proclaimed, the indictment of that which holds him captive" (Ellul 1971a, 208). In the encounter with the Gospel revelation, the individual is persuaded to take the side of Jesus, the innocent victim, and to admit his own participation in the persecution of innocents. Jesus' forgiveness of his persecutors enables the individual to forgive others, and to be forgiven for his own complicity. The fatal necessity of the pagan order is set aside in the witness of the Biblical narrative that invites the individual, liberated from the political order and from a sinful consciousness, to participate in that witness.³⁷

Positive Content of the Life of Faith

The crucifixion of Jesus unmasks the violent nature of the political order, and this revelation sets the individual free from the necessity of that order. The individual may decline the "way of the Cross," and still the offer is made. He is presented with another option and may respond to God's love

³³ "The three great pillars of primitive religion—myth, sacrifice, and prohibitions—are subverted by the thought of the Prophets" (Girard 1978a, 155); compare: "How can we fail to realize that scripture, *in precisely the same way in which the myths contained in scripture itself are treated*, is the true destroyer of myths?" (Ellul 1971a, 206).

³⁴ "Just as conversion always means a break in individual life, so the intervention of revelation means a break in the whole group, in all society, and it unavoidably challenges the institution and established power, no matter what form this may take" (Ellul 1986, 133).

³⁵ "Faith emerges when individuals come out of the mob" (Girard 1996, 279).

³⁶ "Masked violence is found at all levels of society. Economic relations, class relations, are relations of violence, nothing else" (Ellul 1969, 86).

³⁷ "Knowing the shape of sin, and the shape of its refusal, we can at last be radically changed" (Milbank 1991, 397).

made manifest in the suffering atonement of Christ, or continue as best as he can to "sleep peacefully in his religious dream" (Ellul 1975, 207-8).³⁸ God's forgiveness in Christ interrupts the "pagan sacrificial chain of offense and revenge" (Milbank 1987, 215) binding individuals to the legal requirements of the city of Cain and its vindictive gods. Christ is the incarnation of a love that cannot be integrated into the Society of Technique. He opposes to its means and ends a perfectly "useless" truth, something fatal to its order, *ipso facto* (Ellul 1989, 182).

The Gospels are the record of a small minority who disassociated themselves from the social order that executed Christ and instead proclaimed his innocence, his cancellation of the fatal necessity of that order, and his victory over the finality of death. The Gospels and other New Testament writings bear witness to a community who participate in Christ's crucifixion through a penitential way of life and a forgiving practice that liberates and preserves freedom in opposition to the political order.³⁹ The imitation of Christ in his refusal of violence, his concern for victims, and his suffering endurance of evil constitute the freedom of life "in Christ."⁴⁰

Given the divine unveiling of the secular legal system, the followers of Christ understand the contradiction inherent to Christian participation in the legal order.⁴¹ Writing to the community of Christ-believers at Corinth, Paul asks (1 Cor 15:6), "Dare any of you, having a matter against one another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?"⁴² Paul harbored no illusions about the nature of secular power or its "convertibility."⁴³ All surveys of the Biblical critique of power, however, come

³⁸ "The Gospels cannot guarantee that people will act the right way: they are not some kind of recipe for the good society. What the Gospels do is to offer more freedom and to set the example" (Girard 1996, 278).

³⁹ "What are the prescriptions of the Kingdom of God? Basically, give up a dispute when mimetic rivalry is taking over. Provide help to victims and refuse all violence" (Girard 1996, 278).

⁴⁰ "In Jesus Christ, who is fully obedient and also fully free, the will of God is freedom.... The action of Christ takes effect in daily life through the mediation of our freedom" (Ellul 1976, 15).

⁴¹ "[Christian faith] does not change either the structure or the functioning of the state or politics. It sets up a relationship of conflict" (Ellul 1986, 158).

⁴² "'Violent excess' on the one hand, 'law and order' on the other have always fed on each other. What else could they feed upon? If they did not, we would be rid, by now, of both of them" (Girard 1978, 228).

⁴³ "There is no given Christian form of power...the only Christian political position consistent with revelation is the negation of power: the radical, total refusal of its existence.

up against Paul because Romans 13:1-7 seems to challenge all that the Bible, including Paul, has to say on the matter (see Ellul 1991; also Elliott 1997).

Some exegetes have reasoned that Paul's comments in 13:1-7 are too radical a departure from the subject matter surrounding the verses, so that these verses must be a later insertion by redactors. If these verses are deleted, 13:8 seems to follow reasonably from 12:21. Others attribute the traditional interpretation of the verses to Paul, but add counsel concerning extreme cases of political evil not accounted for in Paul's apparently absolute consecration of the powers. Ellul agrees that the verses do come from Paul, but must be properly contextualized both within the epistle and within Paul's other writings. The discussion prior to Romans 13 concerns loving and being at peace with others, both friend and enemy. The last verse of chapter twelve (Rm 12:21), "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good," leads into the discussion of political power, which is an evil that must be endured. Paul is far from advocating revolution or violent resistance, counseling submission instead. If we owe taxes, we pay them, nothing more. We recognize that these *exousia*, or powers are ultimately subject to God alone, but we know, too, that as Christians we have been called to struggle against these *exousia* (Eph 6:12). While these powers are already defeated by Christ, for the time being we experience and admit their necessity, but never their legitimacy.

Mark D. Nanos has recently suggested Paul's epistle has to do with the ordering of the community of faith at Rome, which at the time was a Jewish community into which the Christ-believers are integrated as sub-groups, however marginalized. The community, then, consisted of Gentile Christ-believers along with both believing and non-believing Jews (Nanos 1996). That it strikes Christians today as odd that both Christ-believing and non-Christ-believing Jews together with Christ-believing Gentiles would have comprised a community of faith in the years following Christ testifies to Christianity's disavowal of its Jewish roots. God's historical relationship to Israel is relegated to a propaedeutic function whose purpose has been superseded by Christian revelation, and the result is a gnosticizing of the Christian faith by the evacuation of the historical content of salvation *from* legalistic morality and *out of* the secular political order. Christianity has instead for centuries now consistently sought political power and used that power to enforce morality whenever possible.

a fundamental questioning of it, no matter what form it may take" (Ellul 1988, 172-3).

In the context of the letter, then, Romans 13:1-7 is "not concerned with the state, empire, or any other such organization of secular government" (Nanos 1996, 291). Instead, Paul's concern is "to address the obligation of Christians, particularly Christian *Gentiles*...to subordinate themselves to the leaders of the synagogues and to the customary 'rules of behavior' that had been developed in Diaspora synagogues for defining the appropriate behavior of 'righteous Gentiles' seeking association with Jews and their God."⁴⁴ Paul's advice is based not on arguments for the legitimacy of power, but rather on his previous arguments in chapters 9-11 concerning the historical, present, and future relationship between Jews and Gentiles. Paul is concerned to insure that the community in Rome continues to maintain a "different way of doing things," that the witness of the reconciled community against the secular order is not undermined by a failure to demonstrate the present reality of its eschatological hope. If one takes seriously Nanos' recent work (see also Elliott 1997), a new way is opened up to reconcile Paul's argument in Romans 13 with the rest of his letter, with his arguments against state power in other letters, and also with the entire Biblical witness against secular political power.

In any case, Paul does not suggest that the community of faith will or should seek to overthrow secular government, or that the Kingdom of God will either suddenly or by steady advance appear as the inevitable progression of earthly affairs. His imagery in the letter to the Romans suggests instead the Christ-believers as a remnant, a minority whose encounter with the political order will inevitably produce results in "the way of the cross."⁴⁵ These seven verses in Romans have become *the* text on secular power and the conduct of Christianity toward it, in spite of the overwhelming witness of the Biblical record *against* political power. It is unsettling to speculate on the sociological and psychological reasons that lead exegetes to value a few verses more highly than the vast collection of

⁴⁴ It is beyond the scope of this paper to detail Nanos' recontextualization of Paul's letter, but it is worth noting that Nanos is principally concerned with a coherent reading of Paul's letter, not a polemic against the state. Even so, Nanos concurs that "the call to subordination in Judaism carries an implicit, if not always explicit, judgment against foreign governments, even if God was somehow using their evil intentions to accomplish his ultimate goals" (Nanos 1996, 299).

⁴⁵ "The church should always be the breach in an enclosed world: in the world of Sartre's private individual as well as in the world of the perfection of technology, the totalism of politics or the strongbox of the kingdom of money" (Ellul 1971a, 209).

contradictory passages, and allow one brief passage to neutralize the entire thrust of the Scriptures on this matter. In light of our arguments in this essay, the traditional interpretation of the passage results from internalization of the violent order of the state and a secret reflection and validation of secular power. Christian statism is correlative to the "sacrificial reading" of the Gospels. Although they never advocate a fugitive or criminal practice toward the state, both Jesus and Paul consider the state to be neither legitimate nor divinely constituted. Paul was arrested, tried, and executed by the same court system that condemned and crucified Jesus. Their witness attests that the exigencies of secular power are to be suffered rather than sanctioned.⁴⁶

In St. John's Revelation, the Bible depicts an end to the earthly powers, not by the natural progression to the Kingdom of God on earth, but through the intervention of God and the return of Jesus Christ. The promise of God is not a return to Eden but the New Jerusalem, not the work of humans but the work of God who takes up human work into his own (Ellul 1970). The Kingdom of God will not *naturally* materialize on earth, but neither is the absolute dominion of secular power the *necessary* condition of our world. The community of faith, both Jew and Gentile, is called to be liberated and to liberate others from the predations of the state. Ellul writes: "The profound truth of our history can only be given to it by this union of Israel and the Church, the two bearers of hope for mankind, who must henceforth be one in order that all political actions might receive a meaning" (Ellul 1973, 306). God's revelation conceives no Christian state, but rather poses the question (Lk 18:8): "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

Conclusion

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them," Jesus says, "*Yet it shall not be so among you*" (Mt 20:25-6, emphasis added). Jesus' refusal of power resulted in his crucifixion, a signal of his failure to overturn the secular order. Paradoxically, it is this failure which is also the victory over the

⁴⁶ "If Christianity remains faithful to its inspiration and object, the God of love, it is incompatible with the exercise of political power. The combination of the two came about by accident" (Ellul 1975, 177).

powers,⁴⁷ and the followers of Christ are called to participate in that failure. Ellul writes:

It is truly a *fight*...against a power that can be changed only by means which are the opposite of its own. Jesus overcame the powers—of the state, the authorities, the rulers, the law, etc.—not by being more powerful than they but by surrendering himself even unto death (Ellul 1969, 166).

The Biblical revelation calls the community of faith to be the continuing incarnation of God's atonement, to endure the powers rather than sanctify them,⁴⁸ and to bear the burdens of those who suffer under secular power: "In every situation of injustice and oppression, the Christian—who cannot deal with it by violence—must make himself completely a part of it as *representative of the victims*" (Ellul 1969, 151-2, emphasis Ellul's). Apart from God resistance to the powers amounts to mere Stoic self-denial and masochistic self-sacrifice. Our confrontation of the powers instead proceeds from *concern for the victims* of secular dominion:

Freedom can be obtained only when we strive for it; no power can give freedom to people. Challenging power is the only way to make freedom a reality. Freedom exists if the negation of political power is strong enough, and when people refuse to be taken in by the idea that freedom will surely come tomorrow, if only.... No, there is no tomorrow. Freedom exists today or not at all. When we shake the edifice, we produce a crack, a gap in the structure, in which a human being can briefly find his freedom, which is always threatened. In order to bring this bit of play into the system, however, we must bring to it a radical, total refusal. Any concession to power enables the totality of power to rush into the small space we have opened. (Ellul 1988, 174)

Political power cannot self-limit and tends in every case to expand beyond all bounds. The *myth* of its necessity clears the way by paralyzing all resistance. Into this world of fatal necessity, Christ comes announcing liberty to captives: deliverance from the harsh supervision of unmerciful

⁴⁷ "The Passion is first and foremost the consequence of an intolerable revelation, while being proof of that revelation" (Girard 1978a, 166).

⁴⁸ "The works of the world remain works of darkness, but darkness into which a light has come, which does not validate or justify the darkness" (Ellul 1971a, 36).

morality and freedom to refuse power's exchange of happiness for servitude. Christ's resurrection defeated death, the true end of all necessity. In Christ we know that *our lives will not always be this way*, and the present hope of our resurrection enables the faithful (Jew *and* Gentile) to insinuate freedom into an otherwise ironclad system. We proclaim by our words and demonstrate in our action that another path exists beyond the constraints of the illusory "freedom" purchased or wrested by force from the hand of power. Freedom is realized only when we create it by our radical negation of power and our absolute refusal to submit again to a yoke of slavery under the state.

"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil" (Deut 30:15). God commands us to preserve the primordial liberty of life beyond morality and beyond the narrow choice that passes for freedom. The radical transformation of conversion in Christ extends the promise of a different way of life, not tomorrow, not in heaven, but here in the present world. Today, men and women around us will be set free, or continue to wither under a pitiless master. If we refuse to rescue those for whom Christ suffered and died, we surrender again to the forces of death. Today, we are either free men or slaves.

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THE BIBLE AND MODERNITY: REFLECTIONS ON LEO STRAUSS

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Responding to the criticisms made by Eric Voegelin and Alexandre Kojève of his book *On Tyranny*, Leo Strauss wonders whether the attempt to restore classical social science is not, perhaps, utopian, "since it implies that the classical orientation has not been made obsolete by the triumph of the biblical orientation" (Strauss 1991, 177-178). In similar fashion Strauss remarks to Karl Lowith how "there can be no doubt that our usual way of feeling is conditioned by the biblical tradition," even if he refuses to rule out the possibility of correcting that feeling (Lowith and Strauss, 111). This "triumph of the biblical orientation" concerns Strauss, since he believes no synthesis is possible between the competing claims of Athens and Jerusalem. The cultural predominance of one of these cities would jeopardize the vitality of western civilization, which depends upon the tension between them for its dynamism and life (Strauss 1989, 72; 1997, 116, 121). To speak of the triumph of the biblical in the modern West is to call attention to a disruptive imbalance. Strauss's overall project of reviving the classical orientation in politics can be understood as an attempt to restore a sense of equilibrium.

If the modern world reflects a victory of the biblical orientation, it is relevant to ask just how Strauss conceives the relationship between modernity and the Bible. Given Strauss's well known criticism of modernity, we may wonder whether this criticism is also an implicit criticism of the Bible and its influence. Answering this question is not an easy task. For someone who considered the opposition between Athens and Jerusalem to be the central issue confronting western civilization, Strauss

devotes a relatively meager amount of space to analysis of the Bible.¹ With rare exception we find nowhere near the amount of detailed commentary on biblical texts that we find in his treatment of the classics. What are we to make of an author who writes three books on Xenophon's Socrates, while limiting his only detailed biblical commentary to the first two chapters of Genesis? This discrepancy would pose no problem, but for the fact that Strauss repeatedly emphasizes the importance of keeping alive the question of the relationship between Greek and biblical traditions. By comparison, a thinker like Heidegger simply tends to dismiss or ignore the relevance of the Bible in addressing what he would take to be the contemporary crisis of western civilization. But Strauss insists that we cannot understand the modern world without a serious consideration of the claims of Athens and Jerusalem. His reticence, then, in treating biblical texts (especially the New Testament) with the same degree of probity as he employs when considering the texts of classical Greece, is puzzling. We are left wondering whether his own observation about Machiavelli is applicable to himself: "The silence of the wise man is always meaningful. It cannot be explained by forgetfulness" (Strauss 1958, 30; see Grant 1964; Steintrager 1968).

Strauss's silence may be significant, but arguments based upon an author's omissions are always more precarious than those which rely on written or spoken evidence. In the case of Strauss, there are in fact sufficient statements and hints in his work to enable us to recognize ways in which he construed the relationship between the Bible and modernity. Three themes stand out. The first is the notion that the eschatological vision of the Bible survives in modern times in transfigured and distorted form as the idea of progress. The second is Strauss's contention that the "final atheism" characteristic of late modernity is the child of an "intellectual

¹ As far as I can tell, Strauss devoted only one essay to a specific book of the Bible. That essay is "On the Interpretation of Genesis" (Strauss 1995b; Orr 1995). Strauss deals with much of the same material in his "Jerusalem and Athens: Some Preliminary Reflections" (Strauss 1995; Orr 1995), although the second part of the two part essay (constituting a quarter of the entire essay) contains brief quotes from Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. Another place in which he discusses the influence of the Bible is "Progress or Return?" (Strauss 1997). There is no extended treatment of any New Testament text anywhere in Strauss's published work. By contrast, Eric Voegelin (another political philosopher for whom the Athens/Jerusalem relationship was central) devoted an entire volume of his *Order and History* to drawing out the implications of Israel's experience (See Voegelin 1956). Voegelin also devoted a chapter in his *Ecumenic Age* to St. Paul and (See Voegelin 1974, 239-271) treated the gospels to some degree in his *History of Political Ideas*. See Voegelin (1997, 149-185) and his essay "The Gospel and Culture" (1990, 172-212).

probity" that has its roots in the biblical devotion to truth. The third is his understanding of the role biblical charity has played in the modern world. It is Strauss's treatment of biblical charity or love that will be the focus of this essay.

While it would be inaccurate to claim Strauss as an advocate of the secularization thesis with regard to modernity, he never denies the thesis outright, and he acknowledges that the modern project may, in fact, owe part of its inspiration to biblical teaching.² Although what is particularly distinctive about modern thought is the desire for human control over nature, Strauss is quite clear that "Biblical-Scholastic motives" contribute to this enterprise. He does not believe the issue can be settled by simply claiming that the Enlightenment is "Christianly motivated," because, in his view, any alleged Christian inspiration is inseparable from the Enlightenment's tendency to accommodate itself to Christianity for political reasons. Nonetheless, Strauss notes how the anti-Christian animus of many of the eighteenth century believers in progress disguises the true conflict playing itself out in modernity, which is the quarrel between Christianity and antiquity (Strauss 1990, 4-5; Lowith and Strauss 106, 112). However, while Strauss tends to associate the worst excesses of modernity with the legacy of Christianity, he is certainly aware of how the messianic strain in Judaism has likewise contributed to modern developments.³

In a rather lengthy footnote to the first chapter of his early work *Philosophy and Law*, Strauss makes a reference to the effects of the biblical tradition on modernity:

The Enlightenment's aim was the rehabilitation of the natural through the denial (or limitation) of the supernatural, but what it accomplished was the discovery of a new "natural" foundation which, so far from being natural, is rather the residue, as it were, of the "supernatural." The extreme possibilities and claims discovered by the founders of the religious as well as the

² For example, Strauss leaves open the possibility that Hobbes's antithesis between vanity and fear of violent death may be a secularized form of the Bible's contrast between pride and fear of God (Strauss 1984, 28; 1968, 20).

³ According to one of his interpreters: "Strauss attributed a seriously 'messianic' religious component or residual faith to modern philosophy in its very beginnings, irrespective of whether these were Machiavellian or Hobbesian. For Strauss, this is what differentiates modern philosophers from premodern: the belief that they can "transform, and even perfect, the nature of man and the world." (Green 1997, 72; see Strauss 1995, 200-207).

philosophical tradition by starting from the natural and the typical became, at the outset of modernity, self-evident and in this sense "natural"; hence they are no longer regarded as extremes requiring a radical demonstration, but themselves serve as a "natural" foundation for the negation or re-interpretation not only of the supernatural but also and precisely of the natural, the typical: in contrast to ancient and medieval philosophy, which understand the extreme by starting from the typical, modern philosophy, in its origin and in all cases where it is not restoring older teachings, understands the typical from the extreme. Thus, by leaving out of account the "trivial" question about the essence and teachability of virtue, the extreme ("theological") virtue of charity becomes the "natural" ("philosophic") virtue; thus the critique of the natural ideal of courage...is now "radicalized" in such a way that the character of virtue in courage as such is denied outright...(Strauss 1995a, 135-136)

I have quoted this passage at some length because it captures the essentials of Strauss's understanding of charity and its role in constituting the modern horizon. Before commenting on the passage, it may be helpful to say something about its context, which is a discussion of the effects of the Enlightenment on Judaism. For Strauss, "the present situation of Judaism...is determined by the Enlightenment." Further, if "the foundation of the Jewish tradition is belief in creation of the world, in the reality of the Biblical miracles, in the absolutely binding character and essential immutability of the Law, resting on the revelation at Sinai, then one must say that the Enlightenment has undermined the foundation of the Jewish tradition" (Strauss 1995a, 22-23). Strauss then distinguishes between what he describes as the radical Enlightenment (exemplified by figures such as Spinoza, Hobbes, Voltaire), which intentionally and purposefully set out to undermine the tradition, and the moderate Enlightenment, which tried to "mediate between orthodoxy and radical enlightenment, between belief in revelation and belief in the self-sufficiency of reason" (e.g., Moses Mendelssohn). Believing the position of the moderate Enlightenment to have been declared untenable by the judgment of history, Strauss focuses his attention on those later Jewish thinkers, who, acknowledging the untenability of the moderate view, and conceding that the battle between enlightenment and orthodoxy cannot be won at the level on which it has been previously fought, take the debate to a "higher" level wherein the foundation of the tradition can be reestablished through a synthesis of

Enlightenment and orthodoxy (Strauss 1995a, 23-24). What occurs in this process is the "internalization" of traditional doctrines concerning creation, miracles, and revelation. For Strauss, however, this attempted defense of orthodoxy is, in fact, a disavowal of the tradition, a disavowal resting upon two serious errors. The first consists in explaining "external" orthodox beliefs (such as the literal belief in miracles, creation, and audible revelation) as belonging to an undeveloped stage of the tradition and considering later developments (like prophetic messianism) as an advance; the second error appeals against orthodoxy to the more "extreme" statements that have arisen within the tradition. The passage quoted earlier refers to this second error. In Strauss's view, the peak of the pyramid has been made into the foundation. This distortion is but one more capitulation to the Enlightenment, in that the "extremes of the tradition" have been rendered as "the foundation of a position that is actually completely incompatible with the tradition" (Strauss 1995a, 23-24).

What is striking in both the passage cited above and in Strauss's discussion of these issues is the frequent use of the word "extreme." This usage is crucial in understanding Strauss's position, since, as we shall see later, the way of classical philosophy is held up as a model of "moderation." Central also to Strauss's approach is his choice of example: "the extreme ('theological') virtue of charity" has become the "'natural' ('philosophic') virtue." Strauss faults the Enlightenment for presenting charity (traditionally understood as a supernatural virtue) as a natural virtue. For our purposes what is interesting here is Strauss's rendering of the traditional distinction between the natural and the supernatural in terms of a distinction between the natural (or typical) and the extreme. In developing and employing the terminology of natural and supernatural, the Christian theological tradition wished to say something about how human nature can achieve its highest potential only when brought to completion and animated by the love of God, which is itself disproportionate to "mere" nature. The traditional emphasis is on the supernatural as the perfection of the natural. It would be most unlikely in this context, to refer to charity as an "extreme" in relationship to nature. In Strauss's formulation, this is precisely what happens. Rather than the supreme fulfillment of human nature, charity is contrasted with the natural as a conceptual possibility arising within the tradition, which taken from its original setting, easily leads to the kinds of distortions Strauss sees as culminating in modernity. Yet one could also make the case that, contrary to Strauss's account, from a biblical perspective the supernatural is not arrived at by starting from the

natural, but rather the reverse; the human is understood first in relationship to God, and the natural is only understood in that light.⁴

Strauss's observations about the "naturalization" of charity in the Enlightenment are not dissimilar to comments made by some students of René Girard. Gil Bailie notes how:

Participants in Western culture have lived for so long under the influence of the biblical ethos that it is difficult for us to fully appreciate its uniqueness. So pervasive is the concern for victims it arouses that there is a tendency for us to think of it as either a natural, universal emotion or a personal moral achievement for which the individual can take credit. (Bailie 1997, 30)

As with Strauss, we find acknowledgment of the modern tendency to mistake a theological, biblically-inspired virtue for a natural human inclination. Nor would Strauss be apt to disagree with the judgment that "both the secularizing and rationalizing impulses it espoused were products of the Judeo-Christian tradition that the Enlightenment came into existence by underestimating and repudiating" (Bailie 1997, 12).

What is absent from Strauss's account of these modern developments is that which is central for Girard—the gradual recognition of the victim within the biblical text. Girard is very much aware of the link between the Bible and modernity, and he insists that it is impossible to "conceal the true origin of our modern concern for victims; it is quite obviously Christian. Humanism and humanitarianism develop first on Christian soil" (Girard 2001, 163). With this reference to the gospels, Girard points to the source of that "residue of 'supernatural'" Strauss finds at the root of modern claims

⁴ Consider, for example, the discussions that went on in Roman Catholic theological circles in the 19th and 20th centuries concerning the idea of "pure nature." There the concept of nature is understood in light of (and in a sense derived from) the human person's fundamental orientation to God in love (McCool 1989). One could argue that this is not Strauss's tradition, and that he should not be faulted for not using this terminology in the Catholic sense. Obviously neither Strauss nor anyone else is bound to use these concepts with the same meaning they had in the medieval Christian context. But that is entirely different from maintaining that one's interpretation is an accurate reflection of what the earlier tradition actually meant. I believe Strauss is doing precisely this in the passage we are considering. Anyone familiar with Strauss's work knows his highly critical attitude toward those who would claim to understand an author or a tradition better than they understand themselves. Given that, we are lead to assume that Strauss believes he understands the distinction between natural and supernatural in the manner in which it was originally meant.

about the naturalness of charity. A focus on the biblical concern for victims also enables Girard to explain how and why the supernatural has become transfigured into the natural virtue of the Enlightenment, something Strauss describes but does not explain. When the truth about the victim is revealed, it becomes increasingly difficult to defend the self-justifying myths that have, until then, sustained society. Societies under the influence of the Bible begin to lose their ability to generate lasting, convincing myths. It should come as no surprise then, that when these societies look back at their own histories they find it difficult to understand how anyone could have ever believed such tales. As a case in point, Girard calls attention to the modern capacity to decode medieval and early modern persecution texts. Modern interpreters see through these texts to the acts of scape-goating violence behind them. If the Enlightenment takes this ability to recognize victims as a manifestation of natural benevolence, tolerance, and charity, this is because of the increasing pervasiveness of biblical revelation. The biblical insight concerning victimization has, in fact, become "second nature." The Enlightenment's blind spot is to confuse the sins of the institutional bearers of this revelation with the revelation itself. Thus in Girard's reading, it is not the case (as it is for Strauss) of modernity seizing upon "extremes" within the tradition and taking these to excessive lengths; rather it is a matter of the legitimate development of the tradition in a direction already implicit within the tradition. In the case of the Enlightenment we have a culture wrestling with the implications of its own best, inherited insights. For Girard, biblical faith is responsible for what is best in the modern world, and the excesses of modernity are distortions of the biblical truth at its core (Girard 1996, 279, 287). Despite these excesses, the Enlightenment's embrace of charity, tolerance, and compassion are part of the historical unfolding of the primary and central thrust of biblical revelation. Strauss does not deny the biblical origins of the Enlightenment's appropriation of charity; but he interprets this as the uprooting of one of the "extreme possibilities and claims" of the biblical tradition from its original context. Without the balancing weight of the broader tradition, charity easily becomes a force of disorder in the modern world. Where Girard sees continuity, Strauss sees discontinuity.

What are the specific effects of charity on the modern horizon? Strauss indicates some possibilities:

According to classical philosophy the end of the philosophers is radically different from the end or ends actually pursued by the

nonphilosophers. Modern philosophy comes into being when the end of philosophy is identified with the end which is capable of being actually pursued by all men. More precisely, philosophy is now asserted to be essentially subservient to the end which is capable of being actually pursued by all men....In this respect, the modern conception of philosophy is fundamentally democratic. The end of philosophy is now no longer what one may call disinterested contemplation of the eternal, but the relief of man's estate. Philosophy thus understood could be presented with some plausibility as inspired by biblical charity, and accordingly philosophy in the classic sense could be disparaged as pagan and as sustained by sinful pride. One may doubt whether the claim to biblical inspiration was justified and even whether it was always raised in entire sincerity...Philosophy or science was no longer an end in itself, but in the service of human power, of a power to be used for making human life longer, healthier, and more abundant. (Strauss 1968, 19-20)

At the same time as he raises the possibility of doubt about the influence of biblical charity on modern philosophy, Strauss grants some plausibility to the view that modern philosophy takes its inspiration from this source. This caution is typical of Strauss. He almost never criticizes the Bible directly; instead he raises questions, suggests possibilities and creates associations in the minds of his readers.⁵ Elsewhere, however, he is less reticent in making explicit the connection between modern philosophy and biblical morality.⁶ What is clear in any case is Strauss's linking of charity with the

⁵ I believe Strauss's reticence here is a reflection of his own ambiguous relationship to the Bible. As I have argued elsewhere, Strauss tends to emphasize those aspects of the Bible having to do with law, punishment, and restraint. These aspects of the Scriptures are well suited for the guidance of non-philosophers (the vast majority of the populace), and are therefore quite useful to society. But Strauss is also aware of the prophetic-messianic tradition within Judaism (and its importance for Christianity), with its emphasis on the coming transformation of this world through the action of God in history. It is this aspect of the biblical message that Strauss associates with modernity, and which he tends to downplay when discussing the Bible. This tension in Strauss's thought is reflected in the passage quoted above. To emphasize the connection of the biblical message to modernity is to run the risk of discrediting the Bible as a whole, thus casting doubt on those elements worth preserving; to disregard or to deny this connection would be to falsify history.

"Modern rationalism rejected biblical theology and replaced it by such things as deism, pantheism, and atheism. But in this process, biblical morality was in a way preserved. Goodness was still believed to consist in something like justice, benevolence, love, or charity..." (Strauss 1997, 99; see Strauss 1997b, 81; Strauss 1947, 329).

modern concern for the "relief of man's estate." This leads, in his view, to a subordination of philosophy to extra-philosophical goals, in the interest of serving human needs. From the perspective of classical philosophy, this is a deflection of philosophy from its true path. Strauss cites Francis Bacon to the effect that unlike Greek philosophy, biblical religion makes the human person rather than the cosmos the true image of God (Strauss 1984, 90-91). In his reflections on Genesis, Strauss repeatedly calls attention to the Bible's depreciation of the heavens and its overriding concern for the earthly life of human beings. And even though the biblical authors were not familiar with philosophy in its classical form, they were sufficiently cognizant of Babylonian cosmological reflection (which for Strauss, is a prototype of philosophy) to be able to make the quite intentional choice to question its importance (Strauss 1995, 185-186; 1995b, 219-223). This turning toward the human is an implicit criticism of the "superhuman" contemplative ideal of the philosophers. Likewise, there is a significant lowering of the horizon as the highest type of human life is relegated to a position of lesser rank when compared to the biblical call for moral virtue (Strauss 1984, 12).

The Bible's focus on human affairs at the expense of contemplation paves the way for modern philosophy:

The shifting of interest from the eternal order to man, and thus to application, had as we have seen, found expression earlier in the turning of philosophy to history. Carried to its logical conclusion, it leads to Hobbes's political philosophy. (Strauss 1984, 100)

In the philosophy of Hobbes, the classical, aristocratic virtues are denigrated, replaced by the virtues of justice and charity:

In place of the triad "honour, justice, and equity," we have more and more the two concepts "justice and charity." Thus the more Hobbes elaborated his political philosophy, the further he departed from his original recognition of honour as virtue, from the original recognition of aristocratic virtue. (Strauss 1984, 50)

We must be careful, though, not to misunderstand Strauss's point about the influence of biblical charity on modern thought. It would be highly misleading to depict Strauss as a postmodern Scrooge, frowning at the sight of human acts of benevolence. It would be more accurate to say that he worries about the unintended consequences of granting charity a dominant

position among the virtues that order society. For example, in the first quotation cited in this paragraph, he remarks how the shift of interest "from the eternal order to man" is, in fact, a move toward a focus on "application." Strauss believes a focus on application (in other words, practicality) can easily deteriorate into the manipulation and domination of human life. He suggests as much when he notes how:

According to the modern project, philosophy or science was no longer to be understood as essentially contemplative and proud but as active and charitable; it was to be of service of man's estate; it was to enable man to become the master and owner of nature through the intellectual conquest of nature. (Strauss 1978, 3-4)

When Strauss criticizes Hobbes for allowing "justice and charity" to supplant the aristocratic virtues, it is because in so doing, Hobbes removes the necessary forces of prudence and moderation that would prevent practicality (in the interest of charity), from degenerating into manipulative oppression. Hobbes may consider charity along with justice to be the cardinal virtues, but that does not prevent him from devising a political philosophy that is hardly the embodiment of charity in any recognizably biblical sense. Hobbes may have been motivated by a desire to foster the well being of the members of the commonwealth, but the society he envisions creates and sustains itself by means that are anything but charitable. Strauss does not fault Hobbes for being too kind and compassionate in devising his political philosophy; his point is that charity, insofar as it is a virtue directed toward human need rather than human excellence has the effect of deflecting human life from its highest aspirations. It is certainly not a question of Strauss having mistaken Hobbes for Francis of Assisi.

With this in mind, we can better appreciate the following passage, in which Strauss describes some of the consequences of allowing charity to acquire dominance in society:

By Machiavelli's time the classical tradition had undergone profound changes. The contemplative life had found its home in monasteries. Moral virtue had been transfigured into Christian charity. Through this, man's responsibility to his fellow men and for his fellow men, his fellow creatures, had been infinitely increased. Concern with the salvation of men's immortal souls seemed to permit, nay, to require courses of action which would

have appeared to the classics, and which did appear to Machiavelli, to be inhuman and cruel...He seems to have diagnosed the great evils of religious persecution as a necessary consequence of the Christian principle, and ultimately of the Biblical principle. He tended to believe that a considerable increase in man's inhumanity was the unintended but not surprising consequence of man's aiming too high. Let us lower our goals so that we shall not be forced to commit any bestialities which are not evidently required for the preservation of society and of freedom. Let us replace charity by calculation, by a kind of utilitarianism *avant la lettre*. Let us revise all traditional goals from this point of view. I would then suggest that the narrowing of the horizon which Machiavelli was the first to effect, was caused, or at least facilitated, by anti-theological ire—a passion which we can understand but of which we cannot approve (Strauss 1988, 43-44).

Some of Strauss's most ardent defenders have been troubled by these observations, because they imply that "the elevation of human expectations due to charity 'caused,' indirectly at least, a sort of fanaticism in modernity" (Schall 1994, 226). Strauss makes an explicit contrast between the classical tradition, which would have recoiled at the thought of committing atrocities in the interest of saving souls, and the biblical tradition, whose sense of responsibility for the well-being of others leads necessarily to persecution. Nor should Strauss's criticism of the modern "narrowing of the horizon" inaugurated by Machiavelli lead us to conclude that Strauss is criticizing Machiavelli's insight into the connection between the biblical charity and religious intolerance. Strauss never says Machiavelli is mistaken in his judgment about the effects of charity; rather he faults Machiavelli's *reaction* to these effects. Confronted with the social disruption wrought by charitable intentions gone awry, Machiavelli opts for the way of "calculation" to bring peace through a more judicious and effective use of violence. But calculation is but another word for the preoccupation with practicality Strauss associates with the influence of charity on the modern society. In Machiavelli, Strauss sees a political thinker who turns to calculation in order to stem the violence that results from persecutory zeal. Machiavelli's remedy may be wrong, but his diagnosis is correct. To block the dangerous effects of aiming too high, Machiavelli lowers the horizon. Strauss believes this to be a mistake, and he looks to the classics for models of society that aim high, while remaining free of the harshness that all too frequently accompanies the reign of charity.

This may help to explain Strauss's comment about the narrowing of the horizon by Machiavelli being caused by "anti-theological ire"—"a passion which we can understand but of which we cannot approve." Strauss understands Machiavelli's "anti-theological ire" because he believes there is good reason for it—the Bible is to blame, however indirectly, for the crimes of which it stands accused. But Strauss cannot approve of this passion. He cannot approve of it because it has so consumed Machiavelli as to lead him to adopt the wrong solutions to religiously inspired problems. Machiavelli's turn to "calculation" is ill conceived, and contributes to the further subordination of the contemplative life to politics. He thereby accelerates the biblical revolution against the classical aristocratic tradition.⁷ Strauss also recognizes that anti-theological passions should be kept hidden. Society needs religion; to undermine it overtly is counterproductive for those who wish to serve lasting social goals. The classics understand this better than Machiavelli. In Strauss's eyes, Machiavelli's teaching contains nothing unfamiliar to the classical authors. The primary difference is that Machiavelli states boldly and in his own name what the classical writers would only suggest indirectly through the mouths of their characters (Strauss 1958, 10; 1987, 297). This is his fundamental error. By addressing himself so directly to his readers, he makes philosophy a public phenomenon. Strauss sees this as Machiavelli's resort to "propaganda," which in Strauss's opinion is yet another feature of the biblical legacy. Machiavelli follows in the footsteps of Jesus, the greatest of the "unarmed prophets" (since Machiavelli sees himself as an unarmed prophet as well), who used propaganda to achieve victory for Christianity. Machiavelli "attempted to destroy Christianity by the same means by which Christianity was originally established" (Strauss 1998, 45). The public nature of the Christian proclamation stands in stark contrast to the subtlety of "Socratic rhetoric:"

Its purpose is to lead potential philosophers to philosophy both by training them and by liberating them from the charms which obstruct the philosophic effort, as well as to prevent the access to philosophy of those who are not fit for it. Socratic rhetoric is emphatically just. It is animated by the spirit of social

⁷ (See Drury 1988, 118). Unfortunately, Drury sometimes so overstates or exaggerates her case against Strauss as to spill over into caricature. This should not detract, though from the many excellences of the book.

responsibility. It is based on the premise that there is a disproportion between the intransigent quest for truth and the requirements of society, or that not all truths are always harmless. Society will always try to tyrannize thought. Socratic rhetoric is the classic means for ever again frustrating these attempts. (Strauss 1991, 27)

An author like Xenophon understood how best to influence politics:

[He does so] not by protesting that he does not fear hell nor the devil, nor by expressing immoral principles, but by simply failing to take notice of the moral principles. He has to reveal his alleged or real freedom from morality, not by speech but by silence. For by doing so—by disregarding morality "by deed" rather than by attacking it "by speech"—he reveals at the same time his understanding of political things. Xenophon, or his Simonides, is more "politic" than Machiavelli; he refuses to separate "moderation" (prudence) from "wisdom" (insight). (Strauss 1991, 56)

Machiavelli's teaching, as public and as outspoken has more in common with biblical prophecy than with the subtle wisdom of the classics. Machiavelli forgets what classical thinkers never lost sight of—"the end of the philosophers is radically different from the end or ends actually pursued by the nonphilosophers." If, as Strauss maintains, the Bible is responsible for the erosion of this all-important distinction, then Machiavelli has unwittingly succumbed to its influence. Even the great Florentine thinker remains tainted by the "extreme" virtues he opposes.

In summary, Strauss understands the effects of biblical charity on modernity in the following fashion: because the impulse of charity results in an overriding concern for the well-being of others, philosophy is now forced to take its bearings from the ends pursued by the multitude and to work toward the alleviation of their suffering. But along with this heightened sense of responsibility for human welfare comes a temptation toward social engineering and religious persecution. This combination of the advance of charity as the dominant social virtue in conjunction with an increased threat of coercion and violence has some similarities to what Girard would describe as the apocalyptic situation in which modern men and women find themselves (Girard 1987, 260-261). The modern world benefits from the revelation of the victimage mechanism and the "un-

veiling" (apocalypse) of its culture-generating violence. But this revelation does not result in an immediate embrace of the biblical message; in fact, the unwillingness to adopt the biblical solution can lead to worse violence (at least in the short term). As sacrificial mechanisms lose their effectiveness under the pressure of biblical revelation, people "will be tempted to restore the lost effectiveness of the traditional remedy by forever increasing the dosage, immolating more and more victims in holocausts that are meant to be sacrificial but that are progressively less so" (Girard 1987, 128, 203). Thus the culture that does more than any other to call attention to victims and to do more on their behalf is also the culture in which the number of victims may swiftly increase. On one level this seems to correspond to the tendencies Strauss criticizes about modernity, with its concern for both the "relief of man's estate" and its zeal for persecution.

In fact Strauss and Girard differ considerably in their explanation for the simultaneous increase in both violence and concern for human welfare in the modern world. Girard attributes the increase in violence to the disorder accompanying the breakdown of failing sacrificial structures under pressure from Judeo-Christian revelation. Strauss draws a much more direct connection between the sense of responsibility for others generated by biblical charity, and the tendency for this sense of responsibility to lead to the coercion of those deemed to be in need of enlightenment or reform. In addition, Strauss sees the impact of charity as contributing to a lowering of the horizon he associates with modernity; for Girard the increased concern for victims, which is part of the Bible's legacy to the modern world, represents perhaps the greatest advance ever in human culture. Girard is as attentive as is Strauss to the danger inherent in modern Western civilization's combination of concern for human welfare joined to unprecedented technological and economic might. But from Girard's perspective, Strauss's account of modernity appears to provide only half of the story:

In our perpetual comparisons between our world and the others of the past, we always use two weights and two measures. We do everything possible to conceal the overwhelming superiority of our world, which in any case, is in competition only with itself as it takes in the entire planet. Whether we examine the matter attentively or not, we easily see that everything people say about our world is true: it is by far the worst of all worlds. They say repeatedly—and this is not false—that no world has made more victims than it has. But the opposite proposition is equally true:

our world is also and by far the best of all worlds, the one that saves more victims than any other. (Girard 2001, 164-165)

What Girard enables us to do is to recognize how much Strauss's own position emerges from a cultural horizon already formed by the biblical critique of victimization. It is quite clear that Strauss is concerned with persecution; it is one of his indictments of charity's effect on modernity that it leads to greater violence against victims. But the ability to make this critique is itself a result of the Bible's influence. Strauss decries religious persecution, and he is well aware of the Christianity's historical sins in this regard. He therefore draws the conclusion that it is ultimately the Bible (especially the New Testament) that is to blame. In doing so, he allows the scandal of religious persecution as it has existed in the West to block his insight into the revelation of the victim. Here Girard's distinction between sacrificial, historical Christianity and the gospel is helpful. By distinguishing between the Bible's unmasking of the sacrificial structures at the basis of culture, and the fact that it takes even the recipients of this revelation centuries and centuries to be weaned away from a reliance on these structures, Girard can explain the paradox of a religious tradition simultaneously being the cause of the disintegration of the victimage mechanism and the perpetuator of that mechanism. In Strauss's case his clear-sightedness about persecution does not translate into the explicit recognition of the victim as manifest in the biblical text. Associating the roots of persecution with biblical charity, he draws upon classical wisdom as the source of his critique; a source that, he assures us, would have viewed such persecution as "inhuman and cruel." It is ironic how, in his criticism of religious persecution, Strauss, the critic of modernity, relies upon arguments quite similar to those employed by Enlightenment thinkers in their attacks against institutional religion. The *philosophes* contrasted the violence of "positive religion" with the tolerance and charity of "natural religion." Strauss, by comparison, criticizes biblical religion from the perspective of "the wisdom and moderation" of the classics. But he is at one with his modern foes in tracing the root of religious intolerance to the claims of biblical faith. As Machiavelli was unable to free himself from the Christianity he opposed, Strauss is and remains more of a modern than he is willing to admit.

With this juxtaposition of modern cruelty and classical moderation we return to the question posed by Strauss in *On Tyranny* as to whether "the classical orientation has not been made obsolete by the triumph of the

biblical orientation" (Strauss 1991, 177-178). If the triumph of the biblical tradition has led to the modern impasse, then there is some urgency in discovering non-biblical sources for renewal. Although there are other places in his writings where Strauss takes up the issue of Athens and Jerusalem, nowhere does he address the issue with as great a degree of subtlety as in *On Tyranny*. Apart from his mention of the "triumph of the biblical orientation," the contrast between Athens and Jerusalem is rarely made explicit in this work, yet the entire volume is permeated with the tension, and, I would argue, with Strauss's preference for Athens over Jerusalem. *On Tyranny* is also interesting from the point of view of mimetic theory, for here, in his encounter with Kojève; Strauss comes closest to dealing with the problem of mimetic desire and its social/political implications. As has been the case throughout this essay, the point of reference will be Strauss's understanding of the role of charity.

In *On Tyranny*, the term "charity" (specifying the biblical notion of love) is not used; instead Strauss employs the term "love" throughout his discussion, without indicating the Greek word to which he is referring. This allows him to discuss love in a generic way, calling attention to what its several meanings have in common. Strauss's discussion of love occurs in the context of his analysis of Xenophon's dialogue, *Hiero* (or *Tyrannicus*). The topic of love is brought up as Simonides the poet and Hiero the tyrant converse about the relative merits of love versus admiration. Strauss takes the view that admiration is superior to love. Love is too concerned with the opinions of others; the wise person is indifferent to being loved but relishes the admiration of the few who are similar in excellence (Strauss 1991, 89). The range of love is also more limited than that of admiration; one can be admired, but hardly loved by one's enemies. Strauss goes on to point out further instances of love's deficiencies in comparison to admiration:

Each man loves what is somehow his own, his private possession; admiration or praise is concerned with the excellent regardless of whether it is one's own or not. Love as distinguished from admiration requires proximity. The range of love is limited not only in regard to space, but likewise...in regard to time. A man may be admired many generations after his death whereas he will cease to be loved once those who knew him well are dead. Desire for "inextinguishable fame," as distinguished from desire for love, enables a man to liberate himself from the shackles of the Here and Now. (Strauss 1991, 89)

Strauss then concludes, "Admiration seems less mercenary than love." "It also follows that "Admiration is as much superior to love as the man of excellence is to one's benefactor as such." Strauss expresses this same insight in other words when he notes how "love has no criterion of relevance outside itself, but admiration has." Those who wish to rule are driven by the desire to be loved, whereas:

The wise man is as self-sufficient as is humanly possible; the admiration which he gains is essentially a tribute to his perfection, and not a reward for any services. The desire for praise and admiration as distinguished and divorced from the desire for love is the natural foundation for the predominance of the desire for one's own perfection. (Strauss 1991, 89-90)

This passage can help us to understand the distinction Strauss draws between admiration and honor. The person who is admired or who seeks to be admired desires to possess those qualities that embody human excellence. Those who wish to be *honored* may be interested simply in the acclaim of the crowd, whether or not they are actually virtuous. I use the conditional "may" because someone who is indeed excellent may be honored as well, and he or she may actually desire to be recognized for possessing such excellence. But Strauss's point is that external acclaim is secondary; the excellent or admirable person is interested in his or her perfection in virtue, not in being honored. By comparison, someone motivated by the desire to be loved, will be far more likely to seek to be honored, since love, in Strauss's view, is dependent on the response of others. In the course of his analysis it becomes increasingly clear how the desire for love and the desire for admiration are virtually antithetical (Gourevitch 1968, 73).

Of course this contrast between love and admiration only works if we accept Strauss's account of love as essentially self-seeking. We love those who benefit us and we benefit others in order to gain their love. On Strauss's reading one can readily admire someone for his or her excellent qualities independently of any benefit one might derive from him or her. But in the case of love, Strauss excludes the possibility of loving another purely for his or her own sake or because it is the nature of love to do so

without thinking of oneself.⁸ In other words, the biblical notion of charity as unconditional self-giving is not seriously entertained in Strauss's account of the nature of love. Yet Strauss seems sufficiently aware of the challenge posed to his understanding by the biblical tradition that he includes a brief reference to the New Testament in a footnote to his commentary. In the text, the footnote falls immediately after Strauss observes how love, unlike admiration, requires proximity in space and time. The relevant part of the footnote reads: "Cf. 1 Peter 1.8 and Cardinal Newman's comment: 'St. Peter makes it almost a description of the Christian, that he loves whom he has not seen.'"⁹ Obviously the passages cited contradict the idea that love requires nearness in space and time. But is this really the primary difference between the New Testament's teaching on love and the classical tradition's teaching on admiration? Certainly there are numerous passages from both the Jewish Bible and the New Testament that speak with greater directness and force to the significant differences between biblical teaching on love and the aristocratic ethic of classical Greece. But neither in *On Tyranny* or elsewhere in his writings does Strauss treat this theme with any degree of probity. His silence with regard to the New Testament is particularly deafening. In the passage under consideration it may be well to note that the Greek word for love in the passage from 1 Peter is derived from *agape* rather than from *philia*. Strauss is too sensitive a reader of texts not to have noticed this difference. Yet he excludes any consideration of love as selfless regard for another, independently of whether or not that other is seen or unseen. What, then, are we to conclude? By relegating to a footnote the insights of the religious tradition most responsible for Western civilization's discourse about love, and by reducing the difference between the biblical and classical traditions on this issue to a matter of the spatial/temporal proximity required by love, Strauss conveys much about his attitude toward the biblical perspective. By ignoring the difference between *agape* and *philia* he subsumes the biblical notion within his overall understanding of love, depriving it of its force and distinctiveness. This might not be noteworthy, except for the fact that, as we have already seen,

⁸ Gourevitch states: "He [Strauss] does not allow that we love—or, for that matter, that we benefit—others for their own sakes, any more than he allows for the kind of love that seeks no return. We love—or benefit—others for our own sakes alone" (1968, 72).

⁹ (Strauss 1991, 125). The passage from 1 Peter reads: "Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy."

Strauss himself frames the issue under consideration in *On Tyranny* as a question of how best to make a case for classical social science in the face of the "triumph of the biblical orientation." One would think, under these circumstances, the biblical orientation would be given due consideration.

Kojeve, as part of his response to Strauss, identifies precisely what it is about the biblical tradition that Strauss excludes from his consideration of love. He argues that "man is *loved* solely because he *is*, and independently of what he *does* (a mother loves her son in spite of his faults)," and "love is specifically characterized by the fact that it attributes a positive value to the beloved or to the *being* of the beloved *without reason*" (Strauss 1991, 156). Strauss answers by pointing to the fact that a mother loves her son because he is *her own*, thus reiterating his claim that we only tend to love what is in some sense ours. While Strauss may have found the weakness in Kojève's example, he has not necessarily disproved Kojève's broader point. The primary focus of Kojève's example is not on the fact that the son "belongs" to the mother, but on the *character* of maternal love as regard for the other "independently of what he does." In other words, Kojève's point (as distinguished from his example) would be entirely reconcilable with the notion of love of one's enemies, an example that would not be open to Strauss's objection, unless of course we love our enemies because they are our own.

If anything, Kojève argues, Strauss has gotten the relationship between love and admiration exactly backwards. It is love that acts without regard for the qualities or the response of the other. Genuine love is, in this sense, indifferent to receiving benefits. By contrast, the person who wishes to be admired wants "the recognition of his perfection and not the love of his being; he would like to be recognized for his perfection and therefore *desires* his perfection" (Strauss 1991, 156). This desire is actualized through action, hence, Kojève concludes, the one who seeks admiration does so by performing those actions that will win him the esteem of others. In drawing out the importance of "recognition," Kojève obviously comes close to Girard's insight into mimetic desire. Essentially Kojève questions Strauss's depiction of the person seeking to be admired as being free of mimetic desire. He challenges Strauss's contention that "love has no criterion of relevance outside itself, but admiration has." For Strauss, it is love rather than admiration that must constantly be looking toward others to know the best way to please them and to know how to benefit them in order to be loved in return. Admiration, on the other hand, is granted on the basis of a set of independent criteria for human excellence, so the admired

person is worthy of honor whether he benefits anyone or not—"the wise man is as self-sufficient as is humanly possible; the admiration which he gains is essentially a tribute to his perfection, and not a reward for any services." Kojeve brings out the questionable character of this depiction of self-sufficiency by showing how the one wishing to be admired needs to have his perfection recognized as such. The standards for human perfection are *human* standards that depend on others for their formulation and recognition. The person who desires this perfection must look to others to know what qualities he or she needs to possess in order to be admired. In Girardian terms, the desire for admiration is intensely mimetic, and mimetic in a way that can easily lead to an endless, empty rivalry for prestige. The way of love (as the biblical tradition understands it) also involves taking others as our models, but in a manner devoid of mimetic rivalry. Yet Strauss draws practically the opposite conclusion. Without using Girard's terminology, Strauss would draw the distinction between admiration and love by claiming for the former a non-mimetic desire for one's self-perfection and for the latter an entirely mimetic yet fundamentally self-centered dynamism.

The comparison of admiration and love is incidental neither to the central argument of *On Tyranny*, nor to the primary focus of Strauss's work as a whole. It is, in the final analysis, an embodiment of the problematic relationship between philosophy and politics, the ancients and the moderns, or Athens and Jerusalem. At stake in *On Tyranny* are the political implications of love versus admiration. Within this text we find an exploration of the consequences for political life of the "extreme" virtue of biblical love and the way of philosophical moderation. Strauss poses the contrast in striking terms.

At the root of the moderation characteristic of the philosophical way of life is a marvelous detachment from "human things." The philosopher's dominating passion is the desire to know the eternal order and the eternal causes of that order. But "as he looks up in search for the eternal order, all human things and all human concerns reveal themselves to him in all clarity as paltry and ephemeral" (Strauss 1991, 198). As a result, the philosopher is relatively indifferent to human weal or woe; his attachment to human beings is weakened by his attachment to eternal beings.¹⁰ This is not,

¹⁰ (Strauss 1991, 200). The philosopher's detachment is not absolute. Strauss acknowledges that philosophers will be attached to some degree to their families and to their city, but especially to those rare souls who are either philosophers or potential philosophers.

however, a fault on the part of the seeker of wisdom. Strauss emphasizes how the philosopher's detachment makes him immune to the greedy and rivalrous passions that drive communities apart. Because of this the philosopher will not be inclined to hurt anyone; indeed he will go beyond the negative responsibility to do no harm, and will try to mitigate, as much as he can, the evils that are part of the human condition. Given his detachment, though, it is not at all clear why the philosopher would be inclined to do this (Gourevitch 1968a, 308). The philosopher helps the city by giving advice to those who hold political power. No better advice could be received by political leaders, because conscious of his progress in the quest for the eternal order, the philosopher is entirely without ambition in the realm of human affairs; his self-admiration "does not need to be confirmed by the admiration of others in order to be reasonable" (Strauss 1991, 203-204). Despite this self-sufficiency, the philosopher cannot help being attracted to those well-ordered souls who reflect the eternal order he seeks. And since the well-ordered soul would be one that is inclined toward philosophizing, "the philosopher therefore has the urge to educate potential philosophers." Here is where the philosopher invites conflict with the city. Compelled to go into the marketplace in search of potential philosophers, this lover of wisdom will be viewed with suspicion by the many who have no aptitude for philosophy, and who resent what they view as the philosopher's corruption of their most promising young people. The philosopher is forced then, to defend philosophy before the city by influencing its rulers. This is done through the practice of "philosophic politics," designed to prove to the skeptical that philosophers are good citizens who are in no way subversive and that they reverence and hold sacred the laws and traditions of the city. The moderation of the philosopher consists in performing this task of mediation well. The city must be placated and the philosophical life must be preserved.

Compared to the healthy influence exercised on politics by the admirably disinterested philosopher, the motivation of the political leader seems positively selfish. Of the political man Strauss writes:

He could not devote himself to his work with all his heart or without reservation if he did not attach absolute importance to man and to human things. He must "care" for human beings as such. He is essentially attached to human beings. This attachment is at the bottom of his desire to rule human beings, or of his ambition. But to rule human beings means to serve them. Certainly an attachment to beings which prompts one to serve

them may well be called love of them. Attachment to human beings is not peculiar to the ruler; it is characteristic of all men as mere men. The difference between the political man and the private man is that in the case of the former, the attachment enervates all private concerns; the political man is consumed by erotic desire, not for this or that human being...but for the large multitude, for the demos, and in principle for all human beings. But erotic desire craves reciprocity: the political man desires to be loved by all his subjects. The political man is characterized by the concern with being loved by all human beings regardless of their quality. (Strauss 1991, 198)

Attachment to human beings is at the root of the political man's ambition, rather than ambition being seen as the cause of this attachment. This is important, because when Strauss then goes on to say the political man's attachment to people may be described as love, it follows that love would be at the root of this ambition. Strauss then rather easily glides from calling this attachment "love" to referring to it as an erotic desire, a "craving" for recognition from the crowd. Of course, this is perfectly consistent with what he says about the nature of love as inherently self-seeking and as driven to benefit others by the need to receive benefits in return. The philosopher, entirely free of mimetic rivalry, stands in stark contrast to the political man consumed by the desire for recognition, a desire that will not rest until all, no matter how insignificant, have granted their recognition. The love characteristic of the political man is fundamentally mercenary and self-centered (Strauss 1991, 202). If Strauss's analysis of love is correct, it is easy to understand why the line separating the greatest benefactors from the greatest tyrants is very thin. Failing to win recognition by providing benefits, the political man may resort to whatever means are necessary to achieve his ends. What began with acts of charity designed to win the people's praise may eventually lead to actions that are manipulative and coercive.

This may help to explain Strauss's horror at the thought of modernity's culmination in the "universal and homogeneous state," an end he sees as inevitable given the forces propelling the modern project. "We are now brought face to face," Strauss writes, "with a tyranny which holds out the threat of becoming, thanks to 'the conquest of nature' and in particular of human nature, what no earlier tyranny ever became: perpetual and universal" (Strauss 1991, 27). Strauss has in mind here the vision of the contemporary world articulated by Kojève. Drawing on Hegel, Kojève

argues that, given the limitless nature of the desire for recognition, a human being wishes "to be effectively 'recognized' by all of those whom he considers capable and hence worthy of 'recognizing' him." In the case of a political leader this will include the leaders and peoples of other states, who, by their very ability to maintain their independence from him, demonstrate their worthiness. Those who submit to him already grant him recognition; but over those who resist he will try to extend his authority in order to force their recognition. In the final analysis, "the head of State will be fully 'satisfied' only when his State encompasses the whole of mankind" (Strauss 1991, 145). But once the universal state is achieved, the leader will be interested in gaining genuine recognition from all rather than servile obedience. He will therefore attempt to raise the economic, social, cultural, and even political levels of participation of the people to the highest degree possible. This leads Kojève to the following conclusion:

The political man, acting consciously in terms of the desire for "recognition"...will be fully "satisfied" only when he is at the head of a State that is not only *universal* but also politically and socially *homogeneous*...that is to say of a State that is the goal and the outcome of the collective labor of all and of each (Strauss 1991, 146).

For Kojève the universal character of the state is due to the historical influence of both classical philosophy and the Bible; but its homogeneous character is attributable to the Bible alone, especially as mediated historically through the Hebrew prophets and Paul (Strauss 1991, 171-172).

My purpose in describing Kojève's position is not to take sides with him against Strauss. It is quite possible to share Strauss's resistance to Kojève's vision of the end of history and to disagree with both Strauss's reasons for doing so and with the alternatives he suggests. The point I wish to make is that despite his strenuous disagreement with Kojève as to the desirability of and justification for the universal and homogeneous state, Strauss does not disagree that such is the outcome of modernity. Nor does he oppose Kojève on the issue of the biblical origin of the modern horizon. Strauss criticizes Kojève on other grounds. First, he notes how Kojève assumes the universal and homogeneous state to be the best social order. He questions whether the best society is one in which every human being is fully satisfied in having his human dignity universally recognized, and one in which there is equality of opportunity for all. In Kojève's vision, citizens of this state will work as little as possible because nature will have

been conquered, and war will cease because all are now members of one political community. Strauss wonders whether this is a desirable goal, since by Kojève's own admission it is genuine work and participation in bloody political struggle that raises humans above other animals. The end of history means the loss of our humanity; "It is the state of Nietzsche's 'last man'" (Strauss 1991, 208).

But perhaps this condition of ease will provide people with the opportunity to devote more time to the exercise of their capacity to think. Both Kojève and Strauss agree human beings are rational creatures. Free of other concerns, they would be able to give themselves more fully to the life of the mind. Strauss, however, is not convinced. In the final analysis, he finds the universal and homogeneous state to be contrary to nature:

If the final state is to satisfy the deepest longing of the human soul, every human being must be capable of becoming wise. The most relevant difference among human beings must have practically disappeared. We understand now why Kojève is so anxious to refute the classical view according to which only a minority of men are capable of the quest for wisdom. (Strauss 1991, 210)

By nature, not all are capable of becoming wise, so the coming state will never be able to fully satisfy its people. It is therefore impossible to recognize others as equal with regard to the highest human activity. But where this recognition is lacking, inequality persists, and the state is no longer truly universal and homogeneous. The modern solution has been to create the conditions for universal recognition by lowering the standards on which recognition is based—"The classical solution supplies a stable standard by which to judge of any actual order. The modern solution eventually destroys the very idea of a standard that is independent of actual situations" (Strauss 1991, 210-211).

The consequences Strauss draws from this scenario are bleak. In the universal and homogeneous state few, if any, will be wise, and neither they nor the philosophers will desire to rule. The leader of the state will, therefore, not be wise. To retain power, this "Universal and Final Tyrant" will suppress any movement or any kind of thought which calls into question the validity and goodness of the universal and homogeneous state. Of course the life of inquiry that is philosophy will be a particular target of criticism, so philosophers will, as they have throughout history, be forced to defend themselves before the political community by acting upon the

tyrant. But this attempt takes place in a context shaped by the modern abolition of relevant differences. By making philosophy a matter for public consumption and by placing it in the service of propaganda, Machiavelli's revolution has created the conditions where anyone can claim the mantle of a philosopher. The Final Tyrant styles himself a philosopher, and claims to be persecuting, not philosophy, but only false philosophies. In the past, philosophers were able to survive by going underground, and by writing in a way that appeared to accommodate the ruler's concerns while simultaneously conveying their true teaching to those few capable of understanding. But in the universal and homogeneous state there is no escape:

Thanks to the conquest of nature and to the completely unabashed substitution of suspicion and terror for law, the Universal and Final Tyrant has at his disposal practically unlimited means for ferreting out, and for extinguishing, the most modest efforts in the direction of thought. Kojève would seem to be right although for the wrong reason: the coming of the universal and homogeneous state will be the end of philosophy on earth. (Strauss 1991, 211)

With this chilling vision of society we may appear to have wandered from our discussion of the Bible and modernity. But such is not the case. Strauss's indictment of the universal and homogeneous state is the capstone of his indictment of modernity, and indirectly, of those elements out of which the modern world has been formed. The Bible, in Strauss's view, is one of the central elements in the constitution of the modern. Strauss speaks of the differences between classical and modern tyranny: "Present day tyranny, in contradistinction to classical tyranny, is based on the unlimited progress in the 'conquest of nature' which is made possible by modern science, as well as the popularization or diffusion of philosophic or scientific knowledge" (Strauss 1991, 178). The classical authors were aware of these possibilities, but rejected them as unnatural. Modernity, then, adopts an unnatural posture. If we recall our earlier discussion, it is easy enough to remember the source of this aberration. Is it not the priority given to the extreme, unnatural virtue of charity? And is not the conquest of nature (including human nature in the universal and homogeneous state) primarily undertaken with an eye toward the "relief of man's estate"? One of Strauss's most sympathetic readers calls attention to his rather lopsided view of technological advance, and his tendency to ignore those aspects

which do, in fact lead to the alleviation of human suffering.¹¹ Despite the misuse to which technology has been put, there is no question that a good part of its development and use in the modern West can be traced to the biblical turn to the "human things," i.e., the recognition of victims and the corresponding obligation to address their plight. Yet Strauss is unable or unwilling to consider this attachment to the human as anything more than a form of need. He equates love with neediness, and in so doing he blurs the distinction between selfishness and compassion. Strauss never accuses the Bible directly, but the cumulative effect of his presentation in *On Tyranny* and elsewhere is to establish a strong association, if not a relationship of direct causation, between the Bible's teaching and the worst features of the modern world.

It remains to consider possible reasons for Strauss's fears concerning modernity. Two comments in *On Tyranny* suggest much about the source of his concern. Criticizing Kojève's overly optimistic depiction of the universal and homogeneous state, Strauss observes how Kojève's vision of harmony presupposes a society in which all behave reasonably. Strauss finds this assumption highly questionable, and he asks whether Kojève has underestimated the power of the passions (Strauss 1991, 207). The other comment occurs in the context of Strauss's criticism of Kojève for his uncritical appropriation of Hegel. In Strauss's view, Hegel radicalized the modern tradition ushered in by Machiavelli and Hobbes, and thereby further emancipated the passions. All three of these modern thinkers "construct human society by starting from the untrue assumption that man as man is thinkable as a being that lacks awareness of sacred restraints or as a being that is guided by nothing but a desire for recognition" (Strauss 1991, 192). Without employing the language of mimetic theory, Strauss's awareness of the possible dangers associated with the modern emancipation

¹¹ In his commentary on *On Tyranny*, George Grant writes: "No writing about technological progress and the rightness of imposing limits upon it should avoid expressing the fact that the poor, the diseased, the hungry and the tired can hardly be expected to contemplate any such limitation with the equanimity of the philosopher. Strauss is clearly aware of this fact. One could wish however that he had drawn out the implications of it in the present controversy. It is not by accident that as representative and perceptive a modern philosopher as Feuerbach should have written that 'compassion is before thought.' The plea for the superiority of classical political science over the modern assumptions must come to terms with the implications of this phrase in full explicitness. As the assertion that charity is more important than thought is obviously of Biblical origin, his point leads directly to my second area of commentary." (Grant 1964, 66). Grant goes on to argue that Strauss's reticence about something as important as the influence of Bible implies a definite position on his part.

of the passions resonates with Girard's cautions about mimetic escalation in modern society. With his reference to a "necessary awareness of sacred restraints" Strauss identifies the role played by religion in setting limits to the passions, and with the mention of the "desire for recognition," he indicates something of the centrality of mimetic desire. In this case both Strauss and Girard are more conscious than is Kojève of the potential for conflict contained within the desire for recognition.¹²

However, since in Strauss's view modernity is so tainted by the influence of the Bible, he does not look to biblical wisdom when faced with modern dilemmas. Instead he turns to the classics for inspiration and guidance. There he discovers the figure of the philosopher, a being entirely free of the dangerous passions that afflict modern society. It is striking how Strauss's description of modernity practically demands such a savior figure. The only apparent hope for the contemporary world as he depicts it would be a being who is able to take a stand apart from that world; someone who is detached yet benign. It must be someone whose moderation and intelligence are able to influence those who rule with an eye toward establishing and maintaining a similarly moderate regime where philosophy would be allowed to exist peacefully. There is an invented quality to Strauss's philosopher, a quality that leads one to wonder whether Strauss has not followed in the footsteps of Plato in perpetuating his own version of philosophy's myth about itself. He shares with Heidegger a tendency to romanticize the "Greek beginning" of Western civilization. Heidegger's version, with its valorization of the Greeks and its focus on the role of strife or *polemos*, has the merit of identifying the importance of the issue of violence in Greek culture. Strauss, by comparison, continues the tradition of accepting Greek civilization (especially the philosophical tradition) as the embodiment of reason, balance, and moderation. Preoccupied with the disinterested pursuit of wisdom, supremely moderate in thought and deed, and incapable of harming others, philosophy is never in the wrong. In Girard's view this has been the delusion of philosophy from the very beginning. Appalled by the violence of "primitive" myths, philosophers found a new culture, "no longer truly mythological but 'rational' and 'philosophical,' forming the very text of philosophy" (Girard 1986, 77). To the extent they deny their complicity in their culture's violence.

¹² Indeed Strauss describes the role of vanity in Hobbes's philosophy in a way that is quite similar to Girard's understanding of the genesis of mimetic rivalry (See Strauss 1984, 9-22).

philosophers remain ensnared in its myths. Such is the case with Leo Strauss.

Related to Strauss's worries about the power of the passions in modern society is his deep unease about the loss of social differentiation. According to Strauss, "It is a demand of justice that there should be a reasonable correspondence between the social hierarchy and the natural hierarchy" (Strauss 1968, 21). Some critics dismiss his elitism and his emphasis on natural distinctions among human beings as either snobbery or, even worse, as an argument for tyrannical rule by the wise (Drury 1988). In fact, what Strauss understands (as does Girard) is the relationship between the breakdown of "natural" hierarchies and the consequent increase in mimetic rivalry. Where all are considered politically equal, there is no longer any need to defer to one's "superiors." Each person in society is now a potential rival, and mimetic conflict can flourish. Strauss also understands how biblical ideas about charity contribute to this result. By eroding important distinctions, such as those between philosophers and non-philosophers, biblical ideas about the equality of all before God and the moral stance which flows from these ideas blur the difference between the wise and the unwise. When this distinction is lost, society suffers as a result of its being deprived of guidance from those devoted to the pursuit of wisdom. In addition, when ideas about equality permeate a culture it may lead, as it has in the modern West, to the popularization of philosophy. In either case, whether political power is deprived of philosophical guidance or the people believe themselves to be wise, Strauss sees cause for alarm in a situation where passions have been liberated and the masses rule.

With this mind we can better understand Strauss's apparent preference for what he refers to as the classical idea of the "closed society":

Classical political philosophy opposes to the universal and homogeneous state a substantive principle. It asserts that the society natural to man is the city, that is, a closed society that can well be taken in in one view or that corresponds to man's natural...power of perception. Less literally and more importantly, it asserts that every political society that ever has been or ever will be rests on a particular fundamental opinion which cannot be replaced by knowledge and hence is of necessity a particular or particularist society. This state of things imposes duties on the philosopher's public speech or writing which would not be duties if a rational society were actual or emerging; it thus gives rise to a specific art of writing. (Strauss 1968a, x)

This is a remarkable passage, which should certainly give pause to those who believe Strauss embraces some transcendent standard as a guide in political life. Society depends on a fundamental *opinion*, which Strauss insists cannot be replaced by knowledge. Essentially, society requires a myth by which to live, and the critical task of the philosopher is to publicly support this myth, while writing in such a way as to keep the spirit of philosophy alive among those few capable of understanding. Once again we are reminded of Strauss's extolling of "Socratic rhetoric" over and against the "propaganda" that is part of the biblical legacy. Also striking is how Strauss explicitly juxtaposes this classical vision to that ghastly descendent of the Bible, the "universal and homogeneous state."¹³ He contrasts unfavorably the global vision of humanity made possible by the Bible with the closed society as conceived by classical thought. In the process, he also, without intending to do so, illuminates the difference between a society in the process of dispensing with myths under the pressure of Judeo-Christian revelation, and one that still requires myths to strengthen its unity. Certainly Girard has this difference in mind when he writes:

If we interpret the gospel doctrine in the light of our own observations about violence, we can see that it explains, in the most clear and concise fashion, all that people must do in order to break with the circularity of closed societies, whether they be tribal national, philosophical or religious. (Girard 1987, 198)

To the extent that social and cultural distinctions are ultimately traceable to differences emerging from society's founding violence, biblical revelation will, of course, further the erosion of these distinctions. While Girard would certainly not welcome the universal and homogeneous state as described by Strauss, he would agree that the undermining of distinctions taking place in the modern world is largely due to biblical influence. Of course for Girard, this influence has been salutary and its effects are most clearly seen in the modern attention to victims:

¹³ Clark Merrill argues that Strauss sees the modern ideologies culminating in the rule of the Final Tyrant as the "natural child of Christianity." Merrill also believes Strauss holds Christian scholasticism responsible for the rejection of classical philosophy and the move toward modernity (See Merrill 2000. 94-96).

The gradual loosening of various centers of cultural isolation began in the Middle Ages and has now led into what we call "globalization," which in my view is only secondarily an economic phenomenon. The true engine of progress is the slow decomposition of the closed worlds rooted in victim mechanisms. This is the force that destroyed archaic societies and henceforth dismantles the ones replacing them, the nations we call "modern." (Girard 2001, 165-166)

Here it may be well to emphasize what it is that actually distinguishes Girard and Strauss. Both men understand that biblical revelation has brought about a crisis in western civilization. Both recognize how disruptive this revelation has been and continues to be. But confronted with this crisis, Strauss draws back from the Bible. He apparently holds to the hope that its adverse effects on modernity can be mitigated, if not reversed, through a restoration of classical thought. For Girard, however, this is neither realistic nor desirable. Rather, the crisis of western civilization presents us with a situation where we must learn to live with the irreversible consequences of the "triumph of the biblical orientation." The great insights of the Bible may have led to the current crisis, but they have done so by unmasking the lie by which humanity has lived for centuries. Strauss sees only the disruption caused by biblical revelation, so consequently he does not find in the biblical message a source of future hope. In gravitating toward the solutions offered by classical philosophy, he ultimately shares in philosophy's inability to break fully with the way of myth, ritual, and prohibition.

This also explains why Strauss defends belief as an option in the modern world. He believes those aspects of biblical morality that focus on law and prohibitions are to be preserved and fostered as a guide for those who are not capable of the philosophical life. In the dangerous situation in which we find ourselves, any belief that helps men and women refrain from violence and follow the stabilizing customs and traditions of society should not be explicitly undermined. But those aspects of the biblical tradition that have helped to constitute modernity must be challenged and contained. A direct attack on the Bible would, of course, be counterproductive, since it is the source of the major religious narratives of the modern West, and the weakening of religious belief among the many is detrimental to the stability of society. With this observation we return to where we began, with Strauss's emphatic rejection of any synthesis between Athens and Jerusalem. A synthesis of the classical and the biblical would poison the

classical well and lead to the destruction of philosophy (See Merrill 2000). Strauss insists on preserving the tension between Athens and Jerusalem not because he sees them as possessing equally valid claims to guide civilization, but because modernity represents the triumph of Jerusalem, a triumph that must be offset as much as possible by the revival of classical wisdom. If the biblical message is not countered, it will spell the end of philosophy and hasten the arrival of the universal and homogeneous state. The teaching of Athens, then, must be restored to prevent the total triumph of the biblical. On the other hand, philosophy must never appear to contradict the Bible's teaching, because, whether or not that teaching is true, the city requires deeply held "opinions" to guide and unify the people. Hence, the option for Jerusalem must be defended.

The life-giving tension at the heart of Western civilization is constituted, then, on one side by a life governed by law, prohibition, and submission to the inscrutable will of God, and on the other by a life of inquiry, freedom of thought, and moderation. Within this account, biblical charity, biblical love, biblical compassion are either relegated to the category of "extreme" virtues, understood as a form of need, or identified as the not very remote cause of religious persecution. It is certainly legitimate to ask whether, in marginalizing the Bible's teaching on charity, Strauss has lost sight of what is most distinctive about the biblical voice. But there seems little doubt that his interpretation of the Bible's effect on modernity retains its plausibility just so long as the voices of victims are not taken into account.

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VIOLENT MEMES AND SUSPICIOUS MINDS: GIRARD'S SCAPEGOAT MECHANISM IN THE LIGHT OF EVOLUTION AND MEMETICS

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The present article is an attempt to bring mimetic theory into dialogue with certain evolutionary approaches to human culture, i.e., *evolutionary psychology* and *memetics*. That which immediately suggests a consonance between these approaches is a shared concern for the fundamental aspects of human culture, or "fundamental anthropology." My discussion aims at reconsidering Girard's startling insight concerning the significance of scapegoating in the formation of human culture, ritual and myth—or, in short, his concept of the *scapegoat mechanism*. Two alternative approaches will be explored: (1) On the basis of evolutionary psychology, scapegoating is considered as a cognitive side-effect; (2) with reference to memetics, it is suggested that the scapegoat mechanism is a memetic parasite. The former account is an interpretation of Pascal Boyer's ideas about group mentality and fundamentalist violence in his recent book *Religion Explained* (2001). The latter consideration is inspired by Terrence W. Deacon's concept of language evolution and symbolic reference in his book *The Symbolic Species* (1997). It should be emphasized at the outset that neither Boyer nor Deacon are concerned with scapegoating and, needless to say, the application and interpretation of their ideas is entirely my own.

1. The Scapegoat Mechanism as a Cognitive Side Effect

The following is an attempt to formulate a cognitive account of scapegoating based on Pascal Boyer's ideas about fundamentalism (2001, 292ff).

1.1. The Coalitional Reasoning of the Social Mind

Boyer's theory of religion is firmly rooted in evolutionary psychology (2001, 118, *passim*).¹ A key concept in evolutionary psychology is the *environment of evolutionary adaptedness* (EEA) which is centered around the claim that our cognitive apparatus evolved in response to ecological problems faced by our ancestors in the Pleistocene period (which lasted from ca. 2 million-10,000 years ago). In other words, the cognition of modern humans is geared to the ancestral environments of our hunter-gatherer past. The key issue in evolutionary psychology is to gain insight into the adaptive problems faced by our ancestors, and figure out the necessary cognitive capabilities needed to solve them. The resulting models of how the mind works can then be tested experimentally. Evolutionary psychologists also emphasize the *domain specificity* of our psychological mechanisms, i.e., in simple terms, that our mind is a collection of specialized mechanisms wrought by natural selection to deal with specific features of our environment, such as detecting predators, keeping track of social relations, etc.

In Boyer's account, the mixed stock of our evolutionary heritage includes a complex array of psychological mechanisms for keeping track of a wide spectrum of social relations, the *social mind* (2001, 122). An essential aspect of our social intelligence is "intuitive psychology" or a "theory of mind," i.e., seeing others as intentional agents, realizing what they are up to, what their beliefs and desires are, being able to predict their behavior, etc. According to evolutionary psychologists we are adapted for social exchange. We easily calculate the costs and benefits of our interactions with others. Experiments have shown that logical problems are much more transparent to people when presented as social exchange problems. In such cases, the logical rule in question is restated as a "check for cheaters" rule, i.e., the problem is to figure out whether people respect social conventions or not. Evolutionary psychologists interpret these results to the effect that our cognition is geared to evaluate social exchange, and we have evolved a disposition to check for cheaters in social exchange situations (2001, 124f; Cosmides 1989; Cosmides & Tooby 1992).²

¹ On evolutionary psychology, see Barkow et al. and Laland and Brown (ch. 5).

² Cosmides, one of the pioneers of evolutionary psychology, characterizes "check for cheaters" thus: "cheating can be defined as the violation of a rule established, explicitly or implicitly, by acceptance of a social contract. A social contract relates *perceived benefits* to

Evaluation of trust is essential to human interaction: "That humans depend on cooperation creates *strategic* problems, where the value (the expected benefit) of a particular move depends on whether someone else makes a particular move...." (2001, 125; emphasis his). To tackle such problems, as just mentioned, humans are equipped with cognitive mechanisms to evaluate trust and check for cheaters/defectors. Unconsciously, we look for *signals* that indicate whether other people are trustworthy or not. Although the disposition to evaluate trust is universal the signals themselves are culture-specific, pertaining to certain ways of life—i.e., does *X* speak the language, participate in the appropriate rituals, show the expected gestures, etc. (187f).

Boyer describes the dynamics of human groups in terms of *coalitions*, i.e., associations based on a certain degree of trust in which members reap the benefits of cooperation. A constant threat to coalitions is defection or cheating, i.e., when someone selfishly reaps the benefits of membership while not contributing anything in return. What makes humans capable of the social calculations needed to maintain coalitions is the social mind. With coalitional dynamics we have already entered Boyer's discussion of fundamentalism.

1.2. Boyer on Fundamentalism

Boyer explains social stability in terms of coalitional dynamics; in his view we will gain a better understanding of the making of social groups, and the interaction they entail, "if we realize that many of these groups are in fact coalitional arrangements in which a calculation of cost and benefit makes membership more desirable than defection, and which are therefore stable" (2001, 288). To recapitulate, it is the social mind that gives us what Boyer calls "coalitional intuitions" which enable us to make sense of coalitional dynamics. Boyer couches his discussion of fundamentalism in

perceived costs, expressing an exchange in which an individual is required to pay a cost (or meet a requirement) to an individual (or group) in order to be eligible to receive a benefit from that individual (or group). Cheating is the failure to pay a cost to which one has obligated oneself by accepting a benefit, and without which the other person would not have agreed to provide the benefit.... The algorithms that regulate human social exchange—the 'social contract algorithms'—should include a 'look for cheaters' procedure. In a social exchange situation for which a subject has incomplete information, a 'look for cheaters' procedure would draw attention to any person who has *not* paid the required cost (has he illicitly absconded with the benefit?) and to any person who has accepted the benefit (has he paid the required cost?)" (197, emphasis in original).

coalitional logic. He agrees that fundamentalism is a reaction to modernity, however, in his opinion, that is only a part of the puzzle. To grasp what is at stake, we need to understand how western culture and its global diffusion is interpreted by more traditional societies, or, in other words, what *message* modernity is carrying. Boyer's answer is very interesting and deserves to be quoted at length:

The message from the modern world is not *just* that other ways of living are possible, that some people may not believe, or believe differently, or feel unconstrained by religious morality, or (in the case of women) make their own decisions without male supervision. The message is also that people can do that *without paying a heavy price*. Nonbelievers or believers in another faith are not ostracized; those who break free of religious morality, as long as they abide by the laws, still have a normal social position; and women who dispense with male chaperons do not visibly suffer as a consequence. This "message" may seem so obvious to us that we fail to realize how seriously it threatens social interaction that is based on coalitional thinking. Seen from the point of view of a religious coalition, the fact that many choices can be made in modern conditions without paying a heavy price means that *defection is not costly* and is therefore *very likely*. (2001, 294, emphasis his)

To illustrate the seriousness of the prospect of defection, Boyer asks us to think of a war platoon. Such a group depends on a high level of trust; in the midst of battle the life of each member may depend on the commitment of his comrades. He goes on to say that "people in such groups frequently persecute, brutalize or ostracize *in advance* those individuals who show signs of being less than altogether committed" (294; emphasis his). But why spend all this time and energy on a potential defector in the first place? Simply not to trust such a coward in precarious situations should suffice. In Boyer's view, this squandering of time and energy becomes understandable if it is aimed at the *other members* of the group rather than the victim itself; such an *a priori* targeting of potential defectors would send a powerful message to the rest of the group to the effect that there is a high price to pay for defection. This follows simple coalitional logic: you wouldn't want to join a coalition that others could easily defect from; therefore, the more you contribute the higher you want the price to be for defection (294f). Boyer applies this logic directly to fundamentalism: "Fundamentalist violence too seems to be an attempt to raise the stakes. that

is, to discourage potential defectors by demonstrating that defection is actually going to be very costly, that people who adopt different norms may be persecuted or even killed" (295). In Boyer's view, this explains a number of tendencies of fundamentalism: (1) a pronounced preoccupation with public behavior; (2) the public and spectacular nature of punishments; (3) the concentration of fundamentalist violence inside the group, primarily; (4) the targeting of local forms of modernized religion.

Boyer's conclusion is that although fundamentalism is a modern phenomenon, it has deep, ancient roots in the social mind and its constant coalitional arithmetic.³ Since the logic Boyer identifies behind fundamentalist violence is far from confined to modernity it is conceivable that it might be used to understand other, more ancient aspects of society, such as scapegoating.

1.3. A Cognitive Account of Scapegoating

Boyer's account of fundamentalism applies naturally to the scapegoat phenomenon. In my view, although it might be useful to reserve the term for modern times, fundamentalism should be viewed as a modern instance of a more ancient process, for throughout history social coalitions have confronted each other often with devastating consequences for their integrity. This ancient process of which fundamentalism is but an instance is scapegoating.

Girard has defined the phenomenon along the following lines: "the victim or victims of unjust violence or discrimination are called scapegoats, especially when they are blamed or punished not merely for the 'sins' of others...but for tensions, conflicts, and difficulties of all kinds" (1987, 74). Scapegoating is essentially a simple process: (1) there is a crisis, whether real or imagined, that grips a society or a group of people; (2) a process whereby someone, an individual or a minority, is singled out and accused; (3) a public humiliation of some sort; (4) the whole process is characterized by delusion:

³ Boyer's account of initiation rites is in a sense an inversion of his concept of fundamentalism. The boy who is initiated into the "mysteries" of manhood undergoes a series of dreadful, often violent, trials, the purpose of which is to make him show allegiance *beforehand* to the group he is about to enter; it is a kind of an advance investment in the coalition of men to insure his loyalty and discourage defection (243ff).

Scapegoating must not be regarded as a conscious activity, based on a conscious choice. The very fact that it can be manipulated by people who understand its operation—politicians, for instance—supposes a basic lack of awareness in the passive subjects of such manipulation. Scapegoating is not effective unless an element of delusion enters into it (ibid., 74).

Boyer's account of fundamentalism has all of the tell tale signs of scapegoating as exemplified by Girard:

- *Crisis*. A coalition is confronted by the different culture of another coalition, a situation which is perceived as a threat to cultural integrity. The crisis is fueled by a fear of defection.
- *Finding the guilty*. While those persecuted as potential defectors might indeed be guilty of just that, it follows from Boyer's account that those singled out are more prone to be minorities of some sort, those that are in some sense *different*, the underprivileged, women, etc. Further, as Boyer emphasizes, the victim is punished *in advance* as a *potential* defector, in other words, the person is *perceived* as a traitor even though he or she hasn't done anything. There is a name for such victims—they are scapegoats.
- *Public humiliation*. Boyer emphasizes both the public and spectacular nature of the violence inflicted on the victim. The purpose of this "melodramatic" violence is to convey a signal to the other members of the group to the effect that defection is indeed costly.
- *Delusion*. Although the delusion of the mob may not be emphasized in Boyer's account it is not entirely absent. It lies in the fact that the group is lead to persecute a victim that hasn't necessarily committed a crime, a person who is only *perceived* as a threat. The communal aspect of the crisis further brings out the delusional aspect.

Thus, Boyer's cognitive account of fundamentalism is, to all intents and purposes, an account of scapegoating. In this context, scapegoating can be defined as the "check for cheaters" rule gone wrong, since those who are

targeted may not be defectors at all (this definition would equally apply to the alternative, memetic account offered below).⁴

What this amounts to is a cognitive account of the scapegoat mechanism. It is a side effect of the coalitional reasoning of human beings rooted in their social mind, crafted by natural selection. This does *not* mean that within our brains is a "scapegoat module," far from it. One of the points of evolutionary psychology, which Boyer frequently makes in his theory of religion, is that although culture is ultimately due to our mental capacities, environmental cues are needed to trigger these innate predispositions (see 2001, 113f). This would also apply in the above mentioned account of scapegoating; the process is not created by a special mental "module" but by a fierce sharpening of our coalitional reasoning brought about by environmental cues, i.e., a perceived threat to our coalition.

In the light of this cognitive account, the frequent references to scapegoat violence, whether direct or indirect, which Girard has identified at the heart of rituals and mythological narratives, can be reconsidered. Such references could be rooted in the convergence of the social mind and the not infrequent crises experienced by human coalitions, in one way or the other, throughout human history.

2. The Scapegoat Mechanism as a Memetic Parasite

In the following, I will suggest a memetic approach to scapegoating.⁵ It is not necessarily incompatible with the cognitive account just considered. The difference lies mainly in the additional inclusion of symbolic information, or memes—socially transmitted information which undergoes a cultural evolutionary process.⁶ It is characteristic of evolutionary psychological discourse to ignore culture and relegate it as an uninteresting and

⁴ It should be noted that this definition avoids considerations of abstract, ethical concepts like communal guilt, which then is transferred to the victim. All that is needed as a basis for the process is: (1) a check for cheaters disposition, which, as comparative analysis with other animals suggests, is prior to such abstract ideas (see 2.2., and n. 10 below), and (2) special circumstances which skew peoples' targeting. However, the fact that ethical concerns can be *added* to such a process is without question.

⁵ Probably the best introduction to memetics is Dawkins (ch. 11) along with Blackmore; see also Auger (2002), and Deacon (1999).

⁶ The term *meme* was coined by Dawkins. It is an abbreviation of the Greek *mimeme*, and was intended to convey the sense of a "unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*" (192: emphasis his). His now classic examples of memes are "tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches" (ibid.).

unjustified level of analysis. In this Boyer is no exception. Throughout his *Religion Explained*, cultural information, such as religious concepts, is treated only as epiphenomena—the primary factor is cognition and cognition only. The limitations of this article make it impossible to engage in a qualitative critique of evolutionary psychology, and I will have to suffice with only the most intuitively obvious, and thus naive, objection.⁷ In my opinion, closing our eyes to anything but cognitive criteria is to ignore the obvious fact that human behavior and culture is *also* heavily influenced by symbolic criteria (norms, tabus, prohibitions, etc.). It is for this reason that a consideration of the dynamics of social transmission of symbolic-memetic information is warranted *in addition* to cognition.

2.1. Deacon's Concept of Language Evolution

I will develop the memetic approach with reference to Terrence W. Deacon, who in his great book *The Symbolic Species* (1997) claims that language undergoes an evolutionary process which enables it to take advantage of the learning predispositions of the human brain (1997, 110ff). This is at the heart of the meme concept, i.e., that cultural evolution is "selfish" and not necessarily subservient to biological evolution. The two processes have a momentum of their own, each capable of exploiting the other.⁸

Deacon's concept of language evolution is a part of his sharp criticism of Chomsky's nativist approach to language, which, in simple terms, is based on the assumption that grammar is impossible to learn, and for that reason children must already possess abstract grammatical knowledge when they enter the world. In Deacon's words "languages are far more like living organisms than like mathematical proofs. The most basic principle guiding their design is not communicative utility but reproduction—theirs and ours" (1997, 110).

Deacon views language in evolutionary terms as a parasite or a symbiont that utilizes human hosts for its own reproduction. This makes the cognitive limitations of language learners and teachers an essential part of

⁷ A useful critical discussion of evolutionary psychology along with a justification for the memetic program is found in Auger 2002; see also Auger 2000, Blackmore, Dennett, and Laland and Brown.

⁸ It should be pointed out that Deacon does not formulate his evolutionary account of language in terms of memes. However, he is well aware of the affinity between his approach and that of memetics (see 114f).

the ecology of language transmission; thus the structure of language doesn't reflect its communicative utility but rather its adaptation to its environment, which is the human brain, especially that of children—the languages that have survived are the one's that are well adapted to this niche. This is the reason why children are so adept at learning languages, because language structure is especially adapted to their cognitive limitations (ibid. 110ff). Simply put, evolution is made possible by three factors: *variation* among entities (e.g., genes or memes), *selection*, and *heritability* in the transmission of selected entities. That which secures variation is *imperfect transmission*: "As a language is passed from generation to generation, the vocabulary and syntactic rules tend to get modified by transmission errors, by the active creativity of its users, and by influences from other languages" (ibid. 114). The important point here is that while transmission errors as such are arbitrary, selection is *not*. As time passes changes accumulate because the selection process is biased by the niche of language transmission, i.e., human cognition. It is language evolution that is the source of universals:

[Language universals] have emerged spontaneously and independently in each evolving language, in response to universal biases in the selection processes affecting language transmission. They are convergent features of language evolution in the same way that the dorsal fins of sharks, ichthyosaurs, and dolphins are independent convergent adaptations of aquatic species. Like their biological counterparts, these structural commonalities present in all languages have each arisen in response to the constraints imposed by a common adaptive context (ibid., 116).

Deacon does not limit his concept of cultural evolution to language. Elsewhere, although not going into detail, he speaks of the propagation of "virulent systems of symbols" that thrive due to the "interaction of symbolic cultural evolution and unprepared biology," the latter referring to the evolutionarily ancient neural circuitry that was forced to deal with the novel peculiarity of symbolic reference (1997, 436f; see 423). The cultural evolution of virulent symbolic systems or meme complexes—in simple

terms, rules, norms, tabus, prohibitions, etc.—that take cognitive dispositions hostage, is essential to the following discussion.⁹

2.2. Dissociation between Cognition and Social Organization

In their criticism of the evolutionary psychological concept of *environment of evolutionary adaptedness* (EEA) as a tool to guide model building for adaptive problems faced by our ancestors, Laland and Brown point to the potentially deep phylogenetic roots of many aspects of human behavior and psychology, a circumstance that would make any serious attempt to put the EEA concept to work a difficult and time consuming affair (2002, 179). In this context they point out that

Comparative analyses of animal abilities suggest that many human behavioural and psychological traits have a long history. Some human behavioural adaptations, such as maternal care or a capacity to learn, may even have evolved in our invertebrate ancestors. Many perceptual preferences will be phylogenetically ancient. For example, an understanding of causal relationships may be common to mammals and birds. Much social behaviour, such as forming stable social bonds, developing dominance hierarchies, an understanding of third-party social relationships, and coordinated hunting, probably evolved in our pre-hominid primate ancestors. A capacity for true imitation may also have evolved in pre-hominid apes. (ibid.)

They suggest a more modest role for the concept: "The EEA encourages researchers to recognize that humans, like all species, exhibit *some* adaptations to past environments that are not necessarily of current utility" (ibid. 180; *their emphasis*).

I have no intention of dwelling on the troublesome aspects of the EEA concept. Relevant for the following discussion are two points which Laland and Brown make with characteristic clarity: (1) the potentially deep roots

⁹ The terms *symbolic* and *memetic* will be used interchangeably. Deacon's concept of symbolic reference is a development of C.S. Peirce's sign trichotomy of *icon*, *index* and *symbol*. In brief, an *icon* refers to an object by similarity (e.g., a map of a territory) while an *index* does so by causal connection or spatial-temporal correlation (e.g., smoke indicating fire). Most animal communication is indexical. *Symbols*, on the other hand, are not tied to time or place and thus make possible abstract representation. They pick out their referents via systematic relationships that are established among all symbols (e.g., words). For his in-depth account see Deacon 1997: ch. 3.

of at least some human cognitive adaptations and (2) that there is always a degree of *dissociation* between the traits of an organism and its present environment.

The environmental aspect of interest in the present context is *social organization*. Considering the potentially deep evolutionary roots of some human cognitive dispositions and the abrupt changes in social conditions towards increased complexity over the past millennia (especially pronounced in the past 12,000 years or so), a degree of dissociation between human social cognition and social organization should be expected. The social cognitive disposition I am interested in is that of *checking for cheaters*, mentioned previously. Essentially a social disposition of the order of *reciprocal altruism*,¹⁰ checking for cheaters should be sensitive to increased complexity in social organization, the procedure becoming more cumbersome as the social environment diversifies.

The emergence of symbolic reference is probably a factor in the increased complexity of the social environment. This mode of thinking and communication, which imparted on humans the capacity to represent abstract and counter-factual concepts (deities, honour, moral support, etc.), must have added new dimensions to social relationships. This might have made the determination of defection and cooperation more slippery, and rather the subject of *interpretation* than *detection*.

Essential to the ensuing argument is the assumption that the increased complexity of human groups in the past millennia resulted in a dissociation of human social cognition and social organization making checking for cheaters more difficult, and that this gap provided a niche in which virulent symbolic complexes thrived.

¹⁰ Reciprocal altruism, a key concept in sociobiology, explains social exchange or cooperation between *unrelated* individuals: if individuals interact repeatedly over an extended period, altruistic behavior can stabilize if a cooperative act will be reciprocated in the future. Those involved are better off cooperating than not, thus enjoying reproductive fitness. Imperative for such a system is an ability to keep track of social interaction, for otherwise cheaters could easily exploit the system, reaping the benefits of the altruistic acts of others while not returning any favours themselves. For this reason the phenomenon is rare in nature, being reserved for creatures with enough brain power to keep track of the doings of others. Reciprocal altruism works by a simple principle: you reserve your altruism for those that have acted altruistically towards you on previous occasions, and shun those that haven't. Among the notable practitioners of reciprocal altruism in nature are vampire bats which regurgitate blood to those individuals who have returned empty handed from a night of blood hunting (see Laland & Brown 83f).

2.3. A Memetic Account of Scapegoating

Imagine an ancient human social group. The complexity of the group, along with the use of symbolic reference, has made it difficult for human cognition to check for cheaters. In these conditions any symbolic-memetic complex that would make cheater detection easier should gain foothold. Such a complex could gradually emerge from the great variety of concepts exchanged in daily communication. As soon as a few defector-detection concepts have gained foothold, they go through an evolutionary process similar to the one described above with respect to language (2.1.). Through numerous occasions of imperfect transmissions, from person to person and generation to generation, they undergo a gradual change biased by the human cognitive disposition to check for cheaters. Eventually, a system emerged that provides clear *symbolic criteria* for detecting cheaters and punishing them. Such symbolic criteria would probably be *a priori* in nature, for what would make the task of spotting defectors easier than being able to determine who they are *beforehand*? The emergence of such a system would be an example of symbolic culture taking cognitive criteria hostage.

The system would ensure its reproduction by including instructions for public punishment of victims. Such ritualized processes, in which the members of the group actively participate, would serve to reaffirm the principles and criteria of the system. Each victimization process would confirm the validity of the system. In a sense, a ritualized penalizing process, along with the instructions for carrying it out, would function as an organism's reproductive system.

But what would be the nature of such a system? I think we can make use of Girard's insights at this point. A system that would provide *a priori* criteria for who is a defector would, to all intents and purposes, be a *scapegoat* system. It would ensure that *someone* would be punished for defection by defining punishable individuals. Its criteria would probably target the marginalized, the ones that are vulnerable to accusation. As in the cognitive account above, scapegoating could be defined as the "check for cheaters" rule gone wrong, for the targeted individuals may not be defectors at all (the process is driven by the check for cheaters disposition, and directed by symbolic criteria, which skew people's targeting; cf. n. 4 above).¹¹

¹¹ I would like to emphasize that I am perfectly aware that there are forms of cultural activity which might be termed scapegoating which may not fit with the account provided here. This

An example of such a scapegoat system might be a fundamentalist judicial system, such as the one promoted by the Taliban, where women were particularly vulnerable.¹² If Girard is correct about ritual sacrifice being the precursor of the judicial systems found in more complex societies (1977, ch. 1), that would be another example of such a scapegoat system. Indeed, in some rituals the sacrificial victim is treated like an offender, which would seem to support Girard's view (see *ibid.*, 98, et al). Whether in a fundamentalist judicial process or ritual sacrifice, a victim is chosen according to symbolic criteria, a victim that society can accuse, condemn and kill in communal spirit.¹³

Girard's view of scapegoating processes, ritual sacrifice and public punishments, is inherently Durkheimian, in the sense that such events strengthen the solidarity of the group involved. Such a view can easily be reconciled with the approach suggested here. A scapegoat process could strengthen the group in a number of ways. The members might find outlet for frustrations that otherwise might threaten social stability. According to Girard that is the primary function of ritual sacrifice. By taking part in a scapegoating process, members can signal to one another that they are trustworthy members of the group, reminiscent of Roy A. Rappaport's idea about self-referential messages in ritual (1999). Finally, the process might temporarily discourage defection; however, since the process is in a sense false, with *a priori* criteria targeting the marginalized rather than the guilty, the real defectors would only rarely be punished; hence the efficacy of the process might be expected to be temporary at best and the defectors, who

might, for example, apply in crisis situations and ritual sacrifices where the issues at stake are rather those of reciprocity than punishment of defectors.

¹² What about Western judicial systems? Allowing the above, the Western system has grown out of a scapegoating system. To some extent it still is, since some groups seem more likely to be convicted for the crimes they are accused of than other, more privileged groups. The recent case of the thirteen innocent Death Row inmates in Illinois, and the consequent moratorium on executions, brings the sinister side of the Western/American judicial system into relief. What separates Western systems from other judicial systems is the scientific techniques applied to collect evidence along with the court proceedings that establish guilt based on the evidence. However flawed, as the Illinois case underscores, these methods do reduce the likelihood of scapegoat proceedings.

¹³ Whether one can include ritual sacrifices of animals (which is most often the case in ethnographic data) in this context is of course questionable, since the driving force of the process suggested here is the check for cheaters principle, which applies to social contracts between members of the *same* species (see n. 2 above). I will leave this interesting question open.

took part in the scapegoating process, would be back to defecting sooner than later. This harmonizes well with Girard's theory where the guilt belongs ultimately to the community itself.

Contrary to Girard's theory, however, there is no need to postulate the scapegoat mechanisms as the one and only source of all human culture. The above scenario suggests the existence of a certain process insinuated in the workings of human culture, a process existing together, and in interaction, with other processes, such as language and cognition. In my opinion, the above scenario is more plausible than Girard's privileged scapegoat mechanism.

To recapitulate, in the above account it is suggested that symbolic-scapegoating complexes evolved to take advantage of the human cognitive disposition to seek defectors. This task had become increasingly difficult with the growing dissociation between human cognition and social organization. Such symbolic systems gained advantage because they made it easier to detect defectors. Such a system would secure that there always was *someone* vulnerable to single out and exterminate whenever needed. They secured their own reproduction by incorporating instructions for the public punishment of defectors, which reaffirmed the principles they stood for. Examples of such systems are ritual sacrifice and fundamentalist judicial systems. Such public processes are likely to have positive effects on group solidarity, in a good Durkheimian fashion.

This speculative account of the scapegoat mechanism as a symbolic-memetic parasite that takes advantage of our cognitive tendency to seek and punish defectors fits well with one of the startling insights of Girard, i.e., that scapegoating is at the heart of human culture, ritual and mythology. The numerous semi-veiled references to scapegoat violence in mythology identified by Girard might indeed be rooted in the actual practice of such violence brought about by this parasitic symbolic-scapegoat complex. Mythology is the muse of humanity's bad conscience, bearing witness to a submerged awareness of the gruesome fact of scapegoating.

Concluding Remarks

This article was motivated by the idea that bringing mimetic theory into contact with other approaches concerned with "fundamental anthropology" should be worthwhile. The discussion was aimed at reconsidering Girard's *scapegoat mechanism* concept. Two alternative approaches were explored: (1) with reference to Pascal Boyer's evolutionary psychological take on religion and fundamentalist violence, it was proposed that the scapegoat

mechanism could be regarded as a cognitive side-effect; (2) in the context of a memetic framework inspired by the work of Terrence W. Deacon, it was suggested that the scapegoat mechanism could be considered as a memetic parasite. In my opinion, the discussion has corroborated the initial idea that seeking a convergence of mimetic theory and evolutionary approaches to human culture should be of interest.

Postscript: Generative vs. Emergent Perspective

Eric Gans's project of generative anthropology was brought to my attention after finishing this article. His work is clearly relevant here because he actively seeks a convergence of mimetic theory and evolutionary approaches to human behavior (see Gans 2000; *Chronicles of Love & Resentment* 283 et al.). In addition, we share an interest in the work of Terrence Deacon. Of course, comparing my own efforts with those of Gans involves a conspicuous asymmetry: whereas Gans's ambitious project is the result of long standing dedication to the development of mimetic theory, my own involvement with Girardian thinking is limited to this paper. Be that as it may, a few points are worth considering.

Girard's analysis of myth and ritual, illustrating collective violence as a central element in our cultural heritage, is impressive. And yet, his insistence on scapegoating as the *sole* generator of human culture and its institutions strikes me as being implausible. In fact, this is one of the reasons I wrote this article. The scapegoat mechanism should be seen as *one among several* factors in the making of culture and society.

It is clear that this puts me at odds with the central claim in Gans's generative anthropology, which is the concept of the scene of origins, where the sudden advent of language in a group of primates converging on a single object causes a dramatic speciation event. As a word of caution, I may be underestimating Gans's work, but, caution aside, I must admit that not even Gans's agility with Occam's razor persuades me that we need to seek the origins of the *whole* of human culture in a single event.

There are several problems with the scene of origins. If there was such an event, its memory would have to be kept alive (see Gans 2000, 11). I find it doubtful that a rudimentary sign system spontaneously generated by a group of non-human primates, as Gans suggests, would be capable of supporting the memory of such an event over a considerable period of time, let alone over many generations. Also, there are reasons to believe that conflict resolution is an evolutionary heritage shared to a significant extent

by all primates. Recent research on non-human primates confirms that the societies of these evolutionary cousins of ours are equipped with effective means of conflict resolution (de Waal 2000¹⁴). Surely, Gans's primates would have had their share in this heritage. In that case, it is unlikely that a crisis of violent confrontation would have led to the appearance of linguistic means to defer violence—the primates' evolved dispositions to resolve conflict would have kicked in before. In my opinion, these attested conflict resolution mechanisms make the whole notion of the origin of language and culture as a means to defer violence highly problematic, unless these primates somehow lost their evolutionary heritage in the heat of the moment. And since modern humans clearly share a great deal with their primate cousins, that can hardly be the case.

While the perspectives of Gans and Girard are *generative*, the one developed in this paper could be viewed as *emergent*. In the former case, a mimetic crisis is resolved by way of language and/or scapegoating in a charged event (or series of events) of origins, containing within it all the fundamental moments of human culture—hence the notions of generative scapegoating and generative anthropology. In this paper, scapegoating is viewed as a phenomenon emerging in a synergic interplay of cognitive and cultural processes. Rather than being a privileged generator *of* culture, it is a player *in* culture.

These considerations may simplify the issues at stake, but the salient differences, I feel, thus stand out in contrast.

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¹⁴ As far as I have been able to ascertain, de Waal contributed a version of this paper to the COV&R conference at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1999 [<http://theol.uibk.ac.at/cover/bulletin/xtexte/bulletin17-3.html>].

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WHAT PERSUASION REALLY MEANS IN *PERSUASION*: A MIMETIC READING OF JANE AUSTEN

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The title of Jane Austen's *Persuasion* invites us to accept at face value the light morality tale that frames the novel: Anne Elliot yields to the persuasion of Lady Russell in refusing Frederick Wentworth, suffers years of unhappiness because of it, but is more or less vindicated in the end; by contrast, Louisa Musgrove's reckless leap from the steps at Lyme shows how detrimental a non-persuadable temper can be. Thus, to yield sometimes to persuasion (as Anne did with Lady Russell) rather than to follow the imperatives of romantic heedlessness (Frederick Wentworth's philosophy) is not really such a bad thing.

One could argue forever over this prudent bit of conservative wisdom, but the real problem is that it comports very poorly with the behavior of the characters, especially Louisa and Wentworth, who are in fact highly suggestible people. The wisdom about "persuasion" that frames the novel is undercut by the extreme persuadability of the two characters who are not supposed to be persuadable at all. Thus, *either* Austen manages her thematic packaging poorly, *or* she intends "persuasion" to encompass more than is explicit in her didactic moralism.

I argue that only the latter interpretation is possible. "Persuasion" in the novel must apply to more characters than Anne, and I believe that it must also go beyond the connotation of "guidance" or "advice," to include what we would call "role modeling," "suggestion" and, especially, "imitation." "Persuasion," in other words, is nearly synonymous with what

René Girard calls "mimesis" or "mimetic desire."¹ "Persuasion" means being molded and directed by others, a process that is largely non-conscious and imitative.

It would certainly be unjustifiable to foist Girard's mimetic thesis on Austen's *Persuasion* without unambiguous support from the text, but Austen does provide such support. In scene after scene, she anatomizes the power of persuasion through imitation. Louisa's resolute persona is almost entirely a product of her reciprocal interactions with Wentworth. Wentworth's desire for Anne is re-animated almost completely through his imitation of a steady stream of other people, especially other men. Even the restoration of Anne's beauty is a mimetic process.

The most striking thing about *Persuasion* may be that this does not strike us at all. How could we miss so much persuasion in a novel called "Persuasion?" I believe that Austen deliberately misleads us. She gives us what are essentially two novels: one is a finely executed, conventionally satisfying, bittersweet romantic comedy, with a dainty moral about "persuasion," and the other is a penetrating exercise in psychological realism, so penetrating that it intrudes into the reading experience itself, distorting our judgment and perception. The best way for Austen to make her real point about persuasion is for us to miss the point entirely.

The outline of the present paper is as follows. I first argue that Austen's explicit treatment of persuasion is untenable by demonstrating how Louisa Musgrove's resolute impulsiveness is itself created through a process of persuasion. I then show how imitation drives Wentworth's re-animated desire for Anne. Finally, I briefly examine the real issue Anne has with persuasion, which is Wentworth's bitter denunciation, and not Lady Russell's advice.

The Persuasion of Louisa Musgrove

The explicit treatment of "persuasion" in *Persuasion* occupies no more than a few pages of the narrative. It is spotty, perfunctory, and rather primly moralistic. Three times Lady Russell attempts to persuade Anne with regard to offers of marriage (from Wentworth, Charles Musgrove, and Mr. Elliot, respectively). The first two proposals are treated in historical review and not

¹ My primary backgrounding on "mimesis" and "mimetic desire" comes from the following sources: René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World: The Girard Reader*; Jean-Michel Oughourlian, *The Puppet of Desire*.

part of the real-time narrative, while the third is hypothetical and never takes place at all.

But aside from its minimal presence in the novel, the lesson about persuasion is unpersuasive on its own terms. Of the three times Lady Russell's persuasion is exerted, only once is it successful. Anne is never in danger of marrying Charles Musgrove or Mr. Elliot, despite Lady Russell's enthusiastic sanction. Anne has developed a mature and critical understanding of her friend's limited judgment, and there is no case for her being persuadable by nature. Her giving up Wentworth was a painful, conscientious sacrifice, not an act of timid complaisance.

Readers and critics implicitly understand this, and pay scant attention to the overt treatment of persuasion that frames the novel, focusing instead (quite rightly) on what the novel is really about: Anne's quiet suffering and gradual restoration to hope, and Wentworth's re-animated desire for Anne. The theorist and critic Ronald Crane, for instance, has written, "...except thus subjectively for Wentworth...the whole matter of Lady Russell and of Anne's persuadability is not an issue in the plot" (Crane 291).

There remains Louisa Musgrove, however, whose heedless impetuosity is meant to demonstrate by negative contrast the merits of Anne's conscientious deference. But Louisa demonstrates no such thing. Louisa's "resoluteness" and "independence" are little more than a transient product of her interaction with Wentworth. They first appear during a walking excursion in chapter ten, when Louisa is in the process of edging out her sister Henrietta in competition for Wentworth. Wentworth comments about the hazardous driving of his brother-in-law and sister (Admiral and Mrs. Croft), and Louisa enthuses as follows:

"If I loved a man, as she loves the Admiral, I would be always by him, nothing should ever separate us, and I would rather be overturned by him, than driven safely by anyone else."

It was spoken with enthusiasm.

"Had you?" cried he, catching the same tone; "I honor you!" And there was silence between them for a little while. (1192)

This exchange anticipates Louisa's leap two chapters later, where she throws herself recklessly from the steps and into his power, as proof of her "love." Yet Louisa's assertion above is, at the time she utters it, an unexceptional effusion of romantic sentiment for a young lady out to impress a handsome man. It is in fact Wentworth who, "catching the same tone," amplifies Louisa's assertion with his ardent approval. But Wentworth's ardor originates elsewhere, in his resentment toward Anne, whom he sees as having

failed on exactly this point: taking a risk to be with the one she loves. (Anne catches this intimation immediately, and is duly mortified by it.) Louisa's commonplace romanticism is thus rewarded and reinforced by Wentworth, though it is based on nothing more than Louisa's ingratiating flirtatiousness and Wentworth's grudge against Anne.

A short time later, we arrive at Louisa and Wentworth's famous conversation from the hedgerow, also overheard by Anne. Louisa recounts how she has urged a reconciliation between Henrietta and her sweetheart Charles Hayter, over the interference of Anne's snobbish sister Mary. Louisa speaks of acting decisively on her inner promptings and resolutions, without yielding to interference. "I have no idea of being so easily persuaded," Louisa boasts. "When I have made up my mind, I have made it" (1193).

But Louisa is not motivated here by resolute independence but pragmatic self-interest: she wants to push Henrietta back to Charles Hayter so she can have Wentworth to herself. Furthermore, Louisa's self-advertised contrast with Henrietta is also suspect, for Austen makes little distinction between the two girls, and often goes out of her way to portray them as more or less interchangeable. Admiral Croft (often the voice of blunt realism) can never tell the two girls apart, much less keep their names straight.

Much more importantly, however, Louisa, in her romantic boast, is acting on cues that Wentworth himself has provided. She is saying, "Look! I truly *am* passionate and decisive, just as you noticed a little while ago!" Louisa enjoyed considerable success with her previous effusion about the Crofts, and hopes that this one will work even better, which indeed it does. Wentworth gives Louisa an exceptionally warm endorsement, capping it off with an elaborate metaphor about a sturdy acorn. Yet Wentworth is merely putting Louisa's account, once again, into the service of his own grievance against Anne (Henrietta/Charles/Mary = Anne/ Wentworth/Lady Russell), with Louisa being the fearless and decisive spirit who rights the wrongs of unjustified interference and tremulous complaisance.

Wentworth has now augmented Louisa's commonplace romanticisms into something like a life principle. By a process of mutual reinforcement and flattery, Louisa has become a disciple of Wentworth and of his philosophy of passionate resoluteness. In a very short time, she adapts her words, sentiments and finally actions to a model that Wentworth continues to spell out for her by providing his enthusiastic sanction.

The culmination of this process comes when Louisa takes her disastrous leap from the steps at Lyme. Louisa prepares herself for a particularly hazardous leap, and Wentworth urges her to desist. She leaps, in defiance of his

caution, saying "I am determined I will" (1216). In this leap, Louisa says in effect, "Look! See how resolute and independent I am now! I'll jump no matter *what* you say!" In not yielding to his caution, she merely shows herself to be his obedient disciple, one who now excels her master.

Thus, Louisa's leap is *not* the result of too little persuadability, but of *too much*. The moral of our story now lies in tatters. Is it better or not better to yield to persuasion? The question makes no sense. When Louisa jumps, she *is* yielding to persuasion. She is acting out the robust romanticism modeled through her interaction with Wentworth. If she *hadn't* jumped, she would have been yielding to persuasion as well, but in contradiction to the headstrong impulsiveness reinforced by Wentworth.

To fall back on mimetic terminology, Wentworth has created a "double bind" for Louisa (Girard, *Things Hidden* 290-93). He is saying, "Imitate me!" ("Be the fearless model of womanhood that I admire.") If she does not jump, she will presumably lose his admiration. But he is also saying, "Don't imitate me!" ("Don't jump! You might hurt yourself!"). Thus, if she jumps, she will lose his admiration as well—and in fact she does: she is exposed as a grandstanding exhibitionist for whom Wentworth loses all respect.²

Wentworth has trapped himself as well; to his horror, he finds that he is now considered virtually engaged to Louisa, without having given her a serious thought. The power of persuasion is thus sufficient to inspire dangerous leaps from rocks, and to turn mild attractions into inescapable life commitments. There is no substance behind it at all, yet it is quite real in its effects. Louisa's headstrong resoluteness is a "real" self, impossible to write off as mere play-acting. However, we have watched it appear out of nowhere, and later, when

² Much more can be extrapolated from Louisa's leap in mimetic terms, but rather more speculatively. I suggest that Louisa is aware of Wentworth's increased interest in Anne, and that her leap is an effort to fortify her hold on Wentworth and beat out her new rival by overplaying the new romantic persona. (This is a darker view of Louisa's leap, making it more pathetic and self-wounding.) It is also likely that Louisa must be every bit as disenchanted with Wentworth after her leap as he is with her. By throwing off Wentworth in favor of Benwick (who happens to be an admirer of Anne and Wentworth's close friend), Louisa hopes to stick it to her new female rival and her disappointing lover in one blow. There are echoes here of Lucy Steele in *Sense and Sensibility*, who jilts Edward Ferrars in a comparable way, though with more calculating spitefulness. The lack of overt or even conscious viciousness in Louisa's case would be consistent with my overall interpretation of *Persuasion*; characters do harmful things to one another (and to themselves) without much awareness of what they are doing.

Louisa attaches herself to Benwick, it will vanish just as readily as a new Louisa comes into being: the equally romantic but quiet, bookish, melancholy, "feeling" Louisa.³

Louisa is not alone in manifesting such transient "personality traits." Benwick himself recovers from his soulful grief for Fanny Harville with an alacrity that surprises his friends. Henrietta, too, is quick to forget her infatuation with Wentworth and adopt the concerns of Charles Hayter as her own. Louisa's defining traits at any given time, or for that matter Benwick's or Henrietta's, depend on whichever person they are in the process of attaching themselves to.

This fluidity of personality through the effects of interpersonal influence is really at the center of Austen's novel, and it is here that we find the real significance of "persuasion." People—even normal, likeable people with no conspicuous moral deficiencies—can exert "persuasive" influence on one another through an imitative process that they do not really understand, sometimes with disastrous consequences.

Austen submerges this truth about human nature behind her insubstantial moral lesson about persuasion. That lesson is about fixed character traits, which may need a little adjustment here and there. No one pays much attention to this morality tale, to be sure, but for Anne and Wentworth to reintroduce the debate about persuadability in the concluding chapters gives it just enough prominence to remind us that it frames the novel, and to forget that it is complete nonsense.

Though the more profound truth about persuasion is obscured, it is by no means invisible. Every step in the formation Louisa's "resolute" persona has been spelled out for us. In the case of Wentworth, the persuadability is even more striking.

The Persuasion of Frederick Wentworth

Who is it that really needs to be persuaded in *Persuasion*? Most obviously, Wentworth does. He needs to be persuaded to fall back in love with Anne, a point around which most of the dramatic tension of the novel revolves. Yet there is no one who can persuade Wentworth explicitly on the matter, and he continually shows himself incapable of persuading himself. He must therefore rely on the kind of tacit, imitative persuasion we have been examining. Austen

³ See Oughourlian (234-35), who calls this a "self of desire." The changes in Louisa's persona are an exemplary demonstration of the "interdividual" psychology elaborated by Oughourlian.

makes this increasingly clear as we follow the re-animation of Wentworth's desire. He learns to love Anne again by watching and imitating other people, especially other men.

The best place to begin tracking this process is the same conversation from the hedgerow examined above. After Wentworth's ardent speech about the sturdy acorn, Louisa aims her criticism at Mary again, this time enlisting Anne as an ally:

"We do so wish that Charles had married Anne instead. I suppose you know he wanted to marry Anne?"

After a moment's pause, Captain Wentworth said, "Do you mean she refused him?"

"Oh! yes, certainly."

"When did that happen?" (1194)

Wentworth's "moment's pause" is quite a pregnant one. We saw earlier how Wentworth offered his fervent approbation to Louisa at the expense of Anne. Now, these negative triangulations are seriously disrupted, since Louisa triangulates Anne positively, at the expense of Mary. Wentworth must absorb a great deal of new information: Anne is a great favorite with the whole Upper-cross circle, and Anne is still (or was recently still) desirable as a woman. What is more, Anne was desirable to a worthy man, Charles Musgrove, and she *refused* him; Mary was only his second choice. Anne is not the faded doormat Wentworth has thus far taken her to be. She is a *player*.

It is impossible for Wentworth to see Anne in the same light, and the effect is immediately apparent when the walking party encounters Mr. and Mrs. Croft, who are out for a drive in their gig. Wentworth talks to his sister, secures a ride for Anne, and hands her into the carriage. Thus, he is showing by this public gesture of good will that he now holds Anne in esteem, like the rest of the Upper-cross circle. (Significantly, he is also placing Anne in the symbolic position in relation to the Crofts that Louisa claimed earlier for herself.)

As it is with the circle at Uppercross (Anne as the general favorite), so it is with the circle at Lyme, where Anne quickly becomes the favorite of the Harvilles, particularly Captain Harville. And as it was with Charles Musgrove (Anne as the object of romantic interest), so it is with Captain Benwick, who is quite taken with Anne; romance is a very live possibility. There is no *direct* evidence at this point that Wentworth imitates the Harvilles or Benwick with regards to Anne, but Wentworth cannot be blind to the universal admiration for her shown at Lyme, and it is in line with what just happened at Uppercross. and what will soon follow in the encounter with Mr. Elliot:

When they came up the step, leading upward from the beach, a gentleman at the same moment preparing to come down, politely drew back, and stopped to give them way. They ascended and passed him; and as they passed, Anne's face caught his eye, and he looked at her with a degree of earnest admiration, which she could not be insensible of....It was evident that the gentleman (completely a gentleman in manner) admired her exceedingly. Captain Wentworth looked round at her instantly in a way which showed his noticing it. He gave her a momentary glance,—a glance of brightness which seemed to say, "That man is struck with you, and even I, at this moment, see something like Anne Elliot again." (1203-1204)

The man looks at Anne, Wentworth follows the man's gaze to Anne, and Wentworth imitates the stranger's conspicuous admiration. Nothing could be more obvious. Desire for Anne is sanctioned by this fine-looking stranger, and Wentworth acts on it without hesitation.

When the man is seen again later from the window of the inn, Wentworth's interest remains quite pronounced:

"Ah!" cried Captain Wentworth, instantly, and with half a glance at Anne, "it is the very man we passed."

....

"Pray," said Captain Wentworth immediately [to the servant], "can you tell us the name of the gentleman who is just gone away?" (1204)

Austen would not have inserted this "Ah!," this "instantly," or this "immediately," unless she wanted to underscore Wentworth's rapt interest toward the stranger. Yet Wentworth is only interested in the stranger because of the stranger's interest in Anne, and interested in Anne only because she is an object of interest to the stranger. He is interested in both of them together more than he could be interested in either of them separately. We have a perfect mimetic triangle here: Wentworth as desiring subject, Mr. Elliot as model of desire, and Anne as object of desire.⁴

Like Charles Musgrove's proposal but much more so, the stranger's admiration for Anne excites Wentworth's own. History suddenly reasserts itself

⁴ For a description of the "mimetic triangle," see Girard, *Deceit*, chapter 2.

in both cases (and I am sure in Benwick's case as well) as Wentworth fumbles for priority among these worthy male peers. We can almost hear him say to himself, "But, I admired her *first!*"

We next come to Louisa's leap and its traumatic aftermath, wherein Anne exercises her quick thinking and flawless judgment. It is here, Wentworth recalls later, that he learns "to distinguish between the steadiness of principle and the obstinacy of self-will, between the daring of heedlessness and the resolution of a collected mind" (1284). Thus, as Wentworth witnesses Anne's extraordinary response during the emergency, he would appear (contra the mimetic hypothesis) to come independently to an appreciation of her worth.

Yet there is nothing Wentworth does in these scenes that could truly be called independent. When Anne takes command of the men, she is taking on her characteristic Uppercross role of giving guidance to people who ask for it. Wentworth has been sufficiently enculturated into Uppercross life (especially since his conversation with Louisa, after which he understands Anne's standing in the group) to accept Anne's guidance here along with the other men, especially Charles. When Wentworth later declares, "no one so proper, so capable as Anne!" (1210), his evaluation is one that nearly anyone from the Uppercross circle might make. He can say this not so much because he has seen Anne being capable, but because he has *seen others seeing* Anne being capable. The same would apply to his tender deference to Anne's opinion in the carriage back to Uppercross; he can defer to her now because he has seen others defer to her elsewhere.

It is important to emphasize this, simply because readers and interpreters usually see the relationship between Wentworth and Anne as a struggle of true love against the constraints of social convention. I argue, quite to the contrary, that their struggle is almost entirely against a hyper-persuadability on Wentworth's part, and that in this regard (influence from others) social forces *enable* the progress of their love as much as they *obstruct* it. To explore these assertions, let us follow the lovers to Bath.

Once Wentworth is freed from his implicit engagement to Louisa, he rushes to Bath in pursuit of Anne. Austen would seem to have achieved her primary dramatic goal: persuading Wentworth to fall back in love with Anne. All that remains is for Wentworth to be persuaded that Anne loves him as well. Oddly enough, this proves to be the most difficult stage for Wentworth.

Mr. Elliot appears again, and Wentworth's attention is as rapt as ever, but now the fine gentleman appears not just as a model designating Anne as desirable, but as a rival and obstruction, designating her as off limits. Worse,

he seems strengthened and supported not only by every rumor mill of Bath, but by those formidable ghosts from the past, Lady Russell and Anne's family.

Things look very unfavorable indeed, and Wentworth's jealous frustration about Mr. Elliot would be perfectly understandable, if only he could look at Anne, and stop looking at everyone else. Despite Anne's most exerted efforts, however, Wentworth can only approach her in the most diffident and tentative manner, and interpret every encouraging signal from her in the worst possible light. He is never more than a hair's breadth from running away forever in bitter rejection. As at Uppercross or Lyme, Wentworth cannot see Anne except through the eyes of other people. Now, the problem is that it is all the wrong people.

What has happened to the brilliant, confident Wentworth, who captured French frigates, and could not forgive Anne for being swayed by the opinions of others? It is enlightening to recall Wentworth's denunciation of Anne:

He had not forgiven Anne Elliot. She had used him ill; deserted and disappointed him; and worse, she had shown a feebleness of character in doing so, which his own decided, confident temper could not endure. She had given him up to oblige others. It had been the effect of over-persuasion. It had been weakness and timidity. (1178)

This was never a particularly fair judgment on Anne, but it has become such an accurate projection of Wentworth himself (both at Uppercross, where he uses Anne ill, and at Bath, where he does almost everything else on the list) that we ought to ask where it came from in the first place.

Wentworth's eight-year grudge now begins to appear in a different light. When Anne refused Wentworth at that sad time, out of conscientious deference to her people, Wentworth was quick to see the obstruction as a personal insult: Lady Russell and the Elliots decreed that he wasn't good enough for Anne. His strategy was not to accept or reject this appraisal of himself and bide his time, but to repulse it with retaliatory defiance: "*Me*, not good enough for *her*? No, *she's* not good enough for *me*!" By displacing the unworthiness onto Anne, Wentworth thus set up a form of internal opposition exactly symmetrical to the snubbing he receives from Lady Russell and Anne's family, through Anne. This is the elaborate fiction Wentworth has maintained for eight years: Anne must be unworthy, because he is *not* unworthy.

This is a *necessary* fiction for him insofar as his self-confidence is at stake; he seems to fear Lady Russell may be right about him. Yet this also means he has been unable to see Anne on her own terms since; she becomes the weak

and despised node in the triangular opposition he sets up against these formidable rivals. So long as he can hold Lady Russell and the Elliots in lofty disdain and despise Anne as unworthy, Wentworth can create for himself a sort of creative tension to live by, protected from a sense of failure because Anne was unworthy, yet never disillusioned by success because—with Anne as the object denied by formidable rivals—it would never have been complete.

This interpretation makes Wentworth's subsequent actions more comprehensible. He is perfectly happy to find Anne a wasted, faded, premature spinster when he appears at Uppercross. This confirms his positive evaluation of himself *against* Lady Russell and the Elliots and *at the expense of* Anne. The cruel barbs Wentworth unleashes against Anne at Uppercross are completely consistent with this structural resentment, as is his taking up with inferior girls like Henrietta and Louisa before Anne's eyes. It is like a miscreant son bringing home a girl from "the wrong side of the tracks" to perturb his socialite parents, a kind of negative imitation of Lady Russell—exactly the sort of girls she *wouldn't* approve of.

Though Wentworth is always the one most viscerally contemptful of the snobbish Elliots, he complains too much. His sneering disdain is out of proportion to their real consequence. To bluntly honest characters like Admiral Croft or Charles Musgrove, the ridiculous Sir Walter is never more than a curious and inconsequential figure (at worst), or a rather tiresome social obligation (at best). The social status of the Elliots is of no concern to anyone outside Sir Walter's immediate circle, except (quite tellingly) Frederick Wentworth.

This would explain Wentworth's aggravated uncertainty at Bath. His experience at Uppercross and Lyme now make it impossible for him to elevate himself against these social rivals (which now include the impressive Mr. Elliot) at Anne's expense. Now he sees Anne elevated and himself once more the excluded outsider, and he has no structural defenses, except the ad hoc strategy of petulance. It is no wonder that Wentworth's behavior in Bath is so nervous, so ambivalent, so erratic.

Wentworth is genuinely confused, not only about what is happening, but about what he really wants. He comes so close, so often, to ruining his own chances that he seems to be deliberately courting failure. The prospect of "beating" Mr. Elliot (and with him the whole Elliot ensemble, including Lady Russell) may be every bit as scary to Wentworth as being beaten *by* them. After all, Wentworth has structured his identity on resentful opposition to the Elliots for more than eight years. It's not clear what victory would bring.

Defeat, on the other hand, is a known quantity; it could supply him with

years and years more of indignant self-pity, and he has had a lot of practice at that sort of thing. In Girard's economy, a permanently unbeatable obstacle presents a strangely attractive kind of misery (*Things Hidden* 297-8, 327, 332, 413). The world is full of disappointing young Anne Elliots and Louisa Musgroves. Unbeatable rivals and unobtainable objects, on the other hand, keep desire alive without those inevitably disabusing experiences that show it to be illusory.

So strong are Wentworth's distorted impressions that almost nothing can shake him out of them. He can only see Anne's encouragements—so he will confess later—as the easy complacency of a secure woman. He suspects that she must be triumphing over him as he did over her when he accepted the flirtations of the Musgrove girls. He assumes he and Anne are continuing the same old game, only switching places.

Without necessarily understanding it, Anne has an alert intuition about Wentworth's dangerous suggestibility:

Captain Wentworth jealous of her affection! Could she have believed it a week ago—three hours ago? For a moment the gratification was exquisite. But alas! there were very different thoughts to succeed. How was such jealousy to be quieted? How was the truth to reach him? (1254)

It is an excellent question: how indeed? Later, as Anne begins to grasp the difficulty of getting through to Wentworth, she plaintively laments,

We are not boy and girl to be captiously irritable, misled by every moment's inadvertence, and wantonly playing with our own happiness. (1272)

But Wentworth *is* being childishy captious and irritable, and quite easily misled. He "wantonly plays with their own happiness" exactly as Anne fears in his desperately scribbled letter when he writes, "A word, a look will be enough to decide whether I enter your father's house this evening or never" (1281). Why on earth should a single "word or look" determine their fate? For that matter, why is he writing a letter at all, instead of waiting to propose to her face to face? Wentworth is leaving himself open to all of his most hyper-suggestible tendencies.

Anne is justifiably agitated about this, intuiting (correctly) that she needs to chase Wentworth down the streets of Bath to make sure he doesn't see or hear anything that will persuade him the wrong way. She is afraid that she will

"lose the possibility of speaking two words to Captain Wentworth." She is "[a]nxious to omit no possible precaution" and tries twice to get her unambiguous encouragement to join the evening card party through to him through the Harvilles. Yet "her heart prophesied some mischance" (1282).

Harold Bloom comments that *Persuasion* always moves him to tears because of the unhappiness that is so narrowly missed, especially in this scene (Bloom 243-45). Bloom is quite right; everything hangs on a very thin thread here indeed. Yet the narrowly missed unhappiness in *Persuasion* is not a factor of cruel mischance or "contingency" (as in a Thomas Hardy novel) but of Wentworth's hyper-persuadability, his tendency to let Anne be mediated to him by everyone but Anne herself.

Who, indeed, can rescue Wentworth from his distorted projections? Certainly not himself, and not Anne, apparently. The few direct exchanges he has with Anne in Bath are not particularly successful—necessary, but clearly not sufficient for their reconciliation. None of this is enough. As usual, Wentworth needs persuasion. He needs mediators to help him, lots of them. Austen must bring in the entire rescue crew to Bath—Musgroves, Harvilles, Crofts—for no other reason than to persuade Wentworth that Anne is both attainable and receptive. She must be mediated positively, to counteract the discouraging mediation he sees in everyone else.

Thus, as he and Anne overhear his sister disapprove of hasty and imprudent marriages, he learns that it is acceptable to forgive Anne now for refusing him on the basis of his unsure prospects eight years ago (1277-78). Wentworth's absolution is mediated from his sister, to him, and finally (as the two exchange meaningful glances) to Anne.

When Wentworth overhears the amazingly frank and heartfelt conversation between Anne and Captain Harville about constancy (1278-80), it is another triangle, by which Anne's love is mediated to Wentworth. As far as he can tell, she still feels for him, but he has to hear her say it to someone else. Wentworth chooses *this* time for his desperately scribbled proposal.

We must pause and note the truly bizarre nature of this scene. Wentworth is proposing *by letter*, to a woman who is *standing in the same room*, and *while she is talking to another man*. Austen's genius is simply awesome here. It is at this dramatic climax of her romance that she hoodwinks us most completely, and all but forces us to see the exact opposite of what is actually taking place. Wentworth's letter is considered one of the most romantically charged in literature. Readers and interpreters are almost universally convinced that Wentworth is doing the boldest, most romantic thing imaginable. In fact, it is distant, faint-hearted, derivative, parasitical, dependent. Though Wentworth is

considered the most passionately impetuous of Austen's male principals, no other Austen hero would ever propose in such an absurdly timid manner.

Austen uses the power of persuasion (the charismatic appeal of Wentworth himself) to guarantee that we do not recognize the power of persuasion (the fact that Wentworth is drawing his ardor from others). Wentworth is not manifesting passion here; he is *borrowing* it. He needs to siphon something off from the fervency of Anne and Harville, so that he can build up the fervor to formulate his own renewed pledge.

Even up to the moment of their reconciliation, Wentworth needs Charles Musgrove to hand Anne off to him on the streets of Bath. It is an odd scene, not unlike a wedding, where Wentworth takes Anne's arm from his worthy and unsuccessful rival, his "best man." Musgrove is usually seen as a romantic impediment in this scene, one more in a chain of interruptions that threaten to keep Anne and Wentworth apart, but this is not so, and a simple thought experiment can prove it. Suppose Anne had managed to get into the streets unattended but was intercepted by Mr. Elliot, or Lady Russell, before she could see Wentworth? Suppose she were forced to be escorted home by either of them, to take one of *their* arms instead of Charles Musgrove's? In such a case, what "word" or "look" could Anne possibly have communicated to Wentworth that would not have been misconstrued by him?

Charles Musgrove is not an encumbrance here; he is a shield and facilitator. He shields Wentworth from untoward influences and, at the same time (as a friend of Anne, a former lover of Anne, and an unsuccessful lover of Anne) makes Anne non-threatening and approachable. Wentworth can approach Anne safely; Charles Musgrove is exactly the person who is needed here.

All of these scenes, I emphasize, are mimetic and triangular; Anne must be positively mediated to Wentworth through his friends and loved ones. The pains Austen took to rewrite the final scenes strongly support this interpretation. D. W. Harding notes how Austen originally had the reconciliation between Wentworth and Anne effected directly, just between the two of him, when Anne was obliged by circumstances to explain that she did not intend to marry Mr. Elliot (Harding 152-153). Thinking this reconciliation contrived, Austen rewrote it completely, adding the revised chapters twenty-two and twenty-three (the latter contains the scenes with Wentworth's sister, Harville, and Musgrove). Why would the earlier version seem "contrived" to Austen? It is because Austen knows it would be "out of character" for Wentworth to do such things by himself.

In their joyful conversations as reconciled lovers, the romantic soft focus overcomes us again, allowing us to forget a great deal of what has happened and to retain a picture of Wentworth as an ardent lover whose main fault (and a very endearing one) seems to be that he just feels a little bit too much. He has to establish his *constancy* (as per Anne's heartfelt conversation with Captain Harville). He has to convince us that he is no mere Louisa, no mere Henrietta, no mere Benwick, no mere Charles Musgrove; he must *not* be one of those, in other words, who can transfer their affections at the drop of a hat.

There is no doubt that Wentworth's repentance is completely sincere, or that he will make Anne a very happy woman. I intend no cynical "subversion" of Anne and Wentworth's reconciliation, nor any all-out attack on Wentworth—a fine man, with outstanding personal qualities (intelligence, ability, spirit, wit, generosity, sensitivity, and courage). His renewed pledges and protestations are perfectly adequate to the occasion. All that he needs to do here is consecrate himself anew to Anne, and Austen never insists on complete accuracy from her lovers at such moments (only think of Darcy and his first proposal to Elizabeth Bennet!).

Let us grant Wentworth all of his obvious merits, but let us also be careful not to let him off too lightly, lest we reinforce the misreading Austen so deviously sprung for us a few pages back. We must gauge Wentworth's retelling of history against the real history we have seen. After all, has not Anne just protested to Captain Harville that men, in writing their own histories, always seem to present themselves as constant, and women as fickle (1279)? What of Wentworth's history?

In fact, Wentworth falls into exactly the same systematic bias as those male historians. In dwelling on the excruciating agonies Anne subjected him to simply by being near Mr. Elliot, Wentworth presents himself as the truehearted man tormented by a woman's deportment. But, surely Wentworth must remember how he accepted the flirtations of the Musgrove girls before Anne's eyes? He does, but his ill-judged involvement with Louisa he now excuses as "the attempts of angry pride" (1284). (This is an extraordinary confession: *Louisa meant nothing to me; I was only using her to get back at you!*)

Few romantic heroes could recast such a dubious history (petty, mean-spirited vindictiveness; careless, open flirtations with other girls: jealous petulance) and come off looking so good. The easy excusability of Wentworth is part of Austen's ironic intent. She gives us a sincere, ardent, appealing man who leaves damaged women in his wake (Louisa and Anne) but against whom it is very difficult to sustain any accusatory disposition. Characters are won over to Wentworth, as are readers, and the specific damage he does goes largely

unscrutinized and forgotten, as does the highly persuadable nature of his behavior, which he convinces us is self-determined, because he is so convinced of it himself. We are the ultimate victims of Wentworth's persuadability.

Wentworth does recall many of the important milestones of his reanimated desire (hearing of Charles' proposal, noticing Mr. Elliot's admiration, and appreciating Anne's worth in the emergency). However, he presents as the product of gradual self-discovery what has in fact been the product of persuasion, of mediating influence. For instance, Anne knows very well that Wentworth found her unattractive when he arrived at Uppercross, and Wentworth himself has just admitted that he was "roused" to her beauty again through Elliot's admiration. Yet (speaking of his brother) Wentworth now proclaims,

"He enquired after you very particularly; asked even if you were altered, little suspecting that to my eye you could never alter."

Anne smiled and let it pass. It was too pleasing a blunder for reproach.
(1285)

Alas, "smiling and letting it pass" seems the most appropriate response to so much of Wentworth's review of events. Yet he is not lying, and probably not even willfully forgetting. Like Louisa's headstrong recklessness, Wentworth's renewed admiration for Anne is to large extent a mediated self that, once brought into being, appears to have been there all along. It is a deeper and more secure admiration, to be sure, but only because his friends have helped make it so.

Austen is a skeptic, not a cynic. She is not deconstructing "true love" simply because she skillfully anatomizes its socially mediated aspects. Examples of successful marriages and loving intimacy among friends abound in *Persuasion*, much more than in any other of her novels. Furthermore, as argued earlier, persuasion plays an overwhelmingly positive role in reuniting rather than separating Anne and Wentworth.

Finally, Austen leaves untouched Anne and Wentworth's first love, which she portrays as a strong, ardent, natural, "unmediated" attachment. Their first love (though somewhat protected from scrutiny by the haze of historical review) appears to hold out against our mimetic interpretation. Yet, it is strange how weakly it holds up against mimesis itself. The first sign of disfavor from outsiders sends Wentworth off on an eight-year grudge in which he (not Anne) subjects himself slavishly to a series of strongly mediated impressions.

It must be considered pure irony that Wentworth's scathing denunciation of Anne concerns her yielding (exactly once) to the persuasion of her family advisor, yet he can only approach Anne again after she has been enthusiastically approved by virtually all of his friends and loved ones, and all but thrust into his arms. It would be even more incredible that this irony has remained unremarked by generations of Austen lovers, if it weren't for the fact that Austen has deviously orchestrated this misreading herself. Wentworth's reanimated desire for Anne is a brilliant piece of trick art. As we sigh over our romantic hero, Austen mischievously winks.

The Persuasion of Anne Elliot

It is beyond the scope of this paper to undertake a thorough analysis of Anne, whose finely wrought consciousness is at the cognitive and moral center of the novel. However, a brief sketch can be offered here which is in line with the mimetic thesis we have been pursuing.

There *is* a persuadability issue with Anne, but it has very little to do with Lady Russell's advice and almost everything to do with Wentworth. As Austen records in chapter four, it is Wentworth's bitter denunciation which traumatizes Anne, perhaps even more than the loss of Wentworth himself. As for the specifics of Wentworth's indictment, Anne can acquit herself: his judgment against her temperament is unfair, and her yielding to persuasion can be rationally and ethically defended. But emotionally, Wentworth's charges stick. Anne begins to take on the precise shape of his accusation, spiraling downward into eight years of self-wounding abnegation and physical neglect.

The wasting away of Anne's body and spirits follows the pattern of a present day eating disorder which young women succumb to after a breakup. Anne becomes a shadowy, mousy, faded, undesirable woman, quietly attentive to everyone but herself. Though larger souled and more self-aware than Louisa, Anne is by no means immune to the power of persuasion that compels the younger girl to hurl herself from rocks. Like Louisa, Anne becomes what Wentworth thinks she is.

The cause and cure for Anne is persuasion. Just as she wilts in the aftermath of Wentworth's denunciation, she begins to rebloom at his first sign of forgiveness, which (in my opinion) takes place when Wentworth hands her into the Croft's gig in chapter ten. This tiny gesture sets off an intense wave of emotion in Anne, wherein she senses some relenting and conciliation on Wentworth's part, even as she reviews all of his hurts and injustices toward her (1196). Thereafter, the physical presence of Wentworth is considerably less painful to Anne, and it is not long before her beauty reappears on the beach at

Lyme. The augmentation of her beauty and personability is steady and dramatic from then on, as she attracts an increasing throng of friends and male admirers.

Anne must be persuaded back into beauty and personability. This is by no means a tortured or tenuous reading, since there are strong parallels with other "psycho-symptomatic" characters whom Anne herself must persuade back into health or good spirits. There is Mary, who falls into hypochondria whenever she feels neglected, and Benwick, who is so easily persuaded out of his rather overwrought grief for Fanny Harville.

However, this view of Anne should not diminish her moral achievement, which is of a very high caliber. Anne must endure the grief of estrangement, Wentworth's bitter denunciation, the loneliness and isolation that follow, and finally Wentworth's cold civilities and thoughtless provocations at Uppercross. Through all of this, Anne endeavors not to wish Wentworth ill, not to lie to herself about her own feelings, and not to manufacture blame against others or herself. Anne struggles to live without resentment under circumstances that are particularly grueling and unrelenting. Her moral achievement is tremendous here, and it is not made less so by the fact that she is not completely successful; Anne follows the command to love her neighbor, but neglects the corollary imperative to love herself.

Conclusion

Girard's mimetic thesis is particularly well suited to bring out the unexpected psychological depth and thematic unity that lie hidden in *Persuasion*, a tender and deceptively simple romantic comedy. Girard's thesis works here because his thesis and Austen's thesis are essentially the same thesis. Mimetic psychology is the natural language of Austen, and it pervades not just *Persuasion* but all of her major novels.

To my knowledge, at least one other novel, *Emma*, has received a mimetic analysis in the excellent study by Beatrice Marie, whose only fault is to see *Emma* as the exception rather than the rule. All of Austen's work stands in need of a thorough mimetic analysis. I believe that such efforts will draw out an entirely new dimension to Austen's achievement and raise her stature as a novelist, already deservedly high, higher still.

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NARRATIVE AND EXPLANATION: EXPLAINING *ANNA KARENINA* IN THE LIGHT OF ITS EPIGRAPH

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In this paper, I will be examining the relation of explanation to narrative, looking briefly at the theoretical side of the problematic and in more detail at specific explanatory issues that arise in Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina*. Although the use itself of the term "explanation" is not as visible in the humanities as it is in the sciences, the explanatory enterprise by other names is just as prominent. For indeed, an animating impetus behind textual interpretation is an explanation of how a text can be brought into a correspondence with another text, while contemporary critical-theoretical activities of demystifying aesthetic and cultural assumptions, contextualizing historical knowledge, or laying bare ideological presuppositions are, in one way or another, engagements in the explanation of the workings of language. I approach humanistic explanation via a brief detour of scientific explanation, which constitutes an already established discourse with a set of defined issues and standard arguments, limiting myself to touching upon issues relevant to the narrativization of explanation.

In scientific debates, explanation is defined as an answer to the question of "why?," in contradistinction to the question of "what?," which prompts a description of a phenomenon in question. Descriptive and explanatory conceptual frameworks, however, are interdependent. A physical description involves an "in-depth" understanding of underlying regularities. An explanatory answer to a question is, in its turn, an argument that logically deduces the *explanandum* (the description of a phenomenon to be explained) from the *explanans* (well-understood regularities). This

formal definition of an explanation necessitates a symmetry between explanation and prediction, because the reconstructed logical sequence can also be read in the other direction, demonstrating the inevitability of what has occurred. Thus the sight of shattered glass and a baseball lying about allows me to explain the accident by invoking the law of the conservation of momentum and the low shock-resistance of glass. But the knowledge of these regularities would have also allowed me to predict the same outcome had I seen the baseball flying in its direction of the window.

The ontological status of "regularities" has elicited a lively debate in the scientific community pertaining to the problem of the "real." The standard view of regularities defines them as general laws (the kind we learn about in physics classes) that could be deductive or inductive, deterministic or statistical. A general law may be subsumed under another, even more general law, thus forming a unifying hierarchy of laws. A rival conception appeals to causal mechanisms and defines regularities as established chains of temporal succession. Both models, the covering-law and the causal one, have been criticized: the former—for its failure to distinguish a law from an accidental generalization; the latter—for its resurrection of the metaphysical notion of causal influence and its inability to deal with probabilistic events. One of the later contenders is Nancy Cartwright's model, that proposes to conceive of regularities as so-called "nomological machines"—"fixed (enough) arrangement[s] of components, or factors, with stable (enough) capacities that in the right sort of stable (enough) environment will, with repeated operation, give rise to the kind of regular behavior that we represent in our scientific laws" (Cartwright 50). Cartwright claims that scientific models work on the *ceteris paribus* (everything else being equal) basis. That is to say they "hold only in circumscribed conditions or so long as no factors relevant to the effect besides those specified occur" (Cartwright 28), such as inside a battery, refrigerator, or a rocket—insofar as special shielding conditions are in effect (as a counterexample, imagine using Newton's laws of mechanics for describing the motion of a dropped crumpled dollar). Cartwright's explanatory framework is thus pragmatic and local, avoiding the twin pitfalls of the metaphysical assumptions underlying the two older models—the totalizing and unifying idea of a covering law, on the one hand, and the influence of causal "force," on the other. What is instead emphasized by her is a procedural aspect of scientific knowledge that has been historically prevalent and reflects the practical exigencies of human existence—the experience of dangers and natural obstacles to human

desires. When ill-defined impediments are analyzed and reduced to concrete difficulties, specific working procedures in the form of nomological machines can be offered to overcome them.

In Cartwright's model, the explanation of a phenomenon merges with the description of how to build a nomological machine. Hers is a powerful model that can account not only for deterministic phenomena but also for stochastic ones, described by statistical regularities. There remains, however, one class of phenomena not assimilable to this and other regularity models—singular, emergent phenomena, i.e., phenomena that can be described as principally novel or unexpected, because their occurrence cannot be predicted based on the available information: they can neither be logically inferred from the immediately preceding state of the system nor surmised from the consideration of its constitutive parts. These types of phenomena are covered by so-called genetic explanations. A genetic explanation "that consists in telling a story leading up to the event to be described" (Kitcher 32) is invoked in the evolutionary theory, cosmology, geology, and history, among other disciplines. Although genetic explanations are highly problematic from the standpoint of philosophy of science, my objective in bringing them up is to point to the connection between a genetic explanation and narrative. In offering a genetic explanation, one tells a narrative of how something came to pass, such as a story of Darwinian selection. In a literary narrative, the narration of a singular or exceptional event, such as a story of transgression, functions similarly to a genetic explanation in that when our knowledge about the world cannot be regularized or proceduralized, we resort to telling stories.

The controversiality of genetic explanation, which has to do with its looseness and inability to yield predictions, arises partly because of what is left unexamined by philosophy of science, namely the "why-question" itself. Genetic argumentation, it seems to me, provides us with the paradigm for the why-question that can afford important insights into what constitutes the "explanatoriness" of explanation. I would like to claim that "why" is the question of existential anxiety, which ties directly into what Martin Heidegger deems as the first question of metaphysics: "why is there something rather than nothing?" To this I would also add (because I believe they are the same types of questions): "why are there many things rather than one?"; "why is there this thing rather than some other?"—questions that can properly be addressed by telling a story of origin and the province of the earliest narratives: myths, legends, fairy tales. Even the why-

questions of the more pragmatic nature, as those asked in science, are derivative with respect to the "why something exists" question, for they also resonate with an echo of a sense of wonderment at the variety of life, its whimsical nature, its sheer arbitrariness and aberration. If this were not so, there would be no whys but simply pragmatic prompts for description. What I am arguing, however, is not that mythological narratives constitute proper explanatory responses to existential why-questions, but that why-questions are themselves anthropologically coextensive with narratives. Therefore the ultimate "why," as well as its local instantiations, can never be answered. The why-question itself is embedded in the structure of narrative; or to put it another way: it is "because" we have language, "because" we have narrative, we ask "why." Narrative structures, I believe, are projections of our physical alienation from the world and a resulting sense of impotence. Things suddenly come into our view and just as suddenly disappear. We can manipulate them, but can only make them extensions of our bodies in a very limited sense. Representation, a crucial anthropological mark of human culture, reflects this separation anxiety. But it would be equally correct to say that the separation anxiety itself is epiphenomenal to representation. The point here is not to assign epistemological primacy, because we are mining a territory that is "beyond" the notions of causality or succession, but to tap into the genetic connections between explanatory exigencies and representational structures. Theorizing narrative as the paradigm of explanation would involve embedding it into a structure of significance that would be broader than a theory of conceptualization or a theory of context, but would involve an anthropologically-grounded understanding of narrative as a desire of humans to understand themselves as maximally free, to use representation to heal the trauma of alienation that it has itself engendered, by creating stories of themselves as competent agents ready to face off what Hans Blumenberg in his *Work on Myth* calls "absolutism of reality," denoting man's lack of control over the outside world, which is experienced by him as an environment hostile and impervious to his needs and resistant to his exertions to transform it.

In light of these preliminary comments, I propose to approach the reading of *Anna Karenina* as an explanatory enterprise spurred by two prompts: the epigraph and the first sentence of the novel. I will put off the discussion of the epigraph ("Vengeance is mine: I will repay") until later and will start with the first sentence, which, according to the critical lore, was rewritten by Tolstoy one hundred times. It reads: "All happy families

resemble one another, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Recast as an explanatory cue, it gives rise to questions, such as "why is it that some families are happy while others are unhappy?" and "why happy families are similar, while unhappy ones are dissimilar?" One could read these "whys" existentially, in the sense of "Look at all the different kinds of families that exist. Some are happy, while others are not." But one could also notice that it resonates in a suggestive way with Cartwright's notion of the nomological machine by encoding proceduralized knowledge bound to generate predictable results. A happy family, namely, can be seen as a nomological machine, because, just like well oiled and correctly functioning machines, "all happy families" function similarly, achieving the desirable state of "resembling one another." The workings of an unhappy family, on the other hand, are sadly out of tune with the proper running regime—and that is why it "is unhappy in its own way."

If the novel, as I claim, illuminates its first sentence, then we could expect it to present us with the paradigms of happy and unhappy families. Indeed, according to several sources, Tolstoy is said to have remarked on several occasions that the idea nearest and dearest to his heart when he was writing *Anna Karenina* was the "family idea." His novel, it could be argued, presents an expanded 900-page long explanation of what it takes to be a happy family. But who are the happy families of the novel? The marriage of the eponymous heroine herself to a much older high-ranking government official, Alexis Karenin, does not come about of her own choice, but is arranged for her by her wealthy aunt, who is her legal guardian. We are told that Karenin perceives their marriage to be a good one, but have our doubts as to Anna's experience of it, given her obsessive preoccupation with her son and her first instinctive reaction of recoiling from her husband after a short absence at the sight of his chilly artificiality and "gristly ears" (103). When Anna meets Alexis Vronsky, a dashing officer, she falls in love with him and leaves her husband, scandalizing both him and herself and losing parental rights to her beloved son. Three lives are permanently shattered in the wake of her destructive love affair. Another unhappy family is that of Stephen Oblonsky, Anna's brother, and his wife, Dolly. Given to hedonism and dissipation, Stephen or Stiva, as he is called, is chronically and unrepentantly unfaithful to his wife and neglectful of his parental duties. Dolly, his long-suffering wife and mother of his six children, who stays with him, is both pitied and despised by her sister Kitty and brother-in-law Levin. Levin and Kitty's marriage is the best candidate for the appellation of a "happy family." Indeed we "catch" their relationship at the very

beginning, follow it through courtship, wedding, first months together, and leave them soon after the birth of their first child, son Mitya. In more than one way, theirs is the "happy family" of the novel, which is contrasted to the unhealthy marriage of the Oblonsky, the failed marriage to the Karenin, and the ill-fated illegitimate relationship of Anna and Vronsky, resulting in a bastard child, infamy, loss of affection, and the final tragedy of Anna's suicide.

Tolstoy draws on the Biblical idea of marriage as symbolic of the original unity of man as a being constituted both by the male and female principle, a hearkening back to the time of the first partition or parturition of Eve from Adam's rib: "And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:23-24). In the Jewish mystical tradition, this idea becomes reflected and amplified as that of the Shekhinah. The word has several meanings. It signifies the feeling of God's presence, but it is also considered to be his female aspect, sometimes personified as Israel—both God's bride and daughter. Moreover, the Shekhinah is the soul of man. Originally created by God, all souls combine the male and female elements as they exist in the higher spheres. But as they journey down to Earth, the two parts separate, and only God knows where the two halves of the original soul reside. The man can only find his other half and complete himself by walking in the way of truth.

These metaphors of the original union and the separation of man are invoked throughout the novel. Thus, deeply moved by the liturgy of his traditional wedding ceremony, Levin contemplates the words of the prayer: "'Joinest them that were separate'—what a depth of meaning in those words, and how well they fit in with what I am feeling at this moment!" (450). At the conclusion of the ceremony, the priest tells the couple to kiss: "Levin kissed her carefully on her smiling lips, offered his arm, and with a feeling of strange closeness led her out of the church. He could not believe it was all true, and only realized it when their surprised and timid glances met and felt they were already one" (456). Three months into their marriage, as they are having their first big argument, Levin "for an instant...was offended, but immediately knew he could not be offended with her because she was himself" (479). Conversely, when Anna Karenina is receiving Dolly as her guest at her and Vronsky's fashionably appointed estate, she makes use of the metaphor of disjunction, as she breaks down in tears in front of her sister-in-law, talking about her forced separation

from her son: "Understand that I love equally, I think, and both more than myself—two beings: Serezha and Alexis... I love those two beings only, and the one excludes the other! I cannot unite them, yet that is the one thing I desire" (636). What she means, however, is that she cannot unite herself: she herself is split between the two. In other words, the implacable and unnatural consequences of Anna and Vronsky's unholy union attain to the tragic level of the metaphysical sundering of Anna's subjectivity, while the church-sanctified marriage of Levin and Kitty, on the contrary, is figured in the novel in the valorized terms of wholesome synthesis: from two different beings they have become one complete whole.

Such backward-pulling nostalgic yearning for the state of original oneness that the dream of marital communion represents could be read anthropologically. The falling back from differentiation into undifferentiation, from individuation to pre-individuation is characterized by Hans Blumenberg as a "the longing to sink back...to the level of [man's] impotence, into archaic resignation,...the desire to return home to the archaic irresponsibility of simple surrender"(9). The interpretation that he attaches to this desire to sink back is a surrender to the "absolutism of reality." Such is a reaction of resignation experienced by an early hominid, who has left its native environment in the rainforest for the savanna and now faces the challenge of meeting his food needs in the ecological niche, for which he lacks adaptation. Blumenberg describes this phenomenon as "intentionality of consciousness without an object" fraught with anxiety, which expresses "the pure state of indefinite anticipation" (4). I would like to divorce this notion from a specific historical moment and interpret it in more general philosophical-anthropological terms, connecting it to my preceding argument about existential anxiety implicated in the "why-question." According to Blumenberg, the exigencies of the absolutism of reality are eventually met by *theory* as "the better adapted mode of mastering the episodic *tremenda* of recurring world events" (26). Theory domesticates the world, easing its "episodicity" by regularizing knowledge. It seeks out ways of inducing regular behavior via the resort to specific practices and procedures that guarantee predictable results, what Cartwright would call the creation of nomological machines.

In the realm of the physical world, nomological machines are generally welcomed (albeit not without reservations) as a manifestation of technological progress. In the social sciences and the humanities, they, however, present a problem that gives rise to a certain paradox. What is desirable about procedural knowledge in general is that it works to assuage

the anxiety of being surrounded by threatening undifferentiated world by equipping the human with the capacity to anticipate "the recurring *tremenda*" and prepare for them. Another way of putting this is to say that by liberating the human from the paralysis of unspecified fears, procedural knowledge increases personal freedom. Understanding the world in terms of governing laws and principles sets man free from being rendered helpless by anxieties and uncertainties, arming him with foresight, and allowing him to focus his energies on planning a specific course of action. This thinking can also claim validity in being applied to anthropological knowledge. On the one hand, representing man as the object of knowledge and building a nomological machine that models human behavior would be something desirable, as it would provide one with the same freedom-enhancing advantages as those just mentioned. When we, on the other hand, shift the representation from man as an object to man as a subject, when in place of "the Other" we substitute "I," we no longer wish to think of ourselves as nomological machines, as the same theoretical understanding that empowers us in dealing with our fellow man deprives us, paradoxically, of our own freedom of choice, causing us to become unfree. As a result, we both strive to systematize and construct procedural knowledge, viewing it as a liberating activity, and, at the same time, resist it as something fundamentally constraining. (Herein, I believe, lies one of the reasons for the humanities' ambivalence toward theoretical thinking.)

This paradox of freedom manifests itself in the conflicting way we deal with ethics. According to one tradition, we are to act in accordance with a number of moral rules. From the Old Testament perspective, these rules are stipulated in the codex of the Mosaic law. The corresponding secular attitude understands ethical principles to be part of "natural law," comprising a number of logical propositions which postulate shared human goods and from which practical imperatives are derived. In contradistinction to this legalistic view, the opposing view acknowledges the problematicity of confining moral behavior to a prescribed set of precepts, recognizing that a limited body of law may fail to give adequate counsel in every conceivable situation. There is always a possibility that a situation may always arise which calls for an exception from or an extension of a rule. This is the view that is congenial to the Christian perspective on ethics. As Rufus Black sums up the philosophy of Christian moral realism: "the Christian does not simply follow laws that have been laid down; rather she formulates these laws as part of her ability to respond to situations in ways that allow her to expand her possibilities for human flourishing. If obeying rules becomes an end in itself, rules will be a form of oppression

because they will have lost their justifying purpose of directing a person toward her, and her community's, well-being" (Black 222-223). However, having liberated themselves from the tyranny of the law, the adherents to the interpretative view find themselves on shaky ground when it comes to rationalizing their practical judgments. "When existing principles fail to offer...insights [of wisdom], the Christian is called to turn to the Spirit for help in the task of discerning the right path to take" (Black 223), and so all he has to fall back on is the authoritativeness of his interpretation.

Kant, in his optimistic belief in reason, believed himself to have solved this conundrum. Postulating reason as a shared attribute of all rational beings allowed him to state that the morality of any action could be logically deduced by trying it out mentally as a universal moral law. It is this conception of the rational individual as the autonomous origin of moral principles that enabled him to reconcile the first and the second perspective: as someone who possesses intelligence, man freely recognizes himself as subject to the law of which he himself is the legislator. Kant's basic premise, however, of individual moral responsibility grounded in shared rationality has been variously criticized. He writes: "why should I subject myself as a rational being, and thereby all other beings endowed with reason, to [the universal law]?... I must nevertheless take an interest in it and see how it comes about, for this 'ought' is properly a 'would' that is valid for every rational being provided reason is practical for him without hindrance" (Kant 76). This unproblematic conversion of an *ought* into a *would* is the crux of the problem. Pepita Harzrahi objects that although, according to Kant, "the same complex of circumstances and conditions which assures me of the certainty of my own freedom and moral responsibility, assures others of *their* freedom and *their* responsibility...no point in this argument necessarily implies an assurance for men of each other's freedom and moral capacity." (Kant 294) Kant, in other words, makes an unproven inductive assumption a foundation of moral action by transforming a "what is" (shared reason) into a "what ought to be" (mutual responsibility). As the grounding for ethics, this move necessarily fails because "of what is widely understood as Hume's contention that it is not possible to derive an 'ought' from an 'is'" (Black 6), or an ethical imperative from a set of theoretical postulates. This confusion is illuminated by the ambiguity inherent in the notion of a *law*. The sense of necessity with which we endow theoretical premises owes to our concept of the Laws of Nature (for example, to explain a phenomenon, as shown above, is to demonstrate its inevitability according to some indispensable principle or assured regularity). But the idea of the Laws of Nature came fully into its own only after the Renaissance, retaining the

connotation of social coercion or dictates of convention, and, for a while (long enough so that we can still recognize it in Kant), the boundary between the natural and the customary law remained blurred (as late as in the fifteenth century, a rooster is said to have been sentenced to burn at the stake for the recalcitrant "unnatural" act of laying an egg).

To some extent, this blurring still persists, underlying the explanatory productiveness of the narratives of moral transgression. The anthropology of these narratives has the function of "stabilizing" the meaning of moral injunctions by answering the question of "why should I obey this law?" with "because the punishment will be swift and certain (as this *is* the law)." Since we can offer no deductive proof of severe and unavoidable consequences of infraction, we amass the evidence inductively by a repeated telling of narratives that recount transgression. Retelling of a narrative is a performative act that arrogates the predictive power to guarantee the moral law's certainty. In the case of *Anna Karenina*, an explanation of its ethical import is instigated by its epigraph, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." In this particular phrasing, it is encountered in Romans 12:19—"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord"—which is itself a quotation of a verse from the Old Testament, where in *The Song of Moses* (Deut. 32:35), Moses says: "To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste." The contextual meanings clearly differ between the two quotations. In the latter case, the phrase functions as an unequivocal threat, a warning to the Israelites to resist the temptation of returning to their pagan ways. The etymology of the Hebrew word for *law* is traced to such verbs as "to shoot" or "to throw," both suggestive of the natural, inexorable causality of action. God forecloses the possibility of apostasy by promising: "I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend my arrows upon them" (Deut. 32:23). And indeed, a number of Old testament narratives deal with the certainty of divine punishment. For example, Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons, are immediately killed after they offer an unsanctioned sacrifice (Lev. 10:1-2), or a man who gathers sticks on the Sabbath is directly ordered by God to be killed (Num. 15:32-36). These and other instances make the punitive connotations of the injunction "to give place unto wrath" quite clear. In the New Testament version of the quotation, however, the rhetorical modality of the phrase is instead that of exhortation, not promised terror. Paul entreats his listeners not to take justice into their own hands. Preceding this verse are the verses where Paul instructs: "Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not" and "Recompense to no man evil for

evil" (Rom. 12:14, 17). The shift in meaning is underscored by the shift of moral paradigm: the abolition of the Mosaic Law by Christ's sacrifice. The New Testament believer is encouraged not to despair over his inability to live up to the impossibly high standard of the law, because the latter has been abrogated, through faith, by the gospel—"For sin shall have no dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14)—and the abolishment of the law is an act of liberation: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1).

The moral transgression that is examined in *Anna Karenina* is that of an adultery committed by Anna with Vronsky. But in a broader sense, Tolstoy's "family idea" serves as a fertile thematic ground for investigating the violation of the tenth commandment, which René Girard understands to be the prohibition against mimetic desire (the imitation of one's neighbor's desire). Girard considers this desire to be the root of all violence, and the prohibition against it—the source of all other prohibitions: "Mimetic rivalries can become so intense that the rivals denigrate each other, steal the other's possessions, seduce the other's spouse, and, finally, they even go as far as murder.... If the Decalogue devotes its final commandment to prohibiting desire for whatever belongs to the neighbor, it is because it lucidly recognizes in that desire the key to the violence prohibited in the four commandments that precede it. If we ceased to desire the goods of our neighbor, we would never commit murder or adultery or theft or false witness" (Girard 11-12).

Tolstoy's novel foregrounds mimetic contagion through all of its plot lines. Vronsky falls in love with Anna, because, with her reputation as a virtuous and brilliant society woman, she is perceived by him as unattainable and desirable by every other man. In her turn, what makes Vronsky more attractive in Anna's eyes, is the knowledge that Kitty is in love with him and that the Shcherbatskys expect an imminent proposal. What makes this situation self-reflexive and ironic is that in making a play for Vronsky, Anna chooses Kitty as her model after Kitty declares Anna to be her model, expressing her open admiration for the latter: "'How can *you* be bored at a ball?' 'Why can't *I* be bored at a ball?' asked Anna. Kitty saw that Anna knew the answer that would follow. 'Because you must always be the belle of the ball.'" (72). Predictably, once Anna succumbs to Vronsky's seduction, his interest in her starts to flag, only to be spurred once again by his realization that he might have lost her when, as a result of her serious illness, she briefly returns to her husband. When the breakdown of her marriage and, subsequently, her disgrace and banishment from society become final, he once more loses interest. The more indifferent

Vronsky grows, the more Anna clings to him and the more desperate she becomes. Eventually, her situation appears untenable to her, and she kills herself. The adultery also affects Alexis Karenin in unexpected ways. The stigma of Anna's betrayal contaminates the way Karenin is viewed by society, rendering him a ridiculous figure in everybody's eyes: "he knew that for that reason—because his heart was rent in pieces—they would be pitiless toward him. He felt that people would destroy him, as dogs kill a tortured dog that is whining with pain" (504). As a result of his loss of status, his up to now dizzying ascent up the career ladder is suddenly cut short. As he throws himself in his work, "writing a pamphlet on the new legal procedure," he does not yet know that this would be "the first of an innumerable series of unwanted pamphlets on every administrative department which it was his fate to write" (513). Even the "good" couple is affected by mimetic contagion. Kitty, for instance, is awed by Vronsky's good looks, money, high position, and influential connections—all those things that give him the fashionable status of Saint-Petersburg's gilded youth fellowship. These qualities make him more desirable in her eyes than plain-looking and undistinguished Levin, whose only distinction is the competent management of his and his brother's estate. Once she rejects Levin for the sake of Vronsky, only to have Vronsky reject her, Levin appears suddenly desirable to her again: "Her hopeless grief was really caused by the fact that Levin had proposed to her and that she had rejected him, and now that Vronsky had deceived her, she was prepared to love Levin and hate Vronsky" (125). As for Levin—the most independently thinking and full of integrity character of the novel (widely considered to be Tolstoy's alter-ego)—even he is not immune to mimetic contagion, although its signs are more subtle in his case. For example, Levin harbors feelings of inferiority about being somewhat of a social misfit in lacking acceptance or respect within the social circles to which he belongs. His self-esteem is wounded due to not being taken seriously by the intellectual circle of his half-brother, philosopher Sergey Koznyshev. At the same time, his liberal friends, like Oblonsky and Sviyazhsky, upbraid him for his unmodern political opinion and the lack of engagement with liberal causes, while his brother Nikolai and his radical friends despise him for being a land owner and an oppressor of peasants. Neither does he belong to the fashionable society, despite the fact that he has enough money and stems from an old noble stock. There his agricultural pursuits tend to raise eyebrows, while his person causes general consternation by his "awkward manner" and his "strange and harsh criticisms" (43). On the one hand, Levin himself chooses the position he is in, on the other, he feels like a failure when he reflects on the way he is perceived by others: "He was thirty-two, and while his former comrades

were already colonels, aides-de-camp, Bank and Railway directors, or Heads of Government Boards like Oblonsky, he (he knew very well what others must think of him) was merely a country squire, spending his time breeding cows, shooting snipe, and erecting buildings—that is to say, a fellow without talent, who had come to no good and was only doing what in the opinion of Society good-for-nothing people always do" (22). There is only one character in the entire novel, Mlle Varenka, who is depicted as someone entirely lacking the contagious type of mimetic desire and concerned solely with the welfare of others. Varenka's sincere Christianity and generous spirit of cooperation is contrasted starkly with the hypocritical Christianity of Mme Stahl, her foster mother. Significantly, however, Varenka, although beautiful and still young, is described by Tolstoy as a wholly asexual being. In several places, the narrator likens her to or associates her with mushrooms, invoking a hermaphroditic imagery as a way of suggesting perhaps that only the original state of prelapsarian unity of the male and female aspect could be impervious to mimetic contagion.

By exploring the ramifications of competing mimetic desires, the plot of the novel centered around the "family idea" also probes deeper, serving as a paradigm of mimetic anthropology. The story of Adam and Eve—the first proto-family—already presents a problematization of mimetic desire before it is explicitly thematized in the rivalry of Cain and Abel. With the creation of Adam and Eve, the problematic of the "other *One*" comes into existence that, as Blumenberg would have it, exceeds the earlier and more primitive idea of the "Other" (which comes down, ultimately, to the menacing "absolutism of reality" that intransigently resists the submission to man's wishes) by becoming the next stage in conquering the hostile and incomprehensible environment through "a world exegesis...that involves man, who comes to know, in the story of the Other One, who comes to be known" (22). This principally new mimetic problematic confronts man as he takes cognizance of the Other as the Other One and requires principally new measures of treatment. The Old Testament regulates mimetic desire through codification, offering to the pragmatic question of "what makes for a well-functioning family?" a specific answer in the form of 613 Mosaic laws and their elucidation by the Talmudic and Midrashic exegetes. These laws, which are meant to act as safeguards against what René Girard calls "mimetic snowballing," legislate in two blurred senses of the word, convention and nature, yoking together the "is" and the "ought." In the conventional sense, they operate in the prescriptive, procedural fashion of the nomological machine ("if you do this and this, your marriage will surely be happy"). Had it still possible for the man to cleave to the woman as the flesh

of his flesh, had they been able to cooperate unproblematically as a "help meet" for each other to "dress and keep" the Garden of Eden, there would have been no subsequent story of the fall, no history of mimetic desire. But the nostalgic desire to "sink back...into archaic resignation" is clearly unfulfillable, aiming at, as Blumenberg shrewdly suggests, the "pluperfect"—the past's past—the mythological time of human origin where all genetic explanations of human imperfection point to. All we are left with are nomological procedures that reduce the metaphysical "why" to a pragmatic "how." In its naturalizing sense, on the other hand, the Mosaic Law proclaims the unbending authority of the Divine Will to punish transgressors with the vengeance and indubitable certainty of the Laws of Nature. Yet there is always a suspicion that its self-proclaimed omnipotence might turn out to be just an empty threat. It is this possibility that Anna Karenina's subplot addresses. As other narratives of crimes and punishments, the story of Anna's transgression and her tragic end strives to normalize and naturalize something that cannot be empirically demonstrated—the moral law—but can only be re-asserted as an emphatic exercitive—"for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die"—or just as emphatically countermanded—"Ye shall not surely die" (Gen 2:17; 3:4). Once the moral law is transgressed, the mimetic nomological machine takes over, which, in *Anna Karenina*, leads to a mimetic escalation, triggering the chain of events that lead unstoppably to the final tragedy.

Although Vronsky pursues Anna nearly everywhere she goes and begs her to be his, she, for a while, resists his advances, but in the end, she succumbs to him. The instance of Anna and Vronsky's consummation is figured in the text symptomatically as an elision of dotted lines that represent the irreversible event that has just taken place. What has, in fact, happened is that Anna has made her choice by transgressing the moral law, and from this point on no further choice is possible. Vronsky in this scene is described as a murderer "looking at the body he has deprived of life. The body he has deprived of life was their love" (148). "It's all over," tells him Anna, "I have nothing but you left" (149). Anna's transgression swiftly invokes the vengeance of the jealous God of the Old Testament, who has ruthlessly dealt vengeance to Sodom and Gomorra "because their sin is very grievous" (Gen. 18:20). The irreparable nature of what has happened launches a narrative sequence of cause and effect that cannot be stopped, sidetracked, or reversed. Anna's disgrace and Vronsky's loss of affection are its inexorable outcome. As Anna Karenina contemplates her suicide, she tells herself: "Supposing....I get divorced and become Vronsky's wife! What then? Will Kitty cease looking at me as she did this afternoon? No. Will Serezha stop asking and wondering about my two husbands? And between

Vronsky and myself what new feeling can I invent? Is any kind—not of happiness even, but of absence of torture possible? No! No!" (756). As if to underscore Anna's loss of control over her life, her last agonizing hours are depicted as a ten-page-long metonymic sequence that represents her uninterrupted train of thought, whereby objects and street scenes that she observes steer her thinking along the rails of necessity. As Anna leaves Dolly's house feeling snubbed by Dolly and Kitty, starting on a long carriage and train ride, the reader is given access to her uninterrupted inner monologue, a stream-of-consciousness of inordinate length and intensity that receives a continual boost from the images she sees through the window. Thus the sight of a passerby, who looks her over lasciviously, makes her think of the French expression "I know my appetites," which, in turn leads her to notice a dirty ice-cream seller on the street and conclude that "We all want something sweet and tasty; if we can get no bonbons, then dirty ice-cream" (753)—a sentiment which develops into an insight that her affair with Vronsky was dirty, like eating dirty ice-cream. As she is thinking these deeply unsettling thoughts, Anna is seized with a global vision of the world as filled with malice, mutual resentment, and pitiless competition:

How glad [Dolly] would have been at my misfortune! [H]er chief feeling would have been joy that I am punished for the pleasures she has envied me. Kitty would have been still more pleased.... She is jealous of me and hates me, and she also despises me.... What are those churches, that ringing, and these lies for? Only to conceal the fact that we all hate each other.... [T]he struggle for existence and hatred are the only things that unite people (752-4).

This is a key moment of epiphany, in which the female protagonist suddenly understands the mimetic nature of human relationships. But what can this knowledge afford her at this point? As she literally and figuratively travels to the end of the line, first arriving to the train station, then changing to the train and arriving at her destination (where her plea to meet Vronsky is rejected), then finally pacing to the very end of the platform, where she no longer sees any people, who have up till now been sustaining her train of thought, she at once registers the trains themselves. At about the same time that she reaches the end of the platform, she arrives at the conclusion that there exists no viable course of action open to her. The sight of trains makes her remember the man who was run over on the day she met Vronsky: "Suddenly...she realized what she had to do.... 'There!' she said to herself, looking at the shadow of the truck on the mingled sand and coal dust....'There, into the very middle, and I shall

punish him and escape from everybody and from myself!" (760). Her decision to escape is the only way she can assert her freedom: by extricating herself from the causal chain of necessity generated by mimetic escalation.

Anna Karenina's story line functions as an explanatory narrative of the "vengeful" meaning of the epigraph and an answer to the question of "why are some families unhappy?" The short answer is that mimetic desire causes Anna's tragedy and that her death serves as a compelling testimony to the mechanical nature of the Biblical Law. Yet the integrity of this explanation is somewhat compromised by various loose ends and inconsistencies that prevent us from a complete assurance that the Biblical Law succeeds in regulating mimetic desire. To begin with, justice seems to be meted out too capriciously to conform to this schema completely. Neither Stiva, with his profligate lifestyle and a string of mistresses, nor Anna's friend, Princess Betsy Tverskaya, who is equally open and cynical about her affairs, suffer any bad consequences. Another possible complication is the questionable status of Anna's suicide: after all, Anna kills herself at the end in an act of free will and is not killed, for instance, by the heavenly fire from above. By rejecting the Law, she finds herself imprisoned by the savagery of the even more confining world of mimetic law. But if this is Hell, she flees it by refusing the representation of herself as its trapped subject, and, in this last step of defiance, it could be claimed, regains her agency. These difficulties point to conceptual problems with constructing analogies, preventing us from telling a perfect transgression narrative, which might thus necessitate further re-tellings.

In contrast, Levin's subplot provides the paradigm for the way the New Testament deals with mimetic desire. Levin manifestly affirms his freedom by trying to sidestep the mimetic circle through his choice of the Scriptural path of Christian imitation—the path that stops all imitation by, as Girard maintains, choosing to imitate Jesus, who "invites us to imitate his own desire, the spirit that directs him toward the goal on which all intention is fixed: to resemble God the Father as much as possible" (Girard 13). Here we are confronted with the complementary reading of the injunction of "Vengeance is mine. I will repay" that so confounded Luther. For Luther, the elusive verse of Paul in Romans 1:17—"For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith"—was experienced as acutely troubling. Thinking about it sent him into a profound crisis of faith as he contemplated the seeming frivolity of the idea of "the righteousness of God," understanding it as the inscrutable will of God, his propensity to impose justice without regard for the individual's piety and good works, saying to himself: "As if it isn't enough that we miserable sinners, lost for all eternity because of

original sin, are oppressed by every kind of calamity through the Ten Commandments. Why does God heap sorrow upon sorrow through the gospel and through the gospel threatens us with his justice and wrath?" (qtd. in Wriedt 89). After suffering through a period of mental anguish caused by conflictual meanings, Luther undergoes an experience of conversion, having re-interpreted the verse to mean that "the justice of God by which the just person lives by a gift of God, that is by faith. The meaning of this verse started to open up to me: The justice of God is revealed through the gospel but it is a passive justice by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: 'The just person lives by faith.'" (qtd. in Wriedt 90).¹

The shift in meaning that takes place for Luther between the punishing Old Testament interpretation of the avenging Creator and the Gospels understanding of God as a redeemer corresponds to the interpretative act itself. The mental and spiritual effort of meditating on the passage and explicating it contextually rewards him with the text's yielding a felicitous meaning that resonates with his inherent sense of right.² Luther is thus liberated from the bondage to the letter of the law by the newly found power of interpretation, whose authority is underwritten by the coherence of signification made manifest in "one's heart": "For when Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness..." (Rom. 2:14-15). As Victoria Silver notes in *Imperfect Sense*, he is at this moment delivered from the notion planted by the scholastic exegetes of the scripture that "word[s] [mean] in a void...as though their meaning were severely distinguished like the picture of bodies in space—single, discreet, and absolute" (22).

In a similar move, Levin arrogates to himself the power to interpret. During

¹ Although Eastern Orthodox Christianity does not subscribe to the doctrine of "justification by faith alone," Tolstoy's Christianity was rather idiosyncratic. He preached the gospel of "a living God," for which he was excommunicated. His religious views run close to the Protestant understanding of the "sola scriptura" principle. Russian philosopher, Nikolai Berdyaev, contends that "the Orthodox faith in Tolstoy's consciousness conflicted irreconcilably with his reason.... Tolstoy remained 'an Enlightenment man.' All the mystical and sacramental side of Christianity, all the dogmas and mysteries of the Church evoked in him a stormy reaction of the Enlightenment reason" (par. 2).

² I am indebted to Victoria Silver's insight, equating Luther's hermeneutic act to an act of faith ("the shift of meaning is felt to be the virtual sensation of faith itself" (21). I also rely on Paul Althaus's discussion of "the work of faith" in Luther: "Faith is an act of the will with which a man 'holds to' the word of promise" (44).

the conversation with Fedor, one of his peasants, he hears the latter praise another peasant, Platon, as someone who "lives for his soul and remembers God" (788). This phrase catches him off guard and deeply moves him, spurring a religious conversion. He realizes that the meaning of life "is to live for God, for the soul." Moreover, he understands that he has, in fact, been living well, "but thought badly": "I looked for an answer to my question. But reason could not give me an answer reason is incommensurate with the question.... What I know, I know not by my reason but because it was given to me, revealed to me, and I know it in my heart by faith" (790-793). In other words, what the New Testament reading of "righteousness" promotes is the solution to the dilemma of negotiating between the two kinds of unfreedom: being either constricted by the mechanistic exigencies of mimetic desire or coerced by the arbitrary despotism of the moral code. The shift in thinking reappropriates freedom by extricating one from the vicious circle of mimetic behavior, thus rendering the Biblical law obsolete: "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested" (Romans 3:21). But the newly asserted freedom of interpretation grounded in such religious *invisibilia* as faith is, in itself, problematic. Rejecting the limitational constraints of 613 commandments, the redemptive thinking lacks formal criteria on whose traditional authority it could fall back. Levin's final resolution reflects this difficulty. His gaining of the transformed understanding of what it means "to live for God" does nothing to alter his consciousness of the hereditary privilege. As he tells himself, he has already been living well: he could simply continue to abide by the same principles, while avoiding in his everyday actions the extremes of exploitation.

As surely as one must pay one's debts, so surely was it necessary to keep the patrimony in such a state that when his son inherited it, he would thank his father, as Levin thanked his grandfather, for all that he had built and planted.... He knew that he must hire laborers as cheaply as possible; but that he must not take them in bondage for less that they were worth.... He might sell straw to peasants in a time of shortage, though he felt sorry for them.... Felling trees must be punished as severely as possible, but if peasants let their cattle stray, he must not exact fines from them.... He must lend money to Peter to liberate him from the usurers to whom he was paying ten percent a month; but he must neither reduce nor postpone payments of rent by the peasants who were in default.... He must not pardon a laborer who went home at a busy time because his father had died but he could not neglect giving a monthly allowance to old domestic serfs who were of no use at all to him. Levin knew, too, that on returning home the first

thing he must do was to go to his wife and that the peasants who had been waiting for three hours to see him could wait a little longer; and that he knew that in spite of all the pleasure of hiving a swarm, he must forgo that pleasure, let the old beekeeper hive the swarm without him, and go to talk to the peasants who had found him at the apiary. Whether he was acting well or ill, he did not know. Thinking about it led him into doubts and prevented him from seeing what he should and should not do. But when he did not think, but just lived, he unceasingly felt in his soul the presence of an infallible judge deciding which of the two possible actions was the better and which the worse; and as soon as he did what he should not have done, he immediately felt this (784-5).

Although Levin personifies the criteria of his judgment as "an infallible judge," it is hard not to question the arbitrariness of his principles and speculate that a different person or someone living in an era of different sensibilities would choose a different course of action in every particular case. In fact, the task of interpreting his situation contextually is fraught with such inordinate difficulties that thinking about it, as Levin recognizes, leads one into an abyss, and this is why he must resort to personification as a justification of his behavior.³ His resignation at the realization that "reason could not give him an answer" because "it is incommensurate with the question" is indicative of the predicament one finds oneself in when leaving behind a codified and culturally sanctioned set of principles. The situation is akin to the paralysis of facing the undifferentiated world all over again. This is what the Russian philosopher, Vasilii Rozanov, had in mind when he wrote that "As everywhere in the Gospels, the trifle of 'turn the other cheek' rings hollow; it is an empty alleviation. In reality, Christ has burdened human life enormously, strewn it with 'thorns and thistles,' something loose and porous, something impossible. In fact, the justice of 'an eye for an eye' constitutes precisely that norm of earthly human existence, without which life would keel out of balance. It is exactly that clear, and simple, and eternal which characterizes the 'complete-

³ Robert Althaus's point that receiving justification through faith involves a personal act of appropriation reflects this difficulty of contextualization: "The word of promise...does not have authority in itself, as though it were a universally valid truth that demonstrates its own validity.... It does not convey a purely objective truth but rather is a word of acceptance and summons, of promise and command, which God personally addresses to me" (44). But to receive God's word as a personal, not universal, truth, the believer, in a self-grounding act, must take a chance on the offered promise. To receive faith is thus, in a circular way, predicated on having faith.

ness' of God the Father and his everlasting foundation, that which closes the short with the short; instead of which we now have tears, hysterics, and sentimentality" (451).⁴

The impossible situation of positing oneself as the source and subject of representation opens up ground under one's feet that voids all narrative content. This is why Levin's story cannot really be told. Of the two subplots, it is Anna's narrative of transgression that, despite its inconsistencies, holds up, having enough structural integrity to be read as a meaningful explanation of "why some families are unhappy." Levin's, on the other hand, is not its symmetrical obverse of "why some families are happy." Firstly, because, an answer to this question is not a narrative but a procedural description of a nomological machine. Secondly, because we leave Levin and Kitty at the very threshold of their marriage, and what we are shown up to this point—not only their love and tenderness for each other, but also their first arguments, jealousies, and misunderstandings—does not set them apart from other newlyweds nor precludes the probability of things turning out badly at a later point (even if one resists reading this story autobiographically in reference to Tolstoy's own first happy and later disastrous marriage to Sophia Behrs). In keeping with this, even their match is shown to be accidental and not fated in some transcendent sense of being a union of two lost halves of one soul. Kitty "settles" for Levin as a replacement for Vronsky, while Levin's love for Kitty is shown to be a metonymic sequel of his love for the older Shcherbatskys sisters: first, Dolly, and then, Natalie. In a way, Levin's is a "story about nothing." We follow him through his first unsuccessful and then successful courting of Kitty, his failure to find meaningful civic engagement in the local rural administration, his attempt to re-organize agricultural practices on his estate in a both more efficient and ethical fashion (a fascinating subplot, in itself, that is suddenly dropped), his grief and anxiety at witnessing the death of his brother (an experience that throws him into the tailspin of depression), the birth of his first child, and, throughout all of this, his unrelenting and passionate search for the meaning of life. When this meaning is finally opened to him—"to live for God"—it does not throw any light on the preceding narrative, it is neither explanatory nor redemptive. Neither we nor Levin are any wiser at the end as

⁴ Pavel Goldshtein reads Tolstoy's novel in a Rozanovian way, arguing (incorrectly, in my opinion) that its message constitutes an outright rejection of Christian values and a return to the ethics of the Old Testament. A problematic status of his interpretation rests on the fact that he ignores that epigraph's provenance in the New Testament and attributes it directly to the Old Testament.

to why some families are happy or whether his own family is bound for happiness. Nor does his final epiphany tie the random events of this subplot into an intelligible, cogent whole, accessible through an act of interpretation. On the contrary, his story line resists interpretation through aborted narrative strands, elisions, and actions based on narratively inscrutable motivation. Thus, we come across a casually dropped reference to Levin's attempted suicide, inserted almost as an afterthought and striking in light of his initial marital happiness: "And though he was a happy and healthy family man, Levin was several times so near a suicide that he hid a cord he had lest he should hang himself, and he feared to carry a gun lest he should shoot himself" (783). And, very importantly, Levin's revelation does not lead to any decision—after all "he was living well," as he realized, and "recently even more unfalteringly than before"—although we are only told and not shown this, and although this statement is difficult to reconcile with his nearly attempted suicide (783). He tells himself, therefore, that he will continue as he has always done: "I shall still get angry with Ivan the coachman, shall dispute in the same way, shall inopportunistically express my thought; there will still be a wall between my soul's holy and holies and other people; even my wife I shall still blame for my own fears and shall repent of it" (811).

But for Levin himself, a monumental shift in attitude takes place when he resolves for himself the meaning of "living for God." As he explains to himself: "My whole life, independently of anything that may happen to me, is at every moment of it no longer meaningless as it was before, but has an unquestionable meaning of goodness with which I have the power to invest it" (811). This private explanation, which empowers him, is neither communicable nor transmutable into an interpretable *explanandum* of the novel's first sentence. In the question of "why some families are happy while others are not," one can discern both a tinge of awe and anxiety in the face of life's diversity as well as a prompt for a successful recipe of a good marriage. Behind it is a desire to freely inhabit and navigate a world, that is, to represent oneself as free. As a regularized, procedural know-how, the answer to the question of "why some families are happy" can only be implied by the narrative of "why some families are unhappy"—the narrative of the transgression of the law that *can* be told, because it records an unrepeatable, singular event. Its very narratability underlies the statement that every unhappy family is unique. But as a narrative, the answer to the question of "why some families are happy" cannot be told, because "the answer is incommensurate with the question." By dispensing with meaning-giving law, by arrogating to himself "the power to invest his life with meaning," Levin places himself in the void of the pluperfect. Facing the task of

grounding his own system of significance, he finds himself before the moment of the world exegesis, at the threshold of being able to tell the story of his alter ego as the "Other One who comes to be known."

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"CONCUPISCENCE" AND "MIMETIC DESIRE": A DIALOGUE BETWEEN K. RAHNER AND R. GIRARD

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Since Augustine "concupiscence" has been the theological technical expression for the consequences that remain in all human persons subject to original sin. These consequences were often described as involuntary and uncontrollable desires or passions, especially in the realm of sexuality. In the 1940s Karl Rahner revised that concept, freeing it from its narrow sexual connotations and opening it up, so that concupiscence can be construed as a force in all intentional human action. In 1954 Rahner expanded the scope of this revision still further, situating concupiscence in the theological framework of grace.

While the mimetic theory does not use the concept of "concupiscence," "mimetic desire" is the core of that theory. The mimetic nature of desire accounts for involuntary and uncontrollable passions, in sexuality or otherwise. René Girard's mimetic theory goes a step further than Rahner in that it explains *how* this power of passion can arise. However, it does not link its results with the traditional Christian language of grace. Is there a place for grace in mimetic theory? A comparative look at Rahner's development of concupiscence in a framework of grace and Girard's theory of human desire promises richer insights into the phenomenon of involuntary and uncontrollable human desires and passions than each of the two on its own. My paper attempts to develop and explicate these insights. On the way there, differences and similarities between a more philosophical-minded theology and mimetic theory will be examined and related to each other.

1. Introduction

I will try to give you a brief outline of Rahner's theological analysis of *concupiscence*, already interspersed with comments from mimetic theory, as to how much the two agree or disagree. In a second step I will present to you Rahner's special emphasis on the meaning of concupiscence within a world that has already been redeemed and ask, whether this can be accepted by mimetic theory.

It might seem strange to attempt such a dialogue with Rahner, since he is certainly one of the most "philosophical" theologians there are—while Girard distances himself quite clearly from philosophical thinking.⁵ Yet, many theologians stand in that philosophical tradition, and one obstacle for a wider acceptance of mimetic theory in theology might be its aversion against philosophical thinking. So, if we could contribute something to the diminishing of that divide on the way, it would be no small feat.

2. Rahner's "concupiscence" Commented by Girard's mimetic theory

In 1941 Rahner for the first time published his article on the theological concept of concupiscence, which he later revised and enlarged with a chapter on grace.⁶ In it Rahner starts out by giving three definitions of how the word *concupiscence* is used in philosophical or theological literature of the time. Interestingly Rahner translates the Latin *concupiscentia* into the German *Begehren*, which is *desire*, when he explains the meaning of the term. The definitions are:

1) *Desire* in the broadest sense is any consciousness-related reactive behavior toward any value or good, as opposed to receptive acknowledgement.⁷ It is characteristic for this broad concept of concupiscence that it pertains to voluntary as well as to involuntary acts of human reaction towards value.⁸

⁵ See Girard, 2002, 15 or Girard 1999, 16. Not contained in the English version whose foreword is much shorter.

⁶ Rahner 1941, 61-80. Revised version in Rahner 1954, 377-414. English version: Rahner 1961, 347-382. I will refer here to the version contained in Rahner 1954 and moreover use my own paraphrase of that version in which I will bring Rahner's thoughts already into a more easily understandable English. I claim to do so without distorting Rahner's original meaning (German original given in the references).

⁷ Rahner 1954, 388: "*Begehren* im weitesten Sinn ist jede bewusste reaktive Stellungnahme zum Wert und Gut...im Gegensatz zu hinnehmender Kenntnisaufnahme."

⁸ Rahner 1954, 389: "Das Charakteristische dieses weitesten Begriffes der Konkupiszenz ist dies, dass er sowohl die freien wie die unwillkürlichen Akte menschlicher Wertreaktion

Now, here Rahner is really philosophical. What he says is that we can distinguish two types of human reactive behavior towards any object in the world: we can either passively acknowledge it—or we can actively desire it. For Rahner this says something about both the world and human persons: About the world it says: Every existing thing is such that it can be known, and every existing thing is such that it can be desired, i. e., it has some kind of value about it. About humans it says that we are capable of merely acknowledging the existence of anything—and we are capable of desiring anything, and these types of behavior are distinct from one another, while of course not independent of each other.⁹

For Rahner human desire can be directed towards anything, because it operates within a boundless horizon, within which all possible objects of desire are presented to it. This boundless or infinite horizon is the reason, according to Rahner, why human desire is as free from instinct as it is; it is also the reason why, in the end, our desire is boundless and directs itself toward God, the Infinite. And it is the reason for a very basic form of freedom that is a prerequisite for any type of freedom of choice but much broader than the latter. Because the scope of human desire is boundless, yet any desirable object is finite and thus does not fill the endless horizon, no finite object is such that it can bind our desire completely to itself by its own value. No matter what, there is some greater value, because, in a last resort, the infinite horizon itself is the final object of our desire. No object within that horizon occupies its full range of value and thus we are free to desire one or the other; and even if we desire all of them, the horizon still transcends that.

I don't think much comment from Girard's side is needed here; in my opinion Girard would not object to any of the things said, while he would probably dismiss some of them as not very instructive. Of course we can desire anything—that's what his theory maintains too; and of course, we can merely acknowledge the existence of some object without desiring it, otherwise we would have to desire everything all the time; and of course, no object can bind our desire completely *by its own value*—that's what mimetic theory is all about. So, I guess, Girard would say: Rahner's first definition of concupiscence is a truism that does not interest me very much,

umfasst."

⁹ In fact I have explained here nothing but the old scholastic dictum: *omne ens est verum—omne ens est bonum*.

because the really interesting question is: why do we desire what we desire? So let us move on to Rahner's second definition and see whether it brings us a step further.

2) *Concupiscence* in a narrower sense is that desire for a specific object that develops spontaneously and because of the dynamics of human nature within the person's consciousness; this type of *concupiscence* is a necessary precondition for any personal and free human choice.¹⁰

That says: In order to be able to choose, I must experience an attraction by an object, and this attraction happens spontaneously and in accordance with human nature. This spontaneous attraction thus is involuntary, it simply pops up, so to speak. But it is the prerequisite for making choices. Humans cannot choose out of a distanced attitude of mere acknowledgement: we always choose because we feel attracted by an object; and this attraction is not of our choosing, it just happens to us. Yet it does not happen arbitrarily, it happens according to our nature. Human nature is the guiding principle of our attractions. This does not deny the differences of tastes and predilections, it merely says that our constitution does put our desires within certain parameters.

Let us again surmise what Girard would say to this. He would certainly agree with the claim that the attraction humans experience towards an object has not been voluntarily brought about by themselves but merely happens to them. He might, however, disagree with the contention that this attraction is *spontaneous*, and he might ask what this ominous *nature* that guided that attraction was supposed to be. He could say: this attraction is not spontaneous at all, it is mimetically induced; thus it is not human nature that guides our being attracted, it is mimesis that does that. And finally, Girard might question whether there is such a thing as a free and personal choice for which this 2nd type of concupiscence is supposed to be a precondition.

I think I can answer at least one objection right here: I don't think Rahner means by *spontaneous*, "without outside influences or conditions." He merely means that having this attraction was not premeditated, the

¹⁰ Rahner 1954, 389: "Konkupiszenz im *engeren* Sinn ist der Akt des Begehrungsvermögens in Richtung auf ein bestimmtes Gut..., insofern dieser Akt auf Grund der Naturdynamik des Menschen sich spontan im Bewusstsein bildet und als solcher die notwendige Voraussetzung der personalen, freien Entscheidung des Menschen ist."

attraction just pops up in the self-experience of the attracted person. Rahner does not deal with the question whether this self-perception is correct or deceptive, he merely describes it. And I don't think that Girard would have to object to that description; on the contrary, a mimetically induced attraction is indeed not premeditated on the side of the attracted.

I will return later to the objections about nature and free choice. First I want to give you Rahner's third and most important definition of concupiscence, the most important, because it defines that type of desire that is, according to Christine doctrine, the consequence of original sin:

3) Concupiscence in the narrowest, theological, sense is that spontaneous human desire that precedes free human choice *and resists it*.¹¹

Here Rahner offers a brief and abstract description of how we experience the perils of indecision and personal weakness. I might feel attracted by another mug of beer and some more roast pork with dumplings (all of which would fit my Bavarian nature very well), and at the same time I might be attracted by becoming slim and slender and losing some pounds; here we have two instances of Rahner's second type of desire. I might then consider that losing some pounds is healthy as well as saving money and I might choose to abstain—and yet, the desire is still there and nagging, resisting my good intentions, and finally I'll end up drinking more beer and eating more dumplings than if I'd given in in the first place. A typical—though rather harmless—example of theological concupiscence winning over my so called free choice. You may put any other attraction from harmless to criminal in the place of the gluttony here—the structure is the same.

Rahner, however, adds two insights to the traditional understanding of concupiscence: he sees that it works both ways, and it works not just in the sensual realm but in any case of attraction there is for humans. What does that mean? It works both ways says: it does not only induce us to vices, it might also save us from them. I might well have decided between the attraction to become rich quickly and to remain a law-abiding citizen in favor of the first and be planning a bank robbery. But the fear of being

¹¹ Rahner 1954. 390: "Konkupiszenz im *engsten* (theologischen) Sinn ist definiert als das spontane Begehren des Menschen, insofern es der Freiheitsentscheidung des Menschen vorausgeht *und gegen diese beharrt*."

caught, of spending years in prison, of having my reputation—and therefore all my chances to teach theology—destroyed might resist that decision and I will turn round at the final moment, before I enter the bank. In that case the resistance concupiscence sets against my decision, has saved me from committing a crime. It works both ways, good and bad.

And it is not limited to the sensual, let alone the sexual realm. It pertains to anything a human person can desire—and, Rahner said when describing the first type of concupiscence, humans can desire anything. Whether it is fame or fortune, love or lust, spiritual, mental or physical, human desire is structured by concupiscence in all three meanings of the term, and therefore concupiscence in the third sense also pertains to all these realms and above that to human knowing as well. It permeates all of our experience of self, world, and God.

Rahner then goes on toward a metaphysical analysis, which declares concupiscence to be a consequence of the spiritual-material character of human nature. I will skip these highly abstract remarks and turn again to mimetic theory and what it might say to Rahner's exposition.

I suggest that a mimetic theorist would argue that Rahner's concupiscence in the theological sense is nothing but the clash between two conflicting mimetic desires. What I called my Bavarian nature is not something I was born with but something I was raised into; I follow certain models when I behave like a typical Bavarian. At the same time, being slim is the mimetic creed of the day. I am the poor person in the middle. However, I think that Rahner would not quarrel with my rendering of *nature* here. For him *nature* is not some fixed constant, but rather a dynamic principle of the development of a person that can change itself in the process.

The mimetic analysis of my example, however, is not just saying the same thing with different words, it also adds another piece of insight into the phenomenon. Rahner described how it feels to be hit by concupiscence and then gives ontological reasons for it. Girard concurs with the description but gives another explanation: it becomes socially feasible that a desire whose fulfillment I have already relinquished can retain so much power that I cave in and do what I did not want to do: it is the mimetic strings that draw me, against them I am almost helpless.

What about the question of free decision? When I said that being drawn hither and thither by conflicting mimetic desires was the cause for the described ambiguity, I seemed to exclude freedom. Yet, here I think that mimetic theorists tend to overlook the consequences of the existence of

Rahner's first type concupiscence (and that is why I do not consider them a mere truism): there really is some value or good within any existing thing: the question is, however, whether I desire that thing for its real value or for the value it gains by the model. Teachers of Christian spirituality call upon us to purify our desires in just that sense: that we should not attach more value to a good than it *really* has, then we will make proper use of it. However, how are we to relate to the *real* value a good has?

According to Girard's theory, we have no direct access to that supposed real value, because every value is mediated to us by models, and it is exactly the fact that the desire of acquisition leads to antagonistic desire and to rivalry between subject and model that makes our desire "metaphysical" in Girard's sense of the term: The real value is completely overshadowed and blotted out by the value the object draws from the model: we do not desire the object as such, we desire the object because we want to be like the model.

So, within Girardian thinking, desiring something for what it is really worth, means desiring it not by metaphysical desire, but in the emulation of a model that does not allow itself to be drawn into an antagonistic and rivaling cycle of mimetic desire, it means basically to have Christ as a model. If we desired any object the way Christ desired it, we would desire it according to its own value and nothing else. We can call that making a free choice, and then Girard's theory does not exclude that possibility, it emphasizes, however, that this is only given through conversion.

I do think Rahner would completely agree to that in principle. For him only God's grace really frees us and enables us to act freely. He would, however, insist on a certain addition: For Rahner this conversion need not be explicit; someone could have been converted to Christ—in the sense relevant here—while at the same time confessing to be Jew, a Muslim or even a Hindu or an atheist. In that context Rahner coined the very controversial expression of the "anonymous Christian," meaning a person being a Christian without anybody but God, not even him- or herself, knowing it. Of course, this poses several problems. I will attend to some of these in the second part of that paper.

It is also true, of course, that for mimetic theory mimesis, of course, structures every human desire, not just the sensual or sexual, and it also works both ways—as Rahner's theological concupiscence did. So, we seem to talk about the same phenomenon, but we get different explanations for it: Rahner talks about human nature, Girard about mimesis. Are they mutually exclusive explanations?

I do not think so. On the contrary, I propose that they are complementing each other: Firstly, they answer different questions: Rahner tells us *why* our desire can finally be directed towards God (because He in the end is the boundless horizon) and why we are able to prefer one thing over another (because the horizon transcends any of its objects). Girard explains to us *how* it happens that we prefer a specific object x over another object y (because we emulate a model) and how it is possible that we really create an idol (when mimetic desire makes us desire a single object without bounds). Thus Rahner's ontological differentiations provide us with a framework within which the workings of metaphysical desire become plausible. Treating a single object within the horizon as if it were the horizon means falling prey to metaphysical desire, means creating an idol. Otherwise stated: Rahner says that concupiscence is part of our human nature as it has become and Girard describes what that nature has become. Rahner says: if you want to find concupiscence you have to watch out for it in human nature. Girard has done that and offers an analysis of that nature.¹² In this respect they relate to each other like a heuristic horizon and the answers found within that horizon. Girard does not have to say: it is mimesis and not nature; he could also say: human nature is mimetic, take that into account. It is beyond my scope to say whether Girard actually uses this heuristic horizon. But even if he does not, that does not preclude us from saying that it would be a possible heuristic path for him to walk on. However, I do not think Rahner's concupiscence and Girard's mimetic desire are simply the same. The sets of phenomena referred to by these expressions are intersecting, but not coextensive. Girard teaches us that we are governed by mimetic desire, even if we do not experience this strange resistance which Rahner uses to define concupiscence. Actually when we have completely fallen prey to the mimetic pull and vanish in the mimetic mob, we do not experience any second thoughts: we are completely one with the mob. So in a sense Girard tells Rahner that his definition is not a definition of all the consequences of original sin, but only of how we can recognize them, when we are open for such a recognition. More often than not, we do not recognize them but follow them blindly. Rahner's definition is not a complete definition of concupiscence, but a description of how concupiscence is experienced, when it is experienced.

On the other hand, who is to guarantee that every and any instance of resistance against a decision we make is brought about by mimetic desire?

¹² I am merely applying here something I learned from O. Muck (1994, esp. 46).

Couldn't there be instances of such an ambiguity that have different causes? A mimetic true believer would, of course, deny that. Rahner's definition, however, has the advantage that it is not bound up with mimetic theory. So, if there are other reasons, he can easily fit them into his framework, which is much broader in that methodological respect. For that framework it does not matter, whether concupiscence is brought about by mimetic mechanisms, or—let's say—processes that are better explained by biology or existentialist philosophy; the important thing is the given criteria are fulfilled: it resists our staying true to the conscious decision we had already made.

3. Girard's mimetic Mechanisms Commented by Rahner's Theology of Grace

A basic tenet of Rahner's theology of grace is that every human person at all times has received an offer of God's grace because of the salvation Jesus Christ worked for all of humanity. This offer entails the task of either accepting or rejecting it, thereby constituting one's personal salvation or damnation. Receiving the offer of God's grace also entails for Rahner that we are essentially changed by that very offer, our way of experiencing the world is different from what it would be without that offer. Thus for Rahner our human nature contains a supernatural existential: supernatural because it comes from God and not from us, existential because it permeates all human experience.

In the case of concupiscence that means: Although concupiscence in all three senses comes to us naturally and belongs to our human nature, we nevertheless experience the third type, which is the consequence of original sin, as problematic, indeed as negative and—in St. Paul's writings and the Protestant tradition—in itself sinful. Here Rahner explicitly refers to St. Paul's strong words in Rom 7 and to Martin Luther. But why is this so? Why do we experience something that is quite natural to us as so adverse to what we should be?

Exactly because the offer of God's grace, which we really possess and which really has already essentially transformed us, calls us to make an unequivocal and irreversible choice for God, for the acceptance of that grace, while at the same time concupiscence, which resists this choice of ours, makes us unable to do so. Rahner writes:

This type of concupiscence that we experience, or rather this type of experience that we have and that we call concupiscence cannot

occur in the same way in a human being untouched by God's offer of grace.... Thus we can say: this type of concupiscence is only possible within human persons subject to original sin, and as such they experience it as a contradiction to what they "really" ought to be, although this "reality" is not their nature, yet their—however supernatural, yet irrevocable—calling.¹³

Humanity's historical experience, their analysis of their history with respect to their own state can indeed reveal that human persons do not regard concupiscence as a matter of course, but as something which ought not to be, that evokes consternation and forces the question upon us how this can be, when humans are the work of a God who cannot create a self-contradiction.¹⁴

So for Rahner there is a tension within the human person between the offer of grace and the resistance concupiscence puts up against it. Looking at Girard's theory from that perspective, it seems that Girard spots that tension as well, but not within the individual—not even within any one society, but between pre-Judeo-Christian and post-Judeo-Christian societies, between the pagan and the monotheistic worlds. This seems to run counter to Rahner's contention that, although the offer of grace comes to humanity by Christ's act of salvation, it nevertheless comes to anyone anywhere, anytime, so for example also to the pagan Aztecs with their most bloody sacrifices, as the current exhibition in Berlin (before that in London) impressively shows. Could an Aztec have been an anonymous Christian in Rahner's sense? Or was this impossible because they could in no way step out of the scapegoating cycle they were part of?

Girard writes: "It's not accurate to say that the Bible *reestablishes* a truth that the myths betrayed. If we did, we would give the impression that

¹³ Rahner 1954, 412: "*Diese* Konkupiszenz, die wir erfahren und (oder: bzw.) *diese* Erfahrung, die wir haben und Konkupiszenz nennen, kann es so, wie sie konkret gegeben ist, in einem reinen Naturzustand gar nicht geben.... Dann kann man ruhig sagen: diese Konkupiszenz ist nur im Erbsünder möglich, und er erfährt sie schon als solche als im Widerspruch zu dem, was er 'eigentlich' sein sollte, wenn dieses 'Eigentliche' auch nicht seine 'Natur,' wohl aber seine zwar übernatürliche, aber unweigerliche Bestimmung ist."

¹⁴ Rahner 1954, 413: "Die Erfahrung der Menschheit, die Analytik, die sie im Lauf ihrer Geschichte hinsichtlich ihres eigenen Zustandes vornimmt, kann sehr wohl zeigen, dass der Mensch die Konkupiszenz faktisch eben nicht als ein Selbstverständliches auffasst, sondern als ein Nichtseinsollendes, das Bestürzung erregt und die Frage aufzwingt, wie es zu erklären sei, wenn der Mensch das Werk Gottes ist, der nichts Widersprüchliches schaffen kann."

this truth was already accessible, at human disposal before the Bible discovered it. No, not at all. Before the Bible there were only myths. No one and no tradition before the Bible were capable of calling into question the guilt of victims whom their communities unanimously condemned" (Girard 2001, 118). If this is true, where was the effect of the offer of grace in these people?

It seems Girard and Rahner are at odds here. For this reason, I thought that J. Alison in his *The Joy of Being Wrong*, which is an excellent and completely Girardian book, repeatedly attacks Rahner's theology of grace and of the anonymous Christian, yet without mentioning Rahner in the context of criticizing him (See Alison, esp. 45, 57, 91-99). During the COV&R conference in Innsbruck I had the chance to talk to him about that and I learned that this was a wrong perception. What Alison is criticizing is not Rahner's rendition of these terms but certain interpretations of them. I am very happy to agree with that criticism and want to emphasize that it does not concern Rahner's original intention but interpretations thereof that are themselves—quite common—misunderstandings of Rahner's theology. I cannot aspire to elaborate on them here. Yet, I want to make some remarks that might show that mimetic theory and Rahner's theology of grace are not so much at odds as it might seem.

For one thing Girard's and Rahner's focus of interest is very different. While Girard wants to emphasize that the Bible really brought something new in human self-understanding (he talks about the revelatory significance of the Bible), Rahner wants to stress that God opens a way of salvation even for those who—without their own fault—do not attain this self-understanding (he talks about the soteriological significance of faith). Since the Bible and the Second Vatican Council insist that humans can only be saved by grace and by faith while the Council teaches at the same time that salvation is not bound up with the profession of the Christian faith,¹⁵ Rahner as a theologian has to find a way to make that plausible. And that can be done by stating that human persons are endowed by the *offer* of God's grace in their very nature and accepting that offer is possible without subjectively knowing it. However, this acceptance is not given with human nature, it is our call which we can fail to answer. Being offered that grace

¹⁵ See Second Vatican Council: AG 7; NA 1; LG 16; GS 22. AG 7 explicitly states that "God in ways known to Himself can lead those inculpably ignorant of the Gospel to find that faith without which it is impossible to please Him"—it does not mean the explicitly expressed faith.

and accepting it is not the same for Rahner. Anyone who overlooks that distinction in Rahner's thinking misrepresents it.

Another important distinction often overlooked is Rahner's insistence that the possibility of experiencing grace and the possibility of experiencing grace *as* grace are not the same thing,¹⁶ meaning: I can experience something which is an experience brought about by God's grace; yet I do not realize that it is God's grace, but maybe think it is my own achievement or the gift of someone else—or a counter-force to what my life looked like before. This is a possibility but not a necessity. Is it true that "the gratuitous self-giving of God is always...subversive of any given now?" (Alison 45). That, of course, depends on what you mean by "subversive." J. Alison explained to me that he means by that a process of transformation that starts out by a positive connection to the human given now but then transforms it in a way best explained by the scholastic *triplex via* of talking about God. As our concepts have to undergo a process of affirmation, negation and elevation when applied to God, we ourselves are being transformed by God's grace in a similar process. I would cautiously¹⁷ agree with that but still question whether this is best rendered "subversive," that term having a connotation of adversity and destructiveness. It also can easily mislead, as it misled me, to think that God's grace always has to be experienced by the graced person as adverse to any given now. Yet if that were so, there would be no need for any discernment of the spirits. Since God's grace cannot be detected by such a clear-cut and simple criterion, our search for it must be much subtler and Rahner's theology of grace is of great help here. It teaches us that grace is offered to all of us; thus if we do not perceive it, we will have to look harder—and not merely state that it isn't there. Maybe we are just somewhere in the middle of the dramatic process of transformation described, and therefore cannot yet perceive it clearly.¹⁸

¹⁶ Rahner 1954, 326: "Erfahrbarkeit der Gnade und Erfahrbarkeit der Gnade *als* Gnade [sind] nicht dasselbe." Taken from Rahner, "Über das Verhältnis von Natur und Gnade." In Rahner 1954, 323-345. English version: "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace." In Rahner 1961, 297-317.

¹⁷ My caution comes from the fact that the negation does not concern the finitude of the human person, whereas in the linguistic transformation of the *triplex via* the negation does concern the finitude of the concept itself.

¹⁸ It should be noted that, when Rahner explicitly names experiences of grace, the transformative character is indicated by his choice of examples, which are not experiences of pleasure or convenience but of problematic and even painful encounters. See Rahner 1964, 105-109 (= Rahner 1967, 86-90); and Rahner 1978, 226-251 (= Rahner 1983, 189-210).

But let us return to Girard and to my example of the Aztecs. We said already that Girard uses a revelatory perspective, while Rahner a soteriological one, and—in my opinion—within each perspective each of the two is correct. In order to formulate statements that are equally valid in both perspectives we have to climb to a more universal language by introducing some qualifiers¹⁹ along the lines that Rahner indicated: we have to distinguish explicitly professed faith from implicit faith, grace being accepted from grace being offered, grace being experienced as grace from grace being merely experienced, and experiences that basically structure a society and its traditions from scattered individual experiences.

Then I can perfectly agree—and I surmise Rahner would too—with Girard's contention that no tradition before the Bible was capable of calling into question the guilt of victims whom their communities unanimously condemned, while yet dissenting from the proposition that no one, no single individual was able to do so.

Of course somebody must have experienced it before the Bible was written—otherwise it could not be written there. People write about what they have experienced. Also, given Rahner's proposal that grace is offered to anyone anytime, there must have been the possibility of that recognition for some persons; yet, because there was no tradition, no language to express it, it could never acquire social significance and effectiveness. Here Girard is right that this only happens with the Bible and cultures influenced by it.²⁰ But this then exactly corresponds to the distinction between an implicit or anonymous and an explicitly professed faith. "Anonymous" then does not merely mean that faith *happens* to be unexpressed, it means that it *cannot* be expressed because there is no language available to do so. It is also the difference between grace experienced as grace and grace experienced as being subversive and running counter to your culture.

If we see that, we can dispel the suspicion that mimetic theory has no room for Rahner's supernatural existential. The longing for peace that was present even in sacrificial cultures and the unease individuals in these culture might have felt, without being able to express it or even to realize it themselves, are clear signs of that existential's workings.

¹⁹ Again I am utilizing a distinction, drawn from O. Muck, between a proposition's relative or absolute "affirmability." See Muck 1999, 86-88.

²⁰ See also Girard 1986, 199: "Admittedly, innocent victims were rehabilitated before Christianity...but...[these cases] are isolated in nature and do not affect any society in its totality."

At the same time we have to add a qualifier to Rahner's theology of the anonymous Christian too. The explicit non-Christian who turns out to be an anonymous Christian in post-biblical cultures must be construed differently from the explicit pagan who turns out to be an anonymous Christian in pre-biblical cultures. The post-biblical anonymous Christian lives in a society touched and influenced by biblical revelation—something the pre-biblical anonymous Christian did not. Therefore the offer of grace and the anonymous acceptance of it looks differently in each case. Post-biblical anonymous Christians might have understood the central insights of the Christian message better than some professed believer and this might be the very reason they distance themselves from historical Christianity—Girard has told us so. So in fact he has long acknowledged the supernatural existential in them and their implicit acceptance thereof. Pre-biblical anonymous Christians could not have had these parameters in their lives. So their accepting the offer of grace must have been much more veiled and unclear for our eyes. But why should it be impossible that they experienced instances of compassion for their victims, instances of doubt about the guilt of their victims; instances, however, that never became effective on the level of society but still were there, though even more hidden than those of many who believed in Jesus in their hearts, yet feared to do so publicly (see John 12:37-43)? Girard's analysis of Greek tragedy as a first step of deconstructing myths indicates that there was even some social effect of that.

4. Conclusion

I could not give a thorough one-on-one comparison between Girard's and Rahner's thinking on the topic of concupiscence or mimetic desire. Yet I hope to have shown that the apparent contradictions dissolve when we try to see through the words towards the reality they aspire to point to. If we do that, Rahner's philosophical theology and Girard's anti-philosophical theory are not longer at odds but complement each other toward deeper insights into the complicated structure of human nature.

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"WITH A ROD OR IN THE SPIRIT OF LOVE AND GENTLENESS?" PAUL AND THE RHETORIC OF EXPULSION IN 1 CORINTHIANS 5

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In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul is dealing with a serious case of sexual misconduct. He is understood to be urging the expulsion of a member of the church for incest. Incest is, of course, a serious sexual crime, universally abhorred and prohibited. It has the potential to cause much harm to a community. Not only does it bring disrepute to any who are accused of it, but also to any who appear to condone it. It is scandalous: a cause or at least a symptom—of deep social disease, division, and even disintegration. That Paul should urge—indeed, command—the immediate and uncompromising expulsion of the incestuous evildoer, without even the hint of any kind of due process of inquiry and trial for the accused, seems obvious.

Does it? To whom? And why?

This article will reread 1 Cor 5 as part of Paul's response to what he saw as the attempt of the divided Corinthian community (see 1 Cor 1:10-13, 11:18, 2 Cor 10-13) to regain its lost unity in the only way it knew how: by cleansing itself of undesirable elements among their number and thereby re-establishing harmony by means of the tried and true method, the scapegoat mechanism. The main thesis of this article is that Paul, far from joining in a bit of classical scapegoating, shows it up for what it is: puffed up arrogance, or "inflation," as he calls it (5:2), and a blind mimicking of the very sacrificial system the Corinthians, as "spiritual people" (see 1 Cor 3:1), so self-righteously think they are above.

Since this article is methodologically informed by the work of the literary critic and cultural theorist René Girard, our preliminary task will

be to outline his method, establishing a working hermeneutical context. We will focus on five key ideas in Girardian theory that have immediate relevance for our reading of 1 Cor 5, namely: the mimetic nature of desire; the often resulting rivalry and conflict; the role of scandal; the accusatory principle; and the scapegoat mechanism of the sacrificial system. We then need to establish the textual context that precedes 1 Cor 5 by offering a brief summary of the letter leading up to the text under discussion. That will enable us to engage in a close rereading of the said passage, for which our main exegetical dialogue partner will be the recent commentary on First Corinthians by Raymond F. Collins.

Desire's Double-Bind: Mimesis, Rivalry, and the Victim

The important anthropological role of *mimesis*, or imitation, goes back to the Greeks. Aristotle noted in his *Poetics* (1448b, 4-10) that the greater human capacity for imitation is what distinguishes humanity from all other animals. By imitation we acquire not only language, and therefore the ability to reason, but our very sense of self in and through our relationship to the rest of the world: in short, personhood and culture (see Alison 1990, 18-21.). How? Given the current climate of individualism, it comes as something of a surprise to hear the claim that it is through the *imitation of another's desire*. According to Girard, our desires are neither original nor spontaneous to us; they are learned by imitating the desires of others.¹

Human beings are intrinsically mimetic, imitating one another's desire. This leads to rivalry. Mimetic rivalry leads to conflict, which, if unchecked, degenerates into an all-against-all violence. This, in turn, threatens the complete disintegration of the group. So a problem arises: how is order (*cosmos*) to be re-established out of chaos? Once humans had evolved beyond the submission/domination mechanism (that still works for the other higher primates), our primal ancestors were in real danger of "species

¹ A word of clarification before we proceed to explore this claim in the hope of averting a simple misunderstanding: desire is not to be confused with appetite. They are related, obviously; but they are not the same. What is the difference? At the risk of over-simplifying, simply put: appetite is about needs; desire is about wants. Needs are instinctive, automatic and general; wants are learned, cultivated and specific. For example, one may have an appetite for food, but a desire for champagne and caviar. There is nothing necessary or instinctive about wanting champagne and caviar, but it is obviously and highly mimetic, a desire learned in imitation of social models of desirability. Given the inevitable libidinal meaning of the word Freud gave it; see also Girard 1996, 268 for a discussion on the need for a word other than "desire."

suicide" (see Bailie 1995, 120; Alison 1998, 15; McKenna 1985, 5-6; Gans 1985, 101). Indeed, anthropologists and palaeontologists have recently suggested that our early human ancestors came very close to extinction about seventy thousand years ago, dwindling to as few as two thousand individuals. Was it some viral, bacteriological, ecological or *social* disease/catastrophe that might account for it? So far the bones have yielded no biological clue.

So what saved us? René Girard suggests that what "saved" us was what continues to "save" us: a victim. At the fever-pitch of violence when all looked lost, someone made the crucial *accusatory gesture* singling out one among the rest—one who, for whatever reason, stood out from the rest: giving us the scapegoat or "single victim mechanism" (Bailie 1995, 122).

This mechanism or operation is the community's unconscious way of converging upon someone it blames for its troubles. When this happens, the community actually believes the accusation it makes against the unfortunate person. One way to put this, in the language of the Bible, especially the Gospels, is that this entire single victim process is the work of Satan. It is Satan....Satan... is the "accuser," the power of accusation and the power of the process resulting in blaming and eliminating a substitute for the real cause of the community's troubles. (Girard 2001, xii)

Suddenly, where a moment ago all were *divided* in a conflict of all-against-all, now all are *united* against one: the victim; in all-against-all only the strongest one can survive.

The root cause of division and conflict—rivalistic mimetic desire—remains, however, unrecognized and is soon covered over by myth (Bailie 1995, 28-29, 33-35, 102-104). Myth, according to ethnologists, is the narrative version of ritual, which, logically and temporally, precedes myth (Girard 1977, 89ff). It is the attempt to justify the use of violence to control violence. Law is the more sophisticated means of doing the same: using the threat of violence to control the mimetic desires that lead to rivalry and violence by prohibiting mimetic rivalry at its root: "thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's spouse, possessions, power, prestige or life"—in short, her/his *objects of desire* (Girard, 1977, 20-21; Alison, 1996, 22; Alison, 1998, 148-49).

But what happens when too many people in a given community do exactly that? The community must be "possessed by a demon" or "afflicted

by a god;" either way, *sinful*. And what is the solution? Repeat what worked to begin with, what constituted the group as a community "in the beginning of our creating:" offer a sacrifice to the "angry gods," appease the "angry demons." How? When all else fails, sacrifice a victim.

There is nothing quite as socially cathartic as controlled and righteous violence, especially when it is unanimous (Girard 1977, 78-81, 100-101). But only when all else fails: if expulsion from the community will do, why spill blood?

[T]he three pillars of "primitive" religion, myth, ritual, and prohibition, are interlinked and...all three flow from the misunderstood mechanism of the surrogate victim. That is to say, an original murder brings peace; myth is the retelling of the story of the foundation of the peace, or order, from the perspective of those involved in the lynching as persecutors; ritual is the reenactment of the circumstances of the murder in a slightly distorted form to reproduce the benefits that the murder brought about in terms of social harmony; and the prohibitions...are directed against the supposed causes or forms of acquisitive and conflictual mimesis which led to the crisis culminating in the murder. (Alison 1998, 131)

That the single victim mechanism is universally present in human culture is undeniable. That it is the root of the human institution of religion and its role in the formation and maintenance of culture accounts for the nature and interconnectedness of ritual, myth and law, which comprise religion the world over. The fact that this mechanism became more and more sophisticated may obscure it for those of us who believe that we have outgrown it in our secular age. That it nevertheless continues to operate in human relationships from the one-to-one personal to the institutional and even global is beyond the scope of this article to demonstrate. But that it was operating in Corinth, and that Paul was aware of it, is precisely why we have been considering it here. The question before us, as we re-read 1 Cor 5, then, is whether Paul was urging the Corinthians to engage in a bit of ol' time religion, or trying to stop them from doing so.

1 Corinthians and that ol' time religion

In the First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul is writing to what he takes to be a *divided* community (1:10-11). He appeals for unity based on Christ, "and him *crucified*,"—"foolishness" to the "wise" (the Greeks) and a

skandalon to the "pious" (the Jews), but the revelation of God to those who believe, and the centre and heart of the gospel that he, Paul, proclaims (1:18-31). To that end he reminds the Corinthians of his example and mission (2:1-5) in proclaiming something that "the wise and the rulers of this age" failed to see (2:8-10) but which God reveals to those who receive the spirit and mind of Christ (2:16)—that is, the person and understanding of the *crucified*, or, as James Alison calls it, the "intelligence of the victim."

Paul laments that the Corinthians seem to lack (or have lost) this insight and understanding due to their immaturity (3:1-3a), which he equates with their still being subject to the mimetic passions of "jealousy and rivalry...behaving like the rest of humankind" (3:3b), with its factionalism and strife (3:4-5). He insists on equality in place of rivalry (3:6-9) and asserts that his authority to speak so plainly and critically stems from his role (together with others) in establishing the gospel among them (3:10)—a gospel that establishes the only true foundation, *the crucified victim*, and no other; and which suffering endurance alone proves in a world that rejects that foundation (3:11-15).

That this identification with the victim constitutes the church as "God's temple"—that is, the place of the only acceptable *sacrifice*—is the only source and meaning of its being *holy* (3:16-17) (Hammerton-Kelly 1985, 69). This paradox—indeed, subversion of the usual meanings of "temple," "sacrifice" and "holiness"—must remain incomprehensible to the mind conditioned by this present age: God's wisdom is revealed in the "foolishness" of the cross, in the person of the victim whom the wise and the rulers of this age have crucified (3:18-23).

Paul wants the Corinthians to see him as the servant of this crucified victim, the only one to whom Paul owes his fidelity (4:1-2). As for how the rest of the world judges him, Paul, he couldn't care less (4:3). Indeed, he implores them to leave judgement to God alone (4:5); and applies the principle to their own faction-riddled community (4:6). Anything else is wilful inflation of egos and an abuse of power (4:7-8). The reverse is what God does with the faithful: they imitate and share the lot of the despised and persecuted victim (4:9-13). This is what the Corinthians should emulate in Paul as children do a father (4:14-16), and in Timothy (whom Paul is sending to them) as one does a model brother (4:17).

But, alas, some among the Corinthians are inflated and full of their own importance, abusing power, and asking for trouble (4:18-20). "Shall I come to you with a rod or with love in a spirit of gentleness?" (4:21), he asks. A good question.

With a rod?

It is actually rumoured [ἀκουεταί, lit. "heard"] that there is fornication [πορνεία] among you; and such as is unheard of [lit. "is not"] among the pagans/nations: one of you is having his father's wife. (1 Cor 5:1)

If it is with a rod, the matter is clear, as most modern translations seem to take for granted. But if not, a Girardian-inspired hermeneutics of suspicion suggests several questions.² Firstly, why does Paul say, "it is rumoured" (ἀκουεταί), rather than simply assert that it is *known* that there *is* fornication among the Corinthians? Secondly, what exactly might πορνεία mean in this context? And thirdly, are we meant to take Paul literally when he asserts that incest—"having" one's father's wife (and in this case presumably a stepmother)—does not exist or is unheard of and unknown among the pagans? We shall begin with the last issue first.

Let us remind ourselves of a few historical and cultural facts. Incest is perhaps the most widely prohibited of *mimetic* desires precisely because it invariably leads to conflict, and is therefore considered a most serious social disease.³ As Raymond F. Collins (1999, 206-207, 209) points out:

In every culture incest is considered a particularly egregious form of sexual misconduct....Within Judaism as within the Hellenistic world in general a man's sexual intercourse with his father's wife, concubine, or paramour was considered intolerable....Marriage with one's stepmother was prohibited not only by Jewish law (Lev 18:7-8; 20:11; Deut 22:30; 27:20; see Gen 49:4; Ezek 22:10-11) but also by Roman law (see Gaius, *Institutes* 1.63).

Now, at the time this letter was written (ca. 56-57), Nero (37-68) was Emperor of the known world. Nero's own incestuous relationship with his *mother*—not just his stepmother—would have been well known to the "nations"/"pagans."⁴ Furthermore, as Fr Collins points out, "Greco-Roman literature frequently mentions liaisons between men and their stepmothers

² See McKenna 1990, 85, on the underlying meaning of the term "hermeneutics of suspicion" as the view from "underfoot, from where the downtrodden are."

³ See Girard's treatment of the Oedipus myth (1977, 68f., and 169f; see also Girard 1986, 25-38.

⁴ See Seutonius 1979, 228. Nero had his mother, Agrippina, murdered in 59.

(e.g., Martial, *Epigrams* 4:16; see further Patricia Watson, *Ancient Stepmothers: Myth, Misogyny and Reality* [Leiden: Brill, 1995])" (Collins, *First Corinthians*, 209). Indeed, Paul is writing to one of the most cosmopolitan communities in the Roman Empire, and perhaps its most important Greek city. Are we, for example, to believe that the Corinthians had never heard of *Oedipus*?⁵ Or that they knew nothing of the incestuous goings on of the gods and heroes that abound in Greek *myth*? Curious that Paul should say then that such a thing "is not even heard of" (or alternatively, "does not exist") among the pagans/nations.

Clearly a literal, face-value reading of this verse would have to be completely innocent of history and the pagan culture of the ancient world, not to say critically naïve in its reading of this highly rhetorical text. A much more nuanced and critically savvy reading of Paul is necessary—one that takes account of the heavy irony of this text in its historical and cultural context.

And its irony is not confined to "the unheard of:" it includes the double meaning behind the all too readily rumoured πορνεία—which as we shall see, means a great deal more than its obvious meaning of "fornication" as sexual immorality. As Girard says in his study of Shakespeare:

For a pun to be good the more interesting meaning must be the less readily apparent, the rare meaning, and it must owe this quality not to some cheap verbal trick, empty of significance, but to some essential reason, some deeper-seated resistance of ours in the face of something objectively evident. (Girard 2000, 75)

The same, of course, can be said for any kind of double meaning; and πορνεία certainly carries that possibility in Paul, as he himself points out later in this same chapter (5:9-10), as we shall see when we get to the relevant verses. Suffice to say at this point that we should be warned not to make too simplistic a conclusion about the nature of this "fornication," and be sensitive to "the less readily apparent, the rare meaning" we normally resist for some "deeper-seated" reasons of our own.

And what might those reasons be? Could they have something to do with the *scandalous* nature of the crime? Let us remember that it is

⁵ In Sophocles' tragedy of *Oedipus the King* the ill-fated "hero" responds to a question as to whether the terrible prophecy about him is a secret by declaring: "No secret. Once Apollo said that I / Was doomed to lie with my own mother, and / Defile my own hands with my father's blood. / Wherefore has Corinth been, these many years, / my home no more" (81).

rumoured, rather than a tried and proven fact, that the "unheard of" has happened; and therefore the very thing that makes the salacious nature of the πορνεία so much more *scandalous*: at once both offensive and fascinating—indeed, contagious. And therefore a perfect candidate for some cathartic "ethical cleansing"—which is how the following text has consistently been understood:

And you have become inflated instead of mourning that the one who did this deed might be taken from your midst. (5:2)

However, as translated above it is at best an *ambiguous* statement. Does Paul mean that instead of being inflated they should mourn (be "deflated") so that the man might be removed from them? Or does he mean that they are inflated, and should mourn instead that they might lose the brother accused of the "unheard of?" The usual modern translations of this verse give the impression of no ambiguity whatever, opting instead for a clear and resounding call for expulsion. Here are three modern versions:

And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. (RSV)

How can you be so proud of yourselves? You should be in mourning. A man who does a thing like that ought to have been expelled from the community. (JB)

Are you so inflated? More than that, shouldn't you have mourned, with the result that the one who is doing this be removed from your midst? (Collins, *First Corinthians*, 205)

Compare these with the Authorised Version, which is closest to the original in retaining the ambiguity, and therefore the possibility of a very different interpretation:

And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.

And here is the original Greek (without the punctuation supplied by later editors):

και υμεις πεφυσινωμενοι εστε και ουχι μαλλον
επενθησατεινα αρθη εκ μεσου υμων ο το εργον τουτο
πρα ξας

Everything hinges on three interpretive strategies: a) on the punctuation (which Paul did not provide); b) on how we choose to translate two key words, *ὅτι*, and *ἀρθε*; and c) on how we understand the reference to being "puffed up" and the call to "mourn instead." Firstly, the punctuation: the modern translations divide the original into two (JB, Collins), or even three (RSV), separate sentences; and make at least one into a rhetorical question. Why? Does the Greek require it? The translators who gave us the Authorised Version did not think so; nor did the scholars who first revised it in the nineteenth century (Revised Version of 1885). However, since it reads rather ambiguously as one complete sentence, modern translators (including the Revised Standard Version, and the most recent NRSV) have done away with the ambiguity.

But that ambiguity—allowing for a very different interpretation—is certainly there in the original Greek.

What of the two key words translated variously as: "Let him...be removed" (RSV), "ought to have been expelled" (JB), "with the result that...be removed" (Collins). The consecutive conjunction *ὅτι* means "that" or "so that." It is not the imperative "let it be" as rendered by the RSV; nor the auxiliary verb "ought" as in the JB; and may have the sense of "so that" as suggested by Raymond F. Collins's more fulsome "*with the result that*." As for *ἀρθη*, it is the aorist subjunctive passive of *αἶρω*, and so means "might be lifted up" or "might be taken," and not the imperative "remove" or "expel"—which is the meaning of the Greek *ἐκβάλλω*, or the even stronger *ἐκδιώκω*, either of which would have made more sense to use if expulsion was what Paul was urging. In fact the only other times a cognate of *αἶρω* is used in the *entire* Pauline corpus is at the end of this chapter (5:13), where it is clarified by the prefix *ἐξ*, meaning "take away" (and to which we shall return when we get to that verse); and in the next chapter, 6:15b, where it cannot possibly mean "remove" or "expel." but "take:" "shall I then *take* (*ἀρᾶς*) the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?" "Remove" would clearly be ludicrous here; and "expel" absurd.

So, what is Paul's point then in 5:2? Could it be that he is reprimanding the Corinthians for their arrogance in wanting to condemn one of their own number whom they accuse of the "unheard of" crime of incest when they should be mourning that he *might be taken* from them, or *lost* to them, by their arrogance and smugness in judging him? In short, is Paul perhaps pointing out their *hypocrisy*—literally *ὑπο κρισις*, which is perhaps best understood as pseudo-crisis, "making a mountain out of mole hill?"

Fr Collins notes that "excommunication" is the normal, conventional manner of handling cases of incest in both Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures (Collins 1999, 210). He refers us to a similar situation in 1 Timothy 1:18-20 and Matthew 18:15-18—which is somewhat curious, since 1 Timothy (as Fr Collins notes) is not by Paul, and the Matthean passage is actually about mercy, not expulsion. Matthew 18:15-18 speaks of an open, communal and fraternal process of reasoning with, and a thoroughly compassionate attitude towards, the miscreant brother before the final strategy is applied: "let him be to you as the Gentile and the tax collector"—always remembering, of course, that Matthew, the disciple, was a tax collector (9:9) and, according to the Matthean Jesus, all nations / gentiles were to be "discipled" (28:19). But perhaps what is of even greater moment is that this passage continues to speak of the binding and loosing of the burdens of sin and recrimination, which Simon Peter understood in terms of forgiveness, as expressed in his question: "Lord, how often is my brother to sin against me and I *forgive him*? Seven times?"—which is to say "every time." Not just "every time," says Jesus, "but seventy times seven"—"each and every time with magnanimity without measure."

Excommunication of the miscreant may well be how the "nations" do it—even God's own people, Israel. But is it really appropriate for the followers of Christ? And in the "name" and the "power" of Christ?

For indeed I absent in person [lit. body] but present in spirit have already passed judgment as though present the one who has done this in the name of the Lord Jesus you being assembled and/with my spirit with the power of our Lord Jesus to hand over [παράδουναι, lit. betray] such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. This boasting of yours is not good! (5:3-6a)

Again, are we to take Paul's words at face value? Or is he being even more heavily ironic, not to say sarcastic? If we do take him at face value, what he is saying is this: "Even though I wasn't there in person, I condemn this man on the strength of the accusation alone, without need of any due process of inquiry or trial; and I do so together with you, and in the name of Jesus, and with his power, handing this man over to the *accusatory principle* of this world ('Satan') for the destruction of his mortal life ('flesh') that he may be saved spiritually on the Last Day of Judgement." That seems to be how Fr Collins (1999:207) understands it:

Paul tells the community that even though he was physically separated from them he has nonetheless rendered judgment with regard to the one who had so egregiously violated social mores. He challenges the community to do the same. The scene Paul constructs is that of the courtroom. Paul's judicial language is strikingly similar to that used in Roman judicial proceedings and the deliberations of the Sanhedrin: "convene" (*synachthenton*), "render judgment" (*kekrika*), "hand over" (*paradidomi*), perhaps even "day of the Lord" (*hemera* can suggest one's day in court; see 4:3). Punishment is stipulated: it is banishment. The agent of the court is identified: it is Satan, one who executes divine judgment.

He further elucidates in the exegetical notes on verse 5:

for the destruction of the flesh: Paul concludes (v.13) his consideration of the case of the incestuous man with a Deuteronomic injunction (Deut 17:7) that suggests the death penalty. "Destruction" (*olethron*; see 1 Thess 5:3) is often used in the sense of "death." Within Second Temple Judaism excommunication was considered to be a kind of substitute for execution.... Hellenists believed that the pronouncement of a curse would be followed almost immediately by the death of the person upon whom the curse had been pronounced. (Collins 1999, 212).

If that *were* what Paul meant, then he would have approved wholeheartedly of the Spanish Inquisition, the Salem witch trials, the Taliban and al Qaeda. But that is not the only possibility offered by a close reading of the Greek text; and what suggests the likelihood of an alternative reading is the punch line Paul himself provides:

"this *boasting of yours* is not good!" [οὐ καλὸν τὸ καυχῆμα ὑμῶν]

Why "boasting?" *What* boasting? The use of the word "boasting" (καυχῆμα) is odd; and the stressed use of the second person plural pronoun makes it clear that it cannot be attributed to anyone but the Corinthians as Paul's addressees. As Fr Collins (1999, 213) reminds us: "*Kauchema*, 'the object of your boasting,' generally suggests something in which one can take legitimate pride. Paul...tends to use *kauchema* in a

positive sense (see 9:15,16). The one exception is here...." But is it? Only if, as most interpreters believe, Paul is urging the expulsion of the "fornicator." What, we would have to ask ourselves, are the Corinthians *legitimately* boasting about; and *where* and *how* was this boast made? But what if, as suggested here, the reverse is true, and Paul is trying to stop them from trying to give legitimacy to an action that would result in the possible loss (αρθη) of a brother? Then Paul is consistent in the way he uses καυχημα, and their boast is more than likely referring to the string of claims Paul has just soundly lampooned, as the following way of punctuating this text brings out.

For—indeed!—I, absent in person! (but present "in spirit") have *already passed judgement* (as though present!) the one who has "done this"—"in the name of the Lord Jesus"!?!—you being assembled (and/with my spirit! "with the power of our Lord Jesus"!) to *hand over /betray* such a one to *Satan*—"for the destruction of the flesh!" "that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord!!" This boasting of yours is not good! (5:3-6a)

In other words, this is what they (or some of them) have done or want to do, and claim Paul's and Christ's authority for their wishes/actions. And Paul, still very much in ironic mood, far from endorsing the expulsion, is being heavy handed with sarcasm.⁶ If so, he means the *opposite* of what he is almost universally understood to be saying by interpreters who take him at face value—and so miss the point. All it takes to get the point is knowing how to read the text as it stands, which this way of punctuating helps to bring out. No wording needs to be changed. Indeed, this is a very literal English translation, which follows, as much as possible, the terseness of the original Greek:

εγω μεν γαρ απων τω σωματι παρων δε τω πνευματι ηδη
κεκρικα ως παρων τον ουτος τουτο κατεργασαμενον εν
τω ονοματι του κυριου Ιησου συναχθεντων υμων και του
εμου πνευματος συν τη δυναμει κυριου ημων Ιησου
παραδουναι τοντοιουτον τω σατανα εις ολεθπον της
σαρκος ινα το πνευμα σωθη εν τη ημερα του κυριου ου
καλον το καυχημα υμων

⁶ For another example of Pauline use of sarcasm and parody, see Hammerton-Kelly's treatment of 2 Cor 11 (1985, 75-76).

As to *where* and *how* Paul gets his information about their boasting, could it be in the reports that have come to Paul from Chloe's people about the divisions in the community (1:10-11)? Could he even be using some of their own (and his) favorite phrases back at them—such as, "present in spirit," "in the name of the Lord Jesus," "assembled in spirit," "with the power of the Lord Jesus," "that the spirit may be saved?" Is this superficial appropriation of Paul's own terminology possibly the medium of their "boasting"—a distortion into slogans of the very phrases they learned from him (or at least share with him, see 1:2,10, 24; 3:13)?⁷ Could this be the "leaven" which "inflates" them in their own estimation of themselves as "spiritual people?" "Hand over/betray such a one to Satan," should surely alert us to (at least!) the possibility that Paul does not mean to be taken at face value. And the claim that for Paul "Satan...is God's agent, not God's enemy," (Collins, *First Corinthians*, 212) is hard to credit (see Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 7:5; 2 Cor 2:11; 2 Thess 2:9).

Furthermore, there is evidence to support the possibility, and even the *likelihood*, that Paul has been speaking tongue-in-cheek by what immediately follows on from the abrupt: "This boasting of yours is not good!" (5:6a). Verse 6b continues:

Do you not know that a little [of this] leaven leavens the whole batch [of dough]?

The "leaven" which "inflates," which "puffs up" and leads to "boasting" is hardly to be equated with the *rumoured* "fornication," the "unheard of" among the nations; nor is it, with all due respect to Fr Collins (1999, 213), a promiscuous attitude towards it:

In 5:6 their boasting is disordered because they have not yet come to grips with the problem of the incestuous person in their midst, expelling him from the community so as to have a community that can worthily call on the name of the Lord.

Although, at first blush, that may seem more likely, it is so only if we read Paul at face value regarding the divine agency of "Satan" (the accusatory

⁷ The irony is all the more biting when we realize that these terms are juxtaposed with legal terminology borrowed from Roman and Jewish courts, as Raymond F. Collins points out: "convene," "render judgment," "hand over." (1999, 207), and we might add "for the destruction of the flesh."

principle) and ignore the irony in what Paul has said thus far. But if Paul is being ironic, perhaps what "inflates" and leads to "boasting" here is a particular instance of the factionalism Paul has already identified in general terms when he urged that no one should "be puffed up against another. For how are you different? What have you that you did not receive? And since you have received, who are you to boast as though you hadn't received?" (4:6-7). In other words, Paul is speaking of the kind of "puffed up" *rivalry* that leads to the self-righteous self-deception that *judges* others, and in this instance seeks to expel one accused of the "unheard of"—which is to say, victimizing a scapegoat for the very reason that people always and everywhere have done so: to unite a community divided by rivalry and factionalism.

Purge yourselves of the old leaven, that you might be a new batch, since you are unleavened.... (5:7)

What is this "old leaven?" With this image of "leaven" Paul returns, not with a little tongue-in-cheek irony, to the metaphor of inflation/arrogance with which he began to address this issue, an issue that clearly concerns (and possibly threatens to further divide?) the Corinthian community. It is a powerful and paradoxical image. On the one hand it ironically evokes the "arrogant inflation" of those who "boast;" and on the other it stands in stark contrast to its paschal/"unleavened" (and therefore *eucharistic*) antithesis (to be developed later in 1 Cor 11:17ff.). Its sacrificial undertones, in the image of the paschal unleavened bread—the "bread" *free* from this "old leaven"—are striking. The irony is rich; and the rhetoric typically Pauline. In other words, what Paul is saying is: Do you not realize that even a little of *this* leaven of judgmental self-righteousness that wants to scapegoat an "incestuous evildoer" puffs you up and permeates the whole community, a community that is meant to be *paschal* (and *eucharistic*!) in so far as it is free from this "leaven?" Get rid of it, get rid of the *old* leaven, that you may be a *new batch*! For you are free of that leaven! And why?

...because Christ our paschal lamb has *already* been sacrificed!
Let us keep *that* [paschal] feast, not with the "old leaven," *the leaven of malice and evil*, but with unleavened sincerity and truth. (5:7-8)

Could it be stated more clearly? This is *the* "crucial" moment in the passage. It points unambiguously to the crucified. And what it says is, he

has *already* been sacrificed. As Fr Collins (1999, 214) notes: "Paul uses 'Christ' to evoke the memory of the death of Christ, but it is only *here that he interprets Christ's death in an explicitly sacrificial fashion*" (emphasis added). Indeed! And why? Could it be because Christ's death unveils the sacrificial workings of the "old leaven of malice and evil," the contagion that so fascinates and scandalizes the Corinthians that they cannot see beyond it, and fail to recognize their own part in wanting to sacrifice someone again, and gain, and again, despite the fact that "Christ, our paschal lamb, has *already* been sacrificed?" It is at least a possibility made plausible by a hermeneutic suspicion opened up by the "intelligence of the victim," a way of seeing made possible by faith in one crucified by "the wise and the rulers of this age."⁸

The "old leaven of malice and evil" is not reducible to πορνεία (fornication) in the "worldly," or *common*, sense of "sexual immorality" (of which the "incestuous" man is accused).⁹ Envy, greed, evil, malice, slander, gossip are among the chief characteristics of the accusatory princ(ipl)e of this world, *Satan*, which, far from being a divine agent, is the *Accuser* and *Prosecutor*. Paul is *not* urging the Corinthians to "hand over"/*betray* the accused one to that. Instead he urges: Get rid of it! Cast *that* evil out from *yourselves* (5:13), and not an accused brother from your midst.

If that is what Paul is really getting at, then that obscure and puzzling reference that stands at the centre of 1 Cor 5 as its pivot suddenly makes crystal-clear sense: "For Christ, *our paschal lamb*, has already been *sacrificed!*" (5:7).¹⁰ Christ has died, once for all, to reveal the world's hidden foundations in the sacrificial system; and in doing so, has rendered that system increasingly useless. Thus, with this reference to the paschal lamb/*sacrificial victim*, Paul points to the (structural) innocence of *all* victims of expulsion, and *all* sacrificial scapegoats.

⁸ Nor is this notion and use of the terms "leaven" unique to Paul. We find it in the Gospels in much the same way in which it operates here in Paul; cf. Mt 16:6-12; Mk 8:15-21; see also Lk 12:1-12. Nor is the only other time Paul uses the image of leaven irrelevant to understanding his intent in 1 Corinthians; cf. Gal 5:1-8.

⁹ Interestingly, in his translation of 5:8, Raymond F. Collins prefers the variant reading, ζύμη κακίας και πορνείας ("yeast of evil and sexual immorality") to the Nestle-Aland critical edition, ζύμη κακίας και πονηρίας that the RSV translates as "leaven of malice and evil".

¹⁰ And it is not a merely incidental allusion to the forthcoming Passover feast that year—cf. Collins 1999, 214, referring to "Collela who argues that the reference to the Passover is only temporal."

And in case there is still any ambiguity, he explains that the real "fornication" is rooted in the mimetic passions that give rise to the need for the sacrificial system in the first place:

When I wrote in an earlier letter not to associate too closely with "fornicators," I did not mean fornicators in the common sense, or with the covetous and the greedy, or [that is to say] "idolaters." For only in *this* sense must you "leave the world." (5:9-10)

For corroboration we need look no further than the penultimate chapter of Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, where these passions are more fully articulated:

For I fear that when I come I may find you not as I would want (and you may find me not as you would want!): that there will be rivalry, jealousy, anger, competition, slander, gossip, inflation, disruption; so that when I return, my God may humble me about you, and I mourn for many of those who had sinned and not repented for the impurity and fornication and debauchery that they practiced. (12:20-21)

The impurity, fornication and debauchery that the Corinthians are guilty of are not essentially *sexual* but *mimetic* passions: rivalry, jealousy, anger, competition, slander, gossip, inflation, disruption. Nor is this list fortuitous and haphazard. It is quite deliberately ordered—and revealing. Each passion builds on the one before it. And the sequential juxtaposition of slander, gossip and inflation is particularly relevant for our reading of 1 Cor 5.

So, far from being "obsessed with sex" (as Paul is often slandered—and misunderstood), Paul uses the term "fornication" in its biblical sense, where it is understood as a metaphor for *idolatry* (see Num 25; 2 Chron 21:11; Isa 23:17; Ezek 16:15, 29). And for Paul, "idolatry" is a good deal more than bowing to statues of the non-existent gods (see 1 Cor 8:4-5). It is rather "conforming to this age" (Rom 12:2) and imitating the distorted desires of that generation that wandered in the desert under the leadership of Moses (see 1 Cor 10:1-5): *that* is "idolatry" as Paul understands it.¹¹ And

¹¹ cf., Hammerton-Kelly 1985, 71: "In choosing idolatry as the summary category (10:14), however, the Apostle is in harmony with the rabbinic viewpoint which sees it as the epitome of sin: what begins with epithymia ends as eidolatria..."

he links it directly to distorted mimetic desire:

Now these are examples for us, that we not imitate their distorted desire [ἐπιθυμητας κακῶν]—as they indeed did desire. Nor become idolaters as some of them were—as it is written "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." Well then, let us not "fornicate" as some of them "fornicated"—and "twenty-three thousand fell in a single day." (10:6-8)

It would be ludicrously naïve to think Paul understood the twenty-three thousand who fell in a single day as referring to a sexual orgy (see Hammerton-Kelly 1985, 70-71). The references are to Exodus 32:1-6, where Israel worships the golden calf; and to Numbers 25, where the "plague" is a clear reference to the consequences of Israel's apostasy (Num 25:1-3, 16-18), and the "fornicating" to a *religious* orgy, that is, worship of Baal Peor. "Let us not tempt Christ, as some of them did and were destroyed by *serpents*"—symbols of pagan gods (Num 21:6); "nor are you to *murmur*"—breed resentment and division—"as some of them did and were destroyed by the *Destroyer*"—not God, but *the angel of death*, the accuser and divider (διαβολος). "'Now all this is by way of example, written as a warning for us for whom the end of the ages has come"—those to whom the revelation of history's end has been given. "So let any that think they stand firm, watch out lest they fall" (1 Cor 10:9-12). The "fall" here, as for the twenty-three thousand, is not about sex but about distorted desire *in toto*—of which distorted sexuality is but the most obvious and superficial symptom, and therefore a highly effective *metaphor*.

The conclusion to 1 Cor 5 now makes perfect sense in the context of Paul's admonition against judging, inflation, boasting, divisions, rivalry, etc. It is not a call to self-righteous expulsion of one accused of the "unheard of," but a call to the community to purge itself of its own mimetic contagion, the very self-righteousness that wants to expel a brother with complete unanimity—that is, with Paul's blessing, his epistolary sanction. But Paul will have none of it. He clearly says,

But rather I wrote to you not to associate with any "brother" who is called [ονομαζομενος η] a "fornicator"—who is [η] covetous, who is [η] an idolater, who is [η] a slanderer, who is

[η] a drunkard, who is [η] ravenous. Do not share the table with
such a one [τω τοιουτω]. (5:11)

Notice, "such a *one*," in the singular, indicates that this list of subsequent passions is an exposition of the initial passion (the Bible names) "fornication," and is therefore an explanation of what "fornicator" means: one who is intoxicated ("the drunkard") with the *mimetic* passions (covetousness, slander, rapaciousness—for which sexual passion, "fornication," is a well-known biblical metaphor). And why? Because this disease is the real danger to the community. This disease is so contagious—so "seductive"—that it acts like a leaven, the "old leaven of malice and evil."

For what have I to do with judging "outsiders" [τους εξω]? Do not even [ουχι] judge the "insiders" [τους εσω]! God will judge the "outsiders" [τους εξω]; Remove [lit. "take out," εξαρατε] the evil [τον πονηρον] out of yourselves [εξ υμων αυτων]! (5:12-13)

Contrary to most modern translations, ουχι τους εσω υμεις κρινετε is not a rhetorical question, but, as indicated by the use of the strongest possible negative, ουχι, a command. So, rather than judge anyone—even yourself ("insiders;" see 4:3-4), much less others ("outsiders")—Paul urges: look within yourselves and pluck out of your own heart, "out of yourselves" (εξ υμων αυτων, and not "from among you," εκ μεσου υμων), the evil¹² that lurks there, and drives you to judge and expel others in imitation of one another's contagious, seductive and intoxicating violence.

Conclusion

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul, far from urging the Corinthians to expel a member of the church for incest, is responding to what he saw as the attempt by the Corinthians to regain lost unity in the tried and true method of sacrificial religion: purging themselves of their internal quarrels and factional divisions by expelling one of their own number who was clearly guilty of transgressing a mimetically potent taboo, incest. In the Mediterranean world of the first century, incest was a very serious sexual crime,

¹² NB: the use of the neuter πονηρον, suggests "evil", rather than the masculine πονηρος, which means "evil one"; and certainly not πορνος meaning "fornicator," despite the obvious resonance of the two words in Greek.

as universally abhorred as, say, paedophilia is in the modern West. Such a heinous crime could destroy a community—and not only by bringing it into disrepute and universal censure for appearing to condone it, however tacitly or naively: it was seriously *scandalous*; a cause—or at least a symptom—of social disease, of institutional decadence, moral bankruptcy, and an imminent and justly deserved collapse. That Paul should be read as urging—indeed, commanding—the immediate and uncompromising expulsion of the "sexual pervert," with no need for any kind of due process of inquiry and trial for the accused, seems obvious.

Doesn't it?

This article has attempted to reread Paul's response to this situation with the help of a "hermeneutic suspicion" informed by René Girard's mimetic theory. It argued that Paul, far from joining in a bit of classical of time religious scapegoating, showed it up for what it is: "puffed up arrogance," and blind mimicking of the very sacrificial system the Corinthians, had they understood the gospel of the crucified victim, would never have even contemplated—much less sought Paul's complicity, or at least his sanction. Given the present climate in our churches, rocked as they are by sexual scandals and an almost universal censure for not doing enough to protect the victims of these crimes, the last candidates for victimization are, ironically, those who can be shown to be the victimizers themselves—or worse still, their institutional protectors. In other words, the crucified—the victim—has woken us up; but staying awake, remaining alert, is proving more challenging.

It is always easier to see other people's scapegoats *as* scapegoats, as innocent victims—at least *structurally* innocent. The challenge of the gospel Paul preached—Christ, and him *crucified*—is to realize that we are all implicated in the crucifying, in the sacrificial system by means of which the world bestows peace on itself. And until we do, we will have to read Paul, not as he was after his encounter with the victim of his own violence "on the road to Damascus," but as though it were not true and it had never happened (see Gans 1985, 100-101, 107-108).

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DESIRED POSSESSIONS: KARL POLANYI, RENÉ GIRARD, AND THE CRITIQUE OF THE MARKET ECONOMY

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"The most radical critique of liberal capitalism ever:" that is how Louis Dumont describes *The Great Transformation*, Karl Polanyi's classic work on the rise of the market system. But the French anthropologist goes on to observe that, when one confronts this same critique with the ethnography of tribal societies, "one may ask whether Polanyi did not in fact come up short; having criticized the economy as an idea, he thought he could retain it as a thing..." (Dumont xiv, xvi).

Is the economy indeed a "thing" that has always existed in some form everywhere, and if so, what manner of thing is it? In a word, what is an economy *for*? Is there a particular aim that any economy must serve? A specific motive that it necessarily brings into play? We will begin by looking at Polanyi's answer to this question.

"No human motive is per se economic," Polanyi tells us. "There is no such thing as a *sui generis* economic experience in the sense in which man may have a religious, aesthetic, or sexual experience." It is market society, with its dependence on a disembedded economic system, which fosters the illusion that the "economic" motives of hunger and gain necessarily underlie every economic system (1968, 63-4).

In reality, however, "human beings will labor for a large variety of reasons as long as things are arranged accordingly." For example, "Monks traded for religious reasons... The Kula trade of the Trobriand islanders... is mainly an aesthetic pursuit. Feudal economy was run on customary lines. With the Kwakiutl," industry appears to have been "a point of honor." and

so on (1968, 68). The trick, it seems, is to "arrange things accordingly." An economic system can be "run on noneconomic motives," Polanyi explains, without linking the process of production or distribution "to specific economic interests attached to the possession of goods," as long as "every single step in that process is geared to a number of social interests which eventually ensure that the required step be taken" (2001, 48).

Now, there is a danger in this presentation. It could lead a reader to conclude that other societies arrange things cunningly so that all these social interests are harnessed to ensure the performance of the steps necessary to economic processes in a kind of elaborate ruse—a ruse which the out-in-the-open operation of the economy in our society gives us the ability to see through. Very well, such a reader might acknowledge, the economy is an "instituted process," and, yes, the act of instituting it "shifts the place of the process in society" (Polanyi 1968, 148), but if you track it down to its hiding place and strip away the social contrivances in which it has been embedded, what you will find is still the economy as we know it—indeed, the economy which market society alone lays bare. In this reading, or rather misreading, the "real" economic aims that market society achieves *directly* are elsewhere accomplished only in the most clumsily *indirect* fashion. This kind of erroneous conclusion will likely be difficult to counter as long as one posits an opposition between multiple, variable and diffuse social interests, on the one hand, and the apparently straightforward individual interest in the possession of goods, on the other.

Wherever the economy is submerged in social relationships, Polanyi says, a man "does not act so as to safeguard his individual interest in the possession of material goods; he acts so as to safeguard his social standing, his social claims, his social assets" (2001, 48). The problem with such an opposition between individual and social is that a market-minded theorist can overcome it simply by broadening the individual interest in the possession of goods to include the possession of reified social goods. Once social interests are conceptualized as "social assets," to use Polanyi's own expression—or as "symbolic capital," to cite a more recent formulation—they lend themselves to "economizing" even in the formal sense, and Polanyi's carefully constructed distinction between the substantive and the formal collapses, apparently confirming the universality of the market paradigm. And, after all, while social interests vary enormously, every economy invariably deals in one way or another with the possession of material goods. This being the case, any theorist with an

innate propensity to "economize with assumptions" (the phrase is Polanyi's; see 1968, 144) will be tempted to abstract out the daunting profusion of noneconomic motives and to view even primitive economies through the prism of the supposed "economic motives" associated with the possession of goods and conveniently embodied by the modern market.

There is certainly something to be said for economizing with assumptions, even if it entails simplification, so we might well look for a single motive other than hunger or gain that nonetheless characterizes economies both primitive and modern. What we need is a motive associated with material goods other than mere individual interest in their possession—one that would allow us to go beyond the opposition between individual and social motives, just as Polanyi urges us to go beyond the opposition between material and ideal ones (see 1968, 72). Only in this way will we be able to understand the modern economy better in the light of the primitive, rather than seeing the primitive as an elaborately indirect version of the modern.

Let's return to the idea of the economy as an "instituted process." "Two concepts stand out," Polanyi remarks, "that of 'process' and its 'institutedness'." So far we have been considering "institutedness." What about "process"? For Polanyi, this term "suggests analysis in terms of motion." The "material elements may alter their position either by changing place or by changing 'hands'" (1968, 148). Now, it's easy to see that production and transportation involve changes in location, but why should an object change hands?

Here we will limit ourselves to a couple of examples borrowed from primitive cultures. A.M. Hocart tells us that property in Fiji "changes hands very rapidly, especially if it is anything novel," because Fijian custom approves of asking for what one wants and disapproves of refusing such requests (1929, 100). Turning from the South Seas to Africa, we find that the same is true among the Bushmen. "A Bushman will go to any lengths to avoid making other Bushmen jealous of him," reports E.M. Thomas, "and for this reason the few possessions the Bushmen have are constantly circling among members of their groups" (1959, 22; cited by Sahlins 1972, 211-12).

In these cultures, then, it would appear that objects change hands whenever someone wants what someone else has. Fair enough—but *why* should somebody want what someone else has? At about this point, it would be customary to appeal to some notion of economic value, but that would be begging the question of economic motives, unless we know why

one person should value what another has. Let's see what Polanyi has to say on this question.

Early on in *The Great Transformation*, in the above-quoted passage on safeguarding social rather than individual interests, Polanyi writes that the individual in a socially embedded economic system "values material goods only in so far as they serve" to establish social standing (2001, 48). In the concluding chapter, however, he asserts that the "source" of economic value "is human wants and scarcity—and how could we be expected not to desire one thing more than another?" Thus, on the one hand, the value of goods derives from the social interest attached to them, but on the other hand, their value springs from individual desire. Any desire, Polanyi concludes, "will make us participants...in the constituting of economic value" (2001, 267).

And so we find ourselves confronted once again with the perennial dilemma of individual versus social motives. We can go beyond this opposition with the help of René Girard's pioneering work on the "dual nature of desire, a force oriented toward the Self" which nonetheless turns the individual into "the satellite of an Other" (2004, 7). Where market-minded theorists reduce social interests to individual desires, Girard shows that individual desires are already social. How can we not desire one thing more than another? How can we not desire more than another the thing an *Other* desires, Girard asks, for how else can we be expected to *know* what to desire? In this view, the spontaneity of individual desire is an individualist illusion. The reality is that we learn our desires from others. In this case, it is natural that we should want what someone else has.

The motive we propose, then, in the place of hunger and gain, is *the desire to possess the desired possessions of others*. This motive cannot be reduced to mere individual interest in the possession of goods because the interest in question is not strictly individual; it comes from the other person, just as the possession itself will. The possession is desired because of its possessor. This is explicit in the case of the Kula trade of the Trobriand Islanders. The value of Kula objects turns out not to be purely aesthetic after all, since gifts are "preferably" reciprocated with objects that "previously belonged to distinguished persons" (2001, 52). Indeed, "Some Kula objects are big, greasy white arm shells, without any value except for associations that go with earlier possessors" (1968, 200).

The vast circular trajectory that objects follow in the Kula trade is an apt image for the constant circulation of goods in primitive economies in general. The reason for this circulation lies in the nature of the desire that

motivates it. If what people desire are the desired possessions of others—the possessions desired *by* others—it is important to keep the objects moving, not only to provide people with such possessions, but also to keep the desires for the same objects from clashing. Arranging things so that objects constantly change hands is a good way of preventing the conflict that, in Girard's words, "the convergence of two or several hands toward one and the same object cannot help but provoke" (1987, 8).¹³

The market solution to the problem of convergent desires is different. As Jean-Pierre Dupuy suggests, the mass production of goods in industrial society serves to put the same objects into everyone's hands (see Dumouchel and Dupuy 113). Needless to say, this solution involves equally constant motion. If what people desire are the objects desired by others, they can never be satisfied by the possession of objects that everyone already possesses. That early institutionalist, Thorstein Veblen, foretold in 1899 that no level of material production could ever satiate the "general desire for wealth" when its real basis is "the desire of every one to excel every one else in the accumulation of goods" (32). As a result, just as primitive economies are characterized by an endless circle of exchange, modern economies are characterized by an endless spiral of production.

There may be the kernel of an answer here to the question, raised by Alfredo Salsano, of why Polanyi developed his "broader frame of reference" by investigating primitive economies rather than non-market Western ones (1987, 155). "As far as ethnographical records are concerned," Polanyi notes, "we should not assume that production for a person's or group's own sake is more ancient than reciprocity or redistribution....Indeed, the practice of catering for the needs of one's household becomes a feature of economic life only on a more advanced level of agriculture" (2001, 55), and of course this feature vanishes once again with the advent of capitalism. A comparison between primitive and modern economies is logical, therefore, because neither is based on production for one's own sake; both are oriented to providing people with the desired possessions of others.

But recognizing this means reversing the direction of the comparison. If we replace the so-called "economic motives" with the motive of giving people things that come from others—if this is the noneconomic motive the economy must ultimately satisfy—then it is the market which relies on an

¹³ For the analysis of a rite that stages the convergence of two hands on a single object, see Anspach 1988.

elaborately indirect fashion of "arranging things accordingly." Among the Fijians or Bushmen, if one wants what one's neighbor has, all one need do is ask in order to receive it directly. If we want what our neighbor has, we produce things for others in return for income which enables us to go to the store to buy a replica of it.

The comparison comes out the same if one chooses to think in terms of social standing. Veblen said of modern economies what Polanyi says of primitive ones: "Ceremonial display serves to spur emulation to the utmost" (2001, 49). In modern society, people gain prestige from the display of what they buy with what they earn from what they give others—a notably roundabout arrangement compared to the primitive one in which people gain prestige directly from the display of what they give others.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the primitive arrangement rests exclusively on a human propensity to economize prestige. In fact, the medieval European monks cited by Polanyi are far from the only ones to engage in economic activity for religious reasons—even if, as Hocart declares, "there is no religion in Fiji." No religion in *our* sense, he goes on to stipulate, but "only a system which in Europe has split up into religion and business" (1970, 256). For if primitive economies are embedded in social relations, these social relations are themselves embedded in a religious order. Hence the finding of a group of anthropological investigators led by Daniel de Coppet that in such cultures "exchanges among the living can only be understood in the relations that the latter maintain with the dead, with spirits or with a divinity" (Barraud *et al.* 510).

Thus, Fijian religion centers on potlatch-type exchanges held between paired groups who "come with their gods," as Hocart says, "and impersonate them" (1952, 46). Each side must refrain from consuming the goods it has prepared itself, reserving them as ritual offerings for the other side (1970, 62). Similarly, in aboriginal Australian cultures the "fact of exchange" as such is not primary, according to Alain Testart, but derives from the principle on which the totemic rituals and taboos are based: one must "always *cede* what one has, *pass* it on to another, *give* it to the corresponding moiety (9-10; emphasis original). The Australians and Fijians believed that the bounty of nature could only be assured by respect for these rules of ritual, while flouting them was thought to bring divine retribution.

It is necessary therefore to modify somewhat our statement concerning the *directness* of primitive economic relations. The primitive economy is

a ritual process, and this means that relations among humans are mediated by gods or spirits. If people are compelled to yield their possessions up to others, they are not compelled to do so directly by those others, but by the invisible beings who, as Durkheim would have it, incarnate society. Such invisible beings in some measure relieve individuals of responsibility for the systematic dispossession of each other's goods needed to keep them in circulation.¹⁴

Perhaps the indirectness of this ritually instituted process holds a clue to the indirectness of the market system as well. With the advent of the market, Polanyi emphasizes, *"instead of the economic system being embedded in social relationships, these relationships were now embedded in the economic system"* (1968, 70). As a result, "Society as a whole remained invisible." And, one might add, there were no longer any invisible beings to incarnate it—only the "invisible hand": that is, the belief in the efficacy of so-called "economic motives." We may conclude by proposing that this belief itself serves a religious purpose. As Polanyi observes, the market illusion leaves the individual magically "free from all responsibility for... economic suffering in society" (2001, 266). Faith in the naturalness and inevitability of the "economic motive" absolves those who conform to it from direct responsibility for the suffering caused by their treating each other as commodities. Yet, like the primitive system of relations embedded in ritual, the modern system is geared to give people things that come from others. If it does so in such an elaborately indirect fashion, that is precisely because the modern system is embedded in the ritual of the market—a ritual founded on the religious belief in the "economic motive," the motive of gain.

"The mechanism which the motive of gain set in motion was comparable in effectiveness," Polanyi remarks, "only to the most violent outbursts of religious fervor in history" (2001, 31). And this suggests a final thought. As the cult of the market now spreads throughout the developing world, awakening desires to possess the desired possessions of others without making such possessions readily available, those who find themselves excluded from the ranks of the elect will naturally turn to more traditional forms of faith. What is the violent outburst of religious fervor afflicting so many nations today if not a backlash against the religion of the market at the very moment of its apparent planetary triumph?

¹⁴ For a more developed exposition of this thesis, see Anspach 2002.

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