

STORIES OF SACRIFICE

John Milbank

Peterhouse, Cambridge

1. The quest for sacrifice

The last few years have witnessed several attempts—especially those of René Girard, Walter Burkert, Maurice Bloch, Nancy Jay, Luce Irigaray, Jean-Joseph Goux, and earlier, Georges Bataille—to account for religion in terms of the logic of sacrifice (or of other forms of ritual violence), and on this basis to erect a general theory of society. However, since most of these theorists associate religion (at least in nearly all of its historical forms), either with the instigation or else with the perpetuation of violence, one might wonder whether what one is confronted with here is but the last gasp of enlightenment, were it not for the fact that often these thinkers no longer suppose that religion can easily, if at all, be thought away.

All the same it is striking that, despite these various new attempts to make sacrifice central, and to seek an all-encompassing sociological 'explanation' of religion in terms of its links with violence, a number of ethnographers and historians of religion, especially those writing within a structuralist tradition, have been pointing in a completely different direction.

Just as many writers now argue that there is no such thing as 'religion', univocally definable in such a fashion as clearly to distinguish it from culture in general, so the historian of Greek religion Marcel Detienne has claimed that there is no such thing as 'sacrifice', a concept which he considers belongs in the rubbish-dump of such other nineteenth-century western projections as 'totem', 'taboo', 'mana', and 'the sacred' (1-20). However, the African ethnographer, Luc de Heusch, whilst accepting Detienne's genealogy of the anthropological category of sacrifice nonetheless avers that, if we confine ourselves to the minimum cognitive demand for an element of "gift to supernatural beings" on the one hand, and some form of "violent division" on the other, we have a definition that will pick out a cultural feature nearly always present, and sufficiently distinctive to be recognizable (23). Such a

modest definition is, perhaps, acceptable, but only with this proviso; from another perspective it may be equally valid to view 'sacrifice' as but a species of the genus 'offering' which need not necessarily be violent or divisive. And if the species 'sacrifice' transgresses the bounds of the genus 'offering' in terms of a thematic of sundering, it is equally true that offering, as a subcategory of sacrifice, can transgress it in the direction of a private donation, not linked to any public altar, a center whose function is often to rule through divisions.

If one accepts, in this fashion, that sacrifice is not a pure, intact genus, then de Heusch's definition may stand. However, as he insists, it does not at all follow that a universal feature must possess a universal identity, and then a universal meaning and explanation. On the contrary, a violent (or rather, *apparently* violent) offering, may play an utterly different role as well as many diverse ones, within different ritual economies. For example, it may or may not be expiatory, it may or may not be substitutionary, it may or may not imply self-sacrifice. Moreover, one should note how, on this minimum definition, sacrifice is fractured between the sphere of gift (implying no necessary division of either the giver or what is given) on the one hand, and violence on the other. This fracturing at least holds open the possibility that sacrifice, in many or all instances, does not stem from the single root of either imposition or limitation of violence. The 'gift' aspect may ensure that violence and sacrifice are not, after all, coterminous. And if neither can be simply rooted in the other, then the quest for an *origin* (which cannot, to be an origin, be other than single) for either, may be destined to be forever thwarted.

An unanswered question of gift has the capacity permanently to suspend the quest for sacrifice: that is to say, the *apparent* context for offering, that there exist gods or ancestors to whom one sends things via the operation of death, may remain the most sense that can be made of sacrifice, despite the contorted attempts of social science to derive the gods, and so gifts *to* the gods, as a later effect of sacrificial operations, and an outcome of human violence. These attempts always involve a story concerning a real, original act of violence, which has to be both commuted and concealed through ascription to a divine origin. *For* this concealment, the gods were born. It is notable that, aside from their atheism, such explanations are forced to retrace the path of myth itself, which often accompanied ritual by telling of a first, violent transgression (by a god, human or animal) which then justifies sacrifice as continual revenge, homeopathic mitigation or compensatory expiation.

And in retracing this mythical path, every historicist, purely genetic explanation is bound to be arbitrary, more mythic than myth (which less

clearly grants causal privilege to the origin), since it extracts one mytheme, one signifying element within a complex totality, traces it up to an imagined narrative root, and then derives all the other signifying elements from this source. The same game could be played equally well with all the other elements within a structural complex, and a thousand tales of origin could be related, all of them diverting and plausible, none of them convincing.

However, one must ask why it is that a game played with precisely *this* structural component is the one so favored? Why a quest for sacrifice, especially? The answer supplied by Detienne shows that, surprisingly, obsession with this topic is not at all a new turn in sociology and social anthropology. On the contrary, it turns out that, from their inceptions, these disciplines constituted themselves as theories of sacrifice. In the wake of Richard Wagner, many academics became knights of the grail, engaged in a quest for the conceptual vessel which would contain the content of spilt offering and heal the split between the primitive religions of fertility on the one hand, and the modern wasteland of ethics and expertise on the other. So often, at the time, it seemed like heresy when William Robertson Smith and his heirs amongst the Cambridge ritualists implied a lineage stretching back from the crucified god to the emergency consumption of the tabooed totem animal. And yet, as Detienne suggests, what may now be more striking, is the purported discovery at the center of all cultures of the thematic of sacrifice which is precisely (albeit in a very abnormal form), the central focus of Christian devotion and practice. One only needed to add an evolutionary component in order to suggest that what all societies have really been struggling to express is the necessity for moral self-sacrifice on the part of the individual for the sake of the law, so enabling the operation of the social group. Some or all of these thematics can be found present in the four great stories of sacrifice which we have inherited from the nineteenth century, and which assume the status of veritable metahistories: those of Wellhausen, Robertson Smith, Frazer, and Hubert with Mauss. Because their assumptions still undergird twentieth-century attempts to rewrite such stories, I shall rehearse the shape these stories took.

Julius Wellhausen

In the case of Wellhausen, it is extraordinary to note that not only sociology and anthropology made sacrifice pivotal for their diachronic accounts, but also the new 'higher criticism' of the Old Testament. This concentration may indeed have been in part determined by the objective demands of the material, but one suspects, in addition, the influence of a

Romantic concentration on sacrifice as an element which the eighteenth century thought it had discovered to be universal; a disturbing universality which rivalled that of reason herself. The discovery encouraged the view that sacrifice was *the* distinguishing mark of religion as such, especially of religion in excess of natural or rational piety. But one strategy here, from Hume through to Romantic writers, was to link sacrifice with the universal spontaneity of *feeling*, not reason, and to assert the naturalness for primitive peoples, of a notion of giving to the gods, or even of sharing a meal with them.

Both aspects are stressed by Wellhausen as representing the primitive character of sacrifice, which he associates with a time of closeness to nature, spontaneous joy, individual freedom from political rule, and diversity of freely chosen sacred sites (7-51). Romanticism modifies enlightenment, since the positively irrational, unnatural element in sacrifice is now confined to its expiatory aspect. For Wellhausen the more dreadful sacrificial edifice is raised strictly upon the basis of the *centralizing state* which ruptured the Rousseauian idyll by regulating an oral anarchy of practice, including sacrificial practice, with written laws. The same new focus reinscribed cyclical nature festivals upon historical linearity with its sense of purpose and expectations and supremely prevented cultic irregularity and idolatry by restricting all sacrificial practice to the temple in Jerusalem. As a consequence, Israelite cooking and feasting was *secularized*, therefore joy itself was secularized, and religion henceforward became something separate, serious, and in excess of cyclic completion (52-120).

About the Deuteronomic centralization, Wellhausen was oddly ambiguous. There was, on the one hand the loss of the idyll, but on the other hand such loss brought the gain of progress, a more assured monotheism, and the ethical probity of the prophets. Moreover the loss was inevitable, since the communion aspect of sacrifice has an inevitably centralizing tendency which undoes its own private spontaneity (103). In the end this loss of sacrifice as "the blossom and fruit of life" is salutary, since it makes way for the true gospel religion of "resultless self-sacrifice" on the part of the individual for others and the state, which is contrasted with the pointless fruits of ascetic expiation (78, 513). Hence the centralization of sacrifice does have a beneficent purpose, and the hand of providence is most of all at work in the emergence of politically-governed nations.

The real damage was done, for Wellhausen, not in the course of natural political evolution, but rather in the perversely contingent circumstance of the Babylonian captivity: without her natural soil, without her natural political center, Israel's priestly caste contrived a "wilderness legislation" which wrote

on a *tabula rasa* "the negative of nature" (104). The complexity and artificiality of this legislation, especially as regarding sacrifice, was entirely in the interests of priestly power—a contrived machine compared with monarchic efflorescence and one which the Greeks, whose sacrifices remained predominantly meals and offerings had, by comparison, escaped (79). This is most evident in the stress on dues to priests, priestly portions of the *hattat* (sin offering) and the (supposedly) new prevalence of the *olah* or holocaust (burnt offering) over the *zebah* (thank offering) which involved a meal shared by all the community. Together with the new remoteness of a God sundered from nature, went a remote priesthood, infinite scrupulosity regarding purification, and a work of expiatory atonement never completed in historical time (52-82).

Viewed from a contemporary critical perspective, it is clear that no unassailable height secured this account of original sacrifice and its later perversion. To the contrary, assumptions concerning what is natural in sacrifice themselves assisted Wellhausen to identify too confidently the Priestly material as later than the Jehovistic, Elohist, and Prophetic writings, to construe them as opposed in tone to the prophetic (which supposedly scorned sacrificial efficacy) and indeed perhaps to isolate J, E, and P themselves as older sources behind the redacted texts of the Pentateuch. If, as we may well now imagine, there is every reason to believe that the tales of pre-temple sacrifice were written in full knowledge of the temple system, then they are plausibly taken as self-conscious literary aetiologies, whose content, far from contrasting with the Priestly regulations, tells of their multiple origins, or else of preceding disorder and insufficiencies which exhibit their necessity.

Thus we can now see that Wellhausen constructed his "original sacrifice" not from evidence, but from his own liberal Lutheran preferences for private religion, resecured and purified by the gospel, and for a divinely ordained state. Conversely, "perverse," expiatory sacrifice was found precisely coterminous with the invention of an artificial, *non-political* sociality in exile, which was superimposed on actual landed reality on return, in the context of a political vacuum. The Church as an institution apart from the state, and as more than the sum of its members, is, according to Wellhausen, descended directly from "the Mosaic congregation," and is, like the latter, a distortion (80, 422, 512-3). It perversely directs the sacrificial efforts of individuals towards the wasting of worldly matter and labor upon the supposed appeasement of God, and away from the true work of ethical self-giving. Before the sociologists, Wellhausen 'retrieved' sacrifice as the highest religious truth of surrender of the individual to the (political) community. Albeit with many a wistful backward glance at

Arcadian joy, worship is seen as historically and rightfully converted into solemn ethical duty.

William Robertson Smith

The second account of human history as a story of sacrifice was written by the Scots free Presbyterian, William Robertson Smith, who fused higher criticism with an anthropological discourse informed both by Darwin and by Comtean positivism. More from the latter source, and not mainly (as is sometimes said) from Wellhausen's romanticism (see, for example, Jones), derives Robertson Smith's overwhelming stress on the communal character of primitive religion, which leads him to insist, for example, on the priority of clans over families and the originally tribal and not familial character of the passover meal (277-81). Whereas Wellhausen envisaged natural sacrifice as spontaneous private gift with an associated aspect of communal feasting, Robertson Smith denied the centrality of the gift element in the earliest sacramental practice. This denial was a development of Comte's theory of primitive "fetishism," mediated by his fellow-Scotsman J. M. MacLennan's reworking of the notion as "totemism" (Kuper 82). For the Comtean outlook the primitive person experiences his immediate surroundings as imbued with the same mysterious sacred forces which course through his own body, and in MacLennan's development a matrilinear, exogamous clan-grouping (which initially engages in a form of group marriage) understands itself to be of the same species with a totemic plant or animal, which identifies its lineage.

This theory effectively gave a Darwinian twist to the central Comtean thematic according to which the earliest, most materialist religion foreshadows the eventual emergence of final, positivist science: here the worship of animals in recognition of their kinship with us exhibits the first intuition of evolutionary descent. Conversely a Comtean overlay upon Darwin allowed one to construe a stress on biological inheritance optimistically, for the full knowledge of our community in blood can also be taken for an ethical imperative to sociality which vindicates, at a higher level, not only the primitive germ of understanding, but also its impulse to worship.

Robertson Smith fused such a Darwinized "religion of humanity" with a liberal Protestant Christianity in terms of the thematic of sacrifice. Sacrifice, he claimed, had an origin which explained all later sacrificial practice, although this origin had been lost, and survived only in traces or vestiges akin to redundant elements in organisms, left over from previous evolutionary phases. Hence all historical sacrificial practice is a scene of ruination and ignorant perplexity, whose practitioners manage a heritage which they cannot

comprehend. Those condemned, by decree of tradition, to slay animals on stone altars fantasize a history of original human sacrifice (sometimes as a judicial punishment) which was later commuted to animal offering, although precautionary insurance dictates that such a story leads to the occasional revival of a practice which never existed (365-8). Substitution, according to Robertson Smith, is a garbled version of the totemic truth: it was always the animal who died, yet once this animal was, indeed, a kinsman (269-311). Why did he first have to die? What was the primal scene?

Robertson Smith's answer frames a sheerly materialist moment within a hazy religious solidarism. Nomadic tribes were bonded to those animals whom they milked and perhaps bled for food; such deities who sustained their life were strictly taboo, yet an emergency might require their consumption. This horror had to be sacralized, or read as the extreme instance of divine sustaining: the sacrifice and communal resurrection of the god (289ff., 305, 313, 353). Notoriously, Robertson Smith could find only one instance in all the historical and ethnographical records of a true totemic sacrifice: Nilus's strange story of the complete sacral devouring of a camel by North African nomads (227, 297, 338-9). This account, alone, could fully feed Robertson Smith's theoretical expectation that original sacrifice must have involved, not offering, nor division, but total ingestion, especially of the blood, the seat of life itself.

As a first, material emergency prompted ritual innovation, so, according to Robertson Smith, later emergencies of all kinds were taken to demand a repetition of the ritual, which was deemed to reconfirm tribal strength and unity (269-311). Such a totemic practice, Robertson Smith considered, could still be traced behind the Levitical system of sacrifice of domestic (never wild) animals. Here he drew heavily upon Wellhausen in an effort to demonstrate that Deuteronomic centralization had downgraded the *zebah* in favor of the *olah* and *hattat*. As for Wellhausen, the key intrusion was of *the political*: for a perverse notion of sacrifice as gift derives from the institution of tribute to a centralized power, together with the arrival of private property which alone makes any sense whatsoever of a donative transfer (385-440).

Here Robertson Smith is enmeshed in multiple anthropological delusion: no evidence suggests any phase when relatively nuclear families and certain modes of private property were not already significant.²¹ Likewise, no evidence suggests there was ever a totemic "religion of the matrilineal group" which made its solidarist identity more sacred than the cycle of exchanges *between*

²¹ For an account of the genesis and decline of these illusions, see Adam Kuper.

clan-groupings. Writing before Davy, Mauss, and Malinowski's work on the gift, Robertson Smith was unable to realize the primacy of such exchanges, and the way in which sacrifice (to ancestors, to gods) belonged within these circulations. Since, as these later writers demonstrate, the gift is not *alienable*, but is always bound to return in some fashion to the giver, the concept of gift and therefore sacrifice-as-gift was not, as Robertson Smith supposed, dependent on a modern notion of private property as formally alienable. Gift, and sacrifice-as-gift could and has preceded the arrival of the state.

In seeking an evolutionary decipherment of Leviticus, Robertson Smith added a series of further dubious claims: tithes were older than sacrifice and not linked to it (248-54, 423); the *minha* (cereal offerings) derived from the offerings of first-fruits which rendered consumption *lawful* rather than sacred (240-1); fire was a late intrusion upon the sacrificial scene, and the savoring of smoke by the deity a later rationalization still (224-7). For beneath the appearance of gift still urged the deeper impulse of taboo: after the experience of God's desertion in exile (as Wellhausen had stressed) the pure and holy must be more safeguarded, the animal as sacredly intact be sent up to heaven, or, as sacredly contaminated, burnt outside the camp. Its blood, poured out, was not originally a divine portion, and not offered as a libation but separated and confined as dangerous (228-33). The *olah* and *hattat* only appeared as "most sacred" by virtue of a misunderstanding: since the *zebah* looked more like an ordinary meal, by now deprived of sacramental resonance, it could not be so significant, whereas in reality the "most sacred" offerings were only secretions of meals too nourishing ever to be actually eaten.

What was Robertson Smith's interest in claiming the incoherence of Leviticus as a synchronic system? Supremely in order to show that the most characteristic features of Christ's death and the Eucharist—namely the voluntary death of a divine victim, and the total consumption, rather than sending up, of a sacred offering—were fulfillments of primitive sacred communion, rather than primitive substitutionary expiation. This priestly, Catholic or Orthodox Protestant thematic can, he thinks, be shown to be the result of an intrusive confusion between the religious and the political, or between sacrifice and taxation, compounded by an anxiety resulting from political persecution. Robertson Smith associated healthy, joyful religion with the confidence of early communities which were, by Darwinian definition, *the fittest* who had managed *to survive* (260). By contrast his construal of Israelite priestly religion is almost Nietzschean: its immiseration and obeisance is the expression of a perverse anti-community which has *no* proper communal *landed*, rooted or perhaps political existence of its own. But as with Well-

hausen there are ambiguities: does Robertson Smith celebrate the pastoral pre-state, or the progress which the state represents?

Ostensibly, it is the latter, for the secularization of "the local" permits religion to develop in the direction of universal brotherhood. In totemic religion, solidarity at home meant enmity abroad, for the model for unity was the literality of "one blood" (265-7). At best this was but a materialist mask for a mystical truth, and yet Robertson Smith claims that the first "voluntary associations," or communities detached from "blood and earth," were the mystery cults which emerged first amongst the Semites and engaged in abnormal sacrifices of vermin (as attested by Isaiah) which represented nothing less than a recrudescence of totemic practice (357-8). What once bound the particular now binds the universal, and thus Robertson Smith (in a fashion reminiscent of Renaissance esotericisms) reads Hebraic history as the site of a rebirth of universal, totemic faith. There is a scarcely disguised incoherence here: what unites remains positive blood, yet universal blood courses most thinly. Thus the Scotsman (echoing the first Scottish enlightenment) laments that ethical universalism never makes up for the intensity of "natural faith" and "the old heroic virtues" (268).

At this point, precisely, the fusion of Darwinian positivism with Christianity breaks down. But all the same, Robertson Smith wishes to demonstrate a natural, evolutionary progress of all humanity towards Christianity, the perfected mystery cult and momentous return of totemism, which decodes the blood-bond as also a mystical one and sacrifice as the necessity for altruistic behavior. A this-worldly brotherhood is the true, emergent essence of religion; although it is undergirded by a transcendent God, the essence of this God himself is the sacrifice of transcendence to immanent progress and purpose (430-40).

J. G. Frazer

By a slight twist, Robertson Smith's apologetic merging of theology with science becomes his fellow Scotsman James Frazer's scarcely veiled exposure of Christian doctrine as primitive superstition. Yet as much as the first writer's apologetic reduces to pseudo-science, so also does the second's critical agnosticism reduce to a kind of neopagan scientific theurgy. The key contrast resides in Frazer's preference for Comte's discovery, in fetishism, of a primitive science, over against Robertson Smith's preference for the discovery of a primitive fetishistic religion.

For Frazer, fetishism, or totemism, is magic rather than religion, and individualist and pragmatic rather than organicist and mystical. He believes

that magical reasoning sought, like science, for universal laws and impulses, and only erred in over-reliance on contiguity and resemblance as implying common forces in operation. Sympathetic magic is the key to totemism, and precisely for this reason, Frazer was quick to concede that totemism in the precise sense—mystical communion between one clan and one species—has probably rarely, or never existed, once A.A. Goldenweiser had made this clear in 1909 (see Jones 190; Kuper 104ff.). For Frazer, the totemic plant or animal is not a kinsman, but a depository for the soul or life principle, which can exist separately from a person's body (dreams, Frazer supposes, gave rise to this belief) and therefore can be hidden for safe-keeping (181, 262-94, 595, 667ff.). Such secretion was often, Frazer believed, combined with a principle of "cropping" the forces of sacred *mana*, so that by killing life in one restricted manifestation, one allowed it to flourish all the more abundantly (168ff., 294ff., 576). Hence all sacrifice was calculative and proto-scientific: this permits Frazer to allow much more the primitive character of expiation than either Wellhausen or Robertson Smith.

But for Frazer, all the thematics of primitive fetishism—hiding of the soul, cropping of *mana*, tabooing of the totem species—are summed up in the person of the God-King (263). *All* mythology revolves about political sovereignty, which was, for Frazer, a much more original matter than it was for the Biblical critics. For society scarcely advances at all until the magical practices are centralized by a King-Priest-magus figure. Frazer's reasoning here is brutally materialist and traditional: since magic cannot really work, it only apparently works in the hands of a self-conscious charlatan who uses it to trick and manipulate others (46). This ruthless despot is the source of all deliberate planning and progress. Although the latter, and the king-priest himself, are fundamentally allied with magic, nonetheless they also require the necessary intrusion of religion which alone permits the transition between magic and science (this is again a Comtean thematic). As belief in magic somewhat wanes, men endeavor instead to appease arbitrary personal controlling forces or gods regarded as spirits behind things—this goes along with the emergence of beliefs in "the soul" (50ff.). Eventually such a development permits the distinction of the sphere of free-will, purging nature of analogical association now perceived as mere subjective imposition. Science then allows only links that can be tested and pragmatically relied upon.

Like the magical King, sacrifice is for Frazer the cusp between magic and religion, for it is the endeavor to *manipulate* nonetheless *personal* or psychic forces. These forces are supremely concentrated in the King himself, who must be 'cropped' in order that he may, in another incarnation, more abundantly

live, and to this end his soul must be hidden in the totemic plant, paradigmatically the mistletoe, Virgil's "Golden Bough." These operations may also secondarily involve the "expiatory" transfer of some sort of evil, or contamination (539). In the slaying of the divine King, Frazer discovers the central rite of all religion, and reads Christianity as offering an apolitical and universal version of such a rite, in the wake of a secularization of politics which already rendered the priest of Diana at Nemi (who was always sacrificed by his successor) a mock "nature king" rather than a real one (106, 283ff.).

But here Frazer is ironically a victim himself of Patristic accounts of paganism: first of all, the untrue early Christian claim that the bloody rites of Dionysus reenact the killing and eating of the god himself (so that they are read as a kind of black Eucharist) (see Detienne); second, the more general Jewish and Christian association of paganism with human sacrifice, whereas recent research shows that the link of Artemis and Diana with human sacrifice is a complex and aberrant matter: it reflects this goddess's abnormality and semi-feral character, which demanded propitiation in certain extreme circumstances, for example those of war, civic foundation or initiation of young people (see Vernant 1991a, 207-19). Her rites are in no sense the typical rites for the Greeks and Romans, as Frazer took them to be.

Frazer's implied critique of Christianity, however, did *not* take the form of simply insinuating its link with primitive practice. On the contrary it took the form of reading Christianity as a perverse deviation *from* this practice, just as Wellhausen so interpreted the Jewish temple system and the Catholic Church—both taken as examples of non-natural, *non-political politics*, misdirecting political energies towards transcendent ends. By contrast Frazer takes Christianity as *irremediably* Catholic through and through, and not by accident *The Golden Bough* ends with the Angelus of the Church bells of Rome (not far from the woods of Nemi) and the cry *Le Roi est mort, vive le roi, Ave Maria!* (714). This view is in part the consequence of his understanding of sacrifice as intrinsically substitutionary and expiatory, but it is *also* a result of his taking of Christianity as a variant of "oriental corruption" of the *mythos* of the god-king. In so far as this figure remains true to his primary loyalty to *magic* he is, for Frazer, a positive and progressive figure who dies, in an illusory fashion, for goals which are ultimately *not* illusory, namely the security of the state and the strength of character of the race. He is a Darwinian eugenicist lacking only the appropriate scientific means, and he discloses the *religious* and *ethical* truth of sacrifice to be that of "sacrificing the present for the future" (139).

Like all these metahistorians, Frazer did not *abandon* sacrifice as untruth, but ended up framing *by* a belief in sacrifice (albeit supposedly "ethical" and "rational" sacrifice) a supposed framing explanation of belief in sacrifice. And here again we see the bizarre character of positivism—to explain and replace religion it must become itself religion. Supremely it must be a program of genuine sacrifice. The hidden secret of sacrifice *is* positivism, scientific surrendering of individual energies to truth, truth which subserves a future possession of happiness by humanity, which is a day the individual is not yet to see. For this reason, Frazer declares that *science itself is* "the golden key," the mistletoe wherein is stored magic potential, and both magic and science take humanity "to the top of the mountain and show him the vision of the celestial city" (712, 49). If we forget the devil for a moment, how apparently Christian this nobility of sacrifice must have seemed, how *more* Christian than Christian. As I shall intimate later, only *one* Christian realized that to prevent this triumph of sacrificial and altruistic modernity one must *draw back from* a false sacrificial reading of Christianity all too often affirmed: this man was Soren Kierkegaard.

For Frazer, therefore, the *do ut des* associated with the tabooed God-King is not mere primitive illusion, but close to the literal truth: his positivist scientific theurgy. But Christian sacrifice, by comparison, *is* illusory and insidious. This is because the Christian cult makes ritual veer away from magic towards religion. Here the key for Frazer, curiously enough, is Mariology: Christianity is an "oriental" Son/Mother cult, and like all such cults it takes the "sacred hierogamy" theme in fertility ritual (the priest of Nemi was "married" to Diana as an incarnation of Jupiter) and distorts it in the direction of devotion of a *human* King-Priest to an *other-worldly* female divinity (356ff.). This distortion, claims Frazer, led to excesses of priestly castration and so forth, and the idea that the goal of ritual was *ecstatic rather than pragmatic* (361-2). Christianity represents the irruption of an oriental otherworldly ecstasy within the purposive history of the West, and for an unfortunate while it threatened to replace the "patriot and hero" with the "saint and recluse" (357).

As much as Nietzsche, Frazer taught that the mock-king Jesus should be deserted for the true king-of-power, Dionysius. And he thereby completes a process begun by Wellhausen and Robertson Smith. For the latter two, the meaning of Christ's sacrifice is not held within the tradition of the Church (which is by definition the misconstrual of sacrifice) but is instead indicated by the original type of sacrifice which it fulfills. Science and the State inherit the typological space of the Church and claim that their new typology is

demonstrable in fact and as evolutionary process (whereas it is no such thing). By contrast Church, expiation, and gift (contends Robertson Smith) turn out to be evolutionary redundancies, the accident of a nation that forgot to forget itself in the course of exilic obliteration. But for Frazer Christianity itself is such a redundancy, and the founding event, the primal sacrifice which permits science and the State occurs not illogically in the middle of history but at its inception. Positivism, or science as a religion, requires its own crucifixion, a primal scene without which there can be no explanation of why humanity gave up its mere animality and no sense of what we should aim for, the true essence of culture, for which all has been given up. An original sacrifice alone legitimates our purpose as . . . continuing sacrifice.

Hubert and Mauss

Another variant of this positivist metahistory of sacrifice is apparent in the crucial 1899 *Essai sur le Sacrifice* of Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, whose conclusions in many ways assisted Durkheim's refounding of sociology as such in *The Elementary forms of the Religious Life*, despite the latter's comparatively anachronistic attachment to Robertson Smith and totemic theory (see Jones). For despite Hubert and Mauss's correctly empirical refusal to derive sacrifice from totemism, they still regarded totemic religion as an advance towards the notion of the god who sacrifices himself, which in turn is proleptic of the final truth, at once scientific and ethical, of the socially embodied categorical imperative. Whereas, they claim, every normal sacrifice obeys the gift-logic of *do ut des*, such that self-interest always accompanies self-abnegation, in the case of divine sacrifice "God gives himself irrevocably" (100-1). This image is then a mythological instruction in altruism, the nonexchangist and absolute sacrifice of the individual to society and the social future. Such a reading of the crucifixion becomes especially possible for Hubert and Mauss because they read it, quite arbitrarily, in association with the Hindu theme of *creation* as itself sacrifice, thereby obliterating the contingency upon sin of the need for sacrifice in the Bible. Unbiblically they *ontologize* sacrifice.

Hubert and Mauss's teleological stress on self-sacrifice went along with a new interpretation of sacrifice as "communication" rather than Tylorian offering or Robertson Smith's "communion." By universalizing, and also ethicizing the evidence from Hindu and (supposedly) Hebrew practice, they insisted (rather like the Neoplatonist Sallustius in the fourth century [see Jones]) that all sacrifice transports the person who offers it either into or out of the realm of the sacred—whose essence is deemed to consist in the pressure

exerted by the social organism, embedded in a wider and more ambiguous sphere of nature or divinity. This wider sphere is ambiguous (the dual character of the taboo is taken over from Robertson Smith) and possesses powers which must both be harnessed and held at bay: for this reason sacrifice encompasses rites of sacralization intended to introduce things or people to the realm of the sacred, and also rites of desacralization, intended to free certain finite creatures from improper and dangerous contamination by sacred forces (Hubert and Mauss 2-5). (Notice that their "highest" form of sacrifice—sacrifice of the god—inconsistently will *not* conform to this "communication" paradigm).

But such rites are the primitive masks for the moral truths that the individual must either submit to sovereign law, or else suffer its expurgatory wrath for having attempted to usurp such sovereignty. Either work or be punished. Thus *in contrast*, perhaps, to many *actual* religions, Hubert, Mauss, and Durkheim proclaimed, in the name of science, that the destiny of the individual is to be sacrificed, and that while the social as sacred is never directly present, yet it leaves everywhere its objective trace in the blood of work, taxation, crime and punishment (Durkheim 71-5). One should modify Detienne's genealogy here: this socially necessary exaction, subordination of the individual to the political totality, and insistence that the proof of virtue lies in pain derives surely not from Christian orthodoxy, but rather in the long term from the heretical speculations of Joseph de Maistre, whose "mystical" formulations of sacrificial positivism were but inverted and secularized by Comte (see Milbank 51 -74).

By comparison with the Scottish metahistorians, Hubert and Mauss claimed to exercise a Cartesian sobriety and to eschew all redundant encyclopedism and analogical efflorescence (in Frazer, indeed, so curiously akin to his characterization of magic) which permitted completely speculative genealogies (2-5). Their focus on Hindu and Hebraic laws claims to be strictly synchronic: here we have the most complete accounts of sacrificial systems, so here we can investigate the internal logic of working systems. This is, indeed, a gain, and yet Hubert and Mauss claim to discover in these systems "typical facts," the bare alphabet of sacrifice which consists in the conjoined process of sacralization/desacralization. But a claim to uncover univocal elements is yet more speculative than analogical suggestion: since Hubert and Mauss wrote it has been shown that these elements are *not* found in Ancient Greece nor many parts of Africa (see Detienne and Vernant; Heusch). Nor can we be sure that they capture the most fundamental structures of Hebrew and Hindu sacrifice themselves: for example Hebrew purity is not really a sphere over-against a

secular, diurnal one, which one steps into and out of like a kind of initiation. Hebrew sacrifice is, in fact, far more a matter of gift, communion, and expiation than of communication, and rites of desacralization are not *at all* the essence of Hebrew expiation, which essentially involves giving things to God, but simply an often accompanying mode of carrying away sins and impurities (see Douglas 1993/94; Migrom). Likewise the Levitical stress on a primarily collective purification of the sanctuary and Israel herself (see Migrom 47-85; Douglas 1993) is paradoxically missed by Hubert and Mauss, since for them the sacrificial passage runs *from* the individual *to* the community, whom they always see as over-against each other in a modern fashion. Hindu theory and practice, which stresses the mystic internalization of sacrifice and the commitment of the sacrificer to be himself sacrificed in order to achieve higher and impersonal rebirth (see Biardeau 7-153) is wrenched from its context and used to understand sacrifice as always essentially a giving up of oneself to a suprapersonal reality. By contrast the evidence suggests that in many societies no such annihilative commitment of the giver to the path of his burnt offering is involved, and no essential alteration in his ontological status (see Heusch 7ff.).

For all their eschewal of gift, and for all their invocation of Christological altruism *in extremis*, Hubert and Mauss, like Durkheim, still conceived of modern social sacrifice as a fulfillment of *do ut des*: individual *renunciation* sustains social forces, but the individual *gains back* social legitimation for personal needs: material, erotic, spiritual (Hubert and Mauss 102). Again, as with the other three sacrificial metahistories, it is thought that we are today able to decode sacrifice, because modernity finally *realizes* sacrifice, which is itself the essence of religion. Why is it that sacrifice should have exercised such a lure upon Victorian discourses, to the degree that they were framed by what they purported to frame, seduced by the object of their own fascination?

One can suggest four possible explanations. First, sacrifice usually (in some sense) sunders to unite, and in this respect appears itself to resemble the scientific process (or should one say "scientific" and wonder if it *ever* escapes a sacrificial contamination?) Second, if sacrifice is (sometimes) concession to gain more, then nothing is more perfectly sacrificial, and moreover more *altruistically* so, than humanistic progress. Thirdly, sacrifice appears as the original center, as that round which humans first gathered: so in trying to synthesize sacrificial materials, it is likely that sacrifice will pose itself as the perfect paradigm for synthesis, as not only the story of the means to the end, **but** as the scene of the end itself, of individual giving up of nature to receive **back** political benefits. This suggests a fourth reason, which already appeared

to view in Wellhausen: sacrifice can be seen as a name for that mystery which conjoins (supposedly) the natural individual with the imagined carapace of culture. It is the site of broken mediation of person with citizen.

For all these reasons, the modern, enlightened reasoners about sacrifice found themselves captured by sacrificial reason, and concluded, not that modernity had at last escaped sacrifice, but that modernity was most of all sacrificial—and religious. In making this claim they substituted themselves for the old priests as the new, scientific priests. Arrived, by virtue of their rational virginity at the grail castle, they claimed to disclose to us what truly bears sacrifice: the vessel of society itself. And from henceforward they claimed to open the way to the social sacrifice that will at last purify and cleanse from needless, superfluous, superstitious violence.

For theology, this claim represents a terrible temptation: an offering of the Kingdom of God via possession of Frazer's "celestial city" of this world. For, as we have seen, by a simple twist these metahistories can assume a Christian form. And one can define the temptation more precisely: it is to confuse *evolutionism* (any account of a necessitated history) with *typology*, or the idea that the cross and Eucharist both end and fulfil all sacrifice.²² Indeed (I believe) they do, but not by some sort of demonstrated necessity or logical unfolding. Strange as it may seem, descriptive synchrony is in the end a better ally to typology than scientific diachrony, since whereas the latter places apparent contingencies within hidden necessities, the former locates the cultural necessities of particular communities within an overall historical 'logic' that is itself without foundations. In claiming to fulfil other sacrificial logics, disclose their secret foundations, Christian sacrifice is not engaged in any demonstration, but only in persuasion. Thus in the face of many different cultures it discovers many different modes of fulfillment, and so itself again, as possibly arrived at by an *infinity* of different narrative routes. Moreover, if there is no essence to sacrifice, and no single path for its development, then an elucidation of what it has meant in different times and places requires us to unravel its specific connections to the totality of its cultural context: to its links, in *this* case, with cooking, hunting, politics, initiation, gender and so forth. Then cross-cultural comparison becomes not a matter of tracing a development, nor of comparing variants of an essence of sacrifice, but something always approaching 'a total comparison', not of sacrifice here with sacrifice there, but of one sacrificing culture with another. This permits

²² It is this confusion on which Peter Munz bases his opposition to structuralism (see especially 1-14,38-9,46-7).

theology to envisage much more clearly the significance of sacrifice within the Christian tradition compared with others, and thus to know itself better, since knowledge is always somewhat by comparison. None of the typological task will have been already performed by synchronic analysis (nor will such structural interpretation ever be purely non-controversial), since it is not within its competence to pick out "a real essence" of what is to come, nor "an incomplete development," nor "what needed to be given up" in order for "the truth to arrive." Such sacrificial matters are the province of belief not science, which when it ventures upon diachronically causal explanation or ontological claims, transgresses this limitation.

2. The quest renewed: René Girard

Amongst many recent renewers of the nineteenth-century quest for sacrifice there is space here only to consider the work of René Girard, which is perhaps the most instructive for a consideration of theological in relation to scientific treatment of this topic.

René Girard claims to uncover a primal violence which precedes sacrificial festival, and which derives from the universal prevalence of *mimesis*. He argues in the following fashion: we learn everything at first from others, including to desire what they desire. Yet this circumstance imposes an ineluctable double-bind: the other person is content with our emulation, but fears the inevitable threat of displacement which this entails. To win our own identity we can only take over the identity of the other, outdo the other through greater excellence in the same pursuit, through gaining what he or she fails to gain, or else through a slight differentiation that presents itself as an improvement. If we are directed by a model, then, to follow this model, we must also remove it. This, according to Girard, characterizes the universal, 'raw' condition of human desire, such as would dominate a primal human scene of which no record has been preserved, yet which we must suppose really to have occurred.

Both ontologically and genetically, religious ritual is a later intrusion: a quasi-scientific strategy which is resorted to as a remedy against the plague of mimetic violence. It is the latter which indeed first occupies the site of the sacred as a threatening, terrible, and inhuman force at work amongst us. But through a homeopathic operation, the sacred can be turned against itself. A small, concentrated dose is applied, when a group of people (re)binds itself together by expelling a scapegoat, the abjected rival of all, who thereby constitute a single social identity. After this catharsis, the group characteristically settles back into the maintaining of hierarchized, and thereby not

threatening differences, which involve less rivalry. Copying and competition is restricted and regulated. For Girard, all legal processes of punishment, as well as the formal waging of war, fall within this single, basic, 'religious' scapegoating logic (an equation somewhat reminiscent of de Maistre). Religion therefore limits violence, but also maintains it. Yet as for Durkheim, so for Girard, science and true religion coincide: for both science (in the person of Girard), and religion (in the persons of the Biblical prophets, and finally of Jesus Christ), decode the violent founding secrets of human culture and religion, and make a final gesture of refusal (see Girard 1991).

For Girard, therefore, culture, violence, and sacrality are all coterminous realities. To take the most philosophical issue first. Is Girard right to go behind the seeming contingency of violence, its origins in a subjective will, in favor of a thesis about its intersubjective inevitability? There is no doubt that he does this: desire "to be" more can only be realized through imitation, he states, and this desire for the same must lead to conflict.²³ Yet "becoming more" is of the human essence and therefore inescapable. One might well wonder, therefore, precisely which non-Manichean alternative science and Christianity are able to point us towards. But is this *impasse* inevitable? Or can one question the ineluctably poisoned character of desire?

One key here may be to point out (in a somewhat Lacanian fashion) that imitation does not really precede desire for specific objects. For granted that we first learn desire from copying another person, this other first confronts us not simply as an agent—whom we *then* acknowledge as acting sometimes to realize desires—but from the outset also as a signifier, as an agent defined by particular desires, by an essential indication of something not present, beyond

²³ "Desire itself is essentially mimetic . . . Two desires converging on the same object are bound to clash. Thus mimesis coupled with desires leads automatically to conflict" (Girard 1977, 146). In his most recent work Girard insists that there can be *a. positive* mimesis, without rivalry, and argues that the claim to pure originality exhibits the worst form of imitation-with-rivalry. However, he does not explain the mechanism of positive mimesis, nor does he argue for a positive *desire*, which would certainly contradict his earlier affirmation that desire is initially for *the same*, and thereby automatically engenders imitation-with-conflict. But without an element of desiring, imitation would sink into an *impossible* pure mechanical copying. Imitation always involves desire, and if it can conceivably be non-violent, then one requires an account of what is desired as intrinsically repeated-with-difference (see Girard 1994, 70-9). Although, in his earlier writings, Girard allowed a nonmimetic and purely other-respecting spontaneous 'passion', this is specifically said to be "hardly desire" (1965, 2). The problem with such a category is surely that it prescinds both from the *need* of social beings for the presence of the other, and from the social—so to some extent mimetic—mediation of all subjective characteristics perceived in the other. One can doubt whether there can be 'passion' without desire.

the agent. But this implies that the definition is imperfect, since desire is always for something not yet quite perfectly grasped or possessed. Else there would be neither longing, nor seeking. It follows that no mere mechanical repetition of this agent's action by another is possible. The agent's *every* action is problematic, since it is defined by a desire which cannot be precisely specified. The one who copies this agent is therefore never in an automatic, predetermined relation to the object of the first person's desire. On the contrary, this second agent, in order to repeat the first agent's action in an inevitably different fashion, on account of the person's different circumstances, must undertake a reading of the actions/signs that have been proffered in such a fashion as to further determine for him or herself the character of the desired goal. *Before* one can even imitate, one's own direct relation to the uncertain *telos* must have supervened.

A commonsense view of this matter would seem to suggest that sometimes we desire things more because people we envy have them or want them; while at other times we emulate people more because they are successful in getting the things we want. Girard's reduction of all instances of the latter to instances of the former seems somewhat high-handed. And the analysis developed in the preceding paragraph shows that, wherever the stress may appear to fall, it is transcendently true of every human action that it must *both* desire the desires of imitated others *and* imitate those others whose desires it wishes to appropriate. Since action is also sign, we cannot determine any order of priority here. (Girard's priority for the former also seems to involve a problem of infinite regression: where do the 'first' desires arise from?)

The next five arguments concerning Girard have more specifically to do with ethnography. In the second place, it should be said that there is no evidence that always and everywhere 'the sacred' is primarily regarded as an amorphous, alien, threatening reality. Nor even that it is always thought of as ambiguous: as Luc de Heusch (following Emile Benveniste and Jean Rudhardt) argues, this seems to be a nineteenth-century projection from Latin etymology, reflecting in turn Roman religion, which does indeed possess a notion of the sacred as ambivalent (Heusch 3-6). In other cultures, those of Africa, for example, or of Ancient Greece, it is wholly unclear that the sacrificial transition from men to gods or dead ancestors involves any communicative to-and-fro between the sacred and the profane (Detienne and Vernant 1-87; Heusch 1-25). Here Girard is still the prisoner of Hubert and Mauss's limited ethnographical base, which encouraged the scientific illusion that we can get behind the divinities—always already given, and recipients themselves of gifts—to some kind of amorphous divine 'matter' (the real

'subject matter' of ectoplasmic social ether), which is the material of sacrifice, a forever burning essence whose smoke only *later* gives rise to imagined gods.

Third, scapegoating does not seem to be quite as widespread a phenomenon as Girard allows. Nor, when it occurs, does it always seem to be to do with the suppression of rivalry, but rather with the bearing away of many different impurities, many of a simply ritual variety. And is it always required in order to reinstate hierarchical difference? Of itself it merely instills a sense of cohesion, and so hierarchical differentiation must derive its impulse independently. Girard seems, in fact, to allow that this is another sort of response to the threat of rivalry, or the play of differentiation and identity which is indeed the primary 'ground' of violence (1977, 50-1) (I must stress that Girard is not wrong here: I merely contest the *necessity* of violence within this interplay). However, given that one social response to the ever-present threat of violence is one of hierarchical differentiation, is not this response much more adequate and self-sufficient than Girard allows? Does it not just need *occasional* bolstering by scapegoating, combined with a more consistent abjecting of all others who are not so much blamed, as absolutely refused. And is not this general differentiation and marking a more likely site for the location of religion and culture than violence diverted into sacrifice?

One should add here (following some remarks of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe [25-7,102-34]) that the idea of a violence *preceding* such differentiation and marking is itself a phantom. For the very *first* act of violence will be performed in the name of some claimed identity and difference, some identified site defended, some defined and abjected other refused. And therefore, indeed, the very 'first' violence will have been 'religious', but not, of course, in contrast with some sort of areligious innocence.

If scapegoating is not quite such a universally central cultural mechanism as Girard makes it, there is no evidence, in the fourth place, that sacrifice itself always involves scapegoating. The view that it does is, by contrast, but another aspect of the Durkheimian attempt to derive vertical violence from horizontal. The researches of Detienne and Vernant for ancient Greece, and Luc de Heusch for Africa, have shown, on the contrary, that one entire important form of sacrifice—which for some cultures is the overwhelmingly predominant one—has nothing to do with self-sacrifice, the substitution of animals for humans, or the payment of an inherited, ancestral debt (Detienne and Vernant 1-87; Heusch 1-25). On the contrary, it is rather a reenactment of the divisions between gods and men, and amongst men themselves. In ancient Greece, the smoke of the "sacrifice" (*thusia*) was regarded as the proper culinary portion of the gods, while the confinement of human beings to eating the grosser

portion of burnt flesh reminded them of their mortal condition with its need for constant replenishment, and thereby social and economic dependence. (Holocausts, or non-divided sacrifices, were much rarer occurrences, associated mainly with offerings to chthonian deities, to dead heroes, or to Artemis [Zaidman 37]). It is significant in this connection that the Orphic and Pythagorean sects who stood apart from civic life, and proclaimed that humans could attain to a psychic and eternal beneficence, also refused or modified their participation in sacrificial acts: sometimes this involved a claim to be able to share in the *same* food as the gods. However, in the case of orthodox civic oblations, the cooked sacrificial meat was further apportioned amongst humans according to their status, in divisions which reflected both egalitarian and aristocratic modes of partition in Greek political life. Sacrifice carried out in accordance with such protocols preceded the performance of most important private or civic actions, and could also be used to compensate for an individual misdemeanor: ritual or ethical. In either case, what was primarily involved was a reaffirmation of cosmic order, and the element of violence was deliberately minimized: *not* concealed, but rather recognized and reduced as far as possible.

But why, one might legitimately ask, need one reaffirm cosmic order through the division of the body of an animal? Is this *really* not to do with ritual murder? An answer "no" to this question is made more plausible if one remembers that in the case of animal sacrifice one has to do—in the case not only of Greece and Africa, but also India and (to some degree) Ancient Israel—not univocally with sacrifice, but rather with the intersection of sacral offering and cooking. Approached from the end of cuisine, sacrifice appears not as a perverse and excessive painting in blood, but rather as an attempt to integrate a disturbingly violent sequence— butchering, cooking, and eating—into the ritual domain (see Detienne and Vernant 1-87). Thus in all these societies (including Israel at one stage) one can only eat animals which have been sacrificed: that is to say animals previously provided in a certain sense with a sacred destiny. For while the eating of animals does indeed mark their inferiority with respect to human beings, nonetheless an unease regarding our partial identity with them seems to persist almost everywhere. Thus, according to Leviticus, a man killing and eating an animal *outside* the sacrificial context is guilty of murder (Lev. 17: 4, 10-11) (see Soler 943-55, especially 947). It seems that Girard may be wrong to imagine that the complex of human/animal violence is subordinate and derivative compared to the complex of interhuman violence.

In the fifth place, one must consider instances where sacrifice seems to be much more in accord with the Girardian model: where it involves self-sacrifice, payment of ancestral debts, killing of human beings or substitutes, and appears closely tied up with the eviction or exile of a sacralized individual. All of these features apply to *public* rather than individual sacrifice in those African societies which possess kings and which more approximate to the condition of States. Most of them (apart from the link with exile) apply to India, in which case there is a remarkable coincidence of private, culinary sacrifice, with public, atoning, self-sacrifice. Here *every* sacrifice serves instrumentally the self, and yet also repeats and remedies that first creative immolation of Purusa, the primal god-man, which gave rise to the universe (see Biardeau 7-155; Vernant 1991b, 268-9). It is of crucial significance that these features of non-culinary sacrifice seem to go along with the instance of kingship and empire: the remote God or King exacts a more long-standing, perpetual debt. Whereas, in the primitive self-governing, self-marking society, there were no slaves or ruled, perpetually owing loyalty or service to a sovereign center, now this comes to be the case. One is inevitably reminded here of Wellhausen and Robertson Smith's theses concerning Deuteronomic centralization. However the Israelite center was less imperial, and more strictly *representative*, embodying a sense of co-belonging, just as Israel *herself* was taken to be a nation of priests, in some sense responsible for all humankind (see Douglas 1993/94). Purity here unites rather than divides, whereas sacrificial debtors in India and Africa are often relatively impure and abjected.

All the same, it is *not* the downtrodden subjects in these cultures who are liable to be exiled, or sacrificially destroyed. On the contrary, it is the King himself. Against Girard, Luc de Heusch has retrieved one aspect of the Frazerian thematic: Kings do not *become* kings and sacred monsters because they have first been scapegoated—this would scarcely make sense. On the contrary, they become scapegoats or sacrifices *because* they are kings or sacred monsters. And non-regal scapegoats are commonly *substitutes* for kings (Heusch 107, 116, 206). The King can be destroyed or offered because he is supposed to guarantee the fertility and well-being of his realm. If he fails, sacrifice may be a last resort, or it may in any case be on the agenda. This is in part because the King, like everyone, owed himself as part of a cosmic debt. It is also because the King, as legislator, stands partially above and outside the tribal laws—for example, African kings were often permitted incestuous relations, and one can conjecture that a king only became "Oedipus" when he was deemed to have failed politically. As standing above nature, the King is semi-feral, always a potential Lear or Sweeny. Thus society needs to guard

itself against him as against nature, and feels itself on occasion permitted to turn violently against such a partially alien power. Here one has indeed a *genuine* root of sacral ambiguity.

However, what is clear is that the King is not killed to stop a contagion of mimetic violence. And it is not here the case that scapegoating helps to erect hierarchical differences surmounted by sovereign authority. On the contrary, it is the unaided sovereign authority which establishes a more severe hierarchy, and an alien rule that is imposed from outside by more conspicuous coercion and policing. Moreover, his sovereignty increasingly permits him to revise the laws, and so to render his power more absolute than its temporary instantiations. Whereas, in the case of the small local tribe without apparent government one discovers the paradigm of religious identity working through concealed violence (only visible in initiatory torture and external warfare) in the case of the *Urstaat* one finds the beginning of an abstract, contentless, secular authority that reinstates a purely natural power prefigured in the person of the semi-feral king. Yet it is in this latter context that the monarch is also likely to be toppled, scapegoated, blamed, sacrificed. The collective falling upon one man inside the community therefore belongs more often to these specific, not necessarily primitive, and indeed in certain respects relatively secularized conditions. (Where one has instances of *pharmakoi*, scapegoated or sacrificed priest-kings who were not genuine rulers in city states, one is probably dealing with survivals of practices from monarchic or imperial pasts, just as lines of priests in general often claimed a kingly descent and spiritualized a previous authority).

My sixth point concerning Girard is a more general one. To link sacrifice exclusively with intrahuman violence tends to ignore its aspect as a kind of existential game with death. Not just in the case of sacrifice, indeed, but also in the case of initiation, a kind of attempt is made to die in advance (in the case of self-sacrifice), or else to gain something from death, which on the face of it appears to be pure useless expenditure. This can often have the effect of cancelling out the violent character of sacrifice, of reducing its violence to the level of appearance. Part of the aim of certain sacrificial practices may be simply to include death—even death—within a human economy of meaning.

From the preceding analyses it may be realized that despite Girard's obvious freedom from any lingering devotion to totemism, one can still identify in his thought thematics akin to those of nineteenth-century positivism. First of all there is the attempt to posit a decisive emergence of religion from a pre-religious and yet human past; second is the idea of an ambiguous character of the sacred prior to and independent of divinity; third the notion of

a univocal 'essence' of all sacrifice; fourth the idea that sacrifice precedes religion rather than being inscribed within it; fifth the claim that animal sacrifice substitutes for human; sixth the idea that sacrifice is a perfectly rational although inadequate response to a prereligious predicament. Finally there is even in Girard a certain reworking of the idea that the true 'end' of sacrifice (both termination and conclusion) is pure individual self-renunciation. To be fair to him, this is no longer a renunciation demanded by the political community, but instead one required by a transcendent imperative both to endure and not to perpetuate the mechanisms of socio-political violence. However, the logic of Girard's analyses of desire supposes that the price for the foundation of a totally new form of non-violent community is a kind of self-abnegating denaturation, where all self-expressive attainments and erotic yearnings must be foregone. Is this not a new variant of positivist altruism which demands a surrendering altogether of the poisoned world of subjectivity to something peaceful at the price of its impersonality? Shadows of fetishistic worship, of the brutally given, and of Hubert and Mauss's brahmanic coloring of Christology still hover over this postsacrificial scene.

And this suggests an alarming possibility: namely that Girard, of all people, is still locked within a pernicious 'sacrificial' since he demands the renunciation of the mimetic/desiring (the subjective) for the sake of collective peace. By pernicious 'sacrificial' I mean the giving up of *one* thing for the sake of something greater, a category which can include, but is *broader* than Girard's scapegoating, since what is renounced may be part of oneself (the individual or the community) and therefore not necessarily something that was first a mimetic double. This sacrifice for worldly and temporal gain is to be contrasted, as I shall shortly argue, with a genuine religious sacrifice of *everything* for the sake of its *return* (repetition, *mimesis*) as same but different. Girard, however, still remains within 'the sacrificial' since he demands the sacrifice of 'the religious' in the sense of what faith takes (on no foundations) to be intrinsically worthwhile goals, for he derives such goals behavioristically from imitation and thereby derides them. In line with the positivist project Girard deciphers *all* religion as a groping towards a scientific social solution whose central vehicle is sacrifice, and he both 'explains' religious sacrifice as a stop-gap measure and finally sublates and redeems it as a scientific imperative, namely 'renounce what has been hitherto the universal process of self-becoming'. It is not, for Girard, one might mischievously suggest, that there are to be no more scapegoats; rather it is that we are all to be finally abjected. Thus his 'new science', like every positivist science, traces historical sacrifices deemed necessary for the sake of peace; sacrificially

sunders human beings from their goals in order to reunite them with these goals again according to a behaviorist logic; demands further final sacrifice on a Christological model in the future; 'synthesizes' all humanity round sacrifice as the natural synthesizing center; fantasizes an ultimate suffering renunciation as the final sacrificial scene and sacrificially conjoins Rousseauian 'natural' mimetic man with a cultural humanity still to come. In all these ways Girard still succumbs to the lure of sacrifice, and for the same reasons as his Victorian forebears.

Like them also, Girard represents for religion and theology a temptation to be resisted, namely sacrificially to concede to science a right to explain, in order to receive back from science 'a demonstration' of Christocentricity. One can be sure that such a demonstration represents no more than cultural bias, whereas one should be content, instead, with the bias of faith. Moreover the Christocentricity 'demonstrated' will always logically deviate from that simply believed in. In Girard's case the deviation takes the form (despite much that he has to say in Christology that is profound and correct) of regarding Jesus as making a kind of 'scientific' diagnosis regarding the origin of human violence. For if Jesus understood violence as arising from the logic of desiring *mimesis*, how could he truly have derived it from sin which implies human responsibility, even if we cannot now simply 'will' a peaceful society? To trace violence back to imitation is equivalent to lodging sin gnostically in our finitude, and requires that we listen to Christ's wise diagnosis and not that we *imitate* a peaceful path that he has disclosed in a practice which is inevitably self-expressive and rightly desiring. Error consists surely not in desiring imitation as such, but in the delusion of identical repetition as genuine repetition, since such repetition always seeks to displace, to dominate, and to know by representation or appropriation of the other, rather than by a loving preservation of the other's distance. On this view sin remains lodged in subjectivity and the mystery of self-destruction, not in an external and necessary cultural process. And if it is so lodged then there is no scientific golden key to its undoing, only the possibility of following another path once it has been already taken. Yet this 'mystery' of violence leads us with oddly more hope than a decipherment which demonizes an entire aspect of our nature.

Desiring imitation and the accompanying quest for identity are not necessarily violent: yet violence can be equated with the negation of Being which is involved in any attempt to secure an absolute, fixed, immune, unalterable, impervious identity. Since in reality nothing stays, even for a moment (especially not the moment), such an identity is ultimately empty, and

therefore without identity at all. It is this mode of identity which is to be eschewed, rather than desiring *mimesis* and all forms of sacrifice. Sacrifice as specifically scapegoating or else as perpetually expiating an unpayable debt, is more specifically associated, as we have seen, with monarchies and centralized states (although this structural typology involves no 'sociological' thesis concerning the determination of sacrifice by social order; the determination runs equally in the opposite direction. For this reason Girard's rejection of such modes of sacrifice could only make sense within the context of a more explicitly *political* critique of certain modes of hierarchical differentiation. A generalized critique of sacrifice as expiation will not do, since the logic of expiation within Judaism and Christianity is completely different from that of Hinduism and the West African state-religions. In the latter cases expiation imitates, in reverse, a primary *creative* sacrifice, which involves an original loss, repaid only by an endless counter-renunciation which must *atone* for Being as such. Such *absolute* self-renunciation, and such infinite postponement of sacrificial benefit, seem curiously akin to the secular sacrifices of person to society and present to future, and one may perhaps attribute this to the greater idolatry and economism of the centralized state (Heusch 192-216). But in the case of the Biblical religions, by contrast, creative giving is not loss but a self-emptying *in order* to be, and sacrificial response is, in return, a total giving back which is the only possible mode of continuing to participate in Being. Since, according to the logic of creation *ex nihilo*, *to be* is entirely to receive, a constant giving up of oneself is the only way to receive oneself back again, and so to remain. No 'thing' here is given up for a greater something, but rather, as Kierkegaard came to realize in *Fear and Trembling*, *everything* is given up in order to be received back differently and only, thereby as 'the same'. It is notable that whereas, for Kierkegaard, faith paradigmatically involves 'absurd' belief in the 'return' of a renounced beloved woman—Régine—, for Girard it involves aesthetic, artistic surmounting of mimetic desire for a woman in self-sacrificial surrender to death, supposedly beyond the need for such a hope (Girard 1965, 22, 290)

Expiation enters into this (as Girard rightly stresses, in relation to Christ), if a preceding false claim to possess for oneself a created identity must be suffered and endured in order that one may confess a sin and thereby continue to offer and receive. This suffering is at first undergone by *another*, the innocent God-man who by his innocence alone fully sees and so fully suffers and exposes the illusion of self-possession. His suffering may then be 'assumed' by us, as the only mode of access to his innocence and the regaining of the 'natural' unbloody sacrificial condition of worship. Such an expiatory

logic is *not* linked with political states which characteristically sacrifice individuals as parts to wholes and present moments to a future present, which, of course, will never *remain* present for a single instance. Instead it is linked to religious communities—Israel, the Church—which ensure individual self-expression *as* self-giving, not (at least *ontologically*) as self-renunciation, and have no purpose over and above the many souls which are their members, nor the many successive moments of time which point, not to the future, but to eternity. For this reason it is no accident that all four Victorian metahistories of sacrifice have at their center a displacement of the true sacrificing community—Priestly Israel, the Church—in order to appropriate sacrifice for Science and State, and Girard likewise accuses the Church of a sacrificial misconstrual of Christ's death. Yet by promoting communities which sacrificially subordinate time to eternity, and thereby do *not* subordinate persons to society, or passing moments to the future, the Biblical religions fulfil, without violence, the existential aspect of sacrifice according to which death ceases *to be* death in the face of the author of life. No presumptuous suicide or murder is thereby legitimated, but rather a living of every moment of life as death, in order to live it again.

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