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The Broken Body and the Fragmented Self:

Theological Anthropology After Girard

Paul Andrew Fletcher

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Durham

Department of Theology

1999

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The Broken Body and the Fragmented Self:
Theological Anthropology after Girard

Paul Andrew Fletcher

Recent French post-structuralist thought, through its radical decentering of the self, has challenged the legitimacy of essentialist interpretations of human nature, whatever their theological or philosophical origin. My thesis is an exploration of the theological implications of this fracturing of the narratives in which human self-understanding is formed and transmitted. I begin this exploration with a two-fold critical engagement. First, I consider the 'resituation' of the self in the recent thought of Derrida and Marion. Second, I examine the wide-ranging projects of Jürgen Habermas and his theological followers in which the self is 'reconstituted' in the context of communicative action. In response to the inadequacy of these discourses for the reconfiguration of theological anthropology, I then turn to the work of René Girard.

René Girard argues that mimetic desire governs all human social interaction and mimetic behaviour inevitably generates conflicts which threaten the very possibility of communal existence. By taking seriously the violence of intersubjectivity and in searching for a peaceable alternative, I argue, Girard offers us an opportunity to transcend the violent fragmentation of the human subject celebrated by the theorists of post-modernity and neglected by their critical-theoretical partners. His detailed attention to the constitution of selves through others' desire offers a significant resource for the revisioning of theological anthropology.

Girard's project, however, is not uncritically embraced. I argue that his work has to be supplemented theologically and in relation to the 'visceral register' of human existence. Consequently, I bring Girard's work into conversation with Maurice Blondel and Ignatius of Loyola. Through the work of the latter I construct - in conclusion - three 'exercises' in which the viscerality of the self is central and through which an ethically responsible theological anthropology might be revisioned.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents

Philomena and James Fletcher

with love, affection and gratitude.

Table of Contents

Abstract 1

Title Page 2

Declaration 3

Dedication 4

Table of Contents 5

Acknowledgements 7

Introduction 8

Part One 19

Chapter One: Resituating Subjectivity 20
Introduction 20
1.1: The Dissolution of the Subject 21
1.2: Resituating the Subject 25
1.3: Religion Without Religion 28
1.4: The Recuperation of Theology 31
1.5: Critical Evaluation 35
1.5.1: Derrida's Nondogmatism 36
1.5.2: Marion's Dogmatism 42
Conclusion 47

Chapter Two: Reconstituting Subjectivity 50
Introduction 50
2.1: Discourses of Modernity and Postmodernity 51
2.2: Ideal Speech and Intersubjectivity 55
2.3: The Intersubjective Self as the Subject of Theology 60
2.4: The Relational God 65
2.5: Critical Evaluation 69
2.5.1: The Matter of Exclusion in the Project of Reconstitution 70
2.5.2: Relationality, the Self and God 77
Conclusion 83

Part Two 86

René Girard: Life and Work 87

Chapter Three: The Girardian Hypothesis I 95
Introduction 95
3.1: Fundamental Anthropology 96
3.2: The Formation of Social Structures 100
3.3: The Function of Prohibition 101

3.4: The Victimage Mechanism 104
3.5: The Nature of Religion 107
3.6: Cultural Development, Institutions and their Origins 110
3.7: Mystification Through Myth 113
3.8: Texts of Persecution 115
3.9: Gospel Revelation 121
Conclusion 126

Chapter Four: The Girardian Hypothesis II 128
Introduction 128
4.1: Interdividual Psychology 129
4.2: Mimesis, Desire and Subjectivity 133
4.3: The Subject of Desire 136
4.4: Desire, Sexuality and Freud 141
4.5: Interdividual Psychology and the Gospels 152
Conclusion 157

Chapter Five: Critical Evaluation 159
Introduction 159
5.1: The Violence of Desire 160
5.1.1: The Rivalry of Violence 170
5.1.2: The Antidote to Violence: External Mediation 172
5.2: Interdividuality and Agency 177
5.2.1: Agent or Actor? 180
5.3: Revelation as Resolution 183
Conclusion 192

Part Three 194

Chapter Six: Towards a Theological Anthropology 195
Introduction 195
6.1: Heidegger, Augustine and Neoplatonism 197
6.1.1: Heidegger and Religious Life 202
6.2: Levinas and Alterity 209
6.3: Action and the Supernatural 214
6.4: Spiritual Exercises and the Christian Drama 222
Conclusion 227

Chapter Seven: Theological Anthropology After Girard 229
Introduction 229
7.1: Summarising the Thesis 230
7.2: Exercising the Body 236
7.3: Making Bowels Move 241
7.3.1: 'Her Bowels Yearned upon Her Son' 242
7.3.2: 'My Bowels Yearned for Him' 245
7.3.3: 'All His Bowels Move' 248
Conclusion: The Composition of Hospitality 249

Bibliography of Works Consulted 251

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Introduction

In his 1987 film, *Der Himmel über Berlin*, Wim Wenders portrays the trials and tribulations - the fragmentation - of modern urban life from a very peculiar, though illuminating, perspective.[1] Wenders presents 'a quasi-documentary of Berlin, a way of seeing the (at the time) divided city as a pastiche of individual lives, whose murmurs and acts of despair constitute a painful vision' of contemporary metropolitan existence.[2] This pastiche is offered in the context of the restless drifting of two angels, Damiel and Cassiel. The angels move effortlessly around (and literally through) the city providing a supra-mundane vantage point from which to observe the dissipated and detached lives of individual human beings. The endless angelic vocation, as Damiel concedes, is simply to 'look, assemble, testify, observe.' In the process of observing the pain and joy of people's lives and testifying to their actions and omissions, Damiel falls in love with a circus performer, Marion. This love affair is characterised by two things: distance, because Marion is unaware of the angel's presence (only children have that privileged awareness) and melancholy, as Damiel yearns for a self-realisation that only materiality and sensuality can facilitate. The medium of this endless melancholy, particularly for Damiel, is the angels'

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[1] *Der Himmel über Berlin*, Wim Wenders, 1987. The film was renamed *Wings of Desire* for an English-speaking audience.

[2] Robert Phillip Kolker & Peter Beicken, *The Films of Wim Wenders: Cinema as Vision and Desire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 138.

existence in timelessness and infinite space. This constitutes the 'angelic condition', a state in which stability and the need to be available are constants but within which Damiel feels incomplete. This is demonstrated in a lament at one point in the film when Damiel confesses that he would love to be able to say 'Here' and 'Now' rather than 'Forever' and 'Always'. He desires to participate fully in the ebb and flow of life rather than continue with an angelic pretence. Thus the angel falls to earth - enters the human condition - and the complexity and carnality of life are embraced, a fact attested to in Wenders' switch from the black and white of eternity to the full colour of contingency. This fall from black and white disengagement to the immersion within technicolor, however, is a descent into self-actualization rather than sin - a compelling inversion of the myth of Lucifer's fall.

This celluloid juxtaposition of the angelic and the human provides a powerful commentary on the state and status of subjectivity in a postmodern context. This celluloid elucidation of the human condition is, however, equivocal in its determinant elements. In the first place the film presents the spectator with a postmodern anti-narrative:

> One is confronted not with a unified text, much less by the presence of a distinct personality and sensibility, but by a discontinuous terrain of heterogeneous discourses uttered by anonymous, unplaceable tongues, a chaos different from that of the classic texts of high modernism precisely insofar as it is not recontained or recuperated within an overarching mythic framework.[3]

Only from an angelic point of view can any coherence and meaning be insinuated but within this (spiritual) world existence is monochromatic and devoid of any real delight.

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[3] F. Pfeil, 'Postmodernism as a "structure of feeling" ' *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (eds) C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988), 384.

The sense of fragmentation, of the death or at least decomposition of unifying meta-narratives, is embodied in the figure of Homer the muse. This old and frail figure holds history and identity together but his time is limited and in his own wanderings through the city he exhibits a sense of loss and a heavy burden of mourning for those who have literally lost the plot. Homer, nevertheless, has one last desire: to write and recount an epic of peace that can be realised in flesh and blood. Yet while the film presents this noble desire it is set within the realm of doubt and impossibility because everything that surrounds Homer - isolation, the violence of history and the division symbolised by the Berlin wall - militates against his vision.

Nevertheless, in its endorsement of the supremacy and incomparability of a sensible and tangible environment, *Wings of Desire* is also a celebration of the colour of human life. This is reinforced by Damiel's encounter with Peter Falk who, as a former angel himself, is able to appreciate the significance of the former's fall: 'How good it is to be here, just to touch something ... To smoke, have coffee and if you do it together it's fantastic.' In these sensuous terms the film is an attempt to resolve the fragmentation, brokenness and division of social existence in the wake of Homer and the diremption of the city and its inhabitants. Damiel lacks any history and his lover-to-be, Marion, is an exile whose desire to be an angel - a trapeze artist with wings - is foiled by the economic failure of the circus. The coming together of their desire and their bodies, however, symbolises an immanent resurrection and a return to paradise. 'We are on our way' claims Marion as the camera ushers us towards the heavens at the close of the film.

This denouement, however, is the moment of contradiction. Wenders attempts a resolution of the crisis of subjectivity by reinstating, indeed resuscitating, a subject to whom the film seemed a last testimony or eulogy. A Romantic unity with colour, sense and sensibility sublates deficient histories and deterritorialization and 'autonomy, identity, liberty, choice and

fulfilment'[4] arise from the release of the spiritual into the material in the miracle of an inverse resurrection. Subjectivity and identity, topics that are portrayed by Wenders as problematic for so much of the film, are suddenly reconstituted in the arms of another.

It is this contradiction in Wenders' cinematic exploration that serves as a sign of the times. This is true not only for art house cinema but for theological considerations of the self. There has arisen in the last few decades a major threat to the very possibility of a theological anthropology. This challenge relates to the destruction or deconstruction of the very subject matter of that sub-discipline - namely, the self.

The modern self was constituted on the basis of consciousness, ultimately understood as self-consciousness, and unity and identity were deemed to be secure even in the midst of the change and flux of life.

> Subject (or 'suppositum') is the name given to a be-ing whose *identity* is sufficiently stable for it to bear, in every sense of the word (sustain, serve as a foundation for, withstand), change or modification. The subject remains the same, while accidental qualities are altered. Since Descartes, the most subjective of all subjects is the one which is certain of its identity, the *ego* of *ego cogito*. The quality of subjectivity is thus confined to consciousness.[5]

Attacking both 'phenomenological consciousness and the logic of identity',[6] recent philosophical and critical-theoretical assessments of subjectivity have forcibly removed the foundations of this

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[4] Nikolas Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.
[5] Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy* trans. L. Scott-Fox & J.M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 76.
[6] Ibid.

theoretical edifice and replaced it with a confusing 'series of diverse zones, subject to differing constraints, frequently of an irreconcilable sort.'[7] Consequently, according to Gianni Vattimo,

> Far from being able to be summed up and centred in consciousness, or in the knowledge each of us has of himself and the responsibility each conceives for himself, the individual personality is an ensemble, perhaps not even a system, of different strata or 'pulsations' as we might call them (Nietzsche calls them 'passions') that are at odds with one another and give rise to equilibria that are never more than provisional.[8]

If Vattimo is correct, and he is only one of a myriad of thinkers to follow this line of thought, then the suggestion that the self is but an 'ensemble of pulsations' provides a major challenge to theological appraisals of the state and status of subjectivity. Old certainties are threatened, if not irreparably damaged, and a theological response is essential. The demand for a response, however, is not simply the result of a need to provide a competent rejoinder to recent theoretical developments. The requirement to respond arises from the remarkable socio-political changes in the post-war west that have transformed the site and status of subjectivity.

The crisis of subjectivity- that which Frank Farrell calls its disenchantment[9] - is, according to Eric Alliez, a 'crisis of habitat.'[10] Fragmentation and the 'suppression of distance'[11] between strangers who have no shared home are the conditions in which the contemporary urban self has to

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[7] Wlad Godzich, 'Foreword: The Further Possibility of Knowledge' in Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), ix.
[8] Gianni Vattimo, 'The Decline of the Subject and the Problem of Testimony' *The Adventure of Difference: Philosophy after Heidegger and Nietzsche* trans. C. Blamires & T. Harrison (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 45.
[9] Frank B. Farrell, *Subjectivity, Realism and Postmodernism: The Recovery of the World in Recent Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
[10] Eric Alliez, *Capital Times: Tales from the Conquest of Time* trans. G. Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 228.
[11] Frederic Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping' *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (eds) C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988), 351

forge a home and a habitat.[12] If Erasmus could suggest, in the late Renaissance period, that 'The city is a huge monastery'[13] then the postmodern urban landscape represents a move from the recreational and shared space of the Benedictine cloister to the rigidly separated life of the cell in a privatised version of the Strict Observance of the Trappists. Yet these 'cells' do not represent a stable and constant space for the practice of *askesis* and a vocational cultivation of the self. Rather, as Alliez contends

> In the city, there are *no more places, only emplacements relative to displacements*, with no instance more "profound" than the speed of circulation within a space *empty* of any ultimate and original dimension, a space that annuls itself in the explicating itself ouside of itself: in analysis, in the decomposition of motion into units of distance and time. The city is a *cinematic entity*.[14]

The rise of capitalism and the concomitant creation of a particularly modern conception of time and history (that Alliez exposes) transformed the *telos* towards and through which human beings moved. Time, objectified in the course of Enlightenment thought,[15] (literally) brought with it the mechanism through which 'human beings made history'[16] - for it was by means of the machine that they did so. In the context of late-capitalism, and the dissolution of any unifying *telos*, it is time that creates human beings: 'For us, it is the time of the *workday* - and the subordination of work to time: the time of wages, the capitalistic (in the strict sense) time of *products*, of time that is stocked up, moved forward, negotiated in an abstract commerce that

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[12] Indeed, Giorgio Agamben claims that the exilic 'existence' of the refugee and the camp internee is the paradigm for contemporary political life in western democracies. Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
[13] Quoted by Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday* Life trans. S. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 93.
[14] Eric Alliez, *Capital Times: Tales from the Conquest of Time*, 228. Alliez's emphasis.
[15] The point being that with the turn to the subject objectification is a necessary consequence. As Heidegger puts it, 'the essence of subjectivism is objectivism, insofar as everything becomes an object for the subject.' Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Volume III: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics* (ed.) David Farrell Krell, trans. Joan Stamburgh et al. (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 221.
[16] Helga Nowotny, *Time: The Modern and Postmodern Experience* trans. Neville Plaice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 47.

introduces the consideration of its capitalization under the conditions of infinite duration.'[17] What has occurred is the reversal of Enlightenment progress, or to be more precise, the deceleration of progressive time - the infinite duration of the 'extended present'.[18] It is not simply the case that, as the graffiti artist put it, 'the future is no longer what it used to be' but that the future is

> increasingly overshadowed by the problems which are opening up in the present. The future no longer offers that projection space into which all desires, hopes and fears could be projected without many inhibitions because it seemed sufficiently remote to be able to absorb everything which had no place or was unwelcome in the present.[19]

Helga Nowotny sees the 'future drawing closer to the present'[20] in the techno-scientific quest to conquer time and its exigencies. She points to G.H. von Wright's conviction that 'Time is man's flight from contradiction.'[21] The pertinent question, then, is whence comes this contradiction from which human beings are attempting to flee in the postmodern context?

> The contradiction which is being fled from in this way arises, among other things, from the fact that the insatiable desire for technological and scientific innovations, and the rapid pace at which they are to be converted into economic growth, produce both the unforseeable element and the essence of the innovation, and in addition also seek to bring under control all the consequent effects of this very innovation.[22]

The name of the game is to control both innovation in order to produce desire (and guilt) and comprehend and command in advance the repercussions of such an innovative creed. Consequently, the future is chosen: 'But this future which is to be created is already taking place

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[17] Éric Alliez, *Capital Times*, 227.
[18] Cf. Helga Nowotny, *Time: The Modern and Postmodern Experience*, 45-74.
[19] Ibid., 50.
[20] Ibid., 51.
[21] Ibid., 50. Cf. G.H. von Wright, *Time, Chance and Contradiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).
[22] Ibid., 51.

now, is being determined in the extended present.'[23] It is the extended present that chooses 'the future and not vice versa.'[24] The relation between present and future has undergone a massive shift, the outcome of which is that the future is put into operation - now![25] An image comes to mind of Walter Benjamin's angel of history who, rather than being irresistibly propelled 'into the future to which his back is turned',[26] is limping backwards, the stumbling due to the fetters around his legs that issue from the extended present. It is the managers - the manipulators - of techno-scientific innovation who direct the angel's course, not the storm blowing from paradise nor the gift of providence.

This loss of possibility, and the 'infinite duration' of the present that takes its place in the reign of determinism suggests that the present condition in which humans live, survive and prosper is marked by a series of spatio-temporal fractures that have resulted in a quite unprecedented crisis of identity. Moreover, any possibility or future is commodified and controlled and selves are subject to a status founded on 'value' or price - the irreducible is reduced to the value given within a specific currency. In this study I will attempt a theological response to the fragmentation of the self that takes into account both recent theoretical reflection on the subject and the existential challenge that faces a theological enquiry. My hope in this study is modest. I wish to question contemporary solutions - both philosophical and theological - and add a somewhat different perspective that takes seriously the state and status of the self and the vitality of a tradition that is often ignored in constructive appraisals of theological anthropology.

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[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 52.
[25] Cf. Ibid.
[26] Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1973), 249.

In pursuit of this goal I will, initially, utilise the contradiction portrayed in Wenders' speculation on the possibilities for human existence as a *mise-en-scène* within which to place this theological rejoinder. Practically, this entails an analysis in Part One of two prevalent solutions to the present crisis of subjectivity: namely, an acceptance of the fragmentary character of the self from which arises an attempt to radically resituate the self after, and in line with, its deconstruction and, alternatively, an undertaking to reconstitute subjectivity that arises as a reaction to -indeed against - the dissolution of a subjective ground for dialogue and community. This entails an analysis in Chapter One of the attempt by Jacques Derrida, in particular, to revision subjectivity on the basis of the negation of religion. In its wake, he proposes a 'religion without religion' shorn of any theologico-metaphysical overlay or any commitment to dogma, doctrine or articles of faith. As a counterpoint to Derrida's nondogmatism, I consider the philosophical theology of Jean-Luc Marion. Marion reconfigures subjectivity in relation to an ecclesiastical hierarchy and, in contrast to Derrida, he locates the only authentically theological subject in the hands of the bishop and his concomitant ecclesial dogmatism. These alternatives, I will argue, are seriously deficient solutions. As two distinctive attempts to resituate the self, I argue that Derrida and Marion's dissolution of the self (negative anthropology) and its theological complement (negative theology) embody a tendency towards political and ecclesial quiescence. Neither figure provides the resources for an ethically and theologically responsible anthropology. In Chapter Two I move on to consider the attempt by Jürgen Habermas to reconstitute subjectivity on the basis of an rationality that is distinct from the instrumental and purposive rationality that has been dominant in the modern era. In order to complete rather than reject the project of modernity, Habermas proposes the delimitation of this type of rationality and its supplementation with another rationality based on human intersubjective discourse. Habermas, a leading scholar of the second generation of the Frankfurt school and intensely interested in the revival of the public nature of subjectivity, attempts through an analysis of communication to provide the grounds for non-coercive relations to others in the context of a broad understanding of the role and significance of reason. In line with Habermas's philosophical reflections, I then move to examine

the theological bed-fellow of this attempt to reconstitute the self - a theology of sociality where mutuality and understanding are central theoretical motifs. Both perspectives are charged with a tacit disregard for difference, contingency and contestation. This is particularly true of theological responses in which the (often) purely formal outline of this reconstitution of subjectivity is overlooked or its significance underestimated. Crucially, in the context of theological anthropology, this reconstitutive project ignores the bodily, visceral nature of subjectivity.

As an alternative to these contemporary projects I turn, in Part Two of this study to the work of René Girard. Girard provides an alternative approach to the present crisis of subjectivity. While taking seriously the fragmentation of the self within western societies, Girard's analyses of culture, religion and identity offer, I argue, a way through and beyond these two prevalent alternatives. His analyses of violence, culture and religion offer significant resources for the interrogation of the human condition in which conflict and the problem of recognition are constants. Girard's work is not, however, uncritically embraced and for the purpose of delineating a theological anthropology I critically evaluate and augment his hypothesis.

The modification and, more importantly, the augmentation of Girard's work is executed in Part Three. There I examine the two major contributions to an understanding of the self that are explicitly theological in character - the existential analysis of the early Martin Heidegger and the phenomenological examination of action and practice carried out by Maurice Blondel. It is Blondel's work, I believe, that provides a theological supplement to the cultural criticism of Girard. Blondel's *rapprochement* with Girard is then situated within the rubric of the spiritual exercise, through which Girard's explication of desire is placed within the context of grace and nature and through which the motif of performance is given prominence.

Finally, as a conclusion to this study, I attempt to outline the possible configuration of the subject and the framework within which the self might be set in a theological anthropology after Girard. I attend, in particular, to some examples of desiring practice that are performed in relation to both scripture and tradition. These practices also take seriously the multifaceted nature of subjectivity and the various 'registers' of the self are thoroughly integrated into a theoretical engagement with desire. Moreover, these performances attempt to reclaim the body in theological anthropology by means of attending to the movement of the bowels. To begin, however, I will now move to the first of Wenders' subjects - the resituating of the self.

Part One

Chapter One:
Resituating Subjectivity

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter (and the next) is to outline the present state of some major strands of philosophical and theological anthropology. The reason for undertaking such a task is not simply to portray possible responses to the kind of existential crises of space and time that I sketched in the introduction. There have been a number of attempts, particularly within continental philosophy over the last three decades or so, to dissolve the specifically modern self. The challenges that such projects pose for theology are huge. That is not to say that they are wrong-headed but that theologians have to engage with the varied implications of such ventures. Here I will briefly contextualize contemporary discussions with an overview of the relationship between the death of God and the demise of the subject. This will provide a backdrop to an encounter with one of the two strategies that I delineated with reference to Wenders' portrayal of subjectivity in *Der Himmel über Berlin* - the resituation of the subject.

This encounter will proceed in two movements. First, I will indicate the manner in which deconstruction, and Jacques Derrida in particular, understands how it is that the subject is dissolved and then resituated. This contemporary theoretical perspective is the most important and (in)famous example of the postmodern critique and reassessment of modern anthropological discourse and effectively demands a wholesale reappraisal of essentialist and existentialist interpretations of human nature. Second, I will outline the very different approach to the subject offered by Jean-Luc Marion. Marion's highly distinctive contribution to philosophical theology includes, I will demonstrate, a negative anthropology that is predicated on the primacy of the gift. This aspect of Marion's work is often disregarded as attention is more often given to his retrieval of negative theology. Nevertheless, I will argue that Marion's negative anthropology is just as important an ingredient in his construction of an ecclesiology and eucharist-centred theology as is his engagement with traditional apophaticism. In response to these dissimilar postmodern approaches to the question of the self, I will then critically evaluate the theological and socio-political implications of their work. Before doing so, however, I will first consider the fate of the subject who requires resituating.

1.1: The Dissolution of the Subject

The pivotal feature of the modern subject is disclosed in Montaigne's assertion in the *Essays* that 'I have no other business but myself. I am eternally mediating upon myself, considering and tasting myself.'[1] Here the emphasis is clearly on the interior, private character of Montaigne's identity and it is the prominence of this *inner* life that results in the modern 'thinning' out of the world.[2] 'Meaning, clarity, and truth,' as Charles Winquist suggests, 'all become the domain of the subject. A reversal into modernity occurred in this move. Inner reality

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[1] Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. D.M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), II, 17, p. 499.
[2] Frank Farrell, *Subjectivity, Realism and Postmodernism: The Recovery of the World in Recent Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2-3.

was valued over the external world.'[3] From the perspective of the absolute self-presence and security that Montaigne perceives in the inner life - that non-negotiable, privatised realm of certainty - contemporary theory seems to have moved towards an anarchic celebration of a 'fragmented diachronicity.'[4] The postmodern context, in contrast to Montaigne's assured manner, is marked by a moment of ineluctable privation:

> Postmodernism opens with the sense of *irrevocable* loss and *incurable* fault. This wound is inflicted by the overwhelming awareness of death - a death that "begins" with the death of God and "ends" with the death of our selves.'[5]

The 'death of our selves' signals a crisis of identity that is the existential subject matter of Wenders' films and that is identified, theoretically at least, with the destruction of a 'metaphysics of presence'. The latter is established on the basis of a self-presence secured through self-consciousness. To quote Hegel:

> The truth of consciousness is the *self-consciousness* and the latter is the ground of the former, such that in existence all consciousness of another object is self-consciousness. I know of an object that is mine (it is my representation); in doing so I know of myself.[6]

The world, interaction and others are little more than provisions that feed self-awareness and the building blocks that assist the advancement to consciousness. The displacement of consciousness as the foundation for the development of individual particularity and individual awareness of identity has occurred, not least, as a response to Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God.

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[3] Charles Winquist, *Desiring Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 10.
[4] Mark C. Taylor, 'The Empty Mirror' *Deconstructing Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 93.
[5] Ibid.
[6] G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature: Being Part Two of the Philosophical Sciences* trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), § 424.

The relationship between the death of God and the death of the self is well documented. The first part of this relation consists in the death of God being a 'combination of Luther's Reformation insistence on a personal relationship with God and Descartes' decisive turn to the subject, thereby implicating theology in anthropology, that culminates in a need for the death of God to liberate the humanistic subject.'[7] God here is understood in terms of being, *esse*, and onto-theologically provides a ground or identity through which difference is held secure and ultimately returned to the one. The death of God is the violent interchange of one basic metaphysical support - God - to another - Man. According to the Nietzsche of *The Gay Science*, this interchange is contrived by way of murder. ' "Wither is God?", he cried. "I will tell you. We have killed him - you and I. All of us are his murderers." '[8] The bold claim of the madman brings to light a new age that is full of both terrifying and enticing possibilities for human beings. The challenge to begin again is, in Nietzsche's terms, daunting but the prospects cannot be viewed as 'all sad and dark but rather like a new, scarcely describable kind of light, happiness, relief, exhilaration, encouragement, dawn.'[9] However, as long as 'Man' takes the place of the dead God then the precarious relationship of dependence between the divine authority and the patricidal subject is concealed. Feuerbach's insistence that 'the *absolute* to man is his own nature'[10] demonstrates the theological legitimacy of the subject even though this subject is now a creator in the context of atheistic humanism. This modern subject has imperial pretensions, is believed to possess an essence as impervious as his fallen predecessor and his murder of the divine is fulfilled in order to deify himself. As Charles Davis puts it, 'Descartes' *cogito* to which we can trace the origin of the modern subject, transferred to man the function of God as the source of reality and intelligibility.'[11] God's death is effected through the assertion of the subject and opens up the prospect of the human individual 'determining the essence of certainty by himself in accordance with the essence of certainty in general (self-assurance), and thus of bringing humanity to

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[7] Charles Winquist, *Desiring Theology*, 114.
[8] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), 181.
[9] Ibid, 182.
[10] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* trans. G. Eliot (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 5.
[11] Charles Davis, 'Our Modern Identity: The Formation of the Self' *Modern Theology* 6:2 (1990), 165.

dominance within what is real.'[12] Consequently, to quote James Bernauer, the subject becomes nothing less than 'a substitute for the Absolute.'[13] This thematic - of the self-assertion of the subject - is evident throughout the modern period from Hobbes to Hegel[14] and is undermined by Nietzsche in that he accounts for the overcoming of God in terms of Man's frustration, resentment and desire for revenge.

The claim of Nietzsche's French successors is that *within* the logic of the modern critique of metaphysics and the consequent rise of the subject lies the resources that ensure the demise of the latter. If 'the modern form of the death of God comes to expression in humanistic atheism'[15] then the death of the subject is the result of the same murderous disease: to kill the Other who is the 'original ground of selfhood',[16] is to kill the one who assumes the divine identity. The dissolution of one ground of truth and certainty is negotiated on the basis of the establishment of another - Man. But atheistic humanism is deemed to fail in that it is founded on equally uncertain grounds. The *subjectum* that Man himself has become is the result of a scepticism with regard to a metaphysical foundation that was claimed to reside in the divine. Yet, this same scepticism, taken to its conclusion, undermines the human subject as the ultimate foundation upon which things are rendered intelligible. The inheritance of the masters of suspicion is a recognition, maintained although modified by deconstruction, that 'identity is always constructed and situated in a field and amid a flow of contending cultural discourses.'[17] A sure foundation upon which the subject is based is dissipated and if subjectivity remains it is an effect of, for instance, the *différance* of language (Derrida) or of economies of desire (Deleuze). However one chooses to

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[12] Martin Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy* trans. J. Stamburgh (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 20.
[13] James Bernauer, 'The Prisons of Man: An Introduction to Foucault's Negative Theology' *International Philosophical Quarterly* 27:4 (1987), 368.
[14] Cf. Anthony J. Cascardi, *The Subject of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 31.
[15] Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 20.
[16] Ibid., 23.
[17] Craig Calhoun, 'Social Theory and the Politics of Identity' *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* (ed.) C. Calhoun (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 12.

theorise the dissolution of the subject, one issue is central: 'Henceforth, thinking begins not with the constituting conscious subject but with the material, historical, economic (both in the Marxist and Freudian senses of the word), discursive, or linguistic structures, practices, and drives that constitute subjectivity and of which the subject is an effect.'[18] Rather than a self-grounded subject, the dissolved self is dependent on otherness - the heterogeneity of conditions that constitute its possibility - for any form of identity.

1.2: Resituating the Subject

The thrust of deconstruction and its constant negativity is to resituate the subject. This is attempted in a double move: first, the critical gesture that reveals the illusory nostalgia of unimpaired formulation of subjectivity and then, second, an emphasis on the Other whom the sovereign subject objectified and excluded. This second movement is carried out through the interrogation of various common thematics such as responsibility and difference. Consequently, subjectivity is always mediated rather than fixed and suggests our dependence on, and accountability to, those others that are pre-given.

The deprivation of grounds for certainty - whether divine or human - results in a void characterised by the dissolution of the absolute signified (God) and its privileged signifier (Man). Presence can no longer be guaranteed on the basis of divine or human self-presence and, consequently, negativity and loss are dominant motifs of the deconstructive turn. It is for this reason the 'religious' or 'theological' have become more than mere sub-texts or areas of misunderstanding as proponents of deconstruction have tackled religious questions explicitly.[19] A

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[18] Simon Critchley, 'Prolegomena to Any Post-Deconstructive Subjectivity' *Deconstructive Subjectivities* (eds) S. Critchley & P. Dews (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 26.

[19] Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Of Divine Places', *The Inoperative Community* (ed.) & trans. P. Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Jacques Derrida, 'How to Avoid Speaking: Denials'

remarkable feature of the engagement with religious themes and problems is that in considering and banishing a particular subjectivity based on a metaphysics of presence, the advocates of the dissolution of the self - Derrida and Blanchot are exemplary here - constantly mourn the absent presence of alterity:

> self-relation welcomes or supposes the other within its being-itself as different from itself. And reciprocally: the relation to the other (in itself outside myself, outside myself in myself) will never be distinguishable from a bereaved apprehension.[20]

This bereavement is a constant motif within the work of Derrida and Blanchot. In Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster*[21] and Derrida's essay 'Post-Scriptum',[22] the annihilation of the subject, the death of Man, and an apophatic theology move hand in hand. Both theorists place in close and dependent relation an 'impossible death' that eludes subjective experience and points to radical finitude and an 'unknowable divine'.[23] Death, that which it is impossible to experience - it is the ultimate limit - and a God of which nothing positive can be said - unknown and ineffable as God is - are the absent protagonists in the incessant performance of grief. Just as death is the limit that acts as the heterogeneous other to self-consciousness and self-presence, questioning and destroying its claims, so the God of negative theology, before or beyond *esse*, deconstructs the pretensions of metaphysics in the demand for constant negation. More importantly, however,

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Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory (eds) S. Budick & W. Iser (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). I use the term 'misunderstanding' here as early advocates of deconstruction were at pains to stress the distance between it and negative theology. Cf. Spivak's introduction to Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* trans. G. Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), lxxviii.

[20] Jacques Derrida, *Aporias* trans. T. Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 61.

[21] Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster* trans. A. Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

[22] Jacques Derrida, 'Post-Scriptum: Aporias, Ways, Voices' *Derrida and Negative Theology* (eds.) H. Coward & T. Foshay (New York: SUNY Press, 1992), 283-323.

[23] Cf. Thomas A. Carlson, 'The Poverty and Poetry of Indiscretion: Negative theology and Negative Anthropology in Contemporary and Historical Perspective' *Christianity and Literature* 47: 2 (1998), 169 & Thomas A. Carlson, *Indiscretion: Finitude and the Naming of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

negative theology is a seductive motif for deconstruction on the basis of its passivity. Rather than forcibly speaking for and in place of the Other and establishing an absolute, divine identity, the way of negation is responsible to those deprived of language and effectively silenced. The apophatic disrupts the closure of representation, concept and value while, in contrast, the danger of positive religion is its inherent violence.

Because of its deconstructive potential, negative theology, as the bedfellow of negative anthropology, is 'hot'.[24] Negative theology reminds us that there is always some Other prior to and before us, our utterance and our domination: 'Language has started without us, in us and before us. This is what theology calls God, and it is necessary, it will have been necessary, to speak.'[25] Unlike positive, tradition bound religion - dogma, doctrine and articles of faith - negative theology in the hands of deconstruction emphasises the impossibility of absolute certainty or truth and the provisionality of any formulation with regard to the divine. Even if, as Derrida contends, the apophatic returns to the positive, it is always as promise to be fulfilled.[26] Yet the promise is not located in any one place. It is always to be and is not yet. There is always then a disjunction between the divine promise insinuated in negative theology and the positive moment of the institution of the religious. The significance of this disjunction has been delineated in two major reconsiderations of theology that require exposition and comment. First, I will consider this disjunction in Derrida's work, its importance for an understanding of the state of theological motifs and its significance for theological anthropology in particular. Then, second, I will outline the way in which Jean-Luc Marion has transformed this disjunction into a conjunction in the bid to move beyond a theology predicated on a metaphysics of presence.

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[24] Mark C. Taylor, 'nO nOt nO' *Derrida and Negative Theology*, 176.
[25] Jacques Derrida, 'How to Avoid Speaking: Denials', 29.
[26] Ibid., 49.

1.3: Religion Without Religion

The problematic status of 'the religious' constitutes the focus of Derrida's highly provocative and penetrating essay on faith and reason.[27] It is not the divine that is the concern of Derrida in this essay; how could it be when the parameters of the discussion rest on the Kantian subtitle *la 'religion' aux limites de la simple raison*? It is undoubtedly strange that this motif, which resonates so clearly with the edification of the sovereign subject that *différance* has done so much to undermine, should inform Derrida's exploration of religion. The reason, however, is crystal clear. Religion, according to Derrida, has inevitable consequences, the effects of which can be observed everywhere but particularly in the Middle East, and even more particularly in Jerusalem. For Middle Eastern violence is nothing less than an 'unleashing of messianic eschatologies'[28], the inevitable result of the theological content of the political.[29] Derrida's political response to this violence - which *is* religio-politics - is to limit (within reason) the concept of religion, not to call for its evacuation but to reinscribe what it is that is religious.[30] Again, this is the most Kantian of gestures.[31] For here, rather than constructing an epistemological barrier that ensures (within reason) the separation of the natural and the supernatural, Derrida is inscribing a grammatological or, to be more exact, a geometrical barrier in which the figure of the religious is drawn *within* the political yet the boundaries are prevented from intersecting. Only in this way can the violent messianisms, so dependent on the fuel of religious and theological conviction, be evacuated from politics.

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[27] Jacques Derrida, 'Foi et Savoir: Les deux sources de la « religion » aux limites de la simple raison' *La Religion: Séminaire de Capri sous la direction de Jacques Derrida et Gianni Vattimo* (ed.) Thierry Marchaisse (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1996),

[28] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), 59.

[29] Although things may be more complex than Derrida thinks. Cf. David Martin, *Does Christianity Cause War?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

[30] Jacques Derrida, 'Foi et Savoir', 16-17.

[31] Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* trans. Theodore M. Green & Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper, 1960).

Let us for a moment, however, examine what constitutes the possible religious response to violence in Derrida's religio-political schema. Derrida posits, in the face of the violence of religion, the possibility of a 'religion without religion'. Taking up a long-standing reflection on the conjunction between justice and deconstruction,[32] Derrida's journey into the territory of religion sees him at pains to warn of the consequences of the fundamentalisms that abound with the adherence to positive, dogma-bound religious traditions. In place of these phenomena that engender and sustain violence, Derrida suggests that what he is proposing, as the heir (or is it prodigal son?) to a particular strain of western thought, is 'a nondogmatic doublet of dogma, a philosophical and metaphysical doublet, in any case a *thinking* that "repeats" the possibility of religion without religion.'[33] And in the same place Derrida provides us with a clue as to the content of this (albeit contentless) religion:

> The Christian themes can be seen to revolve around the *gift* as gift of death, the fathomless gift of a type of death: infinite love (the Good as goodness that infinitely forgets itself), sin and salvation, repentance and sacrifice. What engenders all these meanings and links them, internally and necessarily, is a logic that at bottom (that is why it can still, up to a certain point, be called a "logic") has no need of *the event of a revelation or the revelation of the event*. It needs to think the possibility of such an event but not the event itself. This is a major point of difference, permitting such a discourse to be developed without reference to religion as institutional dogma, and proposing a genealogy of thinking concerning the possibility and essence of the religious that doesn't amount to an article of faith.[34]

This lengthy quote helps us to pinpoint the formless composition of a 'religion without religion'. In order for the "logic" of infinite love in the face of the other, of justice, to be an impossible possibility, religion must be evacuated of its dogma, its articles of faith. Religion here is not that which exists as a particular example of a tradition but an unrevealed alterity, the ineluctable

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[32] Cf. especially, Jacques Derrida, ' Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"' *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (eds) Drucilla Cornell et al. (London: Routledge, 1992), 3-67.
[33] Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 49.
[34] Ibid.

responsibility before the other: 'Religion, it is the response. [*La religion, c'est* ***la réponse***.][35] This evacuation of theological content is a familiar Derridean move, reminiscent in so many ways of the young Heidegger's attempt to recover, through a 'destruction' of the impurity of a Christianity overlaid with Neoplatonism, the authentic factical life experience of primordial Christianity.[36] In relation to the dangerous supplement of theological content, 'the point would seem to be to liberate theology from what has been grafted on to it, to free it from its metaphysico-philosophical super-ego, so as to uncover an authenticity of the "gospel", of the evangelical message.'[37]

Derrida's engagement with religion in general and theology in particular emphasises an encounter with otherness that precedes a positive, exclusive proclamation of truth. He invalidates the drive for immediacy whether it is predicated on the basis of revelation or experience. Indeed, in stark contrast to the metaphysical or phenomenal security of dogma-bound religiosity, Derrida portrays Christianity as engendered by a love that is actualised at the limit - death. This 'logic' of sacrificial giving and the refusal of a priority in truth characterises an authentic Christianity whereas institutional forms of religion, while contaminated by this 'logic', conceal and expurgate its unspeakable challenge to violence and immediacy. However, this logic is also based on the negation of a God of metaphysics and the refusal of a subjectivity that is in some sense self-contained. Any notion of the self is, for Derrida, already inscribed with alterity and a rejection of this displacement is seen within deconstruction as an offensive illusion: 'To speak nobly of the human in man, to conceive the humanity in man, is to quickly come to a discourse that is

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[35] Jacques Derrida, 'Foi et Savoir', 39.

[36] Cf. especially, Martin Heidegger, *Augustinus und der Neoplatonismus*, *Gesamtausgabe* II. Band 60, *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens* (Frankfurt, a.M.: Klostermann, 1995), 157-299. There is also something of a Nietzschean twist here. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann & R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), § 214, (Nov. 1887 - March 1888), 125. 'They have mastered Christianity: Judaism (Paul); Platonism (Augustine); the mystery cult (doctrine of redemption, emblem of the "cross"); asceticism (- enmity toward "nature", "reason", "the senses" - the Orient -).'

[37] James Creech, et al. , 'Deconstruction in America: An Interview with Jacques Derrida' *Critical Exchange* 17 (1985), 12.

untenable and undeniably more repugnant than all the nihilist vulgarities.'[38] The logic of humanism is that of violence and exploitation and deconstruction attempts, through the alliance of negations - theological and anthropological - to resituate both discourses.

1.4: The Recuperation of Theology

A quite different combination between a negative theology and a negative anthropology is evident in Jean-Luc Marion's philosophical theology. Marion's aim is to save the deity from the charge that "God" constitutes the Being who grounds beings and, as such, is the metaphysical problem *per se*. He attempts this by reversing the logic through which theological discourse is approached: 'At issue here is not the possibility of God's attaining Being, but, quite the opposite, the possibility of Being's attaining to God.'[39] Consequently, Marion 'shoots' for God according to a name that is his most theological,[40] a name that is wholly otherwise than the one which provides the basis for the 'onto-theo-logical' constitution of metaphysics. This name that is, according to Marion, above all other names, is charity.[41] This rather imprecise name is deliberately contrasted with what Marion calls 'the extremely precise characteristics' of onto-theo-logy.[42] I shall outline these characteristics in due course, but the process of Marion's attempt to foreclose a 'postmodern questioning'[43] of the deity in relation to metaphysics is two-fold. In the first place, he quite literally distances God from the field of metaphysics and retreats to sanctuary in negative theology. This move is duplicated with regard to anthropology where the human

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[38] Maurice Blanchot, *La Nouvelle Revue Française* 179 (1967), 820-21. Quoted in Emmanuel Levinas, 'No Identity' *Collected Philosophical Papers* trans. A. Lingis (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 141-42.
[39] Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors Texte* trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), xix-xx.
[40] Ibid., xxi.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Jean-Luc Marion, 'Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-théo-logie' *Revue thomiste* 95:1 (1995), 36.
[43] Graham Ward, 'The Theological Project of Jean-Luc Marion' *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (ed.) Phillip Blond (London: Routledge, 1998), 229.

concept or thought of God is tied, by analogy, to the idol. A negative theology and a negative anthropology are intrinsically related.

In Marion's terms, the God of onto-theo-logy is an idol, a false apprehension within which 'representation, and hence knowledge, can seize hold of it.'[44] It is central to Marion's thesis that 'the icon and the idol determine two manners of being for beings, not two classes of beings.'[45] With regard to the divine, the idolatrous gesture is accomplished in the reduction of the divine to the image of the onlooker. Conceptually, as well as aesthetically, this means that 'the idol consigns the divine to the measure of a human gaze.'[46] Thus metaphysics is the labour of idolatry: 'When a philosophical thought expresses a concept of what it then names "God", this concept functions exactly as an idol.'[47] This is true, Marion continues, of both theism and atheism because in both 'the measure of the concept comes not from God but from the aim of the gaze.'[48]

As a means to the re-positioning of God in relation to the concept, Marion attempts to define God as the One who is wholly dissimilar to the God of onto-theo-logy. He is keen, therefore, to outline in the most precise terms the constitutive characteristics of this metaphysical idol. There are three elements that belong to the designation onto-theo-logic:

> First, in onto-theology, God must be explicitly conceived as part of the subject matter of metaphysics, that is to say he is arrived at through an analysis of the particular historical determinations of the Being of beings and grasped through a univocal concept. Second, God must be the efficient causal foundation (*Begründung*) of beings as their sufficient reason. Third, God as ground must assume the function and eventually the name of *causa sui*, that is to say as the

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[44] Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, 10.
[45] Ibid., 8.
[46] Ibid., 14.
[47] Ibid., 16.
[48] Ibid.

> supreme ground of being, precisely through being the supreme ground of himself.[49]

This idolatrous God, however, is not, suggests Marion, the God of Christianity. Marion is here following a Heideggerian analysis of a metaphysics of presence founded on the God whose principle function and name is *causa sui*: 'where everything that presences exhibits itself in the light of a cause-effect coherence, even God can, for representational thinking, lose all that is exalted and holy, the mysteriousness of his distance.'[50] With regard to his attempt to save God from the idolatry of metaphysical theism (and atheism), Marion's solution also follows Heidegger's lead while attempting to go beyond Heidegger's obsession with the ontological difference. 'Does not the search,' asks Marion, 'for the "more divine god" oblige one, more than to go beyond onto-theo-logy, to go beyond ontological difference as well, in short no longer to attempt to think God in view of a being, because one will have renounced, to begin with, thinking him on the basis of Being?'[51] Marion's answer to this question is to provide 'an appellation whose determination is to save God from Being, ensure that God is, as it were, absent from Being, absent as a source.'[52] This appellation, echoing Heidegger is *la distance*. Distance is an apposite term because of its refusal to reduce the divine to the conceptual gaze of beings.

> By definition and decision, God, if he must be thought, can meet no theoretical space to his measure [*mesure*], because his measure exerts itself in our eyes as an excessiveness [*démesure*]. Ontological difference itself, and hence also Being, become too limited...to pretend to offer the dimension, still less the "divine abode", where God would become thinkable.[53]

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[49] Jean-Luc Marion, 'Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-théo-logie', 36. Cf. also, Brian Shanley, O.P., 'St Thomas Aquinas, Onto-theology, and Marion' *The Thomist* 60:4 (1996), 617-625.
[50] Martin Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology' *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* trans. W. Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 26.
[51] Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, 44.
[52] David Burrell, 'Reflections on "Negative Theology" in the Light of a Recent Venture to Speak of "God Without Being"' *Postmodernism and Christian Philosophy* (ed.) R.T. Ciapalo (Mishawaka, Indiana: American Maritain Association, 1997), 59.
[53] Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, 45.

In contrast to the measure of onto-theo-logy, God is gift, pure love. This love refuses to be fixed and frozen in the concept and frees God from metaphysics.[54]

In freeing God from metaphysics, Marion theological partner is Denys the Areopagite. After Denys, Marion privileges prayer - not philosophy - as that discourse which preserves distance between the divine and the human: 'Denys tends to substitute for the *saying* of predicative language another verb, *humnein*, to praise.'[55] Praise as a *theo*logical discourse does not reveal a positive 'content' to the divine. Rather, it is a discourse which performs the distance between God and self in prayer.[56] For God is wholly otherwise than – and, therefore, not - that which is. This *via negativa* is also related to God's self: 'The humble and unthinkable authority of the father remains first and foremost that which puts at a distance Being as the icon of distance itself.'[57]

This strategy, of rejecting Being as the context within which to conceive of God, also carries with it, as is clear from my exposition, a negation of any humanistic position. The praiseful subject is privileged to receive the excessive gift of love. God so utterly exceeds human concepts and perception that a relationship to God is marked by unknowing. In this context, the self is subject to love, the gift, and all we can speak of, or consider, is the trace of the given.[58] Consequently, theological discourse is only possible within the *ecclesia* and as the result of a commission:

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[54] Cf. Ibid., 48-49.
[55] Jean-Luc Marion *L'Idole et la distance* (Paris: Grasset, 1977), 232. Cf. Thomas A. Carlson, *Indiscretion*, 197ff.
[56] Thomas A. Carlson, *Indiscretion*, 200.
[57] Jean-Luc Marion *L'Idole et la distance*, 315.
[58] Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, 105.

The rectification of the theological discourse can only result from a restoration of the tie of delegation from the bishop to the teacher, who - learned person and hermeneut - constitutes only one particular case of charismas which are worth nothing unless related to charity and the edification of the community (1 Cor. 14). The theological teacher is not justified unless he serves charity. Otherwise, he brings death. But, the more the teacher inscribes himself in the eucharistic rite opened by the bishop, the more he can become a *theo*logian.[59]

The *theo*logian must arise from the authority of the bishop and must serve nothing and no one but the Word, charity. 'The qualification,' remarks Marion, 'extrascientific but essential, that makes the *theo*logian: The referent is not taught, since it is encountered by mystical union.'[60] There is nothing that one can do or impart as *theo*logian. One somehow conveys or transmits, on the basis of a commission, the mystical union. The follower of this non-metaphysical God is a no one, a subject with no identity or character except that which is delegated.

1.5: Critical Evaluation

The undertakings of both Derrida and Marion - whose work is more expressly theological - are highly distinctive projects that weave together a negative theological movement with respect to content or metaphysics and a deliberate dissolution of the subject, a negative anthropology. As we have seen, both offer particular challenges to contemporary theological anthropology but it is my contention that both are deeply flawed. In this section, I will begin with an evaluation of Derrida's 'religion without religion' before moving to an examination of Marion's radical reversal of theological subject matter.

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[59] Ibid., 154.
[60] Ibid., 154.

1.5.1: Derrida's Nondogmatism

Given the agenda from which Derrida is working, that of the violent consequences of the political messianisms which issue from the religious imperative, his conclusions with regard to the necessary deconstruction, even transformation, of actual religions and their theologico-metaphysical 'overlay', is less than surprising. Rather than being a catalyst for change and for 'infinite love', the 'Abrahamic religions' or the 'religions of the book'[61] have carved a landscape of destruction and terror. Yet rather than work with any positive, actual aspect of religious life, Derrida retreats to concepts that are impossible to realise - responsibility being the most obvious and important. Thus the situatedness of knowledge and identity that were hallmarks of early poststructuralism have given way to a rejection of site and situation.[62] More importantly, Derrida reinforces a religious logic that 'has no need of *the event of a revelation or the revelation of the event.*'[63] In doing so he takes religious life out of a public context where human beings might be engaged in an exchange of meanings which articulate the principles of action. Consequently, what counts as religious is at variance with an ecclesiology - a process of being with others - and there cannot but be a loss of a sense of our relations with others. The limit - the impossible - is now relocated to the centre of theological exploration and there is no other situation circumscribed, however provisional, for the practice and negotiation of *religio*. In casting the sacred to the vague and nebulous region that marks the perimeter of thought and experience, Derrida may well be inviting the cessation of violence predicated on religion. Nevertheless he is also reinscribing religion as a phenomenon that was formally exteriorised by Kant and which ultimately became the

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[61] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 59.

[62] It is in relation to the dissolution of the subject that we can see how his thinking has undergone something of a transformation over two decades or more. It was his contention in 1966 that 'I don't destroy the subject. I situate it. ... It is a question of knowing where it comes from and how it functions.' Derrida's remarks can be found in the 'Discussion' of 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy* (eds) Richard Macksey & Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 270. In a much more recent interview, however, Derrida avers that it is responsibility that is aimed at in the deconstruction of the subject. Cf. ' "Eating Well," or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida', *Who Comes after the Subject?*, (eds) E. Cadava, P. Connor & J-L. Nancy, (London: Routledge, 1991), 100.

[63] Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 49.

captivating and seductive other to bourgeoise Victorian sensibility and was safely demarcated as the shocking 'outside'.[64]

Yet there is another feature of the Derridean treatment of religion that is even more offensive than, although a concomitant of, the rejection of site and situation. This characteristic is, I believe, a major failing of deconstruction and relates to the politics of the postmodern. The best way to consider this issue is by asking: what is this thing called deconstruction?

In order to (at least partially) answer this question, I would like to examine Walter Benjamin's fragment on 'Capitalism as Religion', written in 1921 but unpublished in his lifetime.[65] Here, Benjamin offers an uncompromising analysis of the logic of capitalism, a phenomenon which 'serves essentially to allay the same anxieties, torment, and disturbances to which the so-called religions offered answers.'[66] Benjamin offers three distinctive characteristics intrinsic to this religiosity that 'may be discerned in capitalism'[67]: the purely cultic nature of this religion, the permanence of this cult, and the pervasive nature of guilt engendered by the purely cultic form of capital. Capitalism as pure cult implies that 'things only have a meaning in their relationship to the cult; capitalism has no specific dogma, no theology.'[68] In other words, capitalism is *the* religion devoid of any content. Moreover, in relation to Benjamin's second point, capitalism 'is the celebration of a cult *sans rêve et sans merci*_[without dream or mercy].'[69] It is the impalpable nature of capital, its status as unqualified system that yields both its success

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[64] Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* trans. Daniel Heller Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 75-80.
[65] Walter Benjamin, 'Capitalism as Religion', *Selected Writings: Volume 1: 1913-1926* (eds) Marcus Bullock & Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1996), 288-291.
[66] Ibid., 288.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.

and its consequence - guilt. This third distinguishing mark of capitalism as religion has, in its wake, even engulfed God:

> A vast sense of guilt that is unable to find relief seizes on the cult, not to atone for this guilt but to make it universal, to hammer it into the conscious mind, so as once and for all to include God in the system of guilt and thereby awaken in Him an interest in the process of atonement. This atonement cannot then be expected from the cult itself, or from the reformation of this religion (which would need to be able to have recourse to some stable element in it), or even from the complete renouncement of this religion.[70]

God is no longer transcendent, nor the possible point of reference for an authentic form of existence - God is inscribed and incarcerated within the immanent demands of guilt. 'God's transcendence is at an end. But he is not dead; he has been incorporated into human existence.'[71] Is this the narrative that subsumes and silences Derrida's '*réponse*'? This contentless religion, because it is dogmatically barren and uninhabited by articles of faith, cannot be deconstructed. Of course, if capital is seen solely in terms of fiscal actuality and commensurability, the ultimate presence of the measure of value, then it is urgently in need of deconstruction because of its pretensions to divinity. In Georg Simmel's terms,

> The essence of the notion of God is that all diversities and contradictions in the world achieve a unity in him, that he is - according to a beautiful formulation of Nicholas de Cusa - the *coincidentia oppositorum*. Out of this idea, that in him all estrangements and all irreconcilables find their unity and equalization, there arises the peace, the security, the all-embracing wealth of feeling that reverberate with the notion of God which we hold. There is no doubt that, in their realm, the feelings that money excites possess a psychological similarity with this. In so far as money becomes the absolutely commensurate expression of all values, it rises to abstract heights way above the whole broad diversity of objects.[72]

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[70] Ibid., 288-289.
[71] Ibid., 289.
[72] Georg Simmel *The Philosophy of Money* trans. Tom Bottomore & David Frisby (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 236.

What Benjamin proposes, however, is a religion in which measure [*mesure*] is not something that stands to be so thoroughly comprehended or grasped but is an excessiveness [*demesure*] in which the human being is located (in fact, dis-located) in the context of the 'absolute loneliness of his trajectory.'[73]

This leads us to a second important feature of 'capital' religiosity. Benjamin suggests that while (following Weber) one can reiterate the fact that capitalism's development was parasitic upon Christianity, a point has been reached 'where Christianity's history is essentially that of its parasite - that is to say, of capitalism.'[74] The logic of infinite love is always indebted to the restrictive benevolence of *Schuld* - guilt and debt.[75] The barometer of the possible is the level of anxiety that is inculcated by capitalist religiosity: '"Worries" are the index of the sense of guilt induced by a despair that is communal, not individual and material, in origin.'[76] And then comes Benjamin's warning. 'Capitalism is entirely without precedent, in that it is a religion which offers not the reform of existence but its complete destruction.'[77] Despair is the fulfilment of religion as capital, its *telos* which has no end, no goal: capitalism is the religion of nihilism, of mourning without end.[78] Desire can never be sated, only produced and reproduced in the empty promise of fulfilment. In other words, desire is a lack which is 'created, planned and organized' by capital.[79]

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[73] Walter Benjamin, 'Capitalism as Religion', 289.
[74] Ibid. Benjamin actually argues against Weber and Troeltsch in that he maintains what Howard Caygill calls 'a more radical thesis': 'The Christianity of the Reformation period did not favour the development of capitalism, but transformed itself into capitalism.' 'Capitalism as Religion', 290. Cf. Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London: Routledge, 1998), 56.
[75] Ibid. As the translator's note (on p. 291) suggests, *Schuld* denotes both guilt and debt.
[76] Ibid., 290.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Caygill calls Benjamin's study of the Baroque *Trauerspiel, Origin of the German Mourning Play* trans. J. Osborne (London: Verso, 1977), an analysis of 'the culture of nascent capitalism.' Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*, 57.
[79] Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* trans. R. Hurley et al (London: Athlone, 1983), 28.

How does one negotiate between the incommensurable narratives of love in the face of the other, that is, justice which cannot be deconstructed, and the religion of despair that cannot be deconstructed - because there is no content? The answer in short is that one cannot. There is no between, no possible site of negotiation; what Gillian Rose would call 'the broken middle'.[80] Indeed, Rose's reflection on Derrida's dismantling of Marxism is equally relevant to his discussion of religion. It is her contention that Marxism's 'vital spirit, its anima, has been thoroughly etherialised and floats in a heaven of archi-original Messianic justice.'[81] This, moreover, is the character of a 'religion without religion'. In the nineteen twenties Benjamin was already outlining the destruction that accompanies capitalism and its capacity for what Deleuze and Guattari were to call, some fifty years later, 'deterritorialization' - the destruction of site and situation. Yet it must be said that Derrida did not always eschew situatedness. It is in relation to the dissolution of the subject that we can see how his thinking has undergone something of a transformation over two decades or more. It was his contention in 1966 that 'I don't destroy the subject. I situate it. ... It is a question of knowing where it comes from and how it functions.'[82] In a much more recent interview, however, Derrida avers that it is responsibility that is aimed at in the deconstruction of the subject[83] This transformation exhibits both Derrida's deterritorialization of the subject and his complicity with the non-dogma of capital in his flight from the world and the hard labour of love that is the focus of articles of faith.

As a counterpoint to this (non)concept of religion, within the dogmatic content (always subject to deconstruction) of the Abrahamic religions there lies the centrality of the bodily

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[80] Gillian Rose, *The Broken Middle: Out of our Ancient Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).
[81] Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 66.
[82] Cf. 'Discussion' of 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, 270. Cf. footnote 62 above.
[83] ' "Eating Well," or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida', *Who Comes after the Subject?*, (eds) E. Cadava, P. Connor & J-L. Nancy, (London: Routledge, 1991), 100.

physicality of redemption, of resurrection[84], a resurrection according to the law or the tradition that requires negotiation. This 'content' is of course highly problematic but 'if all human law is sheer violence, if there is no positive or symbolic law to be acknowledged ... then there can be *no work*, no exploring of the legacy of ambivalence.'[85] The point is that if, as Derrida seems to be suggesting, one evacuates the content of religion, politics and law then there is no voyage of discovery even if, as is necessary, it is one of contestation and tension.

All of this seems to be intensely foreboding and gloomy. However, if one considers Benjamin's reflection in a similar spirit to that of the ambivalence proposed by Rose then the possibility is that one's perspective changes. Take, for example, Benjamin's celebrated 'Theses on the Philosophy of History',[86] where the seemingly pessimistic tenor might be construed as the inevitable result of the 'unremitting gloom' of Benjamin's context.[87] If, however, the Theses are understood as coming from a perspective in which '*All* of history appears as wreckage from the standpoint of redemption.'[88] then matters look significantly different. And it is the weight and consequence of this viewpoint that the articles of faith of the 'religions of the book' attempt, all too poorly, to (re)read. That is why these (dogmatic) commentaries as well as narrations have never ceased. The attempt to comprehend such a significance is an enduring hermeneutical exercise comparable to the 'inexhaustible' Abrahamic promise: it cannot be immediately realised but is always to come and as such 'it opens up a history in which this promise can be repeated and reinterpreted over and over again.'[89] As a counterpoint to this physicality, the obsession with and

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[84] Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 66.
[85] Ibid., 69.
[86] Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1973), 245-255.
[87] The Theses were completed in the Spring of 1940.
[88] Peter Osborne, 'Small-scale Victories, Large-scale Defeats: Walter Benjamin's Politics of Time', *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience* (eds) Andrew Benjamin & Peter Osborne (London: Routledge, 1994), 91.
[89] The quote comes from Paul Ricoeur. Cf. Richard Kearney, 'Interview with Paul Ricoeur', *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 26.

celebration of limits drives action - religious, political and legal - into an ethereal wasteland. 'There can,' as Gillian Rose correctly claims, 'be *no work*, no exploring of the legacy of ambivalence, working through the contradictory emotions aroused by bereavement.'[90] To act is delegitimated, and in this celebration of negative anthropology and negative theology politics, law and religion are but components in a 'baroque melancholia immersed in the world of soulless and unredeemed bodies.'[91] Such a melancholic stance is inevitable in the context of Derrida's consideration of religion. He presents an insistent but unresolved dialectic between what Michael Dillon has called 'Another Justice'[92] and an impotent resignation before contemporary religio-political reality. What is required by theological anthropology is an analysis of subjectivity that takes seriously the existential conditions within which a bodily religious, economic and juridico-political life is lived. Derrida's resituating of the subject, as I have demonstrated, fails on this count. With his rejection of the empirical form and status of positive religion, Derrida's concern is with a negative, or more properly a negation, of theology. He is only concerned with delineating a religious life that stands at the limits of his (neo-Kantian) geometrical barrier. Jean-Luc Marion, in contrast, is primarily concerned with the distant side of this barrier where the deity resides unimpaired by, and disinterested in, creation. To his project I will now return.

1.5.2: Marion's Dogmatism

As I have pointed out elsewhere,[93] Marion's thesis is highly problematic. While his aim is thoroughly commendable - to save God from the clutches of onto-theo-logy - and his approach daring, Marion moves toward an 'uncritical dogmatism'[94] that has substantial, unsavoury implications for theological anthropology. Here I will concentrate on two areas in which his

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[90] Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 70.
[91] Ibid., 69.
[92] Michael Dillon, 'Another Justice' *Political Theory* 27:2 (1999), 155-175.
[93] Paul Fletcher, 'Writing of(f) Victims: hors texte' *New Blackfriars* Vol 78 No 916 (June 1997), 267-278.
[94] Graham Ward, 'The Theological Project of Jean-Luc Marion', 229.

undertaking is fatally flawed: first, in relation to Marion's theoretical claims and, second, in relation to the practical repercussions of his ecclesiology.

First, then, in his attempt to resituate theological discourse in the sphere of charity rather than that of metaphysics, Marion effectively destroys one part of the divine/human relationship. God is unknown and all that human beings can hope for is the trace of God's absent and distant gift. However, rather than secure the distinctive and exceptional character of God, Marion runs the risk, as Jean-Luc Nancy points out, of formulating a more radical anthropologization:

> far from being rediscovered, God disappears even more surely and definitely through bearing all the names of a generalized and multiplied difference. Monotheism dissolves into polyatheism, and it is no good asserting that this polyatheism is the true word and the true presence of God in his distance from the supreme Being of metaphysics. For the infinitely absent god, or the god infinitely distended by the infinite distance of god, should no longer be termed "God", nor be presented in any way as "God" or as divine. Try as it may, there is no theology that does not turn out here to be either ontological or anthropological - saying *nothing about the god* that cannot immediately be said about "event", about "love", about "poetry".[95]

Paradoxically, while it seems that God may well be saved from onto-theo-logy, he is in fact dissolved into mediocrity and – ironically - shares the status of any entity (being) that exceeds definition or that is characterised by an inability to provide an adequate explication. In terms of this inadequacy, the world, surely the only context from which the gift can in any way be understood and celebrated, is rendered inconsequential and the human pole of the divine/human relationship is made virtually redundant. As John Milbank puts it, Marion's loving God as 'pure gesture, empty and disinterested' is in fact an offensive God:

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[95] Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Of Divine Places', 113.

> just as Marion's gift is in this aspect a hypostasization of a modern, free, post-Cartesian, capitalist and 'pure' gift, and thereby indifferent to content, so it is also (as a concomitant) relatively indifferent to counter-gift or to relation and reciprocity.[96]

The most human beings can hope for is that 'what such a One does do, in freely calling forth all-that-is, is to inscribe in those who can recognize their existence for the gift it is, an impulse to return it.'[97] Marion's concern, however, is entirely with the category of gift and he has no interest in, nor concern for, what it is that is given. As such, his theology rejects the materiality and carnality of the gift and the struggles and trials of responding to the gift. The absolute commitment to an apophaticism establishes theology in the realm of the ethereal where nothing positive or constructive can be uttered or performed in relation to the content and significance of the gift.

The second issue that Marion's work raises concerns his ecclesiology. While his debt to Denys the Areopagite is often acknowledged, the more detailed and nuanced relationship between Denys's various works is not. When, for example, Marion expounds the unique and distinguished role of the bishop in his ecclesiology, he refrains from revealing the significance of the bishop in Denys's *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*. The Word, in Marion's terms, can only be disclosed on the basis of a 'tie of delegation from, bishop to teacher.'[98] This mirrors Denys's contention that

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[96] John Milbank, 'Can a Gift be Given?: Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic' *Modern Theology* 11:1 (1995), 134.
[97] David Burrell, 'Reflections on "Negative Theology" in the Light of a Recent Venture to Speak of "God Without Being"', 60.
[98] Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, 154.

> the divine order of the hierarchs [i.e., the bishops] is the first of the orders which see God, but it is also the highest and last, for in it are perfected and fulfilled all the ordering of our hierarchy .... The power of the hierarch order pervades all the sacred totalities, and through all the sacred order effects the mysteries of its own hierarchy.[99]

There is no activity within the Church that stands apart from the bishop's office. The mediation of grace is effected through the intermediary who contains and manifests the higher orders. One cannot, in consequence, experience or encounter the gift of grace apart from this intermediary. In the terms of Denys's Neoplatonism this is wholly acceptable and, indeed, the Areopagite constructs an spectacular participative edifice. However, in a (post)modern context, the straightforward transposition of these hierarchies seems to be thoroughly anachronistic. There is a wholesale ignorance and rejection in Marion's work of two important facts. First, that the context within which Christians live at the end of the twentieth century demands an engagement with, if not an uncritical commitment to, the desiring economy of late-capitalism and the emancipatory discourses of modernity. The example of Henri de Lubac is notable here. It was important for de Lubac that 'the Christian's watchword can no longer be "escape" but "collaboration". He must co-operate with God and men in God's work in the world and among humanity.'[100] In contrast to Marion's obsession with securing the integrity and purity of the gift, de Lubac's understanding of grace was more nuanced: 'All grace is *gratia gratis data*, that is, in the old meaning of the expression, given for the sake of others.'[101] The content of the gift and the outward mission of the Church are just as momentous as the gift itself and its status.

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[99] Denys the Areopagite, *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia* in *Corpus Dionysiacum II*, 5.1.5.107 (505AB) (ed.) G. Heil & A. Martin Ritter (Berlin: 1991). Quoted in Eric Perl, 'Hierarchy and Participation in Dionysius the Areopagite and Greek Neoplatonism' *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 68:1 (1994), 21-22.
[100] Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: A Study of Dogma in Relation to the Corporate Destiny of Mankind* trans. L.C. Sheppard (London: Burns & Oates, 1950), 120.
[101] Ibid.

There is, furthermore, a second major implication concealed within the logic of Marion's ecclesiastical hierarchy. Violent exclusion is the cost of a nostalgic return to an inflexible ecclesiology:

> If we start yearning nostalgically, especially these days, for a revitalised 'symbolic order', we should have no illusions. Such an order once existed, but it was composed of ferocious hierarchies; the transparency of signs goes hand in hand with their cruelty.[102]

The cruel logic of this hierarchy also displaces and supplants the logic of *la distance*. There is an evacuation of the distance between God and Being - an overcoming of infinite space - in the figure of the bishop. As John Caputo argues, this singular location of the mediation of grace is marked by absolute power.[103] In the place of a theological anthropology, stripped of any significance in his negative anthropology, Marion has created a meta-subject, the Church whose *subjectum* is a faculty or figure known as the bishop. However, this meta-subject is even more sovereign and disengaged than the most self-certain subject of modern European philosophy. In the name of the pure gift, Marion has given birth to Frankenstein's monster. And this monster is dismissive of any experience and narration of grace that exceeds the bounds of his episcopal office. As Gerard Loughlin, in a different context, reminds us

> It is also important to remember that the founding stories of the Christian tradition are rendered narratable not only by doctrinal 'schemas' or narratives, but also as contextual (e.g. liberationist) theologies remind us - by the lives (autobiographies) of the interpreters themselves, just as they are by the gospel stories, in a complex process of internarrativity.[104]

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[102] Jean Baudrillard, 'Symbolic Exchange and Death' *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings* (ed.) Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 136.
[103] John D. Caputo, 'How to Avoid Speaking of God: the Violence of Natural Theology' *Prospects for Natural Theology* (ed.) Eugene Long (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 130.
[104] Gerard Loughlin, 'Christianity at the End of the Story or the Return of the Master-Narrative' *Modern Theology* 8:4 (1992), 378.

This 'complex process' is compressed under the authority of the solitary figure or censor who regulates the content and narration of the tradition as a figure of divinely-produced totality.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have approached the postmodern resituation of the subject from and through three directions. In the first place I considered the fate of the modern subject whose ruin has been intrinsically linked to the death of God. Here, one metaphysical foundation (the Divine) was conquered and displaced (so the narrative goes) by another (Man). Yet the sceptical disease that saw to the death of one foundational entity proved even too powerful for its new master. Consequently, the heterogeneous elements that were excluded within unified theories of identity are seen, in the wake of God and Man, to engender and constitute the self. The Other, death, finitude and responsibility are inscribed in the flesh and spirit of any self in the fluid context that arises after the *post-mortem* of the divine.

Second, I then moved to a reflection on two ways in which these contemporary thematics are embraced in postmodern thought. The point of departure for this section of the chapter was Jacques Derrida's 'religion without religion'. Derrida repositions the self and religion in a surprisingly similar manner. Both are stripped of the metaphysical and theological overlay and are resituated as modes, examples and instantiations of response. They are moments of dynamic gift-giving that refuse termination and decision but are characterised as liminal generosity. Rather than generating exclusion and violence, this different self - and selves who are religious (without being religious) - welcomes rather than denies the human plurality that Derrida perceives as essential to a just being-in common. As a counterpoint to Derrida's evacuation of the theologico-metaphysical from the religious and the subject, I turned to Jean-Luc Marion's attempt to

revitalise philosophical theology through his reading of the non-metaphysical God of negative theology. Marion attempts to save God from the clutches of onto-theo-logy and thus to recover the integrity of God as God rather than as a conceptual idol who is implicated in Being. This quest of the non-metaphysical God leads Marion to revision the Church as a eucharistic community within which grace is mediated by the bishop who stands as the *theo*logian par excellence.

My third and final move in this chapter was to critically evaluate the work of both Derrida and Marion. Derrida's work, although challenging to theological reflection in that it questions the foundation and presuppositions of its discourse, was, I argued, ultimately deeply flawed. Because of the tendency for deconstruction to take over and reside at the theoretical boundaries, deconstruction tends to eschew the concrete and the rooted. Consequently, I suggested that while Derrida wants, quite rightly, to move beyond the modern obsession with secure foundations, his alternative does not respond in any meaningful way to the critique of modernity by Adorno and Horkheimer in which 'reason itself has become the mere instrument of the all-inclusive economic apparatus.'[105] It was my contention that what we might call the embrace of un-reason terminates in the victory of late-capital. Walter Benjamin's salient prophecy that summarised the status of capital as a perfect, cult-free religion was juxtaposed with Derrida's 'religion without religion' to show the hazard of positing a non-negotiated, unadulterated religious life as a means through which human beings might move beyond the religio-politics - the violence - of positive religion. I then moved to Jean-Luc Marion's revisioning of negative theology and questioned the status of the God of whom nothing (but charity) can be said. After Nancy I claimed that the recourse to a nebulous understanding of a divine characterised by absolute distance terminates in a renewed anthropomorphization of God and also a refusal to take the gift of created being seriously.

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[105] Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* trans. J. Cumming (London: Verso, 1979), 30.

Furthermore, it is evident, I argued, that Marion's negative anthropology dissolves the modern subject but, in its places, asserts a meta-subject, the church, whose authority in terms of the mediation of grace creates an exclusivist agenda.

In response to these projects that purport to resituate the self, there is, however, another strand of contemporary anthropological discourse that believes it transcends the problems and difficulties of the fragmentation of the self celebrated in deconstruction. This second attempt to manage the fracturing of the narratives through which human self-understanding is formed and transmitted corresponds with Wim Wenders' endeavour to reconstruct subjectivity through mutuality and communality - the reconstitution of the subject. This is the project I will delineate and discuss in Chapter Two.

Chapter Two:
Reconstituting Subjectivity

Introduction

In the last chapter I outlined and scrutinised the two very different attempts to resituate the subject that are presented in the postmodern enterprises of Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion. Their fragmentation, indeed dissolution, of the self was examined on the basis that it constituted one element of Wim Wenders' rather confused bid to resolve the problem of subjectivity in *Der Himmel über Berlin*. The second approach of Wenders, which I have termed the reconstitution of the self, is also evident in contemporary theoretical reflection on the crisis of subjectivity. Although the terms of this conceptual engagement are dissimilar to Wenders' turn to the sentimentalism of Romanticism, the desire for an intersubjective foundation to the self is apparent in both these theoretical and cinematic explorations. As with the last chapter, I will expose the philosophical and theological reconstitution of the self in two movements. First, I will outline the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas and his important response to the fragmentation of the self. Second, as a counterpart to his project, I will also summarise the theological anthropology of Alistair McFadyen that is fundamentally dependent on the work of Habermas. In order to demonstrate that McFadyen is representative of a particular strand of theological approaches to the

self, however, I will also refer to the theology of Colin Gunton, Anthony Thiselton and Wolfhart Pannenberg. Gunton and Thiselton, in particular, share a commitment to a conception of relationality that is outlined, although more rigorously pursued, by McFadyen. The particular significance of the work of the former, however, lies in the more explicit association of this relationality with a doctrine of the divine (intersubjective) life of the trinity. As this study is primarily concerned with theological anthropology, this conjunction cannot be ignored and, consequently, I will briefly considered the main tenets of this model of theological anthropology. I will then, finally, evaluate both these philosophical and theological movements in the light of the theoretical and empirical contexts within which subjectivity must be considered. Prior to the theological and critical elements of this chapter, however, I must turn to the reconstitution of the self in Habermas's critical-theoretical enterprise.

2.1: Discourses of Modernity and Postmodernity

As a major figure of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, Jürgen Habermas has sought to formulate a response to the political and socio-economic circumstances of late-modernity that remains faithful to the previous generation of the school but which bears his own distinctive imprint. The continuing commitment to *praxis* - the bringing together of theory and practice in a neo-Marxist analysis of politics - is where Habermas can be seen to follow in the footsteps of Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm and, although he was only loosely affiliated with the school (out of financial need as much as any theoretical alliance), Walter Benjamin. Like his predecessors, Habermas is concerned with delineating a critical theory of society in the context of the forms of life that pertain to 'modernity'. The originality of Habermas's work is evident in his development of a theory of communicative rationality that is critical both of what I referred to in the last chapter as a modern self constituted on the basis of consciousness (and its inclination towards instrumental reason) *and* what he refers

to as the postmodern 'irrational' self: 'To instrumental reason they juxtapose in Manichean fashion a principle only accessible through evocation, be it will to power or sovereignty, Being or the Dionysiac force of the poetical. In France this line leads from Georges Bataille via Michel Foucault to Jacques Derrida.'[1]

Habermas is, then, is no advocate of the dissolution of the self. Insofar as he understands the contemporary standing of mass communication in western societies to be baleful, however, he perceives the timeliness and the appeal of deconstruction. 'Derrida and a capering deconstructivism', he argues, 'give the only appropriate answer to the surrealism of "de-differentiated", "de-reified" mass culture.'[2] The reason for this ambivalent stance on the modernity-postmodernity debate is that while Habermas is very much a champion of the Enlightenment, his work attempts to place the socialising, intersubjective elements of reason in the socio-political foreground and resituate the 'instrumental' or 'strategic' reason of Bacon and Hobbes (respectively) in the background of contemporary socio-political discourse.[3] Not least, Habermas's attempt to chart an uneasy passage between these two philosophical *bêtes noires* - the 'irrationalism' of deconstruction and the 'instrumental' reason of modernity - is due to his desire for political engagement. Consequently, his more constructive task is to establish normative evaluations by which individuals might be bound in the public sphere and through which non-coercive, rational dialogue might proceed.[4]

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[1] Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity - An Incomplete Project' *Postmodern Culture* (ed.) H. Foster (London: Pluto Press, 1985), 14.
[2] Jürgen Habermas, 'A philosophico-political profile' *New Left Review* 151 (1985), 97.
[3] Robert B. Pippin, 'Hegel, Modernity, and Habermas' *The Monist* 74:3 (1991), 343.
[4] Jürgen Habermas, 'Postscript to *Knowledge and Human Interests*' *Philosophy of Social Sciences* 3 (1973), 169.

In taking as his starting point the need for a proper and adequate theory of communicative reason, Habermas is already positioned as a critic of the modern subject of consciousness. As with the proponents of deconstruction, Habermas believes that a concept of reason unconditionally grounded in the consciousness of the individual subject leads to 'a structurally overloaded subject (a finite subject transcending itself into the infinite).'[5] The crisis of subjectivity is, for Habermas, a symptom of the modern inability to negotiate the distinct validity claims associated with differentiated and heteronomous life spheres. In other words, the monologic of modernity does not allow for, nor take account of, the different rationalities and validities operative in the realms of 'purposive rationality' (science) and 'communicative rationality' (discourse ethics). Yet Habermas contends that the reassessment of modernity, while requiring a rejection of 'pure transcendentalism', ought not lead us to the rejection of normative notions and ideals in an orgy of 'pure historicism'.[6] What is required is a completion of the unfinished project of modernity.

Habermas sees modernity as a two-edged sword and, following Adorno and Horkheimer, acknowledges the sombre even hellish nature of the 'dialectic of enlightenment'. Adorno and Horkheimer in an unremittingly gloomy assessment of modernity argued that 'reason itself has become the mere instrument of the all-inclusive economic apparatus.'[7] This purposive-rational reason has flourished in the modern west to the point that its predominance is hegemonic. Notwithstanding the pessimism of his forebears in the Frankfurt school, and with a nod in Weber's direction, Habermas openly celebrates the progress that has been made through the development and utilisation of this dominant form of rationality:

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[5] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* trans. F. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 261.
[6] Jürgen Habermas, 'Questions and Counterquestions' *Habermas and Modernity* (ed.) R. Bernstein (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 193.
[7] Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* trans. J. Cumming (London: Verso, 1979), 30.

> The list of original achievements of Western rationalism is long. Weber points first to modern natural science, which puts theoretical knowledge in mathematical form and tests it with the help of controlled experiments; he adds to this the systematic specialization of scientific activity in university settings. He mentions ... the institutionalization of art ... harmonious music ... scientific jurisprudence, institutions of formal law ... modern state administration ... calculable commerce.[8]

These achievements have been procured by the success of calculative and purposive rationality. Nevertheless, Habermas, as I have shown, is equally aware of the cost of an over dependence on one type of rationality. Addressing the ambiguity of the enlightenment, he attempts to move beyond this version of total rationalisation which Lukács perceived as leaving nothing but the spirit of the basest calculation and the rule of capital.[9] The desire for an alternative is grounded in the realisation that the rationality predicated on the self-conscious subject ultimately annihilates that same subject: 'Man's domination over himself, which grounds his selfhood, is virtually always the destruction of the subject in whose service it takes place.'[10] As a counter-narrative to this underbelly of the enlightenment, Habermas wishes to show that purposive rationality is not the only kind of rationality. He augments instrumental reason, which cannot be *owned* in the social, moral and aesthetic spheres, with the construction of a theory of communicative rationality. This theoretical perspective 'reconstructs the ways in which everyday practices of communication already embody implicit and unavoidable appeals to reason.'[11]

This other, communicative, reason requires explication because it has been expurgated through the imposition of 'a transformation of domains of communicative action into subsystems

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[8] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society* trans. T. McCarthy (London: Heinemann, 1984), 157.
[9] Ibid., 371-72.
[10] Ibid., 380.
[11] Robert B. Pippin, 'Hegel, Modernity, and Habermas', 344.

of purposive-rational action.'[12] The alternative form of rationality delineated by Habermas, connected to human interaction, continues the project of the enlightenment in that its point of departure is the subject - but the self is defined in the midst of the teleological character of communication. Habermas claims that

> the human interest in autonomy and responsibility [*Mündigkeit*] is not mere fancy, for it can be apprehended a priori. What raises us out of nature is the only thing whose nature we can know: *language*. Through its structure autonomy and responsibility are posited for us. Our first sentence expresses unequivocally the intention of universal and unconstrained consensus.[13]

Through his analysis of the status of subjects with regard to their linguistic activity, Habermas wants to locate 'the cognitive-instrumental aspect of reason in its proper place as part of a more encompassing communicative rationality.'[14] In this way, the enlightenment project can be brought to its proper and hope-ful conclusion.

2.2: Ideal Speech and Intersubjectivity

The principle of reason that Habermas constructs takes his project, he believes, beyond a notion of reason that is fundamentally transcendental and out of the relativistic clutches of a radical historicisation of reason - both fundamentally flawed alternatives 'that have bedevilled the post-Kantian' philosophical tradition.[15] Instead, communicative reason is embodied in language. Habermas argues that all speech acts necessarily raise questions of truth, rightness and appropriateness.[16] William Outhwaite nicely summarises Habermas's *via media* in his suggestion

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[12] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One*, 339.
[13] Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* trans. J. Shapiro (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), 314.
[14] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One*, 390.
[15] Robert B. Pippin, 'Hegel, Modernity, and Habermas', 343.
[16] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One*, 39.

that speech acts 'presuppose four validity claims: that what we say is comprehensible, that it is true, that it is right, i.e. that there is a normative basis for the utterance, and that it is a sincere (*wahrhaftig*) expression of the speaker's feelings.'[17] To engage in acts of linguistic communication is, ultimately, to at least agree with these rational standards as possibilities through which the speech act might be judged. Even fallacious and deceitful speech acts enter into the bounds of communicative reason:

> Habermas regards "strategic" forms of communication (such as lying, misleading, deceiving, manipulating, and the like) as derivative; since they involve the suspension of certain validity claims (especially truthfulness), they are parasitic on speech oriented to genuine understanding.[18]

In the light of his understanding of the nature of speech acts, one can see why Habermas terms communicative rationality 'quasi-transcendental'. He is concerned, on the one hand, with the linguistic embodiment of subjects and the 'logical structures that materialize under empirical conditions' for a 'naturally generated and socially formed subject.'[19] On the other hand, the claims raised by *all* speech acts, and therefore to be understood as essentially universal, indicate that his theory 'like the transcendental logic of an earlier period, seeks a solution to the problem of the a priori conditions of possible knowledge.'[20] In outlining a quasi-transcendental principle of reason, Habermas is preserving regulative standards of reason from a territory that is both internal to reason and also above its particular uses as a critical norm.

In the context of a quasi-transcendental principle of reason and its universal pretensions, Habermas fashions his most well-known, if not celebrated, concept - the 'ideal speech situation'.

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[17] William Outhwaite, *Habermas: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 40.
[18] Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 287.
[19] Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 94-95.
[20] Ibid., 194.

Habermas's goal is to delineate the formal ramifications of his reinterpretation of reason so that mutuality and intersubjectivity are attained in a non-coercive context that functions as a regulative force on all speech acts. Even if, as Habermas concedes, this is but an ideal, it is contained within any example of communicative interaction.

> The concept of communicative rationality carries with it connotations based ultimately on the central experience of the unconstrained, unifying, consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech, in which different participants overcome their merely subjective views and, owing to the mutuality of rationally motivated conviction, assure themselves of both the unity of the objective world and the intersubjectivity of their lifeworld.[21]

Although ideal, Habermas is convinced that he is not indiscriminately imposing a transcendental condition on linguistic activity. On the contrary, it is an essential supposition that must be made if discourse and argument are to offer full and unconstrained participation. In a lengthy quote Habermas explicitly brings the ideal speech situation into the context of his quasi-transcendental theory of rationality and, moreover, defends its effective role in speech acts:

> The ideal speech situation is neither an empirical phenomenon nor a mere construct, but rather an unavoidable supposition reciprocally made in discourse. This supposition can, but need not be, counterfactual; but even if it is made counterfactually, it is a fiction that is operatively effective in the process of communication. Therefore I prefer to speak of an anticipation of an ideal speech situation. ... The normative foundation of agreement in language is thus both anticipated and - as an anticipated foundation - also effective. ... To this extent the concept of the ideal speech situation is not merely a regulative principle in Kant's sense; with the first step toward agreement in language we must always in fact make this supposition. On the other hand, neither is it an existing concept in Hegel's sense; for no historical reality matches the form of life that we can in principle characterise by reference to the ideal speech situation. The ideal speech situation would best be compared with a transcendental illusion were it not for the fact that ... [in contrast to] the application of the categories of the understanding beyond experience, this illusion is also the constitutive condition of rational speech. The anticipation of the ideal speech situation has ... the significance of a constitutive illusion which is at the same time the appearance of a form of life. Of course, we cannot know a priori whether that appearance [*Vorschein*] is a mere

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[21] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One*, 10.

> delusion [*Vorspiegelung*] - however unavoidable the suppositions from which it springs - or whether the empirical conditions for the realisation (if only approximate) of the supposed form of life can practically be brought about.[22]

Whether or not the conditions are such that an ideal speech situation is actualised, it is implied as a quasi-transcendental condition of participative discourse. It provides a universal basis upon which to argue through and beyond cross-cultural and transhistorical boundaries. Subjects are bound by their common linguistic condition and are, therefore, constituted intersubjectively.

For all the idealism of his position, Habermas argues that if an ideal speech situation is to be a concrete reality - where the participants are 'motivated solely by the desire to reach a consensus about the truth of statements and the validity of norms'[23] - then the participants must also have what he terms 'communicative competence'. Here the actual linguistic performance, the pragmatic use of language in concrete situations, is open to a universal, rational reconstruction in a manner that bears similarities to a linguistic analysis of the various components of language.

> The assumption is that communicative competence has just as universal a core as linguistic competence. A general theory of speech acts would thus describe exactly that system of rules that adult speakers master insofar as they can satisfy the conditions for a happy employment of sentences in utterances - no matter to which particular language the sentences belong and in which accidental contexts the utterances are embedded.[24]

This theory of communicative competence and its bed-fellow, a theory of communicative rationality, uncover 'the universal infrastructure of sociocultural life.'[25] On the basis of these

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[22] Jürgen Habermas, 'Wahrheitstheorien' *Wirklichkeit und Reflexion: Fetschrift für Walter Schulz* (ed.) H. Fahrenback (Pfullingen: Neske, 1973), 258-259. Quoted in Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*, 310.

[23] Richard Bernstein, *Recovering Ethical Life: Jürgen Habermas and the Future of Critical Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 50-51.

[24] Jürgen Habermas, 'What is Universal Pragmatics?' *Communication and the Evolution of Society* trans. T. McCarthy (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 26.

[25] Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*, 282.

theoretical foundations, Habermas has provided, he believes, the basis for intersubjective relations and social action. His concern is to formulate a notion of rationality that involves not the objectification of others but mutual recognition, reciprocity and complimentarity. By arguing that these elements are basic components of communicative rationality, he suggests that he is pointing to the completion of a modern universalising project that promotes consensus and socio-cultural action rather than pandering to 'the all-inclusive economic apparatus.'[26] Habermas moves beyond the individual and the social to an alternative intersubjective space that guarantees individuality and social systems but places both in relation to the most basic term of identity, the communality of relation.

The Habermasean project takes as its point of departure the requirement to open up rationality as a multidimensional reality. Only through a radical reassessment and remodelling of reason can the failed project of modernity brought to its proper and fruitful consummation. The means through which this might be attained is the diremption or at least sub-division of reason in relation to the exigencies and character of differing contexts or lifeworlds in which human beings operate. Habermas claims that the subject can be reconstituted on the basis of the self being mediated through communication. This intersubjective self is constructed on the basis of a dialectic that brings into play a universal logic of rationalisation and the historical contingency of individual situations. This quasi-transcendental allows the creation of a public, communal sphere that is ideal, non-coercive and inclusive. The ideal speech situation and participants' communicative competency are the building blocks that Habermas contributes to a possible reconstruction of the framework within which authentic intersubjectivity can flourish. Participants are safeguarded from the domination and totalisation of a purposive rationality and Habermas believes that, consequently, his hypothesis is more politically applicable than the 'presentism'.

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[26] Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 30.

'relativism' and 'cryptonormativism' of the postmodern dissolution of the self.[27] The Habermasean strategy is, unsurprisingly, followed in a significant strand of theological anthropology. Not least, the emphasis on intersubjectivity, non-coercion and peaceable politics are attractive themes that resonate with the terms within which theologians would wish to work. To this more explicitly theological work I now turn.

2.3: The Intersubjective Self as the Subject of Theology

There is a significant strand of recent theological enquiry in which the analysis of the self is framed in terms of an intersubjectivity that is either explicitly dependent on Habermas's work or, at the very least, closely resembles the nature of his critique of both the subject of modernity and the non-subject of deconstruction. In many respects - and these shall become clearer as I proceed with this section of the chapter - the work of Alistair McFadyen is representative of this strand of theological anthropology. Nevertheless his presuppositions and, in some cases, conclusions, are shared or developed by theologians such as Wolfhart Pannenberg, Colin Gunton and Anthony Thiselton. Therefore, inasmuch as McFadyen's book *The Call to Personhood*[28] is typical of this theological approach to subjectivity, his study will be the focus of this section of the chapter. However, I shall also draw on the work of these other theologians in order to assist my subsequent clarification of the strengths and weaknesses of this approach.

Early on in his analysis of the character of the self, McFadyen provides a clue as to the theme that might constitute the heart of his theological anthropology. He suggests that the

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[27] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 287.
[28] Alistair McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

personalism of Buber, Barth and Bonhoeffer assisted his audacious attempt to refashion the Christian conception of personhood:

> The key insight which grew out of engagement with these attempts to formulate some middle way between individualism and collectivism was the fruitfulness of understanding personal being and identity in terms of communication.[29]

Communication is not simply here the essence or degree zero of subjectivity. Rather, it is the dynamic vehicle of an identity that is forged through time as human beings are constituted in relationship. As McFadyen sees it

> We become the people we are as our identities are shaped through the patterns of communication and response in which we are engaged. We carry the effects of the communication we have received and the response we have made in the past forward with us into every new situation and relationship. This happens most obviously, but by no means primarily or exclusively, through memory, and is what I later term the 'sediment' which is laid down through our communication history. It is this which makes us the people we are.[30]

Formed through their communicative interaction with those around them, human beings are historical animals who become who they are in their passage through time and their contexts in space. The 'sediment' of which McFadyen talks is similar in function and consequence to a narrative that delivers diverse elements and experiences into a unified 'identity'. Thus the person is ultimately 'dialogical (formed through social interaction, through address and response)' but must also be seen as 'dialectical (never coming to rest in a final unity, if only because one is never removed from relation).'[31] There is always a provisional element to identity because of the

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[29] Ibid., 6-7. The desire to find a way through the modern predicament of individualism versus collectivism is shared by Colin Gunton. Gunton believes that 'the individualist teaches that we are in separation from our neighbour, the collectivist that we are so involved with others in society that we lose particularity.' Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 169.
[30] Ibid., 7-8.
[31] Ibid., 9.

dependence of the latter on relationality: 'Persons are the manifestation of their relations, formed through though not simply reducible to them.'[32]

Thus far the theory of subjectivity that McFadyen is delineating depends chiefly on the social, historical and linguistic contexts in which individuals find themselves (in both the senses of that term). Yet this de-centred, relational self is supplemented - if not supplanted - by another self. This subsequent theoretical move ensures the integrity of the individual self and is made in order to safeguard personal identity in response to the crisis of subjectivity. Although he purports to 'describe individual identity in terms of a response',[33] McFadyen's central concern is to provide an intelligible and palpable foundation to the self:

> The basis of the position I shall be taking on these issues is the understanding of persons as individuals whose consciousness, experience of and interaction with the world are internally centred. Conducting oneself from a personal centre of being and communication is what makes self-direction - that is, personal control of and intervention in oneself and one's interactions - possible. In other words, personal centering enables performance as a subject in communication, being an I for and before others and for oneself (through self-reflection and consciousness).[34]

The provisionality of identity in communicative relation is augmented, or to be more accurate anchored, by a reflexive, conscious 'I'. The possibility of a dialogical identity is predicated on an anterior, internal unity that centres the self and provides a fixed location from which to securely engage with the ebb and flow of communicative interaction. Yet, the formation of this centre and subsequent self-awareness is mediated through communication itself. Such a circular strategy has its antecedent in Pannenberg's insistence that the

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[32] Ibid., 40.
[33] Ibid., 47.
[34] Ibid., 69.

> consciousness of the ego's unity is mediated through experience of the world, insofar as this experience allows the ego to become aware of its own body as existing within the context of a world and to construct a social and spiritual self in connection with it. This is the self to which one refers when one says "I".[35]

There is here a significant convergence between the two notions of a subjectivity grounded in consciousness. First, for both Pannenberg and McFadyen, the person is an internally centred reality. Second, this centering in consciousness is facilitated, indeed engendered, by the external world of experience. Thus with a strong foundation, there is the 'basis for the unfolding of individual particularity and individual awareness of identity.'[36]

There are, then, two distinct though interrelated movements in the production of subjectivity - the formation through communication and the solidity of centred being: 'personal identity is a structure of response sedimented from a significant history of communication. A person is centrally organised and, on that basis, may exercise a degree of autonomy as a subject of communication.'[37] Here we see the dialectical nature of subjectivity - a personal, centred identity that is both formed in connection and communication with others and fundamentally 'owned' by the individual:

> My self-understanding is embedded in my communication, and your understanding and response to it will be embedded in yours. So I receive a reflection of myself in your response. Dialogue may be considered as a process of self-transcendence (movement towards the other) and return (receiving oneself back from the other). Through giving and receiving ourselves in this way we can come to a new understanding of ourselves.[38]

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[35] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Metaphysics and the Idea of God* trans. P. Clayton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 53.
[36] Ibid., 54.
[37] Alistair McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood*, 113.
[38] Ibid., 125.

Understanding one's self is based on a 'genuine mutuality' that is fuelled by a dialectic of egression and return. Moreover, self-understanding is produced by an autonomous self reaching out - the other mediates and augments self-awareness.

The terms within which this mutuality is generated, however, are very similar to Habermas's formal context for genuine non-distorted communication. First, according to McFadyen, 'communication and understanding' are to be 'rational'. Second, 'communication will have to be free of constraints, coercion and all other forms of distortion.'[39] These formal injunctions are imposed in order that a genuine communication can be secured. Reciprocity is perverted if subjects communicate outside a context in which misunderstanding is formally excluded:

> Unlimited, constraint-free explication, in which the autonomy and responsibility of each partner in and for communication is respected and intended as means are found to ensure formal reciprocity in the relation (i.e. non-privileged distribution of dialogue roles, or symmetrical binding by norms), exhibits a formal ideal for communication. It is this ideal to which all communication is or pretends to be orientated (it is therefore anticipated in its distortion), and which presents the codification proper to the ideal form of life in God's image.[40]

The ideal speech situation ensures both formal reciprocity and provides the grammar proper to the way of life of Christians in relation to and with God. Indeed, McFadyen goes so far as to suggest that the ideal speech situation as delineated by Habermas 'indicates the form of interpersonal life as intended by God at creation.'[41] Habermasean discourse theory represents a pre-lapsarian and post-redemptive ideal that mirrors the 'dialogical form of God's communication' as triune intersubjectivity.[42] This statement of commitment to the ideal speech situation points us to the

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[39] Ibid., 165.
[40] Ibid., 187.
[41] Ibid. Cf Jürgen Habermas, 'Towards a Theory of Communicative Competence', 317ff.
[42] Ibid., 207.

model for McFadyen's theological anthropology. He suggests, early on in his study, that one of the two 'theological components' in his argument is 'human existence in the image of the trinitarian God.'[43]

2.4: The Relational God

It is the trinitarian God who, according to many contemporary theologians, can redeem the fragmented and broken identity of the self in the context of the postmodernity. Anthony Thiselton is a good example of this trinitarian perspective. In response to the violence and manipulation that defines and controls the postmodern 'resituated' self - a position that he is out to dismiss - Thiselton posits a self who, via the application of the working hypothesis of a promise that he believes is present in the context of both christology and a perichoretic trinity, can be reconstituted.

> [This promise] transforms the self because, like the experience of resurrection, it *'reconstitutes' self-identity* as no longer the passive victim of forces of the past which 'situated' it within a network of pre-given roles and performances, but opens out a new future in which new purpose brings a 'point' to its life. The self perceives its call and its value as one-who-is-loved within the larger narrative plot of God's loving purposes for the world, for society, and for the self.[44]

This reconstitution is possible 'from ahead' as we are invited to a form of reconstituted identity in relation to Jesus.[45] Thiselton does not provide a programme or outline of practices through which the self might be reconstituted (a point I will return to later) but his claims are bold. It is, in the main, an understanding - after Moltmann, Boff and Gunton - of the interrelationality of the trinity that fuels the radical nature of his alternative to contemporary anthropological discourse.

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[43] Ibid., 17.
[44] Anthony C. Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 160.
[45] Ibid., 163.

Colin Gunton is less cavalier in his discussion of the relationship between the trinity and intersubjective existence. Highlighting the importance of the analogous character of statements that we make of God, he charts a cautious course between the perfect mutuality of the divine and the broken context of nature. Consequently, he suggests that we must not press models of God too far in their application to social and communal life. Nevertheless, argues Gunton, the perichoretic model of the trinity challenges our understanding of subjectivity and society. Through the doctrine of the relational God we can conclude that 'a doctrine of human perichoresis affirms, after philosophies like that of John Macmurray, that persons mutually constitute each other, make each other what they are.'[46] Gunton ultimately believes that the contemporary fragmentation of culture and persons is linked to a unitary conception of God and that through a more properly triune conception of the divine we can conceive of and perform a plurality in unity.[47]

This patronage of a social, perichoretic understanding of the trinity is due, in part, to the fact that it offers a theological response to the crisis of subjectivity. If, as I suggested in the Introduction to this study, contemporary life is marked by a growing fragmentation, then a social and communal doctrine of God provides a significant challenge to this context and an alternative vision of what might be - in short, hope. Thus, if human beings are the *imago Trinitatis*, then 'since God's nature is triune, a society of mutual relationships, life in human nature and the Church is analogous to this. The same analogy holds good for society.'[48] If God is the being whose nature is intersubjectivity *par excellence* then the human vocation of responding to this God must be lived out as intersubjectivity. Jürgen Moltmann summarises this position and

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[46] Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many*, 169.
[47] Ibid., 177.
[48] John Thompson, 'Modern Trinitarian Perspectives' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 44 (1990), 360.

clarifies the extent to which the human/divine analogy demands a transformation of perspective for individual Christians, the church and (ultimately) the world:

> The unity of the triune God is no longer seen in the homogenous divine subject nor in the identical divine subject, but in the eternal *perichoresis* of Father, Son and Spirit. This insight has far-reaching consequences for the hermeneutics of the history of salvation and human experiences of God; for the doctrine of the image of God in human beings and the conception of a creation which corresponds to God; for the doctrine of the form and the unity of the church as the 'icon of the Trinity'; and not least for the eschatological expectation of a new, eternal community of creation. The monarchial, hierarchical and patriarchal ideas used to legitimate the concept of God are thus becoming obsolete. 'Communion', 'fellowship' is the purpose and nature of the triune God.[49]

Moltmann's claims are quite breathtaking, but they are founded on a conception of divine personhood that is fundamentally relational in character. The outcome of embracing a *perichoretic*, trinitarian conception of the divine is a transformation of atomistic individualism into fellowship and communion. The logic of subjectivity, as Habermas might put it, is not to be uncovered through a revision of forms of rationality but a through revised conception of God. Moreover, it is a model of God that is more faithful to the biblical data of salvation history.[50] As McFadyen puts it

> The form and content of God's communication in salvation history is not that of an absolute, totalitarian ruler (monologue); it is an overspilling of the internal trinitarian process of communication. The form and content of this communication are inseparable, in that it is the trinitarian life-process which communicates itself through itself. The dialogical form of God's communication cannot be understood apart from the Father's sending of the Son and the empowering of the Holy Spirit. God's rule is an abandonment of absolute, transcendent power in favour of the grace by which creative appeal is made to human freedom and rational understanding: i.e. to the incorporation of human

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[49] Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God* trans. M. Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1991), xii.
[50] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* trans. M. Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1981), 16-20.

> subjectivity in the relation. Human rule and the exercise of power in this image are to be referred to the understanding held by free political subjects.[51]

God's rule is that of a communicative relationality that fosters an appeal to 'human freedom and rational understanding' in an intersubjective and social context. The trinity is certainly here seen as a blueprint for human relations and political interaction. It is no overstatement to suggest that Nikolai Feodorov's adage is appropriate for what is being claimed here: 'The Holy Trinity is our social programme.'[52]

To summarise. In the second part of this chapter I have outlined Alistair McFadyen's theological anthropology (and adherents to corresponding projects) in which the self is perceived as dialogical in that it is formed in communicative engagement with others and dialectical in that it is never a finished product. Human identity is formed in relationships over time. Yet there remains a sense in which identity is formally one's own - the self is a centred being whose identity is made manifest in communal being-with-others. In this way McFadyen secures both the relational *nature* of the self and the individual *integrity* of the self. I also demonstrated how Habermasean critical theory is utilised by McFadyen in order to delineate the communicative character of the subject and that he goes as far as to suggest that the outline of the ideal speech situation corresponds to the perfection and non-domination of redeemed humanity. Finally, I exposed the trinitarian character of the God who is the ultimate model for human intersubjective identity - a God who, against the monologic of atomistic human identity and the monolithic authoritarianism of a unitary deity, is identified as *perichoretic* fellowship. It now remains for me to critically evaluate Habermas's communicative rationality and its theological concomitant.

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[51] Alistair McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood*, 207.

[52] Quoted by John Thompson, 'Modern Trinitarian Perspectives', 360. Cf. also Mary Timothy Prokes's incorporation of a social doctrine of the trinity into her study of the place and significance of the body in theological reflection and the life of the church. *Toward a Theology of the Body* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 65-73.

2.5: Critical Evaluation

The philosophical project of Jürgen Habermas, and the work of the theologians who closely follow his emphasis on communicative rationality, challenges contemporary theological anthropology to examine the framework for, and nature of, human intersubjective relations. Moreover, through an explicit critique of postmodern attempts to resituate the self, these theoretical undertakings question a thorough-going dismissal of the modern project through a reassessment of reason, language and identity. Yet the force of Habermas's formal conditioning of the public realm and radical consensus is augmented by theologians with an attempted retrieval of the doctrine of the trinity - it is the divine who can be said to provide the most fundamental representation of the possibility and conditions for non-dominant, peaceable intersubjectivity.

Because of the dependence of Alistair McFadyen's communicative-relational model of human interaction on the critical theory of Habermas, I will, for the most part, take it as read that criticisms of Habermas also challenge the force of the former's argument and the applicability of his hypothesis. It is at the point which McFadyen's work departs from Habermas, in his espousal of the social doctrine of the trinity, that his originality and distinctly theological credentials come into play. Consequently, this critical evaluation will consist of two parts. First, I will assess the significance of a communicative rationality and its reconstitution of the subject in both Habermas and McFadyen. I will then, second, consider the theological supplement to this reconstruction - a model of human sociality that is predicated on the nature and Christian experience of the trinity.

2.5.1: The Matter of Exclusion in the Project of Reconstitution

Criticisms of Habermas's project are legion and I do not intend to rehearse all of them here.[53] There are, however, two significant responses to the Habermasean project that I wish to outline and comment on at some length. The terms upon which these responses rest are, first, the place, purpose and status of embodiment in communicative rationality and, second, the role and standing of desire in intersubjective relations. Both themes, I will argue, are deeply problematic in the re-constructive enterprises of both Habermas and McFadyen.

The first of my critical responses to the social reconstruction of the subject is prompted by Friedrich Nietzsche's suggestion in *The Antichrist* that one can distinguish between two forms of Christianity: the *doctrinal* religion that is concerned with original sin, free will, judgement, heaven, hell and damnation and the *practical* religiosity that is evident in pre-Pauline practices of the development of character. Nietzsche ties the latter to Jesus and a pre-institutionalised faith:

> It is false to the point of absurdity to see in a 'belief', perchance the belief in redemption through Christ, the distinguishing characteristic of the Christian: Only Christian *practice*, a life such as he who died on the Cross *lived*, is Christian .... *Not* a belief but a doing, above all, a *not*-doing of many things, a different *being* .... States of consciousness, beliefs of any kind, holding something to be true, for example - every psychologist knows this - are a matter of complete indifference and of fifth rank compared to the values of the instincts .... 'Faith' has been at all times, with Luther for instance, only a cloak, a pretext, a screen, behind which the instincts played their game - a shrewd blindness to the dominance of certain instincts ....[54]

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[53] Cf. John Thompson & David Held (eds), *Habermas: Critical Debates* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

[54] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Twighlight of the Idols and The Antichrist* trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 151. I would want to question Nietzsche's understanding of doctrine here but this is not the place for such a discussion. Cf. Chapter Five for a notion of tradition that at least to some extent challenges Nietzsche's repudiation and rejection of this tradition.

William Connolly, in his commentary on this passage,[55] suggests that 'instincts' here are not to be understood a 'brutish, biologically fixed force'.[56] Rather, what Nietzsche is proposing is that our thought operates across and through several registers and that in his advocacy of instincts he is demonstrating the importance of 'visceral modes of appraisal'.[57] Connolly, following this Nietzschean lead, suggests that 'thinking and intersubjectivity operate on more than one register and that to work on the instinctive register of intersubjective judgement can also be to introduce new possibilities of thinking and being into life.'[58] These new possibilities are posited by Connolly on the basis that the visceral nature of intersubjective relations is fundamentally excluded by contemporary re-assessments of rationality. Indeed, the visceral register is a dangerous outsider. Habermas is a case in point. He institutes a vision of the public realm that extracts public conflict at a cost: he demands submission to an 'infectious insistence upon an authoritative model of discourse from which the visceral element is subtracted.'[59] The point here is that Habermas ignores not only the visceral nature of human interaction but also the need for reflection on and experimentation with practices that relate to an 'ethic of cultivation'.[60] These are not practices that arise from the need for pragmatic responses to various political, social and intersubjective difficulties. On the contrary, they can be seen as arising from a generosity that accepts the place of others in the market-place as providing the context and opportunity for cultivation. Connolly names this an 'ethos of engagement'.[61]

This ethos of engagement does not eschew the fact of disagreement and the demands of agonistic pluralism. This is where attention to the visceral and contingent elements in our thinking and practice question the communicative rationality of Habermas. Habermas claims to reject in

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[55] William E. Connolly, *Why I am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 27-29.
[56] Ibid., 27.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., 35.
[60] Ibid., 36.
[61] Ibid.

his quasi-transcendental scheme the transcendental status of the Kantian supersensible. Yet, in accepting only a limited space for the contingent and finally imposing a firm foundation for intersubjectivity, he is taking one step forward and two back. Habermas claims that

> Transcendental thinking once concerned itself with a stable stock of forms for which there were no recognizable alternatives. Today, in contrast, the experience of contingency is a whirlpool into which everything is pulled: everything could also be otherwise, the categories of the understanding, the principles of socialization and morals, the constitution of subjectivity, the foundation of rationality itself. There are good reasons for this. Communicative reason, too, treats almost everything as contingent, even the conditions for the emergence of its own linguistic medium. But for everything that claims validity *within* linguistically structured forms of life, the structures of possible mutual understanding in language constitute something that cannot be gotten around.[62]

It is the logic of linguistic performance that provides the ground for the assessment of validity claims and, thus, epistemological justification. There is a sense here that unless the condition of intersubjectivity can be judged and evaluated from an Archimedean point then any possibility of non-coercion is removed and the public realm, indeed politics, will dissolve. The consequence of this fearful stand is in fact - *contra* Habermas - a refusal of the public. It is, to borrow Gillian Rose's designation, 'Agoraphobia'. This familiar term is 'usually defined as fear of wide open space, but the word, more closely observed, is specific. *Agora* means the market-place, the place of assembly; it implies public, articulate space, space full of interconnections, with which you cannot enter into exchange.'[63] To be more accurate, Habermas is a *quasi*-agoraphobic: his fear of the market-place is only one side of the coin. He accepts contingency, flux and contestation but only on the basis that it can ultimately be filtered through a communicative rationality and transformed into a unidimensional institutional situation constituted by that filter. In this process, the embodied, visceral selves of the *agora* are reduced to epistemological pawns in the quest to

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[62] Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking* trans. W.M. Hohengarten (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 139-140.
[63] Gillian Rose, *Love's Work* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995), 123.

remove any non-cognitive element. Not to do so would be to accept the 'irrationalism' of the postmoderns.

The case of Alistair McFadyen is even more difficult to uphold in the face of Connelly's Nietzsche-informed apologia for the visceral nature of thought and intersubjectivity. In place of bodily practices of faithful intersubjectivity, he asserts the priority of a secure, rationally sound theory of relationality. One wonders where an existence that is often so messy and difficult meets thought and where it is that the visceral register comes into play in the context of faith. The theology of McFadyen, in contrast to Wittgenstein's understanding of the resurrection, is not that of a way of life. For Wittgenstein

> Only love can believe the Resurrection. If I am to be REALLY saved what I need is faith. And faith is faith in what is needed by my heart and soul, not by my speculative intelligence. For it is my soul with its passions, as it were with its flesh and blood, that has to be saved, not my abstract mind.[64]

Wittgenstein's point, like Nietzsche's, is that the mind - rationality - is not everything and that the flesh and blood or soul are significant factors in a life of faith. If theological anthropology ignores the multidimensional nature of being human and the investment in faith of the *viscera* then this subject is at the very least half-dead.

McFadyen, however, goes further than Habermas and modifies the latter's understanding of intersubjectivity in order to place the self, prior to and apart from communication, on a firmer footing. He claims that the self is 'internally centred' and that this centre is the very thing that

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[64] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (eds) G.E.M. Anscombe & G.E. von Wright trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 33e.

makes interaction possible.[65] This reflexive, internal 'I' is the foundation of any mutuality and communality. Again, Gillian Rose's reflections are apposite. She rails against such a notion of subjectivity anterior to the world and the public realm:

> This self-reliance leaves us at the mercy of our own mercilessness; it keeps us infinitely sentimental about ourselves, but methodically ruthless towards others; it breeds sureness of self, not ready to be unsure; with an unconscious conviction of eternal but untried election. ... This *unrevealed* religion is the baroque excrescence of the Protestant ethic: hedonist, not ascetic, voluptuous, not austere, embellished, not plain, it devotes us to our own individual, inner-worldly authority, but with the loss of the inner as well as the outer mediator. This is an ethics without ethics, a religion without salvation.[66]

The univocal imposition of a personally-centred basis for intersubjectivity in fact destroys intersubjectivity. Truth, standards and validity begin from what is private and non-negotiable - the 'I'. For all his talk of sociality and community, McFadyen is universalising a form of cultural solipsism that is only deserted on the occasions that sentimentalism provokes this 'I' into giving and receiving. Indeed, self-understanding according to McFadyen is mediated by the other in that they provide a reflection of who I am. The other is a mirror - inert and unreal in itself, save that it provides a reflection of me, over there. Its only significance is that it provides an insight into who I am - Narcissus.

The second objection to Habermasean theory and its theological offspring is the role and status of desire within the quest for intersubjectivity. Central to this criticism is the argument that if one is striving to delineate the basis of and means for agreement then a variety of concerns and issues must be met. As Jane Braaten puts it, in relation to her anxiety that in Habermas epistemological 'justification is the foundation of all forms and dimensions of relationship', is it

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[65] Alistair McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood*, 69.
[66] Gillian Rose, *Love's Work*, 127.

not the case that 'mimesis, sympathy, and affection have at least as much claim to this status'?[67] Braaten's point is that, as with the visceral, there are a number of 'registers' through and upon which thought and consensus are constituted. Agreements are embedded, to coin a Wittgensteinian phrase, in forms of life and procedures that engender consensus, and intersubjective communality only exists as a complex ensemble of practices, attitudes and theories. I will consider the case of mimesis in more detail in the next two chapters. There I will also, in the context of René Girard's notion of mimetic desire, consider the status of desire in a more wide-ranging discussion. However, in order to set the scene for that specific examination, I want to explore how it is that the matter of desire is both included and excluded in Habermas's project.

For Habermas, desire is little more than a social utility. If, through the procedures of communicative rationality, desires converge then all to the good. The status of desire here is that of a second order constituent of relations between subjects.[68] Habermas

> at best regards desire as an external threat to the autonomy of the rational subject. As a result, the transformative potential of desire, its orientation "beyond" that may be revealed in and through the recognition of concrete others, is lost; it is jettisoned as part of the sweeping critique of "transcendental philosophy."[69]

Habermas is committed to a theory and procedure of universalising rationality that underpins intersubjectivity. Selves do not move beyond themselves to another but are implicated in a model of mutual understanding. Others subjects are not people who we meet in desiring, bodily encounters in which we are taken beyond ourselves, but other subjects who share the capacity for

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[67] Jane Braaten, 'From Communicative Rationality to Communicative Thinking: A Basis for Feminist Theory and Practice' *Feminists Reading Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse* (ed.) J. Meehan (New York: Routledge, 1995), 149.
[68] Cf. John Thompson, 'Universal Pragmatics' *Habermas: Critical Debates*, 160.
[69] Anthony J. Cascardi, *The Subject of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 271.

rationality or the competence for argument that are the essential ingredients for public life. I am not for one moment dismissing these factors that Habermas has done so much to bring to the fore in contemporary social and political theory. I am simply questioning their priority and the concomitant exclusion of other registers (indeed others in general) which (or who) are surely part of the diverse fabric that constitutes subjectivity. This reductionism is highlighted by Anthony Cascardi:

> In resolving the characteristic antinomies of the subject in relation to a world of objects, Habermas has in essence reduced the Other to a merely empirical or "perspectival" variation of the self, and this reduction is in turn symptomatic of the Habermasean attempt to reconstruct the totality of knowledge based on the accessibility of practical "rules" to rational consciousness.[70]

The other is a reflection of social or practical positions and is seen, perspectively, only in retrospect. This problem of the other is the result of an understanding of subjectivity which is formed in the private sphere and is then - and only then - capable and adequately prepared to engage with others in the public sphere of communicative rationality. Desire is dangerous because it disrupts this neat division of discreet identities who meet in a clean, regulated forum. Desire is that which gives rise to contestation and the demand for recognition, not least of interests and goods that may be incommensurable. One can see quite clearly why Habermasean discourse is problematic for feminists.[71]

To summarise: in this section I have argued that the communicative rationality of Habermas neglects and consequently excludes those registers that stand outside his own understanding of what constitutes knowledge. The embodiment or viscerality of selves and their 'instincts', as Nietzsche calls them, have no place in intersubjective relations. I further suggested

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[70] Ibid.
[71] Cf. Joanna Meehan (ed.), *Feminists Reading Habermas*.

that the visceral returns in the incorrigibility of the body and its central role in any formation of communality. This oversight of Habermas is understandable. The inclusion of the visceral muddies the waters of a sanitised communicative procedure. In response to the myopic perspective of Habermas, I suggested that William Connelly's proposal for an ethic of cultivation takes seriously the interaction of plural practices and beliefs. What this discussion of an alternative ethic raises is the prospect of an intersubjectivity in which a generosity that does not eschew difference may be a central ingredient - a theme I shall return to in the conclusion to this study. I also demonstrated that Habermas can only include desire within his communicative framework if it serves the purpose of bolstering participation in an ideal speech situation. Desire as it may be implicated in problems of recognition and disagreement must be excluded from intersubjective relations. This, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Four, is impossible. I then extended this critique of Habermas to Alistair McFadyen's associated understanding of relationality. McFadyen constructs a self whose basis is a private non-negotiable region or 'centre' from which subjects are anchored sufficiently to venture into relation. I argued that McFadyen was commending a thoroughly narcissistic self for whom the other is but a mirror. It now remains for me to examine the more strictly theological element in McFadyen's theological anthropology.

2.5.2: Relationality, the Self and God

Earlier I outlined the importance for a certain school of theological enquiry of the social doctrine of the trinity. I demonstrated how this triune God provided the basis for a constructive theological analysis of subjectivity. My task in this part of the chapter is to briefly engage with the theoretical and practical implications of this *rapprochement* between anthropological and trinitarian discourse. This I will attempt on two fronts. First, I will assess the logic of similitude that is introduced into the analysis of the social model of God and the relational model of

subjectivity. Second, through an analysis of the status of analogy and the description of the human and divine theatres in the work of theologians concerned to reconstitute the self, I will ask whether there is a danger of dissolving differences between God and the world in a quest for answers to difficult contemporary questions.

The sociality of the trinity - the perichoretic relationship or co-inherence of the three divine persons - provides the church (and ultimately society at large) with a definitive model for intersubjectivity and peaceable living. That is the claim of a myriad of contemporary theologians. The relationship between the trinity and social relations is not a new venture in Christian theology. Indeed, the Cappadocian Fathers and Richard St. Victor are often seen as forebears of a model of God that impacts upon Christian existence and practice.[72] What is new is the insistence that adherence to a social doctrine of the trinity, and all that this model of God promises, will effectively transform the ways in which human beings will live.

The theoretical context for this claim of the adherents of the social doctrine is the relationship between two models of God and the crisis of subjectivity in a modern context. As with McFadyen's attempt to construct a notion of Christian personhood that is relational and social in character, the broad framework within which the social modelists work is that of a response to the autonomous subject of modernity and its rejection of an autocratic, totalitarian God. As Walter Kasper suggests, the challenge facing trinitarian theology is to respond to the modern condition: 'Above all, the issue is how, in continuity with and yet also in opposition to the spirit of the modern age, the human person can be properly understood as the image of the

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[72] Cf. E.J. Fortman, *The Triune God* (London: Hutchinson, 1972), 76. This is not the place to discuss the relevant models of the tradition with contemporary formulations. For a thorough analysis of the major similarities and differences, cf. John Thompson, 'Modern Trinitarian Perspectives'.

trinitarian God.'[73] Not surprisingly, in order to respond to (and against) a particular modern conception of the self, the social modelists are highly critical of an Augustinian psychological analogy in which God's identity is not found in a perichoretic relationship between the three persons of the Godhead but in three activities in the individual soul.[74] In place of this unitary, monolithic God, the social modelists champion a modification of the Cappadocian relational analogy in which, they claim, the emphasis lies with the unity of the three persons in their interrelation and coinherence within God. Nevertheless, the identity of these persons is suspiciously modern. Cornelius Plantinga demonstrates this point when, in an analysis of the social doctrine, he suggests that the identity of the trinity can be summarised in a two-fold definition:

> (1) Father, Son, and Spirit are conceived as persons in a full sense of 'person', i.e., as distinct centres of love, will, knowledge, and purposeful action ... and (2) who are conceived as related to each other in some central ways analogous to, even if sublimely surpassing, relations among members of a society of three human persons.[75]

The notion of separate, distinct centres of various activities and attributes suggests that the selves who are trinitarian persons are disengaged, atomistic individuals *first* and from that position move into communality.

This, it seems to me, is the crisis of theological anthropology - an imposition of a particular model of the subject onto the Godhead and an idealist belief that if we say often enough that *these* persons are relational then human beings will follow suit. There is no struggle in

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[73] Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* trans. M.J. O'Connell (London: SCM, 1984), 286.
[74] A particularly noteworthy attack on Augustine's trinitarian theology can be found in Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 35-57.
[75] Cornelius Plantinga, 'Gregory of Nyssa and the Social Analogy of the Trinity' *The Thomist* 50 (1986), 325.

McFadyen, Gunton or Thiselton to craft a theological response to a triune God that is appropriate for embodied, instinct-saturated human beings. There is, in short, no hard labour of love, no *paideia*. Moreover, there is no content to the human divine analogy but for a simplistic correlation. To suggest that the identity of God and the identity of human beings consists in their both being relational beings is vacuous to say the least. What is the content of 'relational'? Is it not true that human beings may be immersed in relations at every waking moment of their lives but these intersubjective moments can be violent and jealous and full of misunderstanding? And are not intersubjective relations embedded within communities who practice, shape and develop theology as well as vice versa? What is required in a theological examination of the subject is that these contexts are taken seriously and that hope is offered rather than a simplistic idealism. Consequently, an ethically responsible theological anthropology must take account of the violence and fragmentation of human interaction as well as the beautiful, the intimate and the loving that are part and parcel of life. It would also account for the dialectical and integral relationship between thought and practice, ideas and existence. Michel de Certeau offers an insight into the implications of this alternative vision in the context of the fecundity of the life and death of Christ:

> Thus, through community practice and Trinitarian theology, the death of Jesus becomes the condition for the new church to arise and for new languages of the Gospel to develop. The true relation of Jesus to the Father (who gives him his authority) and to the Church (he 'permits') is verified (i.e. manifested) by his death. The Jesus event is extended (verified) in the manner of disappearance in the *difference* which that event renders possible. Our relation to the origin is in function of its increasing absence. The beginning is more and more hidden by the multiple creations which reveal its significance.[76]

The relations that subjects are involved in and with are - even in relation to the church and belief - constantly renewed, reconstructed and displaced in terms of a logic of difference that marks practice and thought. In consequence, relationality is then exposed as encompassing two

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[76] Michel de Certeau, 'How is Christianity Thinkable Today?' *The Postmodern God* (ed.) G. Ward (Oxford: Blackwell), 146-147.

dimensions: the synchronic (involving particular groups of subjects in time and space) and diachronic (involving the identity of subjects as realised in the context of tradition, change and textuality) with all the inevitable engagements, rhythms and collisions that living amidst the two entails. The logic of difference, however, does not proceed neatly and sequentially but can be characterised as layers of interpenetrating apertures and closures that give rise to a multifaceted relationality.

A second problem with an all too simplistic association of anthropological discourse with trinitarian models is closely related to the first. If the first failing of the social modelists is that they move too quickly to correlate the divine and human conditions, and follow with a far too bare analysis of the identity of both, then any distance between God and human beings is evacuated. The logic of correlation pursued by McFadyen and others results in the equivocal nature of analogy being either forgotten or ignored and the idealist account of the relationship between God and the world follows. For example, McFadyen suggests that 'In the provision of space for free human response to the divine address, the divine-human relationship is structured from God's side as a dialogue.'[77] In a footnote to this statement, McFadyen then provides a helpful explanation of what exactly he means by 'dialogue':

> Dialogue is a relationship in which the mutual orientation of the partners is based on their personal uniqueness and discreteness (independence from one another and their relation). It is therefore a bipolar interaction involving both distance and relation. Because it is based upon the unique identities of each and because these must remain unknowable in any final and complete sense by the other, each partner must make her or his own independent contribution to the relation (i.e. be a subject and originator of communication and communicate herself and himself) and give space and time for the other to do the same. So each partner will be passive and active, the subject (I) and object (Thou) of communication.[78]

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[77] Alistair McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood*, 19.
[78] Alistair McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood*, 275 n2.

Of course, dialogue is central to relations between subjects and I would not want to dismiss the presence of dialogue in the human-divine relationship. However, there is an element within McFadyen's outline that seems to be all too clear cut. There is no place for uncertainty, absence and misunderstanding on the part of human beings. If Jean-Luc Marion's attempt to overcome the problem of onto-theo-logy resulted in an almost *absolute* distance between God and Being (bar the bishop), McFadyen's understanding of divine-human dialogue - in its institution of perfect reciprocity - annihilates almost any logic of difference between God and the world. Thanks to the divine structuring of dialogue, any distancing functions to ensure that dialogue is conducted between 'discrete' entities in a bipolar relation. There is not here any concession to the doctrine of creation and, accordingly, to the fact that the structure of divine-human dialogue might be understood as a gift that maintains a distance between God and humanity while, at the same time, enigmatically marks the immediacy of God. The distance and closeness of God is, of course, analogous to intersubjective dialogue but this analogy must incorporate the manifest dissimilarity of relations because of the status of the participants.

In contrast to an unproblematic correlation between human and human-divine dialogue, Hans Urs von Balthasar, in his study of the thought of Gregory of Nyssa, defines the distinction between the human and divine as 'diastemic',[79] dependent, that is, on a 'spacing' that is coextensive with creation. Yet this diastasis is not simply a static chasm between the human and the divine, between nature and grace, but a movement of transformation and alteration.[80] This movement is further (and concretely) exposed in Maurice Blondel's point that 'To reach God, man must go through all of nature and find him under the veil where He hides Himself only to be accessible. Thus the whole natural order comes between God and man as a bond and as an

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[79] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa* trans. Mark Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 27ff.
[80] Ibid., 31.

obstacle, as a necessary means of union and as a necessary means of distinction.'[81] Rather than establishing theological anthropology on grounds that emphasise the univocal relationship between human intersubjectivity and human-divine relations, Blondel elucidates both the inherent equivocation and the attendant discrimination that are required when situating the dialogue partners. Crucially, Blondel also establishes this dia-logic without, as with Marion, positing an absolute rupture between God and the world.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered a major philosophical attempt to reconstitute the subject. The critical theory of Jürgen Habermas, along with its theological counterpart, constitutes the second of Wenders' two portrayals of the condition of contemporary subjectivity. I outlined Habermas's attempt to complete the unfinished project of modernity through a reappraisal and reconstruction of reason. Habermas has spent much of his adult life constructing something of a theoretical edifice as an alternative to the ubiquitous presence of purposive rationality that has triumphed in the modern era. This alternative form of rationality arises in and through human beings as linguistic animals and is entitled 'communicative rationality'. Habermas's aim is to uncover the intersubjective grounds upon which dialogue, and hence politics, can proceed in a non-violent, non-coercive manner. His work is taken up in a theological context by Alistair McFadyen who, as I indicated, augments Habermasean theory in two ways. First, McFadyen proposes a theory of personhood in which, in addition to the intersubjective, communicative component of identity, there is a more basic and secure personal centre. Second, McFadyen proposes that the model for human relationships and their non-violent character is most fully available in the social doctrine of the trinity. Here I added the work of Colin Gunton, Anthony

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[81] Maurice Blondel, *Action (1893): Essay on the Critique of Life and a Science of Practice* trans. Olivia Blanchette (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 410.

Thiselton and Jürgen Moltmann (amongst others) to demonstrate the widespread use of this divine pattern as an exemplar for human interaction.

After exposing these philosophical and theological attempts to reconstitute the self, I critically evaluated their merits and their defects in terms of what they contribute to the challenge of delineating a theological anthropology in a contemporary context. The critical-theoretical project of Habermas was seen to exclude two important elements that are indispensable in any examination of intersubjective relations - the embodiment of the self and the vicissitudes of desire. The displacement of the visceral dimension of being human is particularly grave because of the resultant failure to take seriously the embodied practices in which any communication and intersubjectivity is embedded. A further difficulty is that any understanding of the public realm within which subjects interact is predicated on a knowledge of an anterior subjectivity that is independent of others. Indeed, I argued that Habermas leaves us with little more than an mutilated, half-self. Furthermore, communicative rationality was shown to exclude desire unless it was useful as a means of bringing subjects to commit themselves to the principles and procedures of the ideal speech situation. Consequently, a desire that attempts to move beyond the subject into a drama of recognition and contestation must be excluded as it disrupts the neat and tidy parameters within which Habermas establishes intersubjectivity.

In the theological project of Alistair McFadyen there is, I demonstrated, a related disdain for the visceral register of intersubjectivity and the practices within and through which communality is contrived. Furthermore, McFadyen not only reconstructs the self on the basis of communication but re-centres the self through predicating any external relations on the firm grounds of an internal unity. This escape into self-certainty is ultimately a rejection of the public, contingent context within which subjectivity is formed. From an ecclesiological perspective one

might suggest that it places the individual above any proper ecclesial identity and renders communal interaction insignificant apart from its status as a resource (fellowship) for the edification of the solitary self.

Finally, I analysed the import of a particular form of trinitarian theology into recent explorations of the status of the self. I demonstrated how many theologians including Moltmann, Gunton, Thiselton and McFadyen depend on a model of God as *perichoresis* for their development of a theory of the self in the social sphere. Here the three divine persons co-inhere in a perfect example of loving interaction. I criticised the over-simple identification of this model with human communality on two grounds. First, I demonstrated how this path to a theological anthropology is both idealist and simplistic in that it diminishes the complexities and difficulties of intersubjective relations. Second, I argued that the uncritical replication of models of God and models of human living ignores the distinctive identities of God and human beings and overlooks the dissimilarities between God and the world. Yet again, in preference to the difficult task of the cultivation of embodied practices, theology is presented with anthropological discourses that volunteer easy solutions to some very difficult, if not tragic, challenges. In response to the evident failures of the endeavour to reconstitute the subject I will turn in Part Two to the work of Réne Girard.

Part Two

René Girard: Life and Work

As stated in the Introduction, the purpose of this study is to explore possible avenues through which theological anthropology can be reassessed and reconceived in a postmodern or late-modern context. In Part One I delineated two contemporary anthropological projects - the resituation and reconstitution of the self - that accord with Wim Wenders' cinematic portrayal, and attempted resolution, of the crisis of fragmentation. Due to the inherent failings of these theoretical undertakings I will examine a third project that will, I believe, offer significant resources for the reconfiguration of a theological anthropology that is both ethically responsible and relevant to the exigencies of a pos-modern context.. As a means to this difficult objective, I shall outline and interrogate the wide-ranging hypothesis of cultural and religious origins of René Girard which, at the very least, embodies a significant critical rejoinder to both the contemporary subversion and reconstitution of anthropological discourse. Girard's work has stimulated a significant debate over a period of many years that has engaged the talents and thoughts of theoreticians of religion, biblical exegetes and theologians.[1] However, Girard's work, diverse in its disciplinary scope and evolutionary in character, has both fascinated and offended commentators in a plurality of intellectual fields, from

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[1] Cf. the special issue of *Religion*, 27:3 (1997) edited by James Williams, most of which examines, through an engagement with Girardian theory, the question 'Christianity: a Sacrificial or Nonsacrificial Religion?'; cf. Also the special edition of *Semeia* 33 (1985), edited by Andrew McKenna for an extensive seconday bibliography.

anthropology and literary criticism to psychology and film theory[2]. The purpose of this introduction is to provide an overview of Girard's life and work so that his *oeuvre* might be understood in the context of the significant events of his life as well as twentieth century French thought more generally.

René Noel Girard was born in the town of Avignon in 1923; the middle name bestowed due to the fact that he was born on Christmas day of that year.[3] Girard studied in France until 1947, when he graduated as an 'archiviste-paléographe' from Ecole de Chartres in Paris. He was one of a number of prominent late twentieth-century intellectuals - whose influence has proceeded far beyond French borders - who studied in Paris during the period surrounding the latter days of the second world war. Thus Girard's intellectual formation was contemporaneous with those figures who were to take on the mantle of forging an intellectual agenda in an environment dominated by, yet emerging from, the shadow of Sartre's humanist existentialism.[4] The importance of Girard's passage through the Parisian education establishment at this particular stage cannot be underestimated. In terms of the institutional context, as Clare O'Farrell points out, emergence from the Parisian lycée system is almost a compulsory requirement if one is to develop an academic career of any significance in France. With regards to the period in which Girard's pursued his studies, during the nineteen forties, at Lycée Louis-le-Grand 'we find Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Le-Goff, Jean-François Lyotard and

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[2] Cf. Marcel Detienne, 'Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifices', *Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks* (eds) M. Detienne & J-P. Vernant, trans. P. Wissing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); 1-20; Lucien Goldmann, 'Marx, Lukács, Girard et la sociologie du roman' *Médiations* 2 (1961), 1943-53. Cf. also, *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*, trans. A. Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1975); J-M. Ougourlian, *Puppets of Desire: The Psychology of Hysteria, Possession, and Hypnosis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); C. Wessley, *Von Star Wars, Ultima und Doom* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997).

[3] In providing this intellectual biography I am drawing on R. Girard, *Quand Ces Choses Commenceront ... Entretiens avec Michel Treguer* (Paris: Arléa, 1994), Ch. XII, 'Une méthode, une vie, un homme', 167-199; R. Girard, *The Girard Reader* (ed.) J.G. Williams (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 'René Girard: A Biographical Sketch', 1-6 and 'Epilogue: The Anthropology of the Cross: A Conversation with René Girard', 262-288; J. Bottum, 'Girard Among the Girardians', *First Things* 61 (March 1996), 42-45.

[4] Sartre's *L'être et le Néant* was published in 1943 by Gallimard and his populist 'manifesto' of existentialism, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* was published in 1946 by Les Editions Nagel.

Alain Touraine. At Henri IV we find Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, René Girard and the historians Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, André Burguière and Pierre Vidal Naquet.[5] Unlike most of his peers, however, Girard decided to leave France in order to study in the United States. (That Girard was formed both within and without the French system explains to a great extent his ambiguous relationship with French intellectual culture and the leading representatives of its academic life.) In the United States Girard pursued doctoral studies, again in history, at Indiana University. Three years later Girard received his PhD for a thesis entitled 'American Opinion of France, 1940-1943'. It was at Indiana that the beginnings of a decisive transition in intellectual direction and interests began. Owing to the fact that he was French, Girard was appointed to teach classes in French literature; a discipline of which he was largely ignorant, at least for the purposes of a university course. Girard immersed himself in the works of Stendhal, Proust and Flaubert and, as his literary interests widened, he became enthralled by the literature of Dostoyevsky and Cervantes. Perceiving something unique in the work of these 'classic' authors, Girard was captivated by the way they understood human relationships, desires and antagonisms. It was due to this fortuitous turn of events that Girard (unwittingly) embarked on the first phase of his career that would culminate in his first major work - *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* - published in 1961.[6]

The critical response to *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* was extremely positive but Girard's interests were already evolving. Alongside his deepening interest in literature, now extended to include the Greek tragedians, Girard began to engage with anthropological literature in order that he might test his developing theoretical speculation in a comparative context. Perhaps more significant in terms of an account of his ideas, Girard's work, particularly *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*, was understood by critics and

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[5] Clare O'Farrell, 'Pierre Bourdieu: Sociology as a 'World Vision' *The Judgement of Paris: Recent French Theory in a Local Context* (ed.) K.D.S. Murray (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), 134.

[6] René Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (Paris: Grasset, 1961). English translation, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* trans. Y. Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965).

commentators as being harmonious with a tradition of literary and cultural criticism that was fundamentally suspicious of Freudian psychoanalysis and had, from the nineteen-thirties onwards, taken Marx, Hegel and Heidegger as its principal sources and allies.[7] Freud, it is true, was to bring an unprecedented influence to bear on French intellectual circles in the late nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies, thanks in the main to the ascendancy of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Not only was this a distinctive reading of Freud, however, it was also largely inscribed with the social, political and metaphysical concerns that demonstrate the inescapable influence of French Hegelianism and Marxism.[8] The French reception of Freud, consequently, should be recognised as a radical revision as much as, if not more than, an appropriation of his thought. Sherry Turkle encapsulates the distinctive social and political character of French psychoanalysis when, referring to Lacan's reading of Freud, she suggests that,

> He insists, as did Frankfurt's critical theorists, that to talk of 'social influences' on the individual neutralizes one of Freud's most central contributions: the recognition that society doesn't 'influence' an autonomous individual, but that society comes to dwell within him.[9]

However, with the Girardian understanding of the role and character of the psyche, this 'dwelling within' of the social, is taken, as we shall see in Chapter 4, in a radically different direction.[10] Granted, the impact of social and socialising processes in determining the character of individual psychological phenomena is present in Lacan among others[11], and is

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[7] Cf. Goldmann, *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*, 1-17, 156-171; Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy* trans. L. Scott-Fox & J.M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), esp. 9-54.

[8] Cf. Sherry Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics: Freud's Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1978); Samuel Weber, *Return to Freud: Jacques Lacan's Dislocation of Psychoanalysis* trans. M. Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[9] Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics*, 74.

[10] For a useful comparison of the theoretical approach of Lacanian psychoanalysis and the Girardian hypothesis cf. Eugene Webb, 'The New Social Psychology of France: The Heritage of Jacques Lacan' *Religion* 23 (1993), 61-69 & 'The New Social Psychology of France: The Girardian School' *Religion* 23 (1993), 255-263.

[11] Most notably, the 'founders' of French psychology, Gabriel Tarde and Gustave Le Bon. Cf. G. Tarde, *The Laws of Imitation*, trans. E. Clews Parsons (New York: Henry Holt, 1903); G. Le Bon, *The Crowd* trans. R.A. Nye (London: Transaction, 1995).

central to a full comprehension of Girard's engagement with Freud. Nevertheless, the influence of Cartesian and Hegelian philosophy on twentieth-century French psychoanalysis, even in Lacan's emphasis on the linguistic constitution of subjectivity, served to create an understanding of personal identity that was, in many respects idealist.[12] Through his exploration of literary and anthropological sources, Girard moved towards a less essentialist view of subjectivity and, concomitantly, to a position more distinctively his own.[13] This position, as we shall see, was to be particularly unfashionable as Girard moved towards a 'thick' anthropological description through which might be found answers to political and social crises - just at a stage of French intellectual life where politics was becoming thoroughly aestheticised.[14] The result of this exposition and criticism of cultural, literary and societal forms - along with his idiosyncratic and powerful critique of Freud - was the publication of *La violence et le sacré*, probably Girard's best known book.[15]

During this period of some eleven years between the publication of *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* and *La violence et le sacré* - an interval in which he also published numerous articles as well as books on Proust and Dostoevsky[16] - Girard's personal commitment to, and academic interest in, Christianity remained unspoken – if not wholly concealed - in his published work. Nevertheless, the implicit necessity of the Christian narrative as an antidote to the violence inherent in cultural and religious forms, hinted at in *La*

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[12] Cf. Eugene Webb, *The Self Between: From Freud to the New Social Psychology of France* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), Chapter 2.

[13] The development of Girard's understanding of subjectivity shall be discussed in Chapter 4. Suffice it to say at this stage that the evolving character of his work suggests that *le système Girard* has always been something of a system in process.

[14] The aestheticization of politics has a long history. Cf. D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). For a consideration of more recent examples of aestheticization, cf. T. Eagleton, The Illusions of Postmodernism (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) and F. Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' *Postmodern Culture* (ed.) H. Foster (London: Pluto Press, 1985), 111-125.

[15] René Girard, *La violence et le sacré* (Paris: Grasset, 1972). English translation, *Violence and the Sacred* trans. P. Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

[16] René. Girard, *Proust: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1962) & *Dostoievski: du double à l'unité* (Paris: Plon, 1963) trans. *Resurrection from the Underground: Feodor Dostoevsky* (New York: Crossroad, 1996).

violence et le sacré and later proposed in more explicit terms in *Des Choses cachées dupuis la fondation du monde*[17], was not lost on at least one critic.[18] Only recently, however, has Girard talked of the personal and intellectual significance of a conversion experience that occurred while he was working on his first book.[19] Girard, until this defining moment a lapsed Catholic, recounts how this conversion was two-fold in its character. First, through his reading of, in particular, Proust and Dostoevsky, Girard began to question the cynical and ultra-critical 'debunking' that was so central to his developing project - *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*. The execution of a 'pure demystification' that Girard identifies as his approach to both texts and theory in the nineteen-fifties, very much in line with the 'spirit of the atheistic intellectuals of the time'[20], was thoroughly questioned as he found himself attracted to the Christian elements of the great novels which he read and studied closely. Thus, the initial elements of his conversion could be described as intellectual-literary in character. The second stage of Girard's return to the Catholic Christianity of his birth was of a considerably more personal kind, relating to the fear generated by skin cancer and the awareness of his mortality, but, as he insists, the two moments of this journey of faith are intimately connected.

With the publication of *Des Choses cachées dupuis la fondation du monde*, the pivotal position of Girard's Christian faith in his hypothesis became evident. Of a work that is presented as a theoretical triptych, the central panel is wholly devoted to a delineation and theoretical defence of the remarkable nature and significance of the gospels. Accordingly, in a post- or even anti-Christian milieu, such a theoretical approach was both unfashionable and

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[17] René Girard, *Des Choses cachées dupuis la fondation du monde: Recherches avec Jean-Michel Oughourlian et Guy Lefort* (Paris: Grasset, 1978). English trans. *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World: Research Undertaken in Collaboration with Jean-Michel Oughourlian and Guy Lefort* trans. S. Bann & M. Meteer (London: Athlone, 1987). The issues surrounding culture, religion, violence and the significance of Christianity shall be considered in Chapter 3.

[18] Cf. Hayden White's hostile attack on the Christian implications of the thesis outlined in *Violence and the Sacred*; 'Ethnological "Lie" and Mythical "Truth" *Diacritics* 8:1 (1978), 2-9.

[19] R. Girard, *Quand Ces Choses Commenceront*, (Paris: Arléa, 1994),190-195.

[20] R. Girard, *The Girard Reader*, 283

controversial, especially as Girard's reading of the scriptures demands, as we shall see in the next Chapter, that these *religious* texts are central to any comprehension and transformation of social and cultural forms. Considerably more than a work that offers hope for the pretensions of embattled Christian souls in a secular context, *Des Choses cachées dupuis la fondation du monde* incorporates and integrates nearly twenty years of Girard's theoretical toil. Here one can see that central to the intelligibility of Girard's *oeuvre* is the delineation of a particular anthropology that, while having evolved since *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*, underpins his engagement with literary, anthropological, philosophical, ethnological and theological material. Since the publication of *Des Choses cachées dupuis la fondation du monde*, Girard has principally developed his anthropology in relation to specifically Christian themes and problems as well returning to one of his favourite literary figures – William Shakespeare.[21] In 1982 Girard published his study of the scapegoat, *Le Bouc émissaire*[22] and three years later came , *La Route antique des hommes pervers*[23], a study that, according to Philip Goodchild, 'has shed an incomparable light upon the Book of Job.'[24] Both of these studies locate anthropological discourse within a specifically religious and, ultimately, Christian context.

It is this anthropology and its application to the present status of the human being in a theological context that constitutes the dominant concern of the present study. Consequently, my next task shall be an exposition and analysis, in Chapters 3 and 4, of the Girardian hypothesis. In order to facilitate such a task, Girard's work shall be outlined in a manner and structure that follows that of *Des Choses cachées dupuis la fondation du monde*. There, Girard divides his hypothesis into three sections, 'Fundamental Anthropology', 'The Judaeo-

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[21] R. Girard, *Shakespeare: Le feux de l'envie* (Paris: Grasset, 1990) English translation, *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare* trans. Y. Freccero (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
[22] R. Girard, *Le Bouc émissaire* (Paris: Grasset, 1982). English translation, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).
[23] R. Girard, *La Route antique des hommes pervers* trans. Y. Freccero (Paris: Grasset, 1985). English translation, *Job, the Victim of his People* trans. Y. Freccero (London: Athlone Press, 1987).
[24] Philip Goodchild, 'Job and Sacrifice: The Price of Piety' *Continental Thought: Violence, Sacrifice Desire* (eds) M. Dillon & P. Fletcher (Oxford: Blackwell, forthcoming).

Christian Scriptures' and 'Interdividual Psychology'. In the present study, the first two sections of Girard's theoretical triptych shall be considered in Chapter 3, while his description of what he terms 'interdividual' psychology shall be examined in Chapter 4.

Chapter Three:
The Girardian Hypothesis I

Introduction

In the course of Part One of this study I examined the current status of the 'self', in terms of both contemporary social theory and postmodern philosophy and also in recent theological anthropology. First, in Chapter One, I considered both two attempts to marry a negative theology with a negative anthropology in response to the problem of what Frederic Jameson has called 'the fragmented and schizophrenic decentering and dispersion' of the subject [1]. Second, in Chapter Two, I outlined two approaches to the philosophical and theological implications of this fracturing of the narratives in which human self-understanding is formed and transmitted. In the work of Habermas and McFadyen I demonstrated the manner in which each has attempted the reconstitution of the subject. Put crudely, these two chapters can be characterised as exposing a somewhat uncritical espousal of the death of the subject and a superficial rejection of the postmodern challenge to theological anthropology; both standpoints providing, as far as this study is concerned, manifestly inadequate responses to the demand to refigure a theological subject. In an attempt to construct a more satisfactory

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[1] F. Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (eds) C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (London:Macmillan, 1988), 351.

and nuanced theological reading of the character of human being in the novel, outlandish territory that constitutes the anthropological landscape of Chapters One and Two I will delineate the wide ranging hypothesis of René Girard. If, as we have seen, contemporary anthropological concerns are characterised by the need to explore regions, considered newly discovered, in the midst of a dissatisfaction and disaffection with previous attempts, then Girard's work offers - even if taken as some sort of heuristic fiction - significant tools that help address the questions and difficulties that arise both in mainstream theological enquiry and in terms of the obvious failures of the projects considered thus far. Girard's hypothesis is not however a straightforward critical response to the present status of the subject. Rather, it is as much, if not more, an attempt to provide a constructive anthropological hypothesis in an interdisciplinary context. While Girard's understanding of the configuration of identity through desire constitutes a more existentially grounded theoretical apparatus for the accomplishment of the aims of this study, it will be necessary to analyse the three main sections of his hypothesis since there are many themes and issues that are presupposed in Girard's explicit interrogation of the constitution of subjectivity. In this examination of Girard's work, consequently, I shall initially consider his investigation of the genesis and subsistence of cultural and religious institutions and the weight he gives to Biblical revelation before moving to a detailed consideration of his understanding of the constitution and dynamism of subjectivity.

3:1.: Fundamental Anthropology

In his exploration of a plethora of cultural, religious, and philosophical questions, Girard commences with the anthropological question *par excellence*: what is the origin of the species? In response to this question, Girard's project can be understood as one providing a speculative account of the genesis of humankind - a 'morphogenetic hypothesis.'[2] Hence,

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[2] Cf. Paul Dumouchel, 'A Morphogenetic Hypothesis on the Closure of Post-Structuralism' *Understanding Origins: Contemporary Views on the Origin of Life, Mind, and Society* (eds.) F.J. Varela & J-P. Dupuy (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), 77-90.

fundamental anthropology: a reflection on the process by which humans became distinct from other animals and formed cultural institutions.[3] In an attempt to define the parameters of the enquiry more precisely, a second question is presented: What historically identifies the human as peculiar in the animal realm? The undertaking that Girard is attempting to realise in his reply to these rudimentary questions is designated as an exploration of the 'process of hominization' - 'a science of man.'[4] Girard is eager to disabuse the reader of any notion, *contra* Foucault[5], that we are observing the phenomenon known as the 'end of man.' This critical response to a Foucauldian erasure of Enlightenment 'Man' should in no way be seen, however, as a an attempt to retrieve the self-sufficient, disengaged subject of modernity. Girard shares a pessimistic heritage of twentieth century French anti-humanism that has witnessed the emptiness and despair resulting from the failure of utopian projects in both political and intellectual contexts.[6] Girard's objective is to prevent the irresponsible rejection of questions concerning the nature and status of sociocultural processes and the configuration of subjects in the development and arrangement of these processes. Hand in hand with an exploration of such anthropological questions goes a thorough-going examination of the problems surrounding the place and standing of 'self' and 'other'.[7]

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[3] There are echoes here of Heidegger's 'Fundamental ontology' which, as he notes, 'puts the concrete question: What is the human being?' M. Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* 4th ed. trans Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 1. What distinguishes Girard's answer to the question (What is the human being?) is the attention given to the 'natural history of human beings.' Fergus Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 182.

[4] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 7, 84ff.

[5] Cf. M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1970), 387; Foucault predicts the coming erasure of man 'like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea'.

[6] Cf. especially V. Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1980) and E. Webb, *The Self Between: From Freud to the New Social Psychology of France* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993). For Girard's place in this intellectual collage cf. Hayden White, 'Ethnological "Lie" and Mythical "Truth" *Diacritics* 8:1 (1978), 2-9, an interesting discussion which considers the relationship between Girard and, amongst others, Foucault, Deleuze and Lévi-Strauss.

[7] Cf. 'An Interview with René Girard', in R. Girard, *To Double Business Bound: Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology* (London; The Athlone Press, 1978), 199-201. These latter concerns of identity and alterity with be examined in Chapter Four.

At the time of the publication of Girard's theories, 1972 in the case of *La Violence et le sacré* and 1978 for *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*, such a project was particularly unfashionable. However, the later Foucault's insistence on exploring new possibilities for understanding and 'creating' subjectivity suggest that the perceived death of one dominant configuration of subjectivity raised as many problems as it solved. The Girardian project purports to inform the present sociopolitical situation marked by the insecurity and uncertainty of transition and crisis, and, ultimately, to offer the possibility of finding new ways of conceiving questions of subjectivity as well as alternative ways of living.[8] Girard is not interested, in his more anthropological discussion, with the disappearance of the self but with an exploration of the genesis and development of culture. He asserts that 'no single question has more of a future today than the question of man.'[9] Nevertheless, in harmony with recent criticisms of Enlightenment anthropology, Girard contends that a 'displacement is occurring'[10] in which - and this, I believe, is Girard's major contribution to anthropology - the theme of mimicry is foremost. Mimesis, mimicry, or imitation, is considered as fundamental - to learning and to cultural formation.[11]

Girard's positioning of mimesis at the centre of his anthropology is not, as he accepts, a new departure. French social psychology of the late nineteenth century, particularly the work of Gustave Le Bon and Gabriel Tarde, was considerably more attentive to the role of imitation than its Freudian counterpart in which the individual, rather than the social and cultural context, was deemed to be the proper site of psychological research.[12] However, this understanding of imitation evident in France at the *fin de siècle* was heavily coloured by 'the optimism and conformity of a triumphant *petite bourgeoisie*.'[13] Mimesis was, consequently,

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[8] Cf. R. Girard, *Quand Ces Commenceront...: Entretiens avec Michel Treguer* (Paris: Arlea, 1994), 120-156.
[9] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 7.
[10] Ibid., 6.
[11] Ibid., 7.
[12] Cf. Eugene Webb, *The Self Between: From Freud to the new Social Psychology of France*, 3-26. We shall return to this theme in Chapter 4.
[13] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 8.

perceived through the restricted filter of the quest for 'progress' in which the cohesive, rather than divisive, role of imitation was emphasised. Together with this modern bourgeois vision, the understanding of mimesis since the time of Plato has, Girard contends, been limited to the role of *representation* and it has ignored 'kinds of behaviour involved in appropriation.'[14] This 'essential dimension of acquisitive behaviour'[15], neglected since Plato's reflections on imitation in *The Republic*, is also the 'dimension of conflict.'[16] This is where Girard's work exhibits its originality: the imitation of others and the imitation of their desires breeds a rivalry born of the conflict that results from the attempt to acquire what is another's for oneself:

> As I imitate the desire of my neighbour, I reach for the object he is already reaching for, and we prevent each other from appropriating this object. His relation to my desire parallels my relation to his, and the more we cross each other, the more stubbornly we imitate each other. My interference intensifies his desire, just as his interference intensifies mine. This process of positive feedback can only lead to physical and other forms of violence.[17]

Girard argues that although animals share a propensity for mimesis, some form of evolutionary shift occurred which resulted in the termination of control of the mimetic process through instinctual braking mechanisms such as patterns of dominance and submission.[18] In short, the result of acquisitive mimesis is that it gives rise to mimetic rivalry which, without any form of instinctual control, generates conflict and reciprocal violence.

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[14] Cf. Plato, *The Republic* 2nd ed trans. D. Lee (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), Book X, 595a-608b, 421-439.
[15] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 8. Cf. also, 'An Interview with René Girard', in R. Girard, *To Double Business Bound: Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology*, 200-201. Here Girard defends this understanding of acquisitive mimesis from the criticisms of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in his *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics* (ed) C. Fynsk (London: Harvard University Press, 1989), 43-138.
[16] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 10.
[17] R. Girard, 'Discussion', *Violent Origins: Walter Burket, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation* (ed.) R.G. Hamerton-Kelly (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 122-123.
[18] Cf. R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 94.

3:2.: The Formation of Social Structures

The threat of violence necessitated, according to Girard, the development of social structures in order that human societies might survive the onslaught of the mimetic crisis - a stage at which reciprocal violence threatened the very existence of the community. Girard illustrates the efficacy of prohibitions and ritual as, respectively, preventative and curative measures. Girard readily acknowledges the constructive and pedagogical virtue of mimetic behaviour and, indeed, characterises it as 'the essential force of cultural integration'. As one of Girard's interlocutors, Jean-Michel Oughourlian, suggests in *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*,

> Without mimesis there can be neither human intelligence nor cultural transmission. Mimesis is the essential force of cultural integration. Is it also the force of destruction and dissolution, as the evidence of prohibitions suggests?[19]

Oughourlian's contribution here is twofold. In his statements concerning the impact of mimesis he accords a positive role to it in terms of cultural transmission and integration.[20] Yet, in his question that completes his interpolation, Oughourlian highlights the ruinous possibilities that Girard discerns in the character of mimesis, so often ignored and hidden. If, however, we firstly consider the place of mimesis in the transmission of culture, Girard has, in an examination of the 'modern ideology of *absolute innovation*', exposed the way in which imitation, or repetition is an indispensable, and highly formative, ingredient in any innovative process:

> Until quite recently, the Japanese were dismissed as mere copiers of Western ways, incapable of real invention in any field. They are now the driving force behind innovation in more and more technical fields. When did they acquire that inventive spark which, supposedly, they lacked? At this very moment, imitators of the Japanese - Koreans, Taiwanese - are repeating the same

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[19] Ibid., 17.

[20] Cf. also Girard's remark that, 'If human beings suddenly ceased imitating, all forms of culture would vanish.' *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 7.

> process. They, too, are fast turning into innovators. Hadn't something already occurred in the 19th century, when Germany first rivalled and then surpassed England in industrial might? The metamorphosis of imitators into innovators occurs repeatedly, but we always react to it with amazement. Perhaps we do not want to know about the role of imitation in innovation.[21]

The product of mimesis rather than genius, innovation is, Girard contends, the outcome of a fundamental process of a human being's involvement in the social and cultural milieu. Thus, mimesis underpins human identity and its development. Nevertheless, Girard's main concern is with the acquisitive and conflictual character of much mimetic behaviour indicated by Oughourlian's question - and prohibition testifies to this destructive potentiality.

3:3.: The Function of Prohibitions

The role of prohibitions is, quite simply, to prevent acquisitive mimesis: any occasion or event which might give rise to violence or intense rivalry is forbidden or contained.[22] As Girard suggests, for the most part their effect is this straightforward:

> All occasions or events that might give rise to real violence, even intense rivalries or forms of competition that are often tolerated or even encouraged elsewhere in society, are prohibited.[23]

There are, however, more 'absurd' types of behaviour that Girard and his collaborators maintain are likewise prohibited due to their mimetic character. An interdiction in 'traditional societies' on the repetition of the gestures and words of another member of the community and 'of the use of proper names', as well as a 'fear of mirrors' because of their association

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[21] R. Girard, 'Innovation and Repetition' *SubStance* No. 62/63 (1990), 14.
[22] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 10; 41.
[23] Ibid., 10.

'with the devil', is indicative of a heightened awareness of the effect of mimesis that is absent in modern western societies.[24]

> Imitation doubles the imitated object and produces a simulacrum that can in turn become the object of types of magic. When ethnologists comment on such phenomena, they attribute them to a desire for protection against so-called imitative magic. And this is also the explanation they receive (from the natives) when they inquire into the *raison d'être* of prohibitions.[25]

This structural impediment to particular forms of mimetic behaviour attests to an awareness on the part of traditional societies of the relation between mimesis and violence: 'They know more about desire than we do, whereas our ignorance keeps us from understanding the unity of all prohibitions.'[26] Contrary to societies, like our own, where violence has a 'conceptual autonomy'[27], traditional societies recognise the reciprocity of conflict. 'What permits us to conceive abstractly of an act of violence and to view it as an isolated crime is the power of a judicial institution that transcends all antagonists.'[28] Yet the judicial system is simply a different mechanism for restraining the effects of conflictual mimesis; if it were to fail, 'the imitative character of violence' would become manifest once more.[29] Indeed, Girard believes that mimetic conflict is 'the true common denominator of prohibitions.'[30] 'But it rarely appears as such; it is always interpreted as an evil manifestation of the sacred, the vengeful fury of the divinity.'[31] Thus, there is, Girard contends, a link between the prohibition of mimesis and its violent consequences and the prohibition of all images in some religions.[32]

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[24] Ibid., 10-11.
[25] Ibid., 11.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 11-12.
[28] Ibid., 12. Cf. also *Violence and the Sacred*, 16-17 where Girard explores the relationship between modern western judicial systems and the termination of the process of revenge.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid., 14. Cf. *Violence and the Sacred*, 219-222.
[31] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 14.
[32] Cf. *Violence and the Sacred*, 151-152.

This emphasis on the religious dimension and its relation to violence is, in the Girardian hypothesis, of particular significance. It again highlights that which is 'deep' and 'sinister' about the human condition.[33] The terror of mimesis brings reflection on the 'subject' down to earth and demands that attention be paid to that which we would rather ignore or forget: that human beings are not immune from the desire to appropriate and, therefore, are susceptible to mimetic conflict. This is evident even in Plato's understanding of mimesis:

> When, in *The Republic*, Plato describes the undifferentiating and violent effects of mimesis, one can note the emergence of the theme of twins and also that of the mirror. It must be admitted that this is remarkable, but then no one has ever attempted to read Plato in the light of ethnology. And yet precisely such a reading is necessary in order truly to 'deconstruct' any 'metaphysics'. Aside from the pre-Socratics, to whom Heidegger and contemporary Heideggerian thought return, there is only religion, and one must understand religion in order to understand philosophy. Since the attempt to understand religion on the basis of philosophy has failed, we ought to try the reverse method and read philosophy in the light of religion.[34]

Girard is not attempting to usurp philosophy in order to return theology to the position of queen of the sciences. Rather, he is suggesting that by attending to religious phenomena and structures - in this case, prohibitions - we can understand more fully the significance of philosophical and metaphysical themes that attempt to define, in a more abstract manner, truth and value and, moreover, we may more profitably question their veracity.[35] The necessity for this questioning arises from the cultural importance of mimesis. The reduction, in western culture, of the significance of mimesis to 'modalities of imitation' such as speech and behaviour - 'on the order of simulacrum' - ignores the conflictual aspect of mimesis.[36]

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[33] The phrase is Wittgenstein's. *Remarks on Frazer's* Golden Bough, (ed.) R. Rhees, trans. A.C. Miles (Doncaster: The Brynmill Press, 1979), 16e: 'this deep and sinister aspect is not obvious just from learning the history of external action, but *we* impute it from an experience in ourselves.' For a further exploration of the 'deep' and 'sinister' in this Wittgensteinian context, cf. John Churchill, 'Something Deep and Sinister' *Modern Theology* 8:1 (1992), 15-37.

[34] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 15.

[35] Here, the influence of Durkheimian sociology and its emphasis on 'social facts' as underpinning culture and identity can be detected. Cf. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* trans. K.E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995). However, Durkheim contends that mimesis and 'mimetic rites' are distinct from 'human nature' which can more successfully be explored in relation to morality and moral codes. Cf. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 361-362.

[36] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 17

Consequently, the cause of mimetic rivalry and conflict is concealed, the 'rivalry provoked by an object, the acquisitive mimesis which must always be our point of departure.'[37] Not only is Girard suggesting that the common denominator of all prohibitions is their 'antimimetic character'[38], he is making a bolder assertion that,

> not only the prohibitions but also ritual and ultimately the whole structure of religion can be traced back to the mechanism of acquisitive mimesis. A complete theory of human culture will be elaborated, beginning with this single principle.[39]

3:4.: The Victimage Mechanism.

While prohibitions are designed to prevent or control mimesis, ritual operates as a curative tonic. The prevalent dangers surrounding the mimetic process - 'literally one of culture difference being reversed and effaced as it gives way to reciprocal violence' - can, if unfettered lead, Girard contends, to a 'mimetic crisis'.[40] The mimetic crisis represents 'a conflictual upheaval that destroys social organization'. The ritual context transforms, through the concentration of mimetic energy, 'the conflictual disintegration of the community into social collaboration.'[41] Traditional societies 'abandon themselves, in their rituals, to what they fear most during normal periods: the dissolution of the community in the mimetic crisis.'[42] This conscientious mimicry of a communal disintegration into a mimetic hysteria in a controlled ritual environment, rather than destroying the community, acts as a palliative: 'it is

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[37] Ibid., 18.
[38] Ibid., 19.
[39] Ibid., 18.
[40] Ibid., 20. Cf. also, *Violence and the Sacred*, 89-92.
[41] Ibid., 20, 48.
[42] Ibid., 22.

as if they believed that a simulated disintegration might ward off the real disintegration.'[43]. Thus, the effect of ritual is a restoration of peaceful and ordered existence.[44]

It would seem at this stage that Girard is proposing that social structures arose spontaneously *ex nihilo* - as if some primitive 'common sense' saved the day. Reflecting further on the ritual process, Girard posits the second central feature of his hypothesis - alongside mimetic behaviour - the 'victimage mechanism'.[45] However, this characteristic of the hypothesis is important; the victimage mechanism provides ritual and prohibition with an all too powerful sting in the tail. Ritual concludes with the immolation of a victim and, argues Girard, this culmination is synonymous with the 'conclusion of the mimetic crisis enacted by the ritual.'[46] In other words, the violent consummation acts as a closure to the potentiality of violence engendered by the mimetic crisis; 'it is the last word'.[47] The missing link in the consideration of ritual concerns the force which unites the collective against the sacrificial victim. It is Girard's contention that what 'had in fact united the community and put an end to a real mimetic crisis' was an 'original spontaneous murder.'[48] The victim of this original murder was, by necessity, arbitrary: 'Only an arbitrary victim can resolve the crisis because acts of violence, as mimetic phenomena, are identical and distributed as such within the community. No one can assign an origin to the crisis or judge degrees of responsibility for it.'.[49] The victim simply acts as the focus for conflictual mimesis. In other words, the violence of one against one, engendered by mimetic conflict, becomes the violence of all

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Cf. R. Girard, 'Discussion', *Violent Origins: Walter Burket, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation* (ed.) R.G. Hamerton-Kelly (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 128. Here, Girard summarises the role of ritual and prohibition: 'In my last three books, I tried to show, among other things, that the implicit contradictions between the "dos" and the "don'ts" that must emerge from the successfully misunderstood victimage, the inevitable tension between the ritual imperative and the prohibition imperative, can be regarded as the true source of cultural innovation in the nonhistorical phases of human culture.'

[45] Girard claims that 'All religious rituals spring from the surrogate victim, and all the great institutions of mankind, both secular and religious, spring from ritual' *Violence and the Sacred*, 306.

[46] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 23.

[47] Ibid., 24

[48] Ibid., 25.

[49] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 25

against one. It is the 'allegiance against a common enemy' which is primary, not the identity of the victim.[50] As Girard himself explains,

> The general direction of the present hypothesis should now be abundantly clear; any community that has fallen prey to violence or has been stricken by some overwhelming catastrophe hurls itself blindly into the search for a scapegoat. Its members instinctively seek an immediate and violent cure for the onslaught of unbearable violence and strive desperately to convince themselves that all their ills are the fault of a lone individual who can be easily disposed of.[51]

Moreover, it is this common allegiance at the conclusion of the crisis which *is* the resolution of conflict - identity is restored through the destruction of difference.[52] As Richard Kearney suggests, this sacrifice is 'the immolation of the 'other' on the altar of the 'same'.'[53] The victim, in turn, acquires an ambiguous status. Held responsible for the communal disorder, the victim is 'believed to have brought about his own death' and yet, as also responsible for the renewal of peace, the victim is regarded as sacred.[54] Consequently, Girard declares that,

> the observation of religious systems force us to conclude, (1) that the mimetic crisis always occurs, (2) that the banding together of all against a single victim is the normal resolution at the level of culture, and (3) that it is furthermore the normative resolution, because all the rules of culture stem from it.[55]

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[50] Ibid., 26.
[51] R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 79.
[52] Ibid., 95. Difference is consequently controlled by the structuring role of prohibition and taboo which prevent complete indifferentiation and, therefore, the convergence of mimetic desire and a subsequent mimetic crisis. Cf. Jean-Michel Oughourlian, *The Puppet of Desire: The Psychology of Hysteria, Possession, and Hypnosis* trans. E. Webb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 149. Cf. also, R. Girard, *Quand Ces Commenceront...: Entretiens avec Michel Treguer* (Paris: Arlea, 1994), esp. Ch. VIII,' L'un et le mutiple', 90-119.
[53] Richard Kearney, 'Myths and Scapegoats: The Case of René Girard' *Theory, Culture & Society* 12 (1995), 1.
[54] This ambiguous status of the victim is captured wonderfully by Jacques Derrida in his observation that 'The people's shudder of admiration before the "great criminal" is addressed to the individual who takes upon himself, as in primitive times, the stigma of the lawmaker or the prophet'. J. Derrida, 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"' *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, D. Cornell, M. Rosenfeld & D. Gray Carlson (eds.) (London: Routledge, 1992), 40.
[55] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 27.

The victimage mechanism - the convergence of conflictual mimesis onto an arbitrary victim - is the very basis of social and cultural institutions. It is this mechanism which underpins both prohibition and ritual which are instituted in response to the original murder. Therefore, post-immolation behaviour is characterised by 'two principle imperatives':

> (1) Not to repeat any action associated with the crisis, to abstain from all mimicry, from all contact with the former antagonists, from any acquisitive gesture toward objects that have stood as causes or pretexts for rivalry. This is the imperative of the prohibition. (2) To reproduce, on the contrary, the miraculous event that put an end to the crisis, to immolate new victims substituted for the original victim in circumstances as close as possible to the original experience. This is the imperative of ritual.[56]

According to Girard, then, the cultural order is brought into being through the violence of the victimage mechanism, and it is that violent episode which defines the character of the emergent community and its structure: 'Rituals and prohibitions can be seen as directed toward the same end, which is the renewed order and peace that emerge from the victimage mechanism; the prohibition and the ritual attempt in different ways to ensure that peace.'[57]

3: 5.: The Nature of Religion

The convergence of internecine violence and cultural formation are clearly outlined in Girard's hypothesis.[58] More controversial is Girard's belief that these first cultural frameworks are invariably religious. Girard, in *Things Hidden*, echoes his famous proposition in *Violence and the Sacred* that 'Violence and the sacred are inseparable'[59]:

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[56] Ibid., 28.

[57] Ibid., 29. In many respects, the structural primacy of religion in the foundation and development of social and cultural institutions again indicates the influence of Durkheim's sociology on Girard's thought. This socio-historical approach undermines the criticism that Girard is simply Hegelian in his understanding of the constitution of subjectivity through violence and overcoming. Moreover, Girard's consideration of violence and its correspondence with the sacred carries, as he claims, 'Durkheim's insight to its conclusion'. Cf. *Violence and the Sacred*, 306-307.

[58] As Andrew McKenna puts it, 'In the beginning was the victim'. 'Introduction' *Semeia* 33 (1985), 58.

[59] R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 19.

> To understand human culture it is necessary to concede that only the damming of mimetic forces by means of the prohibition and the diversion of these forces in the direction of ritual are capable of spreading and perpetuating the reconciliatory effect to keep the peace. *The sacred is violence*, but if religious man worships violence it is only insofar as the worship of violence is supposed to bring peace; religion is entirely concerned with peace, but the means it has of bringing it about are never free of sacrificial violence.[60]

As we shall see later in the chapter when we consider Girard's reading of the Judaeo-Christian scriptures, modern societies no longer produce - at least in a straightforward and so concealed manner - religious structures established through violence. There is, in contemporary western culture, abundant knowledge and understanding of the scapegoat mechanism - a comprehension that acts as a check to the occurrence of such surreptitious phenomena and 'any re-creation of true religious systems.'[61] This theme of recognition and misrecognition is fundamental to Girard's conception of the efficacy of the sacred in the production and reproduction of cultural forms: 'The production of the sacred is necessarily and inversely proportional to the understanding of the mechanisms that produce it.'[62]

Nevertheless, there remains an ambivalence regarding our institutions and the inherent threat of violence. Here, Girard borrows the psychoanalytic concept of 'transference' to highlight his exposition of the modern western context.

> Religious phenomena are essentially characterized by the double transference, the aggressive transference followed by the reconciliatory transference. The reconciliatory transference sacralizes the victim and is the most fragile, most easily lost, since to all evidence it does not occur until the mechanism has completely 'played itself out'. We remain capable, in other words, of hating our victims; we are no longer capable of worshipping them.[63]

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[60] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 32.
[61] Ibid., 33.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., 37.

Girard's point is that structure and structural processes persist in which victimage occurs, although a greater awareness of the consequences of such processes forecloses an uncritically blind commitment to them. However, as Oughourlian suggests, there remains the submergence of 'an immemorial history, properly speaking, a diachronic dimension that remains inaccessible to modes of contemporary thought.'[64] There remains, consequently, the possibility of a muted form of victimage that is, for the most part, ignorant of the sacralizing process which remains hidden from view. Exemplary, according to Girard, 'is the ideological opponent, the class enemy, the older generation or the fools that govern us, the ethnic minorities, the ethnic majority, the misinformed, etc.'[65] It is this 'malevolent' process of transference that is invested with significant authority - political and intellectual. Thus, victimage continues even when its processes are in some sense stripped of the sacred, demythologised as it were. Yet, through observation of the 'religious', one can understand more fully than elsewhere the mechanisms of violence:

> religious systems - despite the transfigurations brought about by interpretation of the sacred - are based on a keen observation both of the kinds of behaviour that lead human beings into violence and of the strange process that puts an end to violence. These are generally the kinds of behaviour that religious systems prohibit, and it is this process, roughly, that they reproduce in ritual.[66]

As with the structural processes evident in ritual and prohibition, so the metaphysics of the sacred - characterised by divine vengeance - underpin a fundamentally violent configuration of social cohesion and identity. By displacing the responsibility for violence from the community to a deity, internecine violence is enveloped in an 'imposing mystery' and moves guilt, in a mythic transference to a god, from the location of its occurrence to the realm of the ethereal.[67]

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[64] Ibid., 34.
[65] Ibid., 37-38.
[66] Ibid., 41-42.
[67] Ibid., 42.

While it might be objected that Girard has reduced 'heterogeneous phenomena' to an all-encompassing monogenetic theory, Girard is insistent that his hypothesis, or model, allows for 'infinite variation'.[68] What is being described by Girard is 'the object of a fundamental and founding recognition.' 'The whole theory is based on the already *interpretive* character of religious phenomena in relation to the founding event.'[69] As Oughourlian points out, the Girardian thesis 'is primarily not a theory of religion but a theory of human relations and of the role that the mechanism of victimage plays in these relations. The theory of religion is simply a particularly noteworthy aspect of a fundamental theory of mimetic relations.'[70] What Girard presents, however, is not exclusively a theory concerning the mystification that is intrinsic to religion and its structures. Oughourlian, somewhat controversially, includes within the scope of Girard's hypothesis a wide range of theoretical disciplines in the human sciences that must equally be challenged by this hypothesis: modern psychology, ethnology and philosophy, to name but a few.[71] 'All readings remain mythic if they do not take into account the radical reading of mimesis and its consequences.'[72] Mimesis, in any attempt to understand human identity, culture and society, is central.

3: 6.: *Cultural Development, Institutions and their Origins*

As we have seen, Girard suggests that the driving power behind religious thought and practice is mimesis: 'its concentration in a victim makes it a pacifying and regulating force, the positive mimesis found in ritual.'[73] However, the efficacy of religious structure, in particular ritual and prohibition, depends to a great extent on a necessary deception regarding the founding murder and the progressive distancing of a community from its impact and reality. Thus, there is, in the development of culture the need for the concentration of power (in, for

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[68] Ibid., 44.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., 48.

example, sacred kingship) that acts as a means of transferring power from the community (a power exercised in the killing of an innocent victim) and thus discharging 'the community of all responsibility.'[74] The evolution of institutions, and therefore culture, is consequently established upon violence itself:

> To return to the starting-point of our theory, we propose that in all human institutions it is necessary to reproduce a reconciliatory murder by means of new victims. The original victim is endowed with superhuman, terrifying prestige because it is seen as the source of all disorder and order. Subsequent victims inherit some of this prestige. One must look to this prestige for the source of all political and religious sovereignty.[75]

Indeed, in terms of the rise and reinforcement of centralised communal power in the figure of the sovereign, Girard believes that only religion can fully explain such a phenomenon: 'the paradox of ritual gives rise to the paradox of central power.'[76] In the sacrifice of a king, for example, the 'power of the sacred' is immediate and present. Yet, in the case of the divine, there is an absence which necessitates a repetition of the primordial event and, in some sense, a reproduction of the divine presence.[77] The sacred founds, underpins and sustains cultural institutions and their order.

This exploration of the foundation and continuation of cultural forms undermines, Girard believes, the prevalent attitude that he refers to as 'cultural Platonism'. This approach to social organisation claims that the specificity of institutions implies that their emergence can only be known through an appeal to pre-existent forms - whether these are understood within or beyond the subject is of principal importance. It can be defined as,

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[74] Ibid., 52.
[75] Ibid., 53.
[76] Ibid., 55.
[77] Ibid., 56.

> the unexamined conviction that human institutions have been and are what they are for all eternity, that they have little need to evolve and none whatsoever to be engendered. Human culture is an immutable idea that is immediately available to any human being who begins to think. To grasp it one has only to look within oneself where it resides, innate, or otherwise outside of oneself, where it can be found legibly inscribed in the heavens, as in Plato.[78]

It is obvious that the opposite contention, that cultural institutions do have an intelligible founding mechanism, will, however, be unacceptable to certain contemporary theorists and Girard is profoundly aware of the objections of the practitioners of deconstruction.[79] This is due to the emphasis in Girardian theory upon a 'real' founding event that can be readily excavated. Two points must be made here. Firstly, Girard is not suggesting, in the delineation of his theory, that we can reconstruct the actual event that constitutes cultural origins and social structures. This is because, as Andrew McKenna puts it,

> The victim is the supplement of origin in which, that is, in whose expulsion, the origin is (re)constituted. We are not speaking here of an historical reconstruction, which Girard recognizes as impossible ... , but of a generative principle whose very erasure accounts for properly mythological reconstructions.[80]

Secondly, Girard suggests that, with the development of his theory of the foundation of cultural institutions through violence and sacrifice, 'the beginning and the end of the "deconstruction" are at hand since its accomplishment amounts to a "reconstruction" which begins at the common matrix.'[81] With such a deconstructive reconstruction, Girard believes that his hypothesis makes significant gains that others cannot secure: 'The genetic and structural perspectives are joined in a type of analysis that transcends the limits of previous methods.'[82] Indeed, deconstruction suffers from the same theoretical deficiencies that Girard

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[78] Ibid., 59.
[79] Ibid., 62.
[80] A.J. McKenna, 'Supplement to Apocalypse: Girard and Derrida', 52. Cf. also, A. McKenna, *Violence and Difference: Girard, Derrida, and Deconstruction* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), especially Ch. 3, 'Violence and the Origin of Language', 66-115. Cf., R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 44, and R. Girard, 'Generative Scapegoating', *Violent Origins*, 89.
[81] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 62.
[82] Ibid.

perceives in so much philosophical, psychological and social-theoretical speculation - the lack of an anthropological basis.[83]

3: 7.: Mystification Through Myth

Even though the status of the founding murder and its reconstruction are ineluctably related to the indeterminate dialectic of genesis and structure, Girard is adamant that the process of cultural formation had to be suppressed. Such a contention is further promoted in his distinctive reading and demystification of myths. He believes that the founding murder constitutes the 'generative mechanism of all mythology.'[84] In opposition to Lévi-Strauss - for whom myth 'is nothing more than the fictive representation of cultural development' - Girard insists that myth represents 'the transfigured account of a real violence.'[85] 'Transfigured' because the mythical account is that of the murderers. Thus, the representation of the founding murder is such that the victim (and not the murderers) is held responsible for the 'disorder culminating in a unanimous gathering against it.'[86] This distortion of the victim's role and status in the mythic account, however, leaves the community hostage to its own lie:

> The representation [the myth] is determined by the violent reconciliation and the resulting sacralization. The victim is thus represented with all the attributes and qualities of the sacred. Fundamentally, then, the victim does not belong to the community; it is the community that belongs to the victim.[87]

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[83] Ibid., 63. It should also be pointed out that Girard disassociates his own hypothesis from the (human) sciences that might be accused of being hostage to a metaphysics of presence: 'The attitude to philosophy that still dominates the various methodologies of the human sciences cannot accommodate a hypothesis of this kind. Everything is still subject to the ideal of a mastery that arises immediately and intuitively, from direct contact with the data - this is perhaps one aspect of what we nowadays refer to as the 'metaphysics of presence.' 437.

[84] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 105.

[85] Ibid., 109. Because his work is underpinned by linguistic structuralism, Girard contends that Lévi-Strauss cannot recognise 'a mimetic and violent reciprocity that destroys all cultural differences *in reality* and *that does not exist only in the text*.', 109.

[86] Ibid., 108.

[87] Ibid., 111.

As we have noted, the victim is furnished with the glory appropriate to one who is responsible for the restoration of order. The mythical account is a portrayal of homicide in which the murderers refuse to accept the innocence of the victim and their own culpability. Yet the tensions inherent in mythical accounts point to events - of a definitely violent character - that these descriptions actually enshroud in order to justify the permanence and righteousness of extant cultural forms. Girard, then, employing his own 'hermeneutic of suspicion'[88], attempts to unmask any mythical justification or rejection of the violence focused on the figure of the scapegoated victim:

> The particular combination of themes that we find in mythology, the signs of crisis and the signs of reconciliation against and around the victim can be explained, perfectly and completely, only by the presence of a necessarily real lynching behind the myth.[89]

Thus, we are presented with a theory that provides a (textual) example of the nature of the composition of societal existence founded on a murder: '[Mythology's] real project is that of recalling the crises and the founding murder, the sequences in the realm of events that have constituted or reconstituted the cultural order.'[90] In uncovering the deception inherent in the accusation against the victim (and now, of course, the hero/god) Girard believes that he has laid bare the 'concealed yet truly simple truth of mythology.'[91] However, it is not the case that Girard has acquired a knowledge of the machinations of myth-making and its cryptic character without the help of a tradition of revelation. This revelation, hesitant at first, is evident, Girard contends, in 'texts of persecution'.

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[88] The phrase 'hermeneutic of suspicion' is, of course, that of Paul Ricoeur. 'This hermeneutics', he states, 'is not an explication of the object, but a tearing of off masks, an interpretation that reduces disguises'. P. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* trans. Denis Savage, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 30. Cf. also, Mark I. Wallace, 'Postmodern Biblicism: The Challenge of René Girard for Contemporary Theology' *Modern Theology* 5:4 (1989), 309-325 which critically appraises Girard's hermeneutic strategy. For a more extensive example of Girard's treatment of myth, cf. R. Girard, *The Scapegoat* trans. Y. Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

[89] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 118.

[90] Ibid., 120.

[91] Ibid., 119. Girard makes an even bolder claim concerning his 'laying bare' the truth of myth when he proclaims that 'I will not hesitate to assert that this is the first truly 'hard' finding in the explication of mythology ', 119.

3: 8: Texts of Persecution

The mythological account of the victimage mechanism exhibits a mentality which can be characterised as both deceitful and sacrificial.[92] However, Girard perceives in the desacralization of western culture a tendency towards the disclosure of the operation of the victimage mechanism 'that is progressively less obscured by ignorance.'[93] Consequently, the possibility has arisen, especially in the west, for societies to replace myth by an 'awareness of persecution.'[94] This awareness is exhibited in 'persecution texts'. These texts employ a perspective that is similar to the type of distortion operative in myth. The innocence of the victim and the arbitrary nature of the violence brought upon the victim are still concealed and denied.[95] However, texts of persecution do not proceed to any form of exaltation of the victim - the victim has not been 'sacralized'.[96] The effect of the victimage mechanism is diminished and desacralization of society ensues.[97] As Girard explains,

> In so far as light is shed on the victimage mechanism, concepts like violence and unjust persecution become thinkable and begin to play a larger role in cultural institutions. The production of myth and ritual simultaneously declines and eventually disappears entirely.[98]

Texts of persecution also reveal the slow process of revelation of the founding mechanism and the move towards desacralization. This process of revelation - an uncovering of the victimage-mechanism - makes it 'impossible to rehabilitate a sacrificial mechanism in the process of decomposition because growing awareness of these mechanisms is what

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[92] This deceit is intrinsic to a sacrificial order which is characterised as one that conceals the truth of the victimage mechanism and perpetuates its part in the life of societies and their response to the mimetic crisis.

[93] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 126.

[94] Ibid., 126.

[95] Ibid., 127-128.

[96] Ibid., 127.

[97] Ibid., 130

[98] Ibid., 127. For an application of this process in a modern context, weaving Girardian theory with the concerns of philosophy, literature and contemporary news stories, cf. Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroad, 1995).

decomposes them.'[99] However, Girard argues, another step of 'advanced desacralization' is to come.[100] This advancement is urgently required because.

> The whole of humanity is already confronted with an ineluctable dilemma: human beings must become reconciled without the aid of sacrificial intermediaries or resign themselves to the immediate extinction of humanity.[101]

The condition which underpins reconciliation is a total renunciation of violence.[102] Consistent with much post-war French thought which exudes a fundamental pessimism[103], Girard's consideration of the mechanisms of violence constitutes a salutary caution against complacency in 'advanced' western societies. However, contrary to the same tradition, Girard considers such reconciliation to be possible. The constraining influence of the victimage mechanism can and must be superseded: ''The definitive renunciation of violence, without any second thoughts, will become for us the condition *sine qua non* for the survival of humanity itself and for each one of us.'[104]. This imperative derives its force not only from the fact that violence, in its modern technological form, can bring about the utter destruction of the planet but because, as Girard reminds us, 'If man acts as he has in the past and abandons himself to mimetic contagion, there will be no victimage mechanisms to save him.'[105] The revelation of the violence at the heart of western culture is, then, a double-edged sword. However, if there is to be peace rather than destruction, Girard believes that this can only be effected by the 'unperceived but formidable' influence of the Judaeo-Christian scriptures.[106] It is the Gospels

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[99] Ibid., 128.
[100] Ibid., 137.
[101] Ibid., 136. This concern is powerfully broached in Girard's account of Cold War existence in his declaration that, 'Today the reign of violence is made manifest. It assumes the awesome and horrific form of technological weaponry. These weapons, as the "experts" blandly inform us, are what is keeping the whole world in line. The idea of "limitless" violence, long scorned by sophisticated Westerners, suddenly looms up before us. Absolute vengeance, formerly the prerogative of the gods, now returns, precisely weighed and calibrated, on the wings of science'. *Violence and the Sacred*, 240.
[102] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 137.
[103] Cf. Hayden White 'Ethnological "Lie" and Mythical "Truth"' *Diacritics* 8:1 (1978), 2-9 and Kate Soper, *Humanism and Anti-Humanism* (London: Hutchinson, 1986).
[104] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 137.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid., 138.

which 'unearth victims of collective violence and reveal their innocence.'[107] No longer must the truth of destruction, and the possibilities of alternative ways of living, remain hidden.

Girard's exploration of the development of cultural and social practices, and the integral role played by the sacred, leads, as we have seen, to a consideration of the distinctive and unprecedented influence of the Jewish and Christian biblical traditions. However, the peculiar character of these traditions does not imply that they stand, from beginning to end, as entirely disconnected from other mythological and religious traditions. In addition to the matchless originality of the bible in its treatment of violence, victimage and the foundation of cultural forms, Girard perceives an affinity between, in particular, the themes and structure of world mythologies and some of the oldest material in the Old Testament.[108] Thus, the three 'moments' characteristic of myth outlined by Girard - dissolution in conflict, unanimous collective violence, and the development of interdictions and rituals - are often evident in Old Testament narratives. Exemplary here are the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, the account of Noah and the flood and, thirdly, the sacrifice of Isaac.[109] 'In all these mythic accounts, society and even nature appear as a whole being put in order, or in which order is being re-established. In general these belong to the end of the victimage account, the place where the logic of the hypothesis expects to be'.[110] While accepting, therefore, that there are biblical myths which share familial characteristics with non-biblical myth, Girard's task, without ignoring nor rejecting the similarities, is to highlight the distinctive nature of the biblical type. This particularity of Jewish and Christian narratives is evident in their disclosure of sacrificial violence. It is from this perspective that Girard can claim that the Bible reveals 'things hidden since the foundation of the world.'[111] The importance of this claim can be seen

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[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid., 141.
[109] Ibid., 142 - 43.
[110] Ibid., 143.
[111] Ibid., 160. The quotation is from Matthew, 13:35.

in the unique status granted in Girardian thinking to the much derided religious traditions of the west. This estimation is admirably explained by Paul Dumouchel who suggests that,

> The Judaeo-Christian tradition constitutes, from the viewpoint of Girard's theory, a religion which should not exist. A religion which preaches forgiveness not only towards the innocents but also towards the guilty, towards one's own enemies, reaches out to the heart of the mimetic mechanism that generates the sacred and destroys it, or at least endangers its proper functioning. Such a religion cannot proceed from that mechanism.[112]

Just as texts of persecution represent an advancement in the slow process of desacralization, the Old Testament bears witness to a progression away from a sacrificial mentality which obscures the inbuilt structural inevitability of violence. This can be seen particularly in the prophetic tradition through which 'the three great pillars of primitive religion - myth, sacrifice and prohibitions' - are subverted.[113] It is not until the Gospels, however, that the reality of the victimage mechanism is truly revealed in the life and death of Jesus.

As we have seen, Girard demonstrates the extent to which biblical myths share the characteristics of mythology generally. Yet there is something idiosyncratic about the biblical type. Old Testament narratives such as the story of Cain and Abel describe the founding of culture (Cainite) and law (God's enunciation of the law against murder) as dependent on a murder.[114] The distinguishing feature that disjoins the biblical myth from cognate examples of the genre is the lesson which it teaches - 'that the culture born of violence must return to violence'.[115] Thus, 'in addition to its unquestionable significance as myth, a much greater power of revelation than that of non-Judaic myths' is evident.[116] For Girard the biblical theme of *revelation* is central. Summing up the difference between non-Judaic myths and those

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[112] Paul Dumouchel, 'Introduction', *Violence and Truth: On the Work of René Girard* (ed.) P. Dumouchel (London: Athlone, 1988), 17.
[113] Ibid., 155.
[114] Ibid., 146.
[115] Ibid., 148.
[116] Ibid., 149.

myths prevalent in the Old Testament, Girard demonstrates what he believes to be the radical significance of the latter.

> Suppose that the texts of mythology are the reflection, at once faithful and deceptive, of the collective violence that founds community: suppose that they bear witness of a real violence, that they do not lie even if in them the victimage mechanism is not falsified and transfigured by its very efficacy; suppose, finally, that myth is the persecutors' retrospective vision of their own persecution. If this is so, we can hardly regard as insignificant a change in perspective that consists in taking the side of the victim, proclaiming the victim's innocence and the culpability of his murderers.[117]

Only through disclosure of the sacrificial order can violence be overcome and, in the Old Testament narratives, the victimage mechanism is unveiled. The consequence of this 'inverse movement' of biblical myth is that 'rehabilitating the victim has a desacralizing effect.'[118] The sacred and its concomitant cultural forms no longer conceal or defer the responsibility for victimage. The consideration and appropriation of biblical revelation thus demands change and transformation: the possibility of alternative ways of living - new cultural forms - is the unavoidable implication that issues from the revelatory text. The prophetic tradition is exemplary in its revelation of the sacrificial mentality and its call for transformation, especially in its subversion of 'myth, sacrifice and prohibitions' - the three great pillars of religion. The configuration of this prophetic subversion is 'invariably governed by the bringing to light of the mechanisms that found religion; the unanimous violence against the scapegoat.'[119] Moreover, this tradition still has considerable relevance for today. We (in advanced western society), Girard believes, share a common experience with the crisis ridden 'people of God' to whom the prophets spoke. Pertaining to both is a 'religious and cultural crisis in which the sacrificial system is exhausted and the traditional

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[117] Ibid., 148-149.
[118] Ibid., 153.
[119] Ibid., 155.

order of society dissolves into conflict'.[120] Consequently, the use of prophetic themes and metaphors can be highly effective in comprehending our own contexts.[121]

It is the suffering Servant of Yahweh who serves as the climax of Old Testament revelation. The Servant, contrary to the mythological and sacrificial motif, is presented as innocent and as having no affinity with violence:

> A whole number of passages lay upon men the principal responsibility for his saving death. One of these even appears to attribute to men the exclusive responsibility for that death. 'Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted' (Isaiah 53, 4).[122]

The importance of the recognition of culpability, of the burden of guilt, for the death of the servant is, according to Girard, the actualisation of the desacralizing process - 'It was not God who smote him; God's responsibility is implicitly denied.'[123] Nevertheless, as Girard points out, there is still 'some ambiguity regarding the role of Yahweh.'[124] God is still implicated in the violent process as are the primitive deities who serve as a tool necessary for the deflecting of responsibility away from the persecutors.

> Even if the human community is, on several occasions, presented as being responsible for the death of the victim, God himself is presented as the principal instigator of the persecution. 'Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him' (Isaiah 53, 10).[125]

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[120] Ibid., 155.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid., 157.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.

Only with the early Christian communities' reflection on the life, ministry and death of Jesus are the stifling dynamics of mythology and sacrificial culture fully dissolved: 'the truth of the scapegoat is written for all to see in the text of the Gospels.'[126]

3.9: Gospel Revelation

In attending to the New Testament, Girard highlights the uniqueness of both the Gospels and the person of Jesus. While there is continuity between the developing revelation of the prophetic tradition and the Gospel account of the life and death of Jesus, there is also a dramatic breach characterised by the incomparable quality of Gospel desacralization. The efficacy of Gospel 'demythologisation' is, as with Old Testament narratives, related to the fact of revelation but with the Gospel accounts of the story of Jesus comes an unequivocal declaration of those 'things hidden'. Unbearable and unintelligible to its recipients, the announcement of the 'good news' - a phrase that seems almost oxymoronic in view of this revelation's impact on Jesus' life - leads to a violent climax: 'Within the perspective of the Gospels, the Passion is first and foremost the consequence of an intolerable revelation, while being proof of that revelation. It is because they do not understand what he proclaims that Jesus' listeners agree to rid themselves of him.'[127] The consequence of the life, and in particular, the death of Jesus is that the violent logic of the sacred - unanimous violence, the scapegoat and disavowal of human responsibility - is forcefully exposed in the Gospel text. As Girard and Guy Lefort suggest,

> the Passion is presented as a blatant piece of injustice. Far from taking the collective violence upon itself, the text places it squarely on those who are responsible for it... . There is a complete 'deconstruction' of the whole primitive system, which brings to light the founding mechanism and leaves men without the protection of sacrifice, prey to the old mimetic conflict,

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[126] Ibid., 158.
[127] Ibid., 166.

> which from this point onwards will acquire its typically Christian and modern form.[128]

Moreover, this 'deconstruction', according to Girard, has a potency and efficacy with regard to disrupting the status and sway of myth and the identification of the actuality of persecution that inevitably results in the lessening of their violent dominance of cultural frameworks and institutions. 'The Gospels make all forms of 'mythologizing' impossible since, by revealing the founding mechanism, they stop it from functioning.'[129] Thus, the Gospels have a unique role and authority in the consideration and criticism of cultural, social and religious forms - even in the secularized context of modern western societies.

> By an astonishing reversal, it is texts that are twenty or twenty-five centuries old - initially revered blindly but today rejected with contempt - that will reveal themselves to be the only means of furthering all that is good and true in the anti-Christian endeavours of modern times: the as-yet ineffectual determination to rid the world of the sacred cult of violence.[130]

As so often in Girard's reading of the Gospels, revelation is central. Added to the impact of the revelation of the violence of 'religion' is the fact that in 'submitting to violence', Christ 'uproots the structural matrix of all religion.'[131] Hence, Christianity, as Girard sees it, is radically at odds with previous religious traditions and institutions in its character and must be read and understood as such. Any attempt to reappropriate Christianity in terms of the rubrics of the sacrificial and the violent must be unconditionally resisted.

Uncompromising in his assessment of the Gospels as unique cultural texts through which a subversion of violent cultural forms alone occurs, Girard believes that modern thought is, in its emancipatory reasoning, dependent on the disclosing character of the accounts of

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[128] Ibid., 170.
[129] Ibid., 174.
[130] Ibid., 177-178.
[131] Ibid., 179.

Jesus. However, a rejection of the Gospels can, it seems, result in a reassertion of a sacrificial mentality and a return to founding mechanisms. Part of the problem is that as modern thinkers, 'We believe that we monopolize the unmasking of all masks - while in reality our boldest thoughts in this domain are still based, however unconsciously, on the Gospels. Perhaps modern thinkers are only rediscovering - in a series of tentative and misguided steps that will presently stop appearing to be motiveless - the mechanism of the founding murder and the masking of it, which the gospel revelation has quite literally 'shattered'.'[132] This 'shattering' influence of the Gospels is exhibited in the theme of the Kingdom of God which is central to the active undermining of sacrificial virtues. 'The Kingdom', Oughourlian suggests, 'is the substitution of love for prohibitions and rituals - for the whole apparatus of the sacrificial religions.'[133] Thus, the announcement of the Kingdom demands the end of vengeance and reprisal. Careful attention, however, must be paid to the difference between the Gospel understanding of violence and that which operates in the considerations of modern commentators.

> People imagine either that violence is no more than a kind of parasite, which the appropriate safeguards can easily eliminate or that it is an ineradicable trait of human nature, an instinct or fatal tendency that it is fruitless to fight. But the Gospels tell a different story. Jesus invites all men to devote themselves to the project of getting rid of violence, a project conceived with reference to the true nature of violence, taking into account the illusions it fosters, the methods by which it gains ground, and all the laws that we have verified over the course of these discussions.[134]

The confidence with which Girard offers his hypothesis and its verification is based upon the this 'different' story of Jesus and the open Kingdom, contrasted sharply by Girard and his interlocutors with the 'closed kingdom' of violence.[135] This significance of this contrast is that only with Jesus is there 'the complete elimination of the sacrificial for the first time - the

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[132] Ibid., 191-192.
[133] Ibid., 196.
[134] Ibid., 197.
[135] Ibid.

end of divine violence and the explicit revelation of all that has gone before'.[136] Thus, argues Girard, there cannot be a sacrificial reading of the Gospels, only a reading that is radically anti-sacrificial: 'To say that Jesus dies, not as a sacrifice, but in order that there may be no more sacrifices, is to recognize in him the Word of God - 'I wish for mercy and not sacrifices'.'[137] Indeed, the crucifixion and death of Jesus did not result in his sacralization. Jesus did not become divine as part of a post-sacrificial designation: he was crucified because of his divinity.[138]

It is also significant that the Gospel narratives underline the 'naturalistic character of his death' and his 'human powerlessness before death'.[139] There is, according to Girard, an important distancing here from violence and the sacred in the refusal of Jesus to accede to the demands of the crowd that he demonstrate his divine nature.[140] However, although Jesus illustrates his utter humanity, he is, without doubt, divine. For,

> to recognize Christ as God is to recognize him as the only being capable of rising above the violence that had, up to that point, absolutely transcended mankind. Violence is the controlling agent in every form of mythic or cultural structure, and Christ is the only agent who is capable of escaping from these structures and freeing us from their dominance.[141]

The consequence of the life and death of Christ is that there is now the possibility of an alternative - non-violent - way of life. Jesus has taught humankind their vocation 'which is to throw off the hold of the founding murder'.[142]

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[136] Ibid., 200.
[137] Ibid., 210.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid., 232.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid., 219.
[142] Ibid.

Girard has unearthed what, for him, constitutes the central tenet of the Gospel message. Nonetheless, if the Gospels offer humankind the possibility of a non-sacrificial existence, the question begs itself, Why has this life not been grasped? Girard's answer is that 'historical Christianity took on a persecutory character as a result of the sacrificial reading of the Passion and the Redemption'.[143] Such a reading reinfused the deity with violence. Exemplary is the Epistle to the Hebrews which, argues Girard,

> re-enacts what is re-enacted in all earlier formulations of sacrifice. It discharges human violence, but to a lesser degree. It restates God's responsibility for the death of the victim, it also leaves a place, though indeterminate, for human responsibility. Sacrificial theology is on the same level as the theology implied in the second Isaiah.[144]

Hence, the life-giving revelation of the Gospels becomes, once again, hidden from sight. As retrospective Christian reflection considered the significance of Jesus, a tendency developed- and this Girard believes is particularly exhibited in the dependence on sacrificial motifs in Hebrews - which resacralized and remythologized the Christian narrative. The story of Jesus was consequently reduced to the same order as that of the Suffering Servant; little more than a text of persecution. This sacrificial elaboration was further developed and amplified as Christianity evolved and became a State religion with the result that, 'Historical Christianity covers the text with a veil of sacrifice'.[145] This is not, however, a process that destroys, in Girard's eyes, the unique character of Christianity. The veracity of the anti-sacrificial nature of the death of Jesus will prevail and the 'subversive and shattering truth contained in the Gospels' will be 'understood world-wide'.[146] The importance of this Gospel truth has never been more relevant than today, because,

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[143] Ibid., 225.
[144] Ibid., 231.
[145] Ibid., 249. It must be noted, however, that Girard has somewhat softened his view of the resacralizing process in the Letter to the Hebrews. He even suggests that it acted as a textual scapegoat in the logic of his hypothesis. Cf. Rebecca Adams, 'Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard' *Religion and Literature* 25:2 (1993), 9-33.
[146] Ibid., 252.

> Either we are moving ineluctably toward non-violence, or we are about to disappear completely. But precisely because the present situation is an intermediary one, it allows mankind to avoid the enormous problems it now poses.[147]

The 'either/or' character of this diagnosis of the contemporary cultural situation is certainly stark. Perhaps it might even be said to be an overstatement which, in order to highlight the seriousness of the contemporary global predicament, oversimplifies the human plight. Nevertheless, Girard's point is that social and political life is full of hard choices that offer the possibility of a hopeful future or disaster. In such a context, the way of the Gospels is, he believes, the only means to elude the violent impasse of cultural victimage. This truth will not only change western humanity's perception of the foundation of its cultural heritage but will also effect any understanding of human interaction and socialising processes.

Conclusion

In this chapter we took as our first task the delineation of René Girard's hypothesis of the genesis of cultural and religious forms. This hypothesis, taking the human propensity for mimesis as its point of departure, was seen to account for the creation of social structures - in particular, prohibitions, ritual and myth. Prohibitions prevent acquisitive mimesis from spiralling out of control and advancing to the point of a full-blown mimetic crisis, while ritual acts as a palliative measure in which the mimetic crisis is played out in an institutionally controlled environment. However, it is Girard's contention that these social and religious forms are underpinned by the murder of an innocent victim through a unanimous violence animated by the dynamism of mimesis. Myth, in turn, narrates the events of these founding moments and development of these cultural forms but in a manner which expurgates the founding murder as murder and exonerates those responsible. In the process of this deceptive

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[147] Ibid., 258.

reinterpretation, the victim is ambiguously perceived as the cause of this internecine violence and yet as the means of the restoration of peace - the victim is transformed. In the light of the process he outlines in his hypothesis, Girard can claim that 'violence is the sacred.'[148]

In this chapter we also charted the breakdown of this violent cultural synthesis, particularly in what Girard calls the demythologizing role of 'texts of persecution` and, ultimately, in the Judaeo-Christian scriptures. The absolute singularity of the Gospels is found in their revelation of the violent constitution of religion, society and culture and, most importantly, that through Jesus humankind can forge alternative cultural forms established on non-violent practice. In order to understand the framework in which this practice might be placed and performed, it is essential to attend to the third part of Girard's hypothesis - interdividual psychology. To that subject matter we shall now turn in Chapter Four.

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[148] R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 19.

Chapter Four:
The Girardian Hypothesis II

Introduction

In the previous chapter I outlined the character and content of the first two parts of the theoretical triptych that constitutes the Girardian hypothesis - a description of the ubiquitous influence of mimesis in the construction and reconstruction of the distinctively 'human' as well as the concomitant development of cultural and social institutions, and Girard's contention that only in the light of the Gospels can there be the possibility of non-violence. In this chapter the aim is to complete the exposition of the Girardian hypothesis with an overview and exploration of his 'interdividual' psychology. This elucidation of what, in the context of this study, is the most important part of Girard's work, shall be realised in four stages. First, I will introduce the area of research that Girard finds most fascinating desire. In this initial section I will present an outline of the central themes of Girard's interdividual psychology. I will then, second, examine the relationship between mimesis, desire and subjectivity. Third, after a consideration of sexuality, I shall consider Girard's relation to Freud. Reading Girard in parallel with psychoanalysis provides a means to further highlight the 'postmodern' character of Girard's conception of subjectivity and will provide a theoretical bridge, via a critical evaluation, to an assessment of the applicability of Girard's work in the field of

theological anthropology. Finally, I shall return to the gospels; the only context. Girard believes, in which subjectivity can be fully and peaceably realised.

4.1. Interdividual Psychology

In an attempt to advance the implications of his anthropological theory, Girard has, on many occasions, scrutinised a difficult and somewhat elusive topic that supplements his discussion of Fundamental Anthropology. Indeed, this is one field of inquiry that 'particularly' interests him in relation to anthropology and the genesis of humankind: a mimetic approach to the problem of *desire*. Desire according to Girard is 'a distinctively human phenomenon that can only develop when a certain threshold of mimesis is transcended.'[1] Although mimesis is itself etiologically prior to closely related phenomena[2], desire is a notable ingredient in the process of hominization. Girard proposes that the event which characterised hominization was a 'rigorous symmetry between the mimetic partners.'[3] This symmetry brought about two things among human ancestors:

> the ability to look at the other person, the mimetic *double*, as an *alter ego* and the matching capacity to establish a *double* inside oneself, through processes like reflection and consciousness.[4]

Tracing the mimetic configuration of hominization allows Girard to combine his consideration of human origins with a theory of psychology and human interaction. The result is designated as 'interdividual' psychology. Girard's emphasis in the final section of *Things Hidden*[5] is on the modern western experience of subjectivity. As Girard has indicated, in pre-modern and

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[1] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* in collaboration with J-M Oughourlian and G. Lefort (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 283.
[2] Such as desire, representation, violence and so forth.
[3] R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 284.
[4] Ibid.
[5] *Things Hidden* provides the most systematic and thorough investigation of mimetic *desire* in the Girardian corpus. However, in this discussion of Girard's interdividual psychology, I shall draw on a number of thinkers who have appropriated and developed Girard's thought.

so-called 'primitive' societies the possibility of conflict arising from mimetic symmetry was prevented or controlled through rigid cultural patterns. However, in modern society such frameworks no longer, for the most part, exist. Thus, declares Girard, the 'liberation of mimetic desire' is an omnipresent feature of our times.[6] Gone are the 'external obstacles of traditional societies.'[7] Desire is, it seems, free to run its course. However emancipatory this might sound, Girard's study of the 'mechanism' of desire is a salutary warning against the illusion that human beings have sovereignty over their desire. This note of caution, expressed by Girard with regard to the ramifications of an unobstructed desire consecrated in contemporary culture as the actualisation of human emancipation, could be construed as paternalistic if not lamentably reactionary. Girard, however, is not for a moment suggesting - as his delineation of the violent constitution of cultural forms should make clear - that western society ought to, or can, return to a peaceful, structured origin.[8]

> I do find it absurd that people should greet with a fanfare the liberation of a desire that is not being constrained by anyone. But I find it even more absurd to hear people calling for a return to constraints, which is impossible. From the moment cultural forms begin to dissolve, any attempt to reconstitute them artificially can only result in the most appalling tyranny.[9]

Although aware of the destructive implications of the imposition of prohibitions in an attempt to constrain the force of desire, Girard's consideration of the mechanism of voracious desire is nevertheless coloured by the violent possibilities of its unfettered dynamism. Desire is 'a process of mimesis involving undifferentiation; it is akin to the process of deepening conflict that issues in the mechanism of re-unification through the victim.'[10] Hence, desire cannot be rent from the victimage mechanism:

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[6] Ibid., 285.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Girard is by no means positing a 'state of nature' either in terms of a Hobbsian violence between atomised aggressors or the peaceful individualism of the noble savage as delineated by Rousseau in the *Social Contract*.
[9] R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 286.
[10] Ibid., 287.

> Desire is what happens to human relationships when there is no longer any resolution through the victim, and consequently no form of polarization that is genuinely unanimous and can trigger such a resolution. But human relationships are mimetic nonetheless. We shall be able to discover, beneath the 'underground' (in the Dostoevskyan sense) and always deceptive form of individual symptoms, the dynamic style of the sacrificial crisis. In this instance, however, there can be no ritualistic or victimary resolution, and, if and when it becomes acute, the crisis ensues - what we call psychosis.[11]

Girard's attitude to the liberation of desire as a consequence of the vast transformations of institutional life that has characterised modernity can appear to be, as in the passage quoted above, pessimistic if not despairing. Girard does, however, recognise the indispensable role of mimesis: a 'highly developed mimetic capacity' is necessary 'in situating oneself correctly in one's own culture.'[12] Formative contexts such as 'apprenticeship, education and initiation' depend upon this capacity.[13] Such mimetic behaviour is commendable because of its non-acquisitive character and should be distinguished from acquisitive forms of behaviour which give rise to rivalry. If mimetic behaviour is to be constructive it is essential that it is in some way directed. Yet there are no criteria which allow an objective assessment of what constitute 'good' or 'ill' forms of behaviour to imitate. Indeed, the problem is exacerbated by the process that Girard, after Gregory Bateson, calls the 'double bind.' If a disciple imitates the behaviour of a master then the master naturally enjoys the role of model and thus proclaims 'imitate me.' However, as Girard explains, 'if the imitation is too perfect, and the imitator threatens to surpass the model, the master will completely change his attitude and begin to display jealousy, mistrust and hostility.'[14] Parallel to the imperative to imitate me is the contrary declaration 'Do not imitate me!' Thus, the disciple is left in a confusing and contradictory state that is labelled the 'double bind.' Girard's concern is that in modern society all barriers have been removed to the 'freedom of

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[11] Ibid., 288.
[12] Ibid., 290.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.

desire', the consequence of which is to put individuals in a situation that is inherently confusing and disorienting.[15] Individuals are consequently susceptible to the perplexing force of the mimetic double bind.[16]

So far, we have seen how Girard understands the dynamics of desire and its intrinsic relation to mimesis. As suggested in his treatment of Fundamental Anthropology, central to Girard's analysis of human identity is his assertion that imitation, or to use his own term, *mimesis* is the key to learning and social formation. Mimesis has, as we have seen, been regarded, since the time of Plato, as synonymous with 'representation.'[17] This limitation has, Girard and his followers[18] believe, ignored two factors: that mimesis is `universal' and that it is 'polymorphous in its manifestations.'[19] In Girard`s usage,

> Mimesis is said to be a "mechanism" that generates patterns of action and interaction, personality formations, beliefs, attitudes, symbolic forms, and cultural practices and institutions.[20]

As a result, human individuals cannot escape the mimetic 'mechanism' which underlies as well as engenders all characteristics of social existence. Indeed, Jean-Michel Oughourlian proposes that the universality of mimesis is evident in the three 'dimensions' central to the mimetic mechanism, space, time, and the species itself: 'mimesis is *imitation* in space,

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[15] Ibid., 291

[16] Bateson suggests that such a conflicting imperative taught to a child often results in schizophrenia. Cf. *Things Hidden*, 291-294.

[17] R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 8.

[18] By the term 'followers' I am including those thinkers who follow Girard's theoretical lead and have developed his hypothesis in a variety of contexts. One could mention Jean-Michel Oughourlian, Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, Eugene Webb, Stephen Bann, Michel Serres, Eric Gans, James Alison, Raymund Schwager, Andrew McKenna and, in some of her work, Julia Kristeva. I am not suggesting that these figures are uncritical disciples - far from it - but rather that they owe some intellectual debt (great or small) to Girard's work.

[19] J-M. Ourghoulian, *The Puppet of Desire: The Psychology of Hysteria, Possession, and Hypnosis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991),4.

[20] P. Livingston, *Models of Desire: René Girard and the Psychology of Mimesis* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 2.

repetition in time, and *reproduction* in the species.'[21] Understood as a general principle of human behaviour, the positing of a mimetic mechanism facilitates a greater understanding of social forms. Behaviour which purports to represent the fulfilment of the desires of an autonomous individual is the focus of suspicion. It is the arena of the 'interdividual' - the forms of identity and interaction engendered by imitation - which eschews solipsistic assumptions and provides an alternative model for understanding the complexities of human subjectivity. In Girard's outline of the interdividual nature of the constitution of identity, rather than being sovereign or self-assured, the subject is understood as the 'self between'[22] or the 'uncertain' self.[23] This social dimension does not, however, reveal why mimesis has been such a neglected area of research. This anomaly might be the result of an unwitting evasion of questions relating to 'kinds of behaviour involved in appropriation.'[24] It is the acquisitive dimension of mimetic behaviour which introduces the theme of desire into Girardian psychology.

4.2: Mimesis, Desire and Subjectivity

The play of mimetic forces - the way we imitate in order to acquire language and be initiated into cultural forms - highlights the self's radical dependence on others for subjective identity. In terms of our desires, Girard contends that we do not autonomously choose objects of desire but, here too, the uncertain subject rears its head in that it is the Other who determines these objects for us. 'Man is the creature', in the opinion of Girard, 'who does not know what to desire, and he turns to others in order to make up his mind. We desire what others desire because we imitate their desires.'[25] Accordingly, Girard defines mimetic desire as 'a desire *according to Another*' as opposed to 'a desire *according to Oneself*, that most of

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[21] J-M. Ourghoulian, *The Puppet of Desire*, 4.
[22] The term is Eugene Webb's, *The Self Between: From Freud to the New Social Psychology of France* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993).
[23] P. Livingston, *Models of Desire*, 5-7.
[24] R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 8.
[25] R. Girard, 'Discussion' *Violent Origins* (ed.) R.G. Hamerton-Kelly (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 122.

us pride ourselves on enjoying.'[26] The myth of the self-sufficient subject suggests the existence of a binary (subject-object) configuration of desire. The subject of the mimetic hypothesis, however, desires what another desires: desire is mediated. As Girard analyses it, desire is 'triangular'.[27] The course of desire is not set as a direct route from the subject of desire to the object desired but via the mediator or model whose desire for the object is imitated: 'One desires, in other words, what one learns to desire by watching the example of the mediator.'[28]

The centrality of a dynamic of mimetic desire in Girard's description of identity fosters an account of subjectivity that undercuts any pretensions to self-assurance. However, while much postmodern philosophy has stressed human finitude and the limits of knowledge, that is, the epistemological limitations of the human subject, Girard's radical reconceptualization of intersubjective relations arises from more general anthropological concerns. Consequently, in his consideration of the interdividuality of identity, Girard looks to the unsettling coincidence of desire as a key to understanding not only that which constitutes the self, but also that which holds identity in check. The latter can be observed in the way that Girard conceives of desire as promoting a loss of self in a mimetic relationship - subject and model become as one. Pinpointing the character of their convergence Girard remarks that 'To untie the knot of desire, we have only to concede that everything begins in rivalry for the object.'[29] To understand the operation of desire is to reflect on the value which objects are granted. The contention that self-sufficient human beings desire objects because of some inherent value is, Girard argues, an illusion. Rather, an object is desired because it is desired by an other - desire is mediated by a model. Girard also suggests that the value of an object 'grows in proportion to the resistance met with in acquiring it.'[30] Corresponding to a

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[26] R. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*64.
[27] Cf. R. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 3-6.
[28] E. Webb, *The Self Between*, 92.
[29] R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 294.
[30] Ibid., 295.

growth in value of the object is a growth in the prestige of the 'model'. The model gains prestige in the mechanism of rivalry. The mimetic process is such that the more difficult the object is to obtain the more important becomes the possession of it: 'Since the model obstinately bars access to it, the possession of this object must make all the difference between the self-sufficiency of the model and the imitator's lack of sufficiency, the model's fullness of being and the imitator's nothingness.'[31] This radical desire for ontological fullness is described by Girard as 'metaphysical desire.' Rather than desiring an object for some intrinsic value, my desire is the desire of an other's desire and, moreover, desire itself originates in a desire for the being of the other, the model. Essential to any understanding of the dynamics of mimetic desire, then, is a realisation that the imitator suffers from 'an essential indeterminacy or lack.'[32]

Metaphysical desire fuels the acquisitive mimesis of the uncertain subject. Suffering from this essential indeterminacy or lack, the subject perceives the ontological fullness of the model and, consequently, desires the object of the model's desire, believing this object can guarantee the same plenitude of being. However, this object-desire is, in essence, the signifier of a more fundamental desire. The subject desires not simply the object of the other's desire, but the very *being* of the other: 'Imitative desire is always a desire to be Another'.[33] In consuming the other, the subject will become, so he or she believes, a true self and a new, full ontological status will be gained. This subject of desire - a primary and metaphysical desire - 'has no identity of its own prior to the identification that brings it, blindly, to occupy the point of otherness, the place of the other.'[34] The object of desire, while its importance cannot be discounted in the operation of mimesis, is not the principal motivation of mimetic desire. Rather, it is the one who possesses or enjoys the object who is the real object of desire: 'it is

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[31] Ibid., 296.
[32] P. Livingston, *Models of Desire*, 5.
[33] R. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 83.
[34] M. Borch-Jacobsen, *The Freudian Subject* trans. C. Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 48.

not a matter of having but rather of being.'[35] If Girard's circumscription of metaphysical desire (indeed, mimetic desire in general), and its pivotal role in constructing the self, offers a scheme by which to portray subjectivity, then it is necessary to ask what this self might look like. To this subject of desire we now turn.

4.3: The Subject of Desire

The subject of mimetic desire is, as we have noted, entirely distinct from the self posited by a substantial part of the western philosophical and psychological traditions. Responsible for the character of what has arguably been the foremost understanding of the self in modernity, the Cartesian self represents a celebration of the stability and precedence of rationality over matter, emotions and others: *cogito ergo sum*. Borrowing Robert Hamerton-Kelly's schematization[36], the Freudian subject - prone to the effects of unconscious forces - could be designated as the *libido ergo sum*. The Girardian subject, however, could not be characterised as *mimor ergo sum*. Due to the fact that there is no 'self' prior to mimesis, it would be more accurate to propose *mimesti et sum*, 'imitation happens and I am'. It is the play of mimetic desire which constitutes the self. That is, if there is no other, no imitation of another's desires, there can be no self: 'It is mimesis, and that alone, that makes one human, that constitutes the self, and that makes possible one's entry into the sphere of language'.[37] The radically dependent nature of the mimetic subject is more than implicit in Oughourlian's use of the term 'holon'.[38] He chooses this term as it suggests the 'qualities of the purely psychological entity, that structure in constant becoming at the heart of continuous exchanges with similar structures'.[39] Mimetic desire determines the construction and nature of each

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[35] R.G. Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, 192.
[36] Cf. Ibid.
[37] J-M. Ourghoulian, *The Puppet of Desire*, 15.
[38] After Arthur Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine* (New York: Macmillan, 1968). Cf. J-M. Ourghoulian, *The Puppet of Desire*, 16.
[39] J-M. Ourghoulian, *The Puppet of Desire*, 16.

holon, each self. Thus, in relation to choosing objects of gratification, Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen suggests that,

> In order to achieve its own pleasure, the ego has to take a detour, one that causes its own pleasure to pass through that of another. And this detour is identification (mimesis), resemblance (homoiosis). One only enjoys, in fantasy, as another: tell me whom you are miming and I will tell you who you are, what you desire, and how you enjoy.[40]

Thus far I have simply outlined the topos upon which the contours of subjectivity can be redrawn: the mimetic hypothesis. However, in relation to mimetic desire, the self can be further substantiated in two distinct ways. Firstly, in Girard's view, the fullness of subjectivity, as we shall see[41], can only be reached with reference to transcendence. Secondly, and less ambitiously, the subject can be seen in some ways as a tentative unity through the character of the memory: 'It is the memory that guarantees ontogenesis by holding the subject together through the course of his history'.[42] Yet phenomena such as memory, consciousness and representation are etiologically posterior to mimesis, as is violence, but the very dynamics of mimetic desire suggest, as outlined in Girard's Fundamental Anthropology, that conflict is more generally consequential than any other secondary factor.

It is the object of desire which acts, at least initially, as the focus of the imitator's (or subject's) attention. However, Girard contends that the importance of the object and any differences between the subject and model soon become non-existent.[43] Mimetism is a

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[40] M. Borch-Jacobsen, *The Freudian Subject*, trans. C. Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 21.
[41] In the final section of this chapter. Cf., 'Interdividual Psychology and the Gospels'.
[42] J-M. Ourghoulian, *The Puppet of Desire*, 6. Ougourlian's reflections on memory could be augmented by a discussion of the narrative constitution of the self and, in particular, with Ricoeur's distinction between the self as *ipse* and *idem*. Cf. P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), esp. 2-3 & 118-119; cf. also, Anthony Paul Kerby, *Narrative and the Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).
[43] R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 299.

contagion which not only infects the subject but which also returns to contaminate the model. The consequence is a loss of distinction between the subject and model.

> These vanishing differences are nothing more than interruptions in reciprocity, and they always involve an element of the arbitrary, since they are rooted in the victimage mechanisms and mimetic rivalry; they dissolve in the face of violence, which makes everything return to the pure state of reciprocity.[44]

The fact that there are no longer any distinctions, no way of differentiating between subject and model, suggests that the two protagonists have become *doubles*. Doubles, declares Girard, 'display the reciprocity of mimetic relationships' - all differences are hallucinatory.[45] The dynamics of mimetic desire and its rivalrous consequences are omnipresent even when the symmetry of the mimetic relationship is eliminated.

> The reciprocal violence transforms every model into an anti-model; although the imitators now differ from the model rather than resembling him, the reciprocity is still maintained, precisely because everyone is trying to break away from it in the same way. The desire is always the same, even when it no longer involves belief in the transcendent status of the model.[46]

Girard suggests that phenomena such as psychosis, manic depression and the 'democratization and vulgarization of what we call neuroses'[47] are the result of living in a cultural context where there are few barriers to the propagation of mimetic desire. Accordingly, competition and object-centred desire are not actively discouraged - on the contrary, one could argue, they are powerfully encouraged. Such a cultural context can be characterised as one which reinforces 'mimetic competition and the 'metaphysical' quality of the related tension'[48]: 'Everything comes down to the relationships between the mimetic rivals, each of which is

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[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 302.
[46] Ibid., 300.
[47] Ibid., 307.
[48] Ibid.

model and disciple to the other.'[49] Girard sees such a dynamic as providing a clue to a definition of madness:

> Being rational - functioning properly - is a matter of having objects and being busy with them; being mad is a matter of letting oneself being taken over completely by the mimetic models, and so fulfilling the calling of desire. It is a matter of pushing to final conclusions what distinguishes desire - only very relatively of course - from animal life and of abandoning oneself to a fascination with the model, to the extent that it resists and does violence to the subject.[50]

Between the two - madness and rationality and, Girard suggests, violence and peace - lies no great barrier which must be traversed. Here again, the victimage mechanism rears its head: 'Desire itself leads to madness and death if there is no victimage mechanism to guide it back to "reason" or to engender this "reason".'[51] Only through the reordering of desire can order be re-established, can the sacrificial crisis be terminated, a reordering that occurs via the scapegoat whose murder produces and reproduces societal forms in which the management of difference and indifference is pivotal. As Oughourlian suggests,

> It is this mimetic symmetry - which generates disorder and violence, and is in a perpetual disequilibrium - that is stabilized by the scapegoat mechanism: the zero hour of culture and the zero degree of structure. The culture produced by this differentiating mechanism will possess a structure based on asymmetry and difference. And, this asymmetry and the differences associated with it form what we call the cultural order.[52]

Girard's discussion of Fundamental Anthropology which I outlined in Chapter 3, moves the reader along the path from disorder to order and the institutional forms - ritual, myth and prohibition - that enable the establishment and re-establishment of culture and society. Although modern cultural forms, particularly the judicial systems of western democracies, control violence and symmetrical mimetic relations in a way that often short-circuits full-

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[49] Ibid., 310-311.
[50] Ibid., 311.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 312.

blown victimage mechanisms, the 'confusion' generated by the symmetry of these relations (between doubles) can be understood in the context of a 'return to the pre-sacrificial, undifferentiated state of mimesis.'[53] By understanding psychopathology from the perspective of the mimetic hypothesis, it can be argued that - and this provides a more satisfactory understanding of the process of psychosis - there is only a '*grading of intensity* in the mechanism of conflictual mimesis.'[54]

The descriptive and interpretative strength of the mimetic hypothesis is evident when one considers its aptness for comprehending and assessing the fluidity of identity and the problems of theoretical coordination; how can one map the complexities of subjectivity? The efficacy of such an account is in stark contrast to those (largely modern) approaches that take a somewhat static concept of 'selfhood' as a point of departure and thus determines the sense in which any dysfunctional state - madness, sexual deviancy or various functional incapacities - is understood.[55] In attending to the subject who is 'uncertain', Girard has uncovered a significant resource for interpreting the heterogeneous possibilities subsumed under the term 'the human condition'. Although Girard's work undermines any pretensions to exalt a fixed and stable self - grounded in epistemic certainty, totalising self-reflexivity or self-presence - this does not suggest a withdrawal from consideration of the experience, complete with all its conflicts and paradoxes, that informs any reflection on the constitution of the self. This is particularly evident when Girard's understanding of the mimetic subject is extended to the realms of hypnosis and possession.

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[53] Ibid., 313.
[54] Ibid., 316. Girard's interlocutors in *Things Hidden* - both practising psychiatrists - believe that this investigation of mimetic desire reveals why a psychotic state can be *either* momentary *or* enduring.
[55] Michel Foucault's study of the history of madness is exemplary in exposing the ideological frame within which subjectivity is defined and ordered. Cf. M. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* trans. R. Howard (London: Tavistock, 1967).

The observation of a move from doubles to psychosis, via desire for an object, throws light, Girard and his interlocutors believe, on the states of hypnosis and possession. In both these latter cases the point of departure for an exploration of the mechanisms involved is distinct from those that induce psychotic behaviour. While, as we have seen, the psychotic structure belongs to a 'pre-sacrificial "time"', 'hypnosis and possession, by contrast, are situated in a post-sacrificial "time", a structure that is symmetrical and differential.'[56] No object is central to the phenomena of hypnosis and possession, yet mimetic desire remains powerfully at work: the hypnotic state can be perceived as a 'caricature of interdividual psychological mechanisms.'[57] What is significant in each of these psychological states, as well as hysteria, is the presentation of desire, the suggestion, inherent in any movement toward what seems to be a loss of self. Often, according to Oughourlian, the processes of hypnosis and possession can be understood as peaceful mimesis - 'mimesis without any element of rivalry since the model invites the subject to copy the model's desire.'[58]

4.4: Desire, Sexuality and Freud

From the perspective of the Girardian hypothesis, the effects of mimetic desire, unbounded and 'supra-individual'[59], seem to refuse mastery and control. Andrew McKenna endorses this perspective with his claim that 'Our relation to the world is mediated by other subjects, not by their ideas but by desire, which is neither their desire nor ours to do as we or they would with it; rather, it does with us exactly as we would not, for will and desire are antinomial, antithetical.'[60] Through consideration of the elusive and fluid character of mimetic desire even the most complex variations in social and institutional life are accounted

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[56] Ibid., 317. It is differential because the 'subject under hypnosis never loses sight of the difference between himself and the hypnotizer, the god who is possessing him.'
[57] Ibid., 320.
[58] Ibid. For a more thorough discussion of the role of mimetic desire in phenomena such as hysteria, possession and hypnosis cf. J-M. Oughourlian, *The Puppet of Desire*, esp. 73-97, 188-241.
[59] Thomas F. Bertonneau, 'The Logic of the Undecidable: An Interview with René Girard' *Paroles Gelees: UCLA French Studies* 5 (1987), 19.
[60] A. McKenna, *Violence and Difference: Girard, Derrida, and Deconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 204.

for and demystified. With regard to hypnosis and possession, states of consciousness that are considered strange, even magical, in their ancient as well as modern contexts, Girard reveals the ubiquitous nature of that which engenders the production of such phenomena. Equally mystifying in contemporary western consciousness is sexuality - particularly in a context of a transformation of the culture of confession in which sexuality is now subject to the public gaze of the chat-show settee rather than the privacy of the confessional or the analyst's couch. With the dissolution of 'oppressive' social mores that ensured the restraint of the libido and the privacy of sexual activity, so the story goes, western subjects may freely indulge and explore what was once renounced and repressed. Such a view has been undermined by Foucault's reflections on the 'Repressive Hypothesis'. It is Foucault's claim that while deliberations on sex and sexual behaviour have multiplied in the modern era, this phenomenon can be construed not as liberating but rather as the development of a *scientia sexualis*, a regime through which power is exercised over bodies, desire and sexual behaviour.[61] As Foucault suggests,

> This is the essential thing: that Western man has been drawn for three centuries to the task of telling everything concerning his sex; that since the classical age there has been a constant optimization and increasing valorization of the discourse on sex; and that this carefully analytic discourse was meant to yield multiple effects of displacement, intensification, reorientation, and modification of desire itself. Not only were the boundaries of what one could say about sex enlarged, and men compelled to hear it said; but more important, discourse was connected to sex by a complex organization with varying effects, by a deployment that cannot be adequately explained merely by referring it to a law of prohibition. A censorship of sex? There was installed rather an apparatus for producing an ever greater quantity of discourse about sex, capable of functioning and taking effect in its very economy.[62]

Foucault's analysis is of particular importance due to its exposition of the relation between the production of discourses concerning sex - however complex and multifarious - and the

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[61] M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1, An Introduction* trans. R. Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981). Interestingly subtitled in French, *La Volonté de savoir*, to emphasise the transformation of the economy of desire in a post-Enlightenment context and ths disciplinary implications of this theoretical mutation.
[62] Ibid., 23.

techniques of controlling and categorising what came to be *known* as deviancy.[63] From a Girardian perspective, however, Foucault's analysis is only partial. for while desire is undoubtedly produced and reproduced through the significant cultural shifts that Foucault outlines, the ways in which desire itself is implicated are largely ignored. What Girard suggests is that, *contra* Foucault and the pretensions of a *scientia sexualis*, sexuality can be interrogated through an analysis of mimetic desire and understood in terms of intersubjective relations; this is especially true with cases of so-called 'deviancy'.

At the basis of sexual 'deviation' and psychopathology, claims Girard, is the all too real configuration of mimetic desire. Thus, Girard contends that masochism and sadism are linked to a failure to overcome an obstacle-model and the success of another: failure and the status of the other are central. Jean-Michel Oughourlian helpfully summarises Girard's position with regard to masochism:

> [T]he subject becomes weighed down by failure and devalued in his own eyes, and at the same time the surrounding world becomes enigmatic. Desire can easily see that appearances cannot be trusted. It lives more and more in a world of signs and indices. Failure is not sought for its own sake but in so far as it signifies quite a different thing - the success of another, obviously, and only this other is of interest to me, since I can take him as model; I can enrol in his school and finally obtain from him the secret of the success that has always eluded me.[64]

The masochistic subject, overtaken by metaphysical desire, wants to reproduce the 'relationship of inferiority, contempt and persecution that he believes he has - or really does have - with his mimetic model.'[65] Rather than credit the unconscious with responsibility for the masochistic imperative, it is Girard's contention that we must abandon the notion that there

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[63] Ibid., esp. Ch. 2, 'The Perverse Implantation'.
[64] R. Girard *Things Hidden*, 327-328.
[65] Ibid., 330.

are 'inscrutable instincts and impulses of a specifically masochistic kind.'[66] Consequently, in order to understand the masochistic condition, one must attend to the fact that,

> The subject has repeatedly observed the disillusionment that he experiences when he defeats his own rival and remains the unchallenged and secure possessor of the object. To counteract such disillusionment, this subject will henceforth place all his faith in an impenetrable obstacle. The only type of model that can still generate excitement is the one who cannot be defeated, the one who will always defeat his disciple.[67]

The sadist, meanwhile, 'plays the role of the model and persecutor. Here, the subject imitates not the desire of the model, but the model himself, in what now forms the major criterion for selecting this model: his violent opposition to all conceivable aspirations of a normal human being.'[68] The term 'normal human being' may well be contentious, but understood in the context of mimetic desire it makes perfect sense; human being is contrasted with the self-constituted god: 'To invite brutal treatment from a love partner who plays the role of the model, or conversely to treat the partner brutally - making him submit to the ill-usage one believes oneself to suffer at the model's hands - is always to seek to become a god mimetically.'[69] In becoming a god, the subject must be involved in a violent economy of the negation of the other or, in the case of masochism, self-abnegation in the face of the model. Girard, in opposition to Freud, wants to demonstrate that it is not the libido, nor the unconscious, that determines our sexual preferences. Rather; 'Mimetism is the motive force, and the specifically sexual appetite is taken in tow.'[70] As with masochism and sadism, argues Girard, so too with homosexuality - it is the 'eroticizing of rivalry.'[71] Indeed, for Girard, the dynamics of sexuality are constantly 'controlled by rivalry.'[72] The subject always makes 'the

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[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., 332.
[68] Ibid., 332.
[69] Ibid., 334.
[70] Ibid., 335.
[71] Ibid., 346.
[72] Ibid., 343.

rival play an active part as an intermediary, literally that of 'mediator' between himself and the object':

> The human subject does not really know what to desire, in the last resort. He is quite incapable on his own of fixing his desire on one object and, on his own, of desiring that object consistently and relentlessly. That is why he is given over to the paradoxes of mimetic desire.[73]

The prominence given to psychopathology and psychosis in the Girardian hypothesis is of no small significance, and two points will serve to highlight their importance. First, in contemporary western societies, as we have seen, the controlling mechanisms that ensured differentiation and the regulation of mimetic desire in traditional societies - through sacrifice, prohibition and myth - are no longer extant. This general move towards desacrilization, however, has not released human individuals and societies from the difficult negotiation of mimetic desire and its consequences.[74] In Girard's view the contemporary task of confronting desire and its implications is made even more difficult by the fact that the mimetic process 'does not, in our world, unfold in the light of day, in crises that involve the whole community and attain a level of paroxysm and near-frenzy so that the victimage mechanisms can be unleashed.'[75] Mimetic desire works rather in a 'subterranean fashion.'[76]

Second, Girard's concern in his discussion of sexuality and psychopathology, is to eradicate what he terms the 'Platonic' foundation of psychology. In emphasising the 'triangular' configuration of mimetic desire and in undermining any pretensions to a simplistic essentialism with regard to subjectivity, Girard's target is Freud and post-Freudian

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[73] Ibid.
[74] Cf. R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 188, where Girard suggests that 'the phrase "modern world" seems almost like a synonym for "sacrificial crisis".'
[75] R. Girard *Things Hidden*, 349-350.
[76] Ibid., 350.

psychology. Freud's thought and heritage requires, in Girard's view, an active 'deconstruction.'[77]

The work of Sigmund Freud is highly significant for an understanding of both the originality of Girard's thought and the latter's application to theological anthropology. Freud's work represents a major shift with regard to perceptions of the self in the modern era, and it is an intellectual transformation in which desire (particularly unconscious desire) plays a dominant role. Girard's engagement with Freud is broad-based. It consists of an exploration of the most important texts in Freud's development of psychoanalytic theory and practice as well as those later works that Girard believes have been treated as more 'mythological' and hence marginal, *Totem and Taboo* and *Moses and Monotheism.* While the latter are of considerable interest, I want to focus here on Girard's interrogation of psychoanalytic theory as it bears directly on the theme of this study - Girard's delineation of an 'interdividual' anthropology. In doing so, I will consider two areas in which Girard's critique of Freud helps to unfold and fill out his own hypothesis. These areas are the Oedipus complex and narcissism.

Freud's Oedipal triangles are, Girard contends, an example of materialistic Platonism. In Freud's account of intersubjective conflict, because of the omnipresence of triangular relationships, there must be 'an archetypal triangle somewhere of which all the other triangles are reproductions.'[78] This triangular model could only be found, in the context of the nineteenth-century materialism of which Freud was a proponent, in *this* world and Freud's milieu - that of the Viennese bourgeoisie[79] - provided the familial triangle: 'Since there can be

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[77] Ibid., 351.
[78] Ibid., 355.
[79] Cf. George Steiner, *Real Presences: Is There Anything* in *What We Say?* (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), 109 for a compelling description of the unconscious - 'The Freudian tripartite scenario of the psyche (itself so beautifully a simile of the cellarage, living quarters and memory-thronged attic in the bourgeois house)....'

no question, for modern materialists, of setting the archetypal triangle outside this world, in some eternal, intelligible kingdom of ideas, such as Jung, up to a point, imagined, the Platonic idea has to be brought down into this world. Obviously the family triangle is the only possible candidate for the archetypal role, given these circumstances.'[80] Dismissive of these Freudian triangles, Girard reiterates his belief that triangular desire is only of a mimetic kind:

> What is missing in Freud is exactly what is missing in Plato - an understanding that the mimetic is itself a desire and is therefore the real 'unconscious' (supposing that there is still any point in keeping such a term). Non-representational mimesis is perfectly capable - uniquely capable - of giving rise to all forms of triangular rivalry.[81]

Freud's error is, in Girard's eyes, the result of his obsessive attachment to Oedipal triangles that constitute a metaphysical foundation for an analysis of human interaction, the genesis of desire and conflict. 'To sum up: once you have missed the process of mimetic rivalry, you are forced to revert to an archetypal vision, and once you are trapped in this vision, you really have to come up with something like the Oedipus complex.'[82]

While there are significant and incommensurate differences between Freud's standpoint and his own, Girard suggests that the former certainly exhibited a 'mimetic intuition'.[83] Indeed, Girard is convinced that the Oedipus complex follows the route of mimesis as its basis but 'Freud saw the path of mimetic desire stretching out before him and deliberately turned aside.'[84] This turning aside, so Peggy Boyers suggests, resulted in Freud converting 'mimetic desire into a mere symptom of the greater, all encompassing Oedipal

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[80] R. Girard *Things Hidden*, 355.
[81] Ibid., 359.
[82] Ibid., 363.
[83] R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 169. Girard's attitude to Freud is one of tremendous respect despite his substantial disagreements with Freud's theories. Cf Oughourlian's remarks in *Things Hidden*, 367; 'You see him [Freud] as an observer of the highest order, but none of the conceptual *results* that you find in his work seems to be worth keeping.'
[84] Ibid., 171.

desire.'[85] In constructing his Oedipus complex it was Freud's contention that rivalry occurs with the model because of a straight-forward, unmediated desire for the object, while Girard's mimetic hypothesis suggests that imitation of the model leads to desire for the object. Furthermore, Girard considers a hypothesis founded upon mimetic desire to be not only different to the Oedipus complex; it is also superior. Freud failed on two accounts. In his 'attempt to isolate the three elements of mimetic desire: identification, choice of object, and rivalry'[86] and in his obstinate attachment to the 'cumbersome necessity' of the desire's repression[87] Freud was unable, believes Girard, to discern the superior explanatory effectiveness of the mimetic hypothesis. In contrast to Freud's complexes, 'as an interpretative tool the concept of mimetic rivalry is far more serviceable than the Freudian complex.'[88] In other words, the mimetic hypothesis does away with the mystification of the Oedipus complex, its dependence on a 'romantic lie' of object-oriented (binary) desire and, significantly, that which Girard objects most to in Freudian psychoanalysis - the 'obstinate attachment - despite all appearances - to a philosophy of consciousness.'[89] Although the unconscious is the most celebrated of Freud's innovations, particularly in that it effectively decentres the rational, self-conscious subject, it is grounded, Girard believes, on the assumption of consciousness: Freud 'first assumes this consciousness and then gets rid of it in a kind of safe-deposit box, the unconscious. In effect he is saying: ego can suppress all consciousness of a patricidal and incestuous desire only if at one time ego truly experienced it. *Ergo sum.*'[90] Freud, as a result of his philosophy of consciousness, confines the three elements of his theory - identification, choice of object and rivalry - 'to a solipsistic context, a traditional philosophic subject, instead of identifying them as a fundamental trait of all human relations, the universal double bind of imitated desires.'[91] Consequently, Girard believes that his own position 'does away with the unconscious.'[92]

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[85] Peggy Boyers, 'After Freud: Sacrificial Crisis and the Origins of Culture' *Salmagundi* 41 (1978), 137.
[86] R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 180.
[87] Ibid., 183.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid., 176.
[90] Ibid., 177.
[91] Ibid., 182.
[92] Ibid., 183.

It is, however, in Girard's consideration of Freud's theory of narcissism and its relation to mimetic desire that the required 'deconstruction' of the metaphysical prejudices upon which psychoanalysis is established can be accomplished. Narcissism for Freud 'occurs when the subject takes himself as an object.' It implies 'a primary, basic narcissism' that 'affects all individuals.'[93] The fact that Freud posits a narcissistic imperative based on desire-for-self suggests that, for Freud, there are two poles to desire: object-desire which, in the context of the Oedipus complex, is the maternal object, and 'the unique type of object that I am for myself.'[94] However,

> From the mimetic perspective, the two poles cannot be inversely proportionate as they are with Freud. The mimetic process implies that 'narcissism' and submission to the other can only exacerbate one another. The more narcissistic you become - or the more 'egoistic', as it used to be said - the more you become morbidly 'object-directed' or 'altruistic'. Here I am merely redefining the mimetic paradox that is the foundation of our anthropology and our psychology.'[95]

The radical separation of object- or subject-directed desire is, in the context of the mimetic hypothesis, an illusion. The two are intimately connected, not as with Freud in a proportionate relation, but in the fact that both are determined by the configuration of desire. This interdependence is brought to light through an investigation of the sexed nature of desire in Freud - 'Object-directed desire, which is principally masculine' and narcissistic desire 'which is principally feminine.'[96] The feminine character of narcissism is classically designated as coquetry but, *contra* Freud, Girard discerns a strategic use of self-desire rather than an essential trait of the eternal feminine.

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[93] R. Girard *Things Hidden*, 367.
[94] Ibid., 368.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.

The coquette knows a lot more about desire than Freud does. She knows very well that desire attracts desire. So, in order to be desired, one must convince others that one desires oneself. That is how Freud defines narcissistic desire, as a desire of the self for the self. If the narcissistic woman excites desire. this is because, when she pretends to desire herself and suggests to Freud a kind of circular desire that never gets outside itself, she offers an irresistible temptation to the mimetic desire of others. Freud misinterprets as an objective description the trap into which he has fallen. What he calls the self-sufficiency of the coquette, her blessed psychological state and her impregnable libidinal position, is in effect the metaphysical transformation of the condition of the model and rival, which we outlined earlier.[97]

Coquetry - not, it should be noted, a phenomenon confined to women - is constructed by desire for desire: 'everyone has to try to convert to his own benefit mimetism that is still seeking a point to fix on which it will always find by reference to other desires.'[98] Thus, the logic of narcissism and object-directed desire is one and the same - mimetic desire. 'The definition of narcissism and of object-directed desire always imply one another reciprocally: narcissism is what object-directed desire really desires, and object-directed desire is what narcissism does not desire - what, by virtue of the fact that it is not desired, feels itself to be 'impoverished' in relation to the colossal richness of narcissism.'[99] It is this plenitude of the other that fuels desire: 'The intact narcissism of the other is the indescribable paradise where the beings that we desire appear to live - and it is because of this that we desire them.'[100] Yet, this belief in the other's self-sufficiency and assurance, their 'intact narcissism', is the 'phantasm of desire *par excellence*.'[101] In Girard's compelling and vivid description of desire in Freud, a damning conclusion is reached:

> Narcissism is in fact the final manifestation of the idol worshipped by the Romantics. It gives its own mythological character away when it turns uncritically to the narcissus myth and interprets it as a myth of solipsism, while in reality the image behind the mirror (as in the story of the nymph Echo) conceals the mimetic model and the struggle between doubles.[102]

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[97] Ibid., 370.
[98] Ibid., 371.
[99] Ibid., 375.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid., 375-376.
[102] Ibid., 377.

Freud's mistake, according to Girard, was to suppose that desire, whether object-directed or narcissistic, is 'primary' and independent of imitation and a model.[103] He failed to realise that desire is a desire determined by another. It was within a mythological framework that Freud consequently encapsulated his supposed doctrines. Girard believes that all the 'phenomena described by Freud' (i.e. the pleasure principle and the death instinct, narcissism and the power of the libido) can be drawn together and understood as a 'process of mimetic rivalry, with the model first metamorphosing into an idol and then turning into an obstacle and a hateful persecutor, which reinforces his sacred status.'[104] In his observations of human interaction that formed the basis for his psychoanalytic theory, Freud described the effects of mimetic desire, but he failed to identify them as such.[105] Because of this failure, he could not divorce psychoanalysis from a mythology that conceals the acquisitive nature of desire:

> In the light of the mimetic theory, the Freudian distinction between Oedipal and object-directed desire on the one hand, narcissistic regression on the other, simply does not hold up; it is rooted in Freud's particularly strong tendency to segregate 'worthy desires' from 'unworthy' ones and to activate victimage mechanisms that psychoanalysis cannot criticize because it is wedded to them - because they remain fundamental to any kind of mythology.[106]

In the light of a philosophical romanticism and his blindness to victimage mechanisms, it could have been Freud, rather than Narcissus, that Ovid was describing when he suggested that 'He fell in love with an insubstantial hope, mistaking a mere shadow for a real body.'[107] In Girard's view, it is only when one recognises the 'body' that is mimetic desire that hope can be substantial. The way to this recognition, as I outlined in the last chapter, is only possible because of the revelatory significance of the person and life of Christ and is, as a result of this revelation, available to all in the text of the gospels.

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[103] In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 16-17, Girard designates the belief that object-oriented desire arises from a self-sufficient subject the 'romantic' lie or illusion (*mensonge romantique*).
[104] R. Girard *Things Hidden*, 411.
[105] Ibid., 410.
[106] Ibid., 381.
[107] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* trans. M.M. Innes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), 85.

4.5: Interdividual Psychology and the Gospels

There is little doubt that Girard's hypothesis is wide-ranging. In this chapter alone I have illustrated how Girard believes that an interrogation of mimetic desire, its character and its dynamism, sheds light on a variety of areas of what we might term the 'human condition': identity, conflict, sexuality, psychopathology, neurosis, to name but a few. Certainly the pretensions of such a universally applicable cultural theory are enormous and, unsurprisingly, have attracted significant critical attention. I shall consider some important critical evaluations of the Girardian hypothesis in the next chapter, but, without doubt, it is Girard's claims regarding the centrality of the Judaeo-Christian scriptures in the conception and construction of a peaceful, non-sacrificial culture that has invited the most hostility. If anything, this hostility can be understood as part of a theoretical milieu that is anti-religious or, in terms of apathy rather than antipathy, that perceives recourse to the transcendent as in some way dehumanising.[108] It is not as though Girard considers such animosity as incomprehensible, he wishes, rather, to warn of its consequences:

> What arouses the modern conscience against any form of initiation or conversion is a refusal to allow any distinctions - they are now considered *hypocritical*, in the gospel sense - between legitimate and illegitimate violence. This refusal is in itself quite reasonable and commendable, but it is sacrificial all the same because it takes no account of history. At the present moment, sacrifice is being sacrificed; culture in its entirety, especially our own culture, historic Christianity, is playing the role of the scapegoat. We attempt to wash our hands of any complicity with the violence that lies at the origins, and this very attempt perpetuates the complicity. We all say: 'If we had lived in the time of our forefathers, we would not have joined ourselves with them to spill the blood of the artists and philosophers.'[109]

The contemporary social situation of advanced western countries is identified by Girard as a cultural condition in which the 'dynamic content of the Judaeo-Christian revelation is being

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[108] Cf. Girard's remarks concerning the the adverse response of other intellectuals to his interest in religion. Thomas F. Bertonneau, 'The Logic of the Undecidable: An Interview with René Girard', 9-10.
[109] R. Girard *Things Hidden*, 399.

brought to a conclusion' and in which predominates 'people's burning indignation about everything that still expels, oppresses and persecutes.'[110] Positive though this sounds, Girard also perceives a subterranean counterpoint, as it were, to the admirable and important cry for justice: 'the spirit of hatred and violence that is itself an aberration. The proof of this lies in the fact that the Judaeo-Christian text is misunderstood; people try to erase it completely from our memories and take pleasure in the idea that by now the process is more or less complete.'[111] Although ambiguous in character, the modern age is, Girard believes, apocalyptic:

> When I say that modernity is apocalyptic, I mean that it is revelatory. Certain of the *choses cachées* are being revealed. ... It goes back to the disavowal of the sacred at the beginning of our culture, Judaeo-Christian culture. The argument *against* the sacred cannot, if it is to differentiate itself *from* the sacred, use the methods *of* the sacred. Our epoch is characterized by the on-going revelation of the human origin of violence.[112]

To move beyond the sacrificial is to embrace the apocalyptic, not in terms of doom and gloom, but rather in attending to the often-concealed sacrificial obstacles that, in the name of peace and security, perpetuate the logic of the sacred. This imperative can only be satisfied through the gospel texts in which, Girard claims, interdividual psychology is present.[113]

In this second exploration of the gospel texts, now considered in the light of interdividual psychology, Girard concentrates on the notion of *skandalon*. In Girard, the term can be understood as an exact counterpoint 'to how love in the Christian sense works.'[114] The term *skandalon* never refers to 'a material object.'[115] Rather, it 'is the obstacle/model of mimetic rivalry; it is the model in so far as he works counter to the undertakings of the disciple

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[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Thomas F. Bertonneau, 'The Logic of the Undecidable: An Interview with René Girard', 13.
[113] R. Girard *Things Hidden*, 416.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.

and so becomes an inexhaustible source of morbid fascination.'[116] The nature of *skandalon* is only fully understood, claims Girard, in terms of the reciprocity of its effect:

> Scandal is a relationship that has equally bad consequences for the person who provokes it and for the person who submits to it. Scandal is always a relationship of doubles, and the distinction between the person provoking the scandal and the person undergoing it will always tend to vanish; the passive object of scandal becomes an agent of it and contributes to its diffusion. That is why Christ says, 'woe to man by whom scandal comes', for his responsibility can extend to many people.[117]

Notice here that Girard is insistent on human culpability and accountability for the machinations involved in scandalous relations: 'If humanity will not transform the Kingdom of violence into the Kingdom of God without suffering or danger, then there will inevitably be scandals.'[118] This 'inevitability', however, is not due to the inescapability of historical necessity or an extrinsic divine will. As Girard explains, 'The historical process is inevitable, but it is human rather than divine. Scandal always arrives through humans, and it always affects other humans: this circular process is that of doubles and of all the expressions of mimetic desire that we have been discussing.'[119] This process of conflict, the 'stumbling block' to peace and consonance between desiring subjects, is rooted in the Old Testament but finds its fullest expression in the gospels. There, the 'notion of *skandalon* gets rid of everything 'thing-like' and 'reified' in the Old Testament notion, as well as dispensing with its sacrilized character. The *skandalon* avoids the reefs on which philosophical thought has always run aground, from the Greeks up to our own time: empiricism and positivism, on the one hand, and on the other, the tendency to subjectivize, idealize, and derealize everything.'[120] It is Christ who undermines both the false extremes prevalent in the competition between prevailing ideologies and the structures of the sacrificial: 'He is depriving humankind of the

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[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid., 418.
[118] Ibid., 424.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid., 425.

last of the sacrificial crutches.'[121] What characterises the Christian (or 'quintessential') scandal is 'the fact that the founding victim has finally been revealed as such and that Christ has a role to play in this revelation.'[122] The revelation of Christ does not demand the end of mimetic behaviour (if such a thing were possible) but it does demand - in revealing the 'supreme scandal' of the cross - an end to the victimage mechanism and the worship of the gods of violence.

> The Cross is the supreme scandal not because on it divine majesty succumbs to the most inglorious punishment - but because the Gospels are making a much more radical revelation. They are unveiling the founding mechanism of all worldly prestige, all forms of sacredness and all forms of cultural meaning. The workings of the Gospels are almost the same, so it would seem, as the workings of all earlier religions. That is why all our thinkers concur that there is no difference between them. Another operation is taking place below the surface, and it has no precedent. It discredits and deconstructs all the gods of violence, since it reveals the true God, who has not the slightest violence in him.[123]

The gospels compel us to imitate the 'sole model who never runs the danger - if we really imitate in the way that children imitate - of being transformed into a fascinating rival.'[124] This 'sole model' is, of course, Christ; he is the one who offers, in Girard's terms, 'not the slightest hold to any form of rivalry or mimetic interference. There is no acquisitive desire in him. As a consequence, any will that is really turned toward Jesus will not meet with the slightest of obstacles. His yoke is easy and his burden is light. With him, we run no risk of getting caught up in the evil opposition between doubles.'[125]

Much of Girard's analysis of the state of advanced western cultures seems to be deeply pessimistic. However, his foreboding tone also serves to highlight the radical

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[121] Ibid., 428.
[122] Ibid., 429.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid., 430.
[125] Ibid.

possibilities that the gospels open up for humankind. On the one hand, Girard declares that 'Following Christ means giving up mimetic desire'[126] while, on the other, he is adamant that the gospel text opens for us a 'new perspective.'[127]. The Judaeo-Christian scriptures (read in a non-sacrificial manner) can make us realise that the present (critical) context cannot be condemned as a senseless or meaningless cultural cul-de-sac into which we have fallen. On the contrary, there is now a different path along which humankind must travel:

> The non-sacrificial reading of the Judaeo-Christian scriptures and the thinking that takes the scapegoat as its basis are capable of coming to terms with the apocalyptic dimension of present times without relapsing into frightened hysteria about the 'end of the world'. They make us see that the present crisis is not an absurd dead-end into which we have been pitched by a scientific error in calculation. Interpreting the present in this way is not an attempt to force outdated meanings on mankind's new situation, nor is it a desperate attempt to stop new meanings from coming across; there is simply no need for frivolous expedients of this kind. We have carved out such a strange destiny for ourselves that we can bring to light both what has always determined human culture and what is now the only path open to us - one that reconciles without excluding anyone and no longer has any dealings with violence.[128]

In short, Girard is suggesting that it is only the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus that facilitates peace, love and ultimately salvation from violence and destruction. In the interrogation of desire and the psychological constitution of the subject, Girard's enquiry conveys a hopefulness born of the persistent influence of the gospel text: 'A new kind of humanity is in the process of gestation; it will be both very similar to and very different from the one featured in the dreams of our Utopian thinkers, now in their very last stages.'[129]

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[126] Ibid., 431. Although, as I will show in the next chapter, Girard has modified his position since the publication of *Things Hidden*.
[127] Ibid., 435.
[128] Ibid., 445.
[129] Ibid.

Conclusion

Girard's work offers a re-reading of anthropological theory and texts (in the widest sense of the term 'anthropology) in a post-critical context. This reconception can in no way be understood, however, as an intellectual exercise in which the object of discussion - human being - is simply approached with contemporary theoretical concerns in mind. It is a hypothesis that, if it is to be taken seriously, requires a praxis that is *radical* in nature.[130] The radical praxis that Girard suggests is rooted in the gospels and can only be performed in relation to the demands of non-acquisitive imitation of Christ. Thus Girard presents a moment of decision - the either/or that requires immediate and constant negotiation - between the sacred which *is* violence and the more demanding path of Christ-like mimesis in which the victimage is renounced[131]: 'On the one side are the prisoners of violent imitation, which always leads to a dead end, and on the other are the adherents of non-violent imitation, who will meet with no obstacle.'[132]

In his delineation of the three-fold hypothesis of cultural origins, the revelatory power of the Judaeo-Christian scriptures, and interdividual psychology, Girard points the way to a new understanding of the human condition. This originality, particularly in its depiction of an alternative, mimetic approach to subjectivity, is surprisingly similar to, yet different from, Montaigne's characterisation of being human. 'Between ourselves', Montaigne warns his reader, 'there are two things that I have always observed to be in singular accord: supercelestial thoughts and subterranean conduct. ... They want to get out of themselves and escape from the man. That is madness: instead of changing into angels, they change into

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[130] The use of 'radical' here is deliberate and accords with John Caputo's explication: 'By "radical" I do not understand "foundational" but rather racinated, rooted in a dense and inextricable system of roots, of factical pregiveness, which antedates me and my attempts to disentangle it.' *Against Ethics: Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 254 n14. Cf. further J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology* trans. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 101-102.

[131] R. Girard *Things Hidden*, 199.

[132] Ibid., 430.

beasts; instead of raising themselves, they lower themselves. These transcendent humors frighten me, like lofty and inaccessible places.'[133] In relation to the sacred, the 'supercelestial' sphere of the sacrificial *is* the territory of 'subterranean conduct'. In relation to Christ, the one who reveals the transcendence of the anti-sacred, Montaigne's analysis cannot in Girardian terms hold good; in the case of the imitation of Christ, the false transcendence of a desire centred on appropriation and the violent expulsion of otherness is conceived as the outcome of a subjectivity which is itself false. Only in relation to Christ, the divine Logos, can subjectivity be fulfilled in what Girard calls the 'sur-transcendence of love.'[134]

In Chapter Seven, the conclusion, I will attempt to develop this Girardian understanding of authentic subjectivity as the performance of the sur-transcendence of love. It is nevertheless important to acknowledge that the Girardian hypothesis has received a significant amount of criticism and in the next chapter I shall attend to what I consider to be a number of the most notable and serious challenges to Girard's theoretical conclusions.

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[133] *The Complete Essays of Montaigne* trans. D.M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), III. xiii, p. 856.
[134] R. Girard *Things Hidden*, 233.

Chapter Five:
Critical Evaluation

Introduction

After outlining the main characteristics of Girard's hypothesis and before proceeding to the more constructive task of exploring the potential shape and character of a theological anthropology after Girard, it is essential to evaluate this hypothesis in the light of the wider discussions that it has provoked. It is not surprising that an approach to social, cultural and human origins and identity as wide-ranging and as ambitious as Girard's should have been the subject of a significant amount of critical debate. Since an examination of the full range of critical appraisals of Girard's work is beyond the scope of this study I will be interrogating those specific evaluations of his hypothesis that explicitly encroach upon on anthropological problems and themes.

The analysis of the Girardian corpus undertaken in the previous two chapters suggests that there are two foci to Girard's theoretical ellipse: the human propensity for mimesis and the ubiquitous recourse of human groups to victimage mechanisms and the sacrificial: the former developed with respect to the mediated character of the production and reproduction of desire. Commentators on Girard's work have largely concentrated on the second constituent of

this twofold hypothesis, particularly in theological elaborations where the distinctive (non-violent) role of the Gospels and Girard's hermeneutic of suspicion have provided profitable tools with which to explore the character and exigencies of Christian belief. As an exploration of theological anthropology, however, the particular interest of this study is the first strand of Girard's hypothesis and this chapter will largely exclude unrelated material. Nevertheless, because of the integrated nature of Girard's work, there will often be allusions to the entire spectrum of his thought. Thus, I shall not be exploring criticisms of Girard's biblical hermeneutic which is called into question both on the level of its universal claims (by hermeneuts) and in terms of the detailed readings of particular biblical texts (by biblical scholars).[1] Rather, in this chapter I wish to engage with what I believe to be the most serious theoretical charges laid at the feet of Girard's anthropology - that it is founded on a notion of human being that is inherently violent, that the interdividual subject is stripped of agency and that his understanding of Christianity is fundamentally positivist when it comes to his understanding of the efficacy of gospel revelation. I will begin with the first of these issues, the omnipresence of violence in the Girardian hypothesis, where I hope to answer Girard's critics. With regard to the insufficient role of agency in Girard's interdividual configuration of the subject, I hope to demonstrate that such criticisms are invalid. Finally, concerning Girard's understanding of revelation, I will elaborate the problems through an examination of tradition.

5.1: The Violence of Desire

There is little doubt that the subject of mimetic desire seems to be ceaselessly confronted with the danger of, and potentiality for, internecine violence. It is this prevalence of all things savage that invites a substantial amount of adverse criticism from Girard's interlocutors. This is because, while it is theoretically uncomplicated, Girard's hypothesis

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[1] A good example of each approach is, respectively, Mark I. Wallace, 'Postmodern Biblicism: The Challenge of René Girard for Contemporary Theology' *Modern Theology* 5:4 (1989), 309-325 and Robert North, S.J., 'Violence and the Bible: The Girard Connection' *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47:1 (1985), 1-27.

seems to present violence as a constant. Girard himself is aware that what he outlines could be seen as little more than a 'hostile dialogue between Self and Other which parodies the Hegelian struggle for recognition.'[2] It is the hostility of the intersubjective 'dialogue' that raises significant questions concerning Girard's anthropology. Is Girard presenting a concept of human identity that is founded upon the propensity for violence, almost Hobbsian in form, in which alterity is synonymous with threat? The reference here to Hegel is illuminating as Girard is accused of grounding the constitution of subjectivity in a quasi-Hegelian fashion: as a struggle for recognition culminating in a violent overcoming.[3] Indeed, as this reference to the master-slave dialectic is provided by Girard himself, in a discussion of novelistic truth, it seems that he is damned by his own words. The essential point here, and it is one that is seriously incriminating if upheld, is that if it is the case that all Girard has done in developing an 'interdividual' concept of intersubjectivity is to expand and resituate an Hegelian framework, then surely he is guilty of John Milbank's charge of predicating human identity on an 'ontology of violence'.[4] More serious, however, is Milbank's suggestion that the unmitigated nature of the human propensity for mimesis and the ensuing violence of mimetic relations as conceived by Girard is more akin to Manicheanism than Christian anthropology.[5] The necessity of answering such criticisms is not simply to establish Girard's 'orthodoxy' but to examine whether there is more to Girard's work than a manifesto of despair. This question of violence and, in particular, its relation to the theological import of Girard's work, is complex and in order to interrogate these criticisms thoroughly I will proceed in three steps. First, it is necessary to examine something of Girard's intellectual context and the content of the Hegelianism that seems to be an indispensable ingredient of his hypothesis. Second, I will assess Girard's anthropology in the light of the inheritance that informs his intellectual

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[2] R. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1965), 111. Prior to this invocation of Hegel, Girard suggests that this dialogue is the 'concrete' towards which the novelist gropes in his or her work - a realm of specificity and actuality that is in marked contrast to the dreams of 'solipsistic idealism and positivism.'

[3] Indeed, Gillian Rose claims that Girard's declaration that the mimetic hypothesis is dissimilar to the Hegelian master-slave dialectic is spurious. Gillian Rose, *The Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 144.

[4] J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 394.

[5] John Milbank, 'Stories of Sacrifice' *Modern Theology* 12:1 (1996), 42.

enterprise and, finally, I will closely interrogate the Girardian economy of desire in the light of the previous analysis.

While Girard's understanding of subjectivity and human interaction is distinctive, it owes a great debt, as we saw in the last chapter, to his engagement and ultimate rejection of Freud. Just as important for an understanding and evaluation of Girard's project, however, is a particularly French reading of Hegel that, supplemented by the residual influence of Marxism and Heideggerian existentialism, supplanted neo-Kantianism as the dominant philosophical force in France during the first part of this century.[6] The significance of this radical accommodation and adaptation of Hegel, and its influence upon Girard, can be more fully appreciated with reference to the seemingly all-pervasive influence of a set of seminars given by a Russian emigré, Alexandre Kojève.[7] These lectures revolutionised French philosophical reflection between the 1930s and the 1960s and situated Desire at the centre of philosophical anthropology. Indeed, it has been suggested that Kojève's project so dominated French thought that all subsequent philosophical reflection either declared 'Hegel will draw us together' or, after 1968, 'Deliver us from Hegelianism.'[8] In relation to Girard, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe goes as far as to propose that Girard's conception of acquisitive mimesis and mimetic desire are based 'in actual fact on Kojève's interpretation of the dialectics of desire in

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[6] Mention should also be made of the advent of Structuralism and Post-structuralism. While Girard cannot be simply pigeon-holed as Structuralist or Post-Structuralist, Andrew McKenna has argued that the reading of Girard and Derrida in tandem is helpful in elucidating the work of both. Cf. A. McKenna, *Violence and Difference: Girard, Derrida, and Deconstruction* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

[7] There is little biographical material in English that charts Kojève's life and influence. Cf. however Mark Lilla, 'The end of philosophy: How a Russian emigré brought Hegel to the French' *TLS* April 5 1991, 3-5.

[8] V. Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy* trans. L. Scott-Fox & J.M. Harding (Cambridge: CUP, 1980), 13. The watershed of 1968 is proposed by Descombes, 171-172. and E. Webb, *The Self Between: From Freud to the New Social Psychology of France* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 4. It seems that the failure of the 1968 uprisings to realise a socialist utopia led to a disillusionment with Marxism (and Hegelianism, i.e. the omnipresence of the dialectic) and a move towards psychoanalysis as a theoretical and explanatory tool in the face of discontent.

Hegel's *Phenomenology*.'[9] Who then is Kojève and why is his work seminal to Girard's description of the character and dynamics of the desiring subject?

Between 1933 and 1939 Kojève lectured on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris.[10] Kojève augmented (and, he believed, corrected) the Idealism of Hegel with a Marxist and existentialist reading of the *Phenomenology*.[11] For Kojève the interpretation of Hegel was no ivory tower endeavour - it was the central means of influencing, or rather determining, the way in which human destiny was to unfold:

> We can therefore say that, for the moment, any interpretation of Hegel, if it is more than idle chatter, is but a programme of struggle and of work (one of these "programmes" being called *Marxism*). And that is to say that the work of an interpreter of Hegel is equivalent to the work of political propaganda. ... For it is possible that in reality the future of the world and therefore the meaning of the present and that of the past depend, in the last analysis, on the way in which we interpret today the Hegelian writings.[12]

Kojève placed the dialectic of Master and Slave at the centre of, and as the key to understanding, what he considered to be the most significant of these '*écrits hégéliens*', the

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[9] P. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art and Politics* trans. C. Turner (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 81. Lacoue-Labarthe's assertion is not without truth, although, as I hope to show, Girard's project diverges significantly from that of Kojève.

[10] A. Kojève, *Introduction à la Lecture de Hegel* (ed.) R. Queneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1947). An abridged version is available in translation, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (ed.) Allan Bloom, trans. J.H. Nichols (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980). All quotations will be taken from the English edition unless otherwise specified.

[11] Robert B. Pippin suggests that Kojève's philosophical anthropology was 'much influenced by Hobbes and Heidegger as well as Hegel.' R.B. Pippin, 'Being, Time, and Politics: The Strauss-Kojève Debate' *History and Theory* 32:2 (1993), 138-161. There is little doubt that Kojève's reading of the Phenomenology is influenced by Marxism, even if, as Allan Bloom contends, it is a reading that responds to a dissatisfaction with the 'thinness of Marx's account of the human and metaphysical grounds of his teaching.' Cf. the editor's introduction to A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, viii.

[12] A. Kojève, 'Hegel, Marx et le Christianisme' *Critique* 7 (1946), 366; 'On peut donc dire que, pour le moment, toute interprétation de Hegel, si elle est plus qu'un bavardage, n'est qu'un programme de lutte et de travail (l'un de ces ·programmes· s'appelant *marxisme*). Est c'est dire que l'oeuvre d'un interprête de Hegel a la signification d'un oeuvre de propagande politique. ... Car il se peut qu'effectivement l'avenir du monde, et donc le sens du présent et la signification du passé, dépendent en dernière analyse de la façon dont on interprête aujourd'hui les écrits hégéliens.'

Phenomenology. It is the fight for recognition which is essential to becoming a self - an 'I'.[13] Kojève, like Hegel[14], posited a distinction between the desire to fulfil instinctual needs or 'appetites' and a higher Desire. This higher Desire *is* human desire and must win out over the purely animal desire. Human Desire, however, is not, as is animal desire, simply instinctual:

> Desire is human only if the one desires, not the body, but the Desire of the other; if he wants "to possess" or "to assimilate" the Desire taken as Desire - that is to say, if he wants to be "desired" or "loved", or, rather, "recognized" in his human value, in his reality as a human individual.[15]

This "recognition", however, is not simply a matter of some supplementary status which sorts the masters from the slaves - it is an essential characteristic of human identity. As Kojève declares, 'the human being is *formed* only in terms of a Desire directed towards another Desire, that is - finally - in terms of a desire for recognition.'[16] Thus Kojève, in positing the fight for recognition as pivotal, suggests that the *Phenomenology* presents an 'account of universal history in which bloody strife - and not 'reason' - is responsible for the progress towards the happy conclusion.'[17] The conclusion being, of course, Absolute knowledge and the End of History[18]. As Descombes suggests, Kojève 'bequeathed to his listeners a *terrorist conception of history*.'[19]

This last phrase, in which Vincent Descombes summarises the Kojèvean enterprise, cannot be simplistically grafted onto Girard's understanding of hominization, nor to his emphasis on the conflictual possibilities of mimetic relations. However, there does seem to be a convergence between the two projects. In *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* Girard makes

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[13] A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading Of Hegel*, 7.
[14] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: OUP, 1977), 109-110.
[15] A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading Of Hegel*, 6.
[16] Ibid., 7. My italics.
[17] V. Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy* , 13.
[18] Kojève was widely used, and understandably so, by Francis Fukuyama in his *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992).
[19] V. Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, 14.

explicit use of the Master - Slave dialectic to elucidate the dynamics of desire in Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*.[20] Just as Kojève suggests that 'Human Desire must be directed toward another Desire'[21], Girard outlines the mechanism of desire described by Stendhal in terms which fulfil Kojève's imperative.[22] Furthermore, the desire for recognition which forms the basis of Kojève's dialectic is echoed in Girard's contention that the mechanism of object-desire is fuelled not by the value of the object itself but by the (perceived) self-sufficiency and ontological fullness of the model who becomes a rival. As Girard explains, 'Since the model obstinately bars access to it, the possession of this object must make all the difference between the self-sufficiency of the model and the imitator's lack of sufficiency, the model's fullness of being and the imitator's nothingness.'[23] This radical desire for ontological fullness is described by Girard as 'metaphysical desire'. Rather than desiring an object for some intrinsic value, firstly desire is the desire of an other's desire and, secondly, desire itself originates as a desire for the *being* of the other, the model.[24] The key is that the imitator suffers from an essential indeterminacy or lack. Thus, the desire for the object becomes incidental and the pivotal experience is that of the rivalrous relationship between the imitator and the model-rival who, according to Girard, become doubles.[25] This scenario is comparable to the Master - Slave dialectic endorsed by Kojève in which the fight to the death is in order to be 'recognised' and, thus, to be identified as human.

It would seem obvious then that, according to Girard, self and other are ineluctably ensnared in a violent framework in which recognition necessitates annihilation. However, if one pays close attention to the complexities of desire in Girard's work then such a simplistic assertion would seem to be undermined. For example, the novelistic truth which Girard

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[20] R. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 109-112.
[21] A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading Of Hegel*, 5.
[22] Cf. R. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 109.
[23] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* in collaboration with J-M Oughourlian and G. Lefort (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 296.
[24] Cf. R. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 53.
[25] R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 284-287.

discerns in certain nineteenth-century novels undermines a dialectic in which violence is the foremost vehicle towards selfhood and recognition. 'Violence', Girard believes, 'far from serving the interests of whoever exerts it, reveals the intensity of desire; thus it is a sign of slavery.'[26] Rather than freeing one from bondage, the Kojèvean celebration of 'bloody strife' only increases one's subjection to the dynamics of desire. Moreover, Girard's notion of mimetic desire is essentially triangular. While, as we have seen in the last chapter, the object becomes of secondary importance once the imitator and model-rival assume the status of doubles, Girard's insistence on the role of the object cannot be ignored. This is due to Girard's observation that desire is often characterised as acquisitive in nature. Thus he allows for a richness and complexity in human interaction that is lacking in a rigidly dialectic approach. As Robert Hamerton-Kelly suggests, 'Direct recognition is a limit; actual recognition is always mediated through an object. Desire is acquisitive, and acts through the representations of desire.'[27]

It is the foundational character of the mimesis which is unveiled in Girard's attention to the contours of human subjectivity - augmented by his study of literary, anthropological and philosophical texts. It is worth emphasising that Girard has developed a method which is enlivened by his literary analysis and his contention that mimesis has, since the time of Plato, been limited to role of *representation* and it has ignored 'kinds of behaviour involved in appropriation.'[28] It is the acquisitive nature of mimetic desire which is, one the one hand, shared by Kojève, but on the other, is configured in a way - triangular - that does not accord with Kojève's Hegelian analysis. Girard shares with Kojève a suspicion of an Enlightenment paradigm which exhorts the purity of knowledge, of unqualified speculation. The former's investigation, and theoretical positing of, the centrality of mimetic desire and the victimage mechanism questions the innocence of human interaction - indeed, rationality itself as a

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[26] R. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 112.
[27] R. Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 202.
[28] R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 8.

standard-bearer for human progress. However, unlike Kojève, Girard is also suspicious of a theory of human interaction which posits a binary archetype. A theory of triangular desire undermines a tradition of philosophical and theological anthropology which propounds a self-sufficient subject who chooses an object for its inherent value.[29] The stress on mimesis also suggests a link with a tradition of French psychology that highlighted the importance of, in Gabriel Tarde's terms, 'imitation' and, what Hippolyte Bernheim and Gustave Le Bon designated as, 'suggestion'.[30] Indeed, the importance of mimesis in Girard's work is demonstrated by his epigrammatic use of Aristotle's assertion that 'Man differs from the other animals in his greater aptitude for imitation.'[31]

Such an understanding of subjectivity, precarious at the best of times, diverges from the notion of violent subjectivity in Kojève's project. There the self is not engendered with and by the other but is self-generated. Within the ongoing composition of this human drama, the recourse to a notion of desire that transcends a master-slave dialectic, and not simply a violent supersession characteristic of the Kojèvean conqueror, facilitates a more complex and ambiguous understanding of identity than the wholly immanentist view of contestation allows. For it is evident that the configuration of desire and the accompanying interaction between subjects - if one can still call the Girardian 'actor' a subject - is most definitely dissimilar from the unequivocal negation of alterity in Hegel for whom

> self-consciousness is thus certain of itself only by superseding this other that presents itself to self-consciousness as an independent life; self-consciousness is Desire. Certain of the nothingness of this other, it explicitly affirms that this nothingness is *for it* the truth of the other; it destroys the independent object and thereby gives itself the certainty of itself as a *true* certainty... .[32]

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[29] Cf. R. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 15. The belief that one's desire arises from one's own resources, 'that it is the emanation of a serene subjectivity' or, alternatively, that desire is constituted by the object's inherent value, 'it is written into the nature of things', is seen by Girard to be the illusion of the romantic *vaniteux*.
[30] Cf. E. Webb, *The Self Between*, 38.
[31] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 4. Cited in R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 1.
[32] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 109.

Consequently, due to its status as the uncertain subject - utterly dissimilar from the assured subject of Hegel - the subject of mimetic desire outlined by Girard cannot simply be bracketed with the reactive constitution of the Hegelian self through some violent overcoming.

The sense of the annihilation of the other which informs Kojève's philosophical anthropology is, furthermore, closely related to the proposition that the subject is 'God' - a theme closely associated in French Hegelianism to that of limit experiences and taken up in particular by Bataille.[33] This is evident in Kojève's ultimate reliance on the development of a Feuerbachian framework in which it is anthropology that acts as the substructure from which to consider all theoretical endeavour that demands abstraction. Along these lines, Kojève makes two assertions that are pertinent. Firstly, he contends that 'In fact, theology was always an unconscious anthropology; man projected into the beyond, without realising it, the idea he had of himself.'[34] Secondly, and concomitantly, Kojève suggests that 'The only, the single *reality* of the Christian notion of God is, for this philosophy [i.e. Kojève's Hegelianism], Mankind taken in the totality of its historical evolution within nature.'[35] Kojève's left Hegelianism and Marxist gloss of theology is the outcome of a significant aspiration to overcome what he perceives as a mistaken idealism in both Hegel and theological discourse more generally. In place of what he perceives to be an intellectually dishonest mystification, Kojève's project is one in which he tries to ascertain the fundamental nature and elucidate the 'reality' (a much used term of Kojève's as it is of French existentialism) of existence.

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[33] Cf. Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience* trans. L.A. Bolt (New York: SUNY Press, 1988), esp. 108-111. Bataille suggests that '*The Phenomenology of Spirit* comprises two essential moments completing a circle: it is the completion by degrees of the consciousness of self (of human *ipse*) and the becoming everything (the becoming God) of this *ipse* completing knowledge (and by this means destroying the particularity within it, thus completing the negation of oneself, becoming absolute knowledge.' (108-109).

[34] A. Kojève, 'Hegel, Marx et le Christianisme', 345; En fait, la théologie était toujours une anthropologie inconsciente; l'homme projetait dans l'au-delà, sans s'en renre compte, l'idée qu'il se faisait de lui-même.'

[35] Ibid., 340; 'Car la seule et unique *réalité* de la notion chrétienne de Dieu est, pour cette philosophie, l'Homme pris dans la totalité de son évolution historique effectuée au sein de la nature.'

However, as I shall demonstrate in more detail, in Girard's exploration of the configuration of desire the divine - not in this case the indefinable 'sacred' of so much recent theoretical endeavour, but the 'full-blooded' Other of the Christian tradition - is the necessary point of reference for the formation of a non-violent, non-acquisitive, redeemed subjectivity. Desire, as understood by Girard, is equivocal. It encompasses the transcendent, peaceful dimension of human interaction as well as those relations that occur within a more immanent, immediate context. It is, to borrow a Platonic-cum-Derridean term, a *pharmakon*.[36]

It is nevertheless the case that despite a significant divergence between Girard's project and that of Kojève, the dynamic characteristics of mimetic desire present the likelihood of conflict between the mimetic protagonists - to suggest otherwise would be disingenuous. The reciprocity of the desire of subject and model breeds violence. Brutality, as we have seen, is an all too common result of human interaction, the contours of which are traced in Girard's hypothesis of violence and cultural formation.[37] Conflict is not, however, determined, nor is the configuration of desire homogenous. There are two possible patterns within the Girardian hypothesis through which desire is mediated and, argues Girard, the possibility of conflict is dependent on which type of mediation is operative. These alternatives are, in the words of Eugene Webb,

> (1) that which leads almost inevitably to conflict, because the self and its model are competitors *within the same field of action*, and (2) that which does not, because the self and its model cannot be competitors since their fields of action do not overlap.[38]

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[36] Cf. Jacques Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy' *Dissemination* trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone, 1981), 61-172. Cf. R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 296-297 for the Girard's discussion of the *pharmakon* and for his analysis of the link between *pharmakon* and *pharmakos*, the scapegoat.
[37] Cf. especially, R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977) for a full account of the violence which arises from the heightened rivalry caused by the unrestrained progress of acquisitive mimesis.
[38] E. Webb, *The Self Between*, 93.

The first of these possibilities Girard refers to as 'internal mediation' and the second 'external mediation' - as a *pharmakon* desire is a poison or a remedy, internal or external. Girard illustrates this distinction with reference to *Don Quixote*[39]. Cervante's novel presents a fine example of external mediation. While the Don imitates the chivalrous adventures of the knight errant, Amadis of Gaul, there is no possibility of rivalry because the subject (the Don) and the mediator (Amadis) inhabit quite separate regions of activity. It is only when mimetic desire is operative in the relation of 'immanent neighbours' that internal mediation is established and that conflict, with what seems to be almost a structural necessity, ensues.[40] This mediatory distinction is an extremely important ingredient in the Girardian hypothesis. It points to the ambiguity of desire and displays that Girard's thought cannot be simplistically characterised as pointing towards wholly violent conclusions. In the last two chapters I considered the constituent elements of these forms of mediation, now it is worth pursuing these elements more explicitly under the rubric of this 'internal-external' distinction.

5.1.1: The Rivalry of Violence

The pattern of internal mediation is such that object rivalry is the inevitable outcome of the force and influence of desire when the imitator and model are involved in the same field of action. This configuration is exacerbated by the confusion which arises from what Girard, after Gregory Bateson, terms the 'double bind'. If a subject imitates the behaviour of a model then the model naturally enjoys the role of exemplar and thus proclaims 'Imitate me'. However, as Girard explains, 'if the imitation is too perfect, and the imitator threatens to surpass the model, the master will completely change his attitude and begin to display jealousy, mistrust and hostility.'[41] Parallel to the imperative to imitate me is the contrary declaration 'Do not imitate me!' Thus, a 'double bind'. Girard's concern is that in modern society all barriers have been removed to the 'freedom of desire' and the possibilities for

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[39] R. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 1-4.
[40] Cf. R.G. Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, 21
[41] R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 290.

situations of internal mediation are infinite.[42] Consequently individuals are susceptible to the perplexing force of the mimetic double bind.

The double bind and the rivalrous dynamics of internal mediation suggest that competition is the destined outcome. As with the double bind, in the scope of internal mediation the relationship of the subject or imitator to the model is, at least initially, marked by a distinctive ambivalence. That is, the model is adored because the model acts as the source of desire but, as the subject attempts to acquire the object of desire, the model will assume the role of *obstacle* to appropriation. Convergence of desire onto a common object leads to rivalry for that object. The attention, however, shifts from the object of desire and the energy of mimetic desire fuels a rivalry in which the obstacle-rival is the figure of attention. Thus, 'an imitative aspiration for the object becomes a direct rivalry between the imitators'.[43] This rivalry is a reciprocal mediation 'in which the model becomes drawn into the play of mimesis, imitating in the other the desire the other first found in him'.[44] The imitator and the model become the focus of each other's mimetic rivalry. They become like each other in their obsession to acquire the being of the other. They are now, in every way, *doubles*.[45] There is no ontological difference between them since the basis of their reciprocal desire is 'a process of mimesis involving undifferentiation'[46] The structural inevitability of violence is schematised by Girard with reference to the intensity of internal mediation.

In terms of how it might inform a theological anthropology, this exposition of the internal configuration of desire by Girard offers the possibility of maintaining the social location of the self without neglecting the harsh realities evident in the violence of the social

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[42] Ibid., 291.
[43] R.G. Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, 20.
[44] E. Webb, *The Self Between*, 95.
[45] R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 242.
[46] Ibid., 287.

space and the pathology of mimesis. On the other hand, Girard's hypothesis is not as thoroughly pessimistic as it might seem nor as wholly predicated on violence as critics such as Milbank suggest. Girard proposes that the violent predicament can be overcome. If there is one area where Girard's contribution is original (and controversial) it is in his assertion that it is only in relation to Christ that the rivalrous lure of internal mediation can be superseded. As Hamerton-Kelly characterises it, 'The divine is the proper transcendental pole of mimesis by relation to whom mimesis is preserved from rivalry and violence'.[47]

5.1.2: The Antidote to Violence: External Mediation

External mediation, as we have seen, is distinguished by the fact that the subject and the model are acting in separate fields of action. Although it is quite obvious that God is as external to the field of rivalrous desire as any being can be, there is more to the external mediation of the transcendent than the encouragement of the ultimate hero-worship. Girard has, suggests Webb,

> come to believe that to understand what human being is, one must also consider questions about the nature of the relation between the human and the divine, because only in that relation does human being enter into its fullness.[48]

Full human being is a question not of the elusive plenitude gained in fusion with, or consumption of, the Other. How, then, can fullness be gained? In his conversation with Girard in *Things Hidden*, Oughourlian outlines Girard's consideration of the topic:

> If we follow your reasoning, the real human *subject* can only come out of the rule of the Kingdom; apart from this rule, there is never anything but mimetism and the 'interdividual'. Until this happens, the only subject is the mimetic structure.[49]

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[47] R.G. Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, 46.
[48] E. Webb, *The Self Between*, 174.
[49] R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 199.

Girard's contention is that the Gospels reveal, for the first time, the violence of mimetism. The authority of this revelation is inherent in its unveiling of the 'victimage mechanism'.[50] The victimage mechanism, as we have seen, is the outcome of the endemic nature of mimetic violence, which, through the operation of mimesis itself, is the conversion of reciprocal violence which threatens to destroy the community into a unanimous violence where a victim acts as the focus for conflictual mimesis. This common allegiance at the conclusion of the mimetic crisis becomes the resolution of conflict.[51] The victim, in turn, acquires an ambiguous status. Held responsible for the communal disorder, the victim is 'believed to have brought about his own death'[52] and yet, as also responsible for the renewal of peace, the victim is regarded as sacred. This ambivalent reading of the murder of the victim passes into communal myths and, thus, the innocence of the victim is concealed. Girard concludes that the victimage mechanism is the basis for all human institutions which, because of the quasi-transcendent principle attributed to the victim, he terms 'sacrificial'.[53] Nevertheless, this transcendent factor is constituted by violence and, hence, can only be characterised as false.

The prevalence of false transcendence is definitively revealed in the person, life and work of Jesus and, therefore, it does not, indeed cannot, retain its potency. Revelation is so efficacious because the continued influence of the victimage mechanism, the sacrificial order and false transcendence, is reliant on the omnipresence of mystification. 'Violence', declares Girard, 'in every cultural order, is always the true *subject* of every ritual or institutional structure'.[54] Only the revelation of Jesus can save human beings from false and violent subjectivity and promote the true subjectivity which is apparent in what Girard calls the 'sur-transcendence of love'.[55]

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[50] Cf. Chapter 3 of this study..
[51] Cf. R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 95.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., 19-22.
[54] Ibid., 210.
[55] Ibid., 233. Cf. E. Webb, *The Self Between*, 176 for a discussion of true versus false subjectivity.

The possibility of new ways of living - true subjectivity - is actualised in the person of Jesus. He is the 'incarnation of non-violent love'[56] and is the only model of imitation who can redress the imbalance created by the violence of mimetic desire and false subjectivity. Jesus is, then, the 'external mediator' *par excellence* because,

> The saving revelation that breaks Satan's power and opens up the possibility of true life in the Kingdom of God - that is, life governed not by mimetic desire and violence but by love - is not just taught by Jesus as the bearer of a message but is embodied in him as the beginning of the new life itself.[57]

Through 'Christ's perfect love'[58] true subjectivity can be actualised and a life in which revenge and victimisation are ubiquitous is overcome. Furthermore, the human tendency toward idolatry, exacerbated by the mimetic mechanism, could be identified in Girardian terms as a form of internal mediation and false transcendence. Idolatry helps human individuals and groups to remain within the security of a mimetic and sacrificial framework rather than encounter the possibility of alternative forms of living. Thus idolatry has, *contra* Jean-Luc Marion, the kinds of repercussions that are infinitely more serious than a problem of the veracity of one's metaphysics.[59]

This distinction between internal and external desire, and the accompanying potential for violence and non-violence, suggests that Girard's project is not so easily characterised as one in which the recourse to conflict is determined or essentialised. Whereas in Girard's project the ubiquitous recourse to violence is subject to an analysis that at once reveals its

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[56] E. Webb, *The Self Between*, 178.
[57] Ibid. Satan, in Girardian terms, is the Christian symbol of false transcendence and the victimage mechanism. Cf. R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 162.
[58] R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 277.
[59] Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: hors texte* trans. T.A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), esp. Ch. 1, 7-24. For a criticism of Marion along Girardian lines cf. my 'Writing of(f) Victims: hors texte' *New Blackfriars* Vol. 78, No. 916 (1997), 267-278.

actuality and outlines its disastrous consequences, it is easily distinguished from theoretical perspectives in which violence is an essential element or one in which ruthless conflict is celebrated. It is interesting to note, in this context, that in Kojève's political theology even the most bloody violence, defined in relation to the human being as both temporality and negation, can be wholly positive if understood in terms of the consummation of subjectivity.[60] Furthermore, in Girard's terms, human potentiality for non-violent living is intrinsically related to the fact that the uncertain subject, produced and reproduced, as it were, by the desire of the other, is compelled to renegotiate the drama of (mis)recognition that constitutes intersubjectivity in relation to transcendence. How this might be actualised is a question that I shall consider in due course.

This examination of the violent or non-violent constitution of subjectivity and, it should be said, culture,[61] does not, however, answer the charge that Girard's hypothesis identifies and depicts human beings as fundamentally violent, unredeemed creatures whose proclivity is for violence rather than peace. Or, in the more theological language of one critic, the problem is that Girard 'considers only blood and murder, not love and the divine plan.'[62] Two points are in order here. First, as Girard himself suggests, there is a distinction between the biblical creation and what his own work is at pains to stress in its delineation of the recourse to violence by human groups and individuals - 'the founding murder and the creation of culture.'[63] The latter is indicative of fallen humanity. Secondly, the role of Christ in Girard's theoretical framework removes any illusions that Girard conceives subjectivity as essentially predicated on violence. Girard's understanding of the (anti-) sacrifice of Christ, because of its emphasis on a fundamentally non-violent God whose creation is constituted as and for love, exposes the antithetical relationship between this untypical life and death and

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[60] A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading Of Hegel*, 160.
[61] Cf. R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 178.
[62] R. Le Gall, 'La conception négative de l'imitation et du sacrifice chez René Girard' *Nova et vetera* 56 (1981), 48.
[63] Rebecca Adams, 'Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard' *Religion & Literature* 25:2 (1993), 20.

classical concepts of sacrifice. The significance of this distinction is summarised by Julia Kristeva in her Girard-informed reflection on the love of God:

> Not only is the sacrifice temporary (the body of Christ will be resurrected in its integrity) but in addition, and beginning with the immersion of the faithful in Christ, what the faithful allows to die is only a lustful body, the erotic body, in order to recover, through resurrection, the body in its integrity but completely invested in the ideal.[64]

Kristeva's point is that sinful humanity, because of the radically different economy inaugurated by the resurrection, is transformed. After Girard, she suggests that the desiring economy initiated by Jesus changes the significance, and ultimately restores, the sacrificed body. Unlike Manicheanism, moreover, this transformation is effected within a bodily - if transient and mortal - existence and reconfigures human beings in line with the gift of creation. The full integrity of that which is human - and here 'body', it seems to me is a synecdoche that plays a similar role to *anima* or 'soul' - is revealed, indeed actualised, in the resurrection. While in no way revolutionary, Kristeva's reading of the sacrificial economy (after Girard) is profoundly important. For the passion and death of Christ, that bloody episode that so animates Girard and his religious thought, can be understood as the instantiation of 'passionate love':

> passionate love is a gift that assumes total suffering and loss, not in order to make of it a metaphorical assumption towards the Other but to allow a Meaning, always already there, anterior and coming from above, to manifest itself to the members of the community that share it.[65]

It is this 'gift' that characterises the 'subject' of the Girardian hypothesis but it is a gift that is *lived* in terms of the economy of desire and 'concrete' situations rather than simply possessed.

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[64] Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love* trans L.S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 142.
[65] Ibid., 143.

5.2: Interdividuality and Agency

There is little doubt that Girard's emphasis on the 'concrete' engagement of subjects of desire owes much to an Hegelianism shaped by the particularity of Kojève's concerns. Even though much of the substance of Kojève's anthropology must be and is rejected in Girard's hypothesis, it is obvious that Girard's project is wholly at odds with the intrinsicist materialism of Kojève in which violence constitutes the major ingredient in the constitution of the self. Nevertheless there is one positive inheritance that must be taken into account before I further evaluate Girard's work. Although I shall explore this theme in more detail in the next chapter, I want for a moment to examine the dynamic character of the Girardian subject that takes many of its characteristics from Kojève's Hegelian self.

If it is true that Girard, along with the most significant French thinkers of his generation, has inherited much from French Hegelianism then one question urgently requires an response. Why have I been at pains to disassociate Girard's work from that of Kojève? The answer is that it is the emphasis on the ineluctability of the violent constitution of subjectivity in the latter's project which distinguishes it from Girard's notion of the genesis and constitution of the self. However, I want to suggest that subjectivity, in its Girardian pattern, bears the hallmark of twentieth-century Hegelianism - especially with regard to one central feature of the ubiquitous master-slave dialectic. Kojève's reading of the *Phenomenology* was peculiar in that its emphasis was wholly on the struggle for recognition. Hence, his work has been particularly denounced for its divergence from the purity of the Hegelian system. However, the consequence of reading Hegel from the standpoint of the master-slave dialectic is not simply - depending, of course, on one's critical perspective - either the bastardization or renewal of the Hegelian corpus.[66] Kojève's reading of Hegel

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[66] The former view - that Kojève's interpretation of Hegel is thoroughly flawed - is extremely common. Cf. T. Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 436-437, n. 110; P. Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1996), 119-122. Cf. also, Andrew Shanks' view that Kojève's influence has been 'almost entirely regrettable'. A. Shanks, *Hegel's Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991),

effectively regenerated philosophical anthropology and installed desire as a central component of politically-sensitive reflective endeavour. The exploration of desire and its character is not excluded from the canon of modern philosophy, nor in fact was Hegel the first to consider its place in a study of subjectivity.[67] Nevertheless, as Judith Butler points out,

> Desire has been deemed philosophically dangerous precisely because of its propensity to blur clear vision and foster philosophical myopia, encouraging one to see only what one *wants*, and not what *is*. Desire is too narrow, focused, interested, and engaged. But when philosophy interrogates its own possibilities as *engaged* or practical knowledge, it tends to ask after the philosophical potential of desire.[68]

It is the emphasis on *engagement* that Girard has inherited, along with much twentieth-century French philosophy. Even those who ultimately rejected the all-encompassing pretensions of Kojève's Hegelian project embraced this aspect of his (in)famous seminars of the nineteen-thirties. The subject could no longer be understood exclusively in terms of a self-conscious monad that was safe within its bounds. Accordingly, Kojève contrasts the 'contemplative', quiescent self - 'the "knowing subject"' who '"loses" himself in the object that is known'[69] - with the subject of desire for whom 'Desire dis-quiets him and moves him to action.'[70] It is, therefore, action that becomes the proper site for a thorough topography and comprehension of subjectivity and not contemplation nor the conceptual alone. Consequently, to borrow from Michel de Certeau, one could, after this particular reading of Hegel, outline a cultural and anthropological hypothesis 'allowing the logic of unselfconscious thought to be taken seriously.'[71] - or, in Girard's case, the logic (or folly) of desire. The Girardian self is one who

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210, n. 21. The latter view - which takes into account the originality of Kojève's project as well as its status as commentary - is volunteered by Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 61-79.

[67] Cf. Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 3; Benedict de Spinoza, *The Ethics* trans. R.H.M. Elwes (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), Part 3, prop. 9, p. 137 & Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason* trans. L. White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), § 3, Theorem II, Remark 1, p. 21-22.

[68] Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 3. Butler's emphasis.

[69] A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading Of Hegel*, 3.

[70] Ibid., 4.

[71] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. S. Rendall (Berkeley: California University Press, 1984), xv.

can only be considered in the midst of various engagements with, indeed 'as', the other. Yet, whereas for Kojève desire is 'the project of self-realization through the mediation of the other's recognition',[72] in Girard's terms the problem of recognition is not necessarily an ineluctable element of the fulfilment of one's 'project'. Because desire is socially generated and sustained it inevitably shapes subjectivity and generates personal agency and the various engagements that give rise to and animate identity.

The subject of desire as delineated by Girard is both dynamic and uncertain and is the result of an Hegelian residue, of a particular kind, of course. This inheritance is particularly evident in the anthropological theory propounded in *Things Hidden* and *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*. In the next chapter I will show how such an understanding of the subject provides a significant resource for the revisioning of theological anthropology. At this point it is sufficient to suggest that the tensions and difficulties involved in living and acting as a 'self-between' are obvious - not least due to the problems of conflict, of autonomy and of identity. Nevertheless, it is not as though these difficulties, gleaned in part from Kojève's Hegelianism, wholly negate the possibility of identity, even if that term is understood in an extremely 'soft' sense. One could even suggest that they serve to highlight the necessary negotiations of which life is constituted. As John Caputo remarks,

> the importance of Hegel and German philosophy generally is the discovery of opposition, which is the true test of affirmation, the ordeal through which life must pass, the test of whether it is an angel or a demon that whispers in our ears and tells us that life goes on and on, without remission.[73]

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[72] M.C. Dillon, 'Desire: Language and Body' *Postmodernism and Continental Philosophy* (eds) Hugh J. Silverman & Donn Welton (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1988), 36.

[73] John D. Caputo, *Against Ethics: Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 51. It is possible that Nietzsche can also provide a lesson here in that his anti-metaphysical stance is represented by Zarathustra who *descends* from the mountain into wisdom. The point would seem to be that 'truth' does not reside in the ether but in the messiness of the human condition. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961).

Yet while Girard provides a thoroughgoing exposition of the vicissitudes of subjectivity, including an analysis of much neglected trials and tribulations and the undetermined nature of the self, this same theoretical investigation necessarily raises the question of the status - or even the very possibility - of agency. Can the uncertain subject be considered in any sense as an agent or is he or she simply an actor whose roles are determined by the ebb and flow of social forces and demands?

5.2.1: Agent or Actor?

The problem of agency reaches to the heart of Girard's anthropology and has been highlighted by two commentators in particular.[74] The question posed concerns the role and nature of desire. Is it that Girard outlines a notion of self (constituted by mimetic desire) that is so 'thin' that it borders on a nihilist rejection of any 'content'? I want to suggest that this is not so and in order to demonstrate why such an accusation is misleading I will consider, with the help of Judith Butler's more recent work, the anthropological implications of the loss of a strong foundational subjectivity.[75]

In her recent work, *Excitable Speech*,[76] Butler proposes, through an analysis of J.L. Austin's philosophy of language and Louis Althusser's theory of interpellation, that subjectivity can only be intelligible when understood as a discursive process and, moreover,

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[74] Cf. Paisley Livingston, 'Demystification and History in Girard and Durkheim' *Violence and Truth: On the Work of René Girard* (ed.) Paul Dumouchel (London: Athlone, 1988), esp. 130. Robert Greer Cohn 'Desire: Direct and Imitative' *Philosophy Today* Winter (1989), 318-329. I am also grateful to Gerard Loughlin whose own observations communicated in conversation and correspondence have assisted my reflection on this issue.

[75] The most famous being that of Kant for whom the subject is the 'ground of thought'. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason* trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1933), B 429, p. 382.

[76] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997).

that 'linguistic agency' emerges from an 'enabling vulnerability'.[77] The fields of linguistic possibility enable and sustain subjectivity but also always exceed any static identity:

> To be addressed is not merely to be recognized for what one already is, but to have the very term conferred by which the recognition of existence becomes possible. One comes to "exist" by virtue of this fundamental dependency on the address of the Other. One "exists" not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being *recognizable*.[78]

It is the linguistic act that constitutes the possibility of subjectivity, of "existence". Broadening the terms of Butler's discussion, one could suggest that the activity or agency of the subject is only possible or evident in a cultural, historical (as well as linguistic) context. Indeed, Butler remarks that 'an "act" is not a momentary happening, but a certain nexus of temporal horizons, the condensation of an iterability that exceeds the moment it occasions.'[79] Thus it is not the sovereign subject who is responsible for the act but it is the act or the utterance that constitutes a subject of response and responsibility.

> Untethering the speech act from the sovereign subject founds an alternative notion of agency and, ultimately, of responsibility, one that more fully acknowledges the way in which the subject is constituted in language, how what it creates is also what it derives from elsewhere. Whereas some critics mistake the critique of sovereignty for the demolition of agency, I propose that agency begins where sovereignty wanes. The one who acts (who is not the same as the sovereign subject) acts precisely to the extent that he or she is constituted as an actor and, hence, operating within a linguistic field of enabling constraints from the outset.[80]

There are two telling points in this passage. In the first place, agency is in no way lost simply because the subject is stripped of his or her sovereignty. Indeed, according to Butler, a more vulnerable subject can be understood as inherently responsible in that the derivative nature of "existence" indicates a subjectivity constituted by reception and response. Second, agency is

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[77] Ibid., 2.
[78] Ibid., 5.
[79] Ibid., 14.
[80] Ibid., 15-16.

that which occurs because of - *not* despite - the constitution of the self (as actor) in a 'field of enabling constraints'. It is these constraints that seem to worry critics of mimetic desire[81]. yet it seems almost too obvious to suggest that all that we are (and do) is in some way conditioned and enabled by convention and context, for which the 'Other' is often a cipher. Andrew McKenna, in line with Butler's analysis, but this time in the idiom of mimetic desire, suggests that because 'desire originates not in the self but in another desire it is prey to mimetic behaviour in which the sovereign will has no role.'[82] Furthermore, one is by no means simply a pawn in the midst of a sea of determinacy. The point here, as Butler suggests, is that '"agency" is not the same as "mastery".'[83] There are constraints as to what and who the agent can be when that being or becoming is regulated by social possibilities and rituals. That is why subjects act in different ways - play different roles? - in distinct places, positions and relationships. But there is one more point that Butler makes that I simply want to mention here in preparation for the more thorough theological reflection in the next chapter. That is, subjectivity is made possible because of a linguistic and socio-cultural "excess".[84] Indeed, if one were to compile all the desires that one had ever desired 'would they not present a quandary for identity?'[85] It is the undecideability of identity and subjectivity that highlights not only its dependent nature but that there is always a surplus to meaning and responsibility that itself demands recognition and interrogation. The consequence of such a surplus, in contradistinction to a 'homeopathic' conception of life and existence in which the content and parameters of the latter are endlessly diluted,[86] is that the agent or actor is confronted by the ambiguities and incompleteness of life, a state in which the mastery of desire is unrealisable no matter what a consumer society and its production and reproduction of desire suggests - that we believe in the illusion of our sovereignty over desire.

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[81] Cf. Paisley Livingston, 'Demystification and History in Girard and Durkheim', 131.
[82] Andrew McKenna, *Violence and Difference*, 150.
[83] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 26.
[84] Ibid., 28.
[85] Ibid., 30. Butler remarks 'what if one were to compile all the names that one has ever been called' but I think that her point is easily transposed into an analysis of desire and subjectivity.
[86] This strategy is evident in Simon Critchley's *Very Little ... Almost Nothing* (London: Routledge, 1997), 26, where '*the ultimate meaning of human finitude is that we cannot find meaningful fulfilment for the finite*'. The emphasis is Critchley's.

The importance of Butler's reflections on subjectivity and agency, apart from augmenting my discussion of the Girardian concept of the interdividual self, is that it questions the very point from which an analysis of subjectivity most profitably commences. While the fear that the decentering of the subject, so evident in Girard's work, may result in an extreme nominalism, a renewed 'metaphysical thinning out of the world' must certainly be attended to,[87] it is also apparent that the claim that self has been so decentred that it constitutes a complete fiction and does not in any intelligible way exist at all is somewhat overstated. As Malcolm Bowie suggests, in relation to Lacan, the self 'does not 'disappear' ... as a fashionable phrase would have it, but has its manifold trajectories plotted and re-plotted by him.'[88] What Girard has done is to plot the trajectories of the self taking as his co-ordinates a desire that is dependent on alterity and the mimetic context in which the responses to the desiring other occur. The theory of subjectivity that Girard has developed will, I hope, provide the resources for an interrogation of what constitutes human being from a theological perspective.

5.3: Revelation as Resolution

Before moving to the task of delineating a theological anthropology after Girard, there is one other important problem evident in the Girardian hypothesis that requires critical attention. As I suggested in Chapter Three, the most controversial aspect of Girard's work is his insistence that it is only with the aid of Gospel revelation that humankind can rise from the mire of conflict and violence. The question that arises from this assertion is quite simple. How is this liberation effected? Again, John Milbank is heavily critical of this aspect of Girard's work and he suggests that what is missing from the latter's consideration of the

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[87] Cf. Frank B. Farrell, *Subjectivity, Realism and Postmodernism: The Recovery of the World in Recent Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. 151ff.
[88] M. Bowie, 'Jaques Lacan' *Structuralism and Since* (ed.) J. Sturrock (Oxford: OUP, 1979), 131.

significance of Christ is any hint of the form of peaceable conduct, or more accurately. any context in which such conduct can be set: 'Do we not need to know the idiom of peaceable behaviour if we are able to distinguish it from the coercive?'.[89] This is an important point and one which certainly carries weight. However, in Girard's defence it must be said that he is no theologian and that his work, rather than in any way presenting a systematic or polished theology, offers a number of what Lucien Scubla has called 'theological inferences'.[90] Yet the very lack of any attempt to outline the way in which one can live a life characterised by the 'sur-transcendence of love'[91] is a major deficiency in Girard's affirmation of Christianity. The difficulty is that if Christianity is the only religion 'to point to the remedy - the only one to lift men out of the sacrificial order by uniting them directly around the God of love instead of reconciling them belatedly over the grave of the surrogate victim',[92] who or what is the means by which the remedy executed? The answer to this question has important theological as well as anthropological repercussions. From a theological perspective the controversial element in Girard's championing of Christianity is not the suggestion that unless human beings, as Scubla aptly remarks, 'benefit from some divine grace, they will inevitably descend anew into violence',[93] but that such a reflection upon grace is wholly missing from Girard's analysis. It is for this reason that Pierre Manent accuses Girard of presenting a Pelagian understanding of nature and grace - Pelagian in the sense that once the truth of human violence is revealed 'everything takes place between men.'[94]

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[89] J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 398. However, Fergus Kerr provides an important rejoinder to Milbank when he asks, in Girard's defence, 'How would it be possible to flesh out' what Milbank calls 'the absolute vision of ontological peace?' This latter vision is Milbank's alternative to Girard's lack of a programme of transformation. Cf. F. Kerr, 'Rescuing Girard's Argument?', *Modern Theology* 8:4 (1992), 396

[90] Lucien Scubla, 'The Christianity of René Girard and the Nature of Religion' *Violence and Truth*, 160.

[91] R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 233.

[92] Lucien Scubla, 'The Christianity of René Girard and the Nature of Religion', 160.

[93] Ibid., 172.

[94] P. Manent, 'René Girard, la violence et le sacré', *Contrepoint* 14 (1974), 169. Quoted in Lucien Scubla, 'The Christianity of René Girard and the Nature of Religion', 172

The characterisation of Girard's theology - if that is what one can call it - as rigorously Pelagian is, I think, somewhat overstating the deficiencies in his work. As I mentioned earlier, Girard only provides 'theological inferences' and has not worked out, in print at least, the implications of his exploration of the Gospels. Yet the fact remains that there are two major weaknesses apparent in the conclusions that Girard draws from these explorations.

First, it is apparent that Girard presents a framework in which the efficacy of the Gospels can be understood in terms of 'revelation and recognition' or, as William E. Connolly puts it, 'definitive recognition and resolution.'[95] What this amounts to is that the Gospels reveal the truth of human violence and the recourse to victimage mechanisms through the 'unadulterated' disclosure of the reasons for and method of Christ's death. Thus, there is no displacement of responsibility for violence, nothing concealed, and the possibility of non-violent living is the subsequent challenge of the texts. There is little equivocation in Girard's belief that the significance of the passion and death of Christ can be summarised thus: 'it [the passion] is quite capable of undermining and overturning the whole cultural order and supplying the secret motive force of all subsequent history.'[96] This suggests, however, that it is simply by knowing that human beings are caught in a cycle of violence that such a cycle can, as if from nowhere, be arrested and vanquished. The emphasis is upon a certitude being learned and known, not on the fact that the incarnation, death and resurrection have in some way transformed nature itself by the grace of God and that the latter demands continued activity, a way of life, as it were, that accords with faith as well as the knowledge gleaned from the gospel texts.

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[95] William E. Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative: A Reflection on the Politics of Morality* (London: Sage, 1993), 31 n. 5.
[96] R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 209.

This takes us to the second weakness which relates to the paucity of references in the Girardian corpus to such practices through which the non-violent alternative announced by Christ's life and work can be lived. This failing is summarised by Scubla who remarks that 'in *Des Choses cachées* Girard seems to outline a Christianity stripped of all sacredness and ritual.'[97] There is no doubt that this is a mystifying omission. For while Girard has described the constitution of subjectivity in terms of its altogether 'existential' and institutional composition, with regard to his insistence on the efficacy of revelation - its impact and consequences - such a 'thick' description of the theological subject is almost wholly absent. There is no discussion in Girard of the church and its role as a site of the production and reproduction of desire nor as the location for the practice of love. All Girard concerns himself with is Jesus, as if the gospels themselves are divorced from the communities within which they were written and from which they emerged as central texts for the wider church. Girard himself provides a good example of the difficulty that I have highlighted when he suggests that

> Jesus invites all men to devote themselves to the project of getting rid of violence, a project conceived with reference to the true nature of violence, taking into account the illusions it fosters, the methods by which it gains ground, and all the laws that we have verified over the course of these discussions.[98]

Girard is undoubtedly right that the 'project' announced by the gospels is new and revolutionary. However, what is missing from Girard's understanding of Jesus's invitation is the difficult and complex demands that follow. The gospels demand a way of life that is the result of the hard work of discipleship. It is worth reminding oneself of John Donahue's exploration of the theology of discipleship in Mark's gospel. There Donahue suggests that Mark's Gospel is a manual for discipleship, a text in which the vicissitudes of the imitation of Christ are explored and outlined in 'a narrative expansion of the journey of commitment and

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[97] Lucien Scubla, 'The Christianity of René Girard and the Nature of Religion', 170.
[98] R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 197.

recommitment that is to characterize Christian life.'[99] It is not as though Girard is blind to the need for action. 'The Gospels tell us', claims Girard, 'that to escape violence it is necessary to love one's brother completely - to abandon the violent mimesis involved in the relationship of doubles.'[100] While it is obvious that Girard could not establish beyond doubt the shape and character of a Christian life, his hypothesis is nevertheless devoid of any attempt to point to frameworks within which different kinds of activities that are central to the practice of a Christian life, a life of loving 'one's brother completely', might be rehearsed and conducted. What is the point, for instance, of liturgical ritual if it is revelation alone that provides the necessary ingredients for a thoroughly Christian life? Or does ritual simply act as a reminder as to the content of revelation?[101] Just as pressing is the question of the place and purpose of the church in the midst of an often violent world. The church is traditionally, and for good reason, characterised as a sacrament of Christ, not simply as an ontological fact but as a living presence of the Spirit of Christ. Indeed, the documents of the Second Vatican Council echo, according to Walter Kasper, 'the splendid idea of Irenaeus of Lyons' that 'through the communion of the church God wishes to renew everything in Christ.'[102] This ongoing task is a much more multidimensional affair than Girard's conception of the resolution of the world's violence which, in contradistinction, seems utterly unidimensional. Because of the very conflicts, difficulties and roles that are intrinsically part of being the church in various contexts, the move towards non-violence is a difficult journey. As Rowan Williams observes, 'We are always already in history, shaped by privation, living at the expense of each other: important moral choices entail the loss of certain specific goods for certain specific persons, because moral determination, like any 'cultural' determination, recognizes that not all goods

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[99] John R. Donahue, *The Theology and Setting of Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1983), 52.
[100] R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 215.
[101] Mary Barbara Agnew argues that if, as Girard argues, Christ's death must serve as a summons to reject violence, then the liturgy 'must be the place where that rejection is nourished, deepened, witnessed and celebrated.' She begins the process of developing possible liturgical strategies from Girard's hypothesis. Cf. her ''A Transformation of Sacrifice: An Application of René Girard's Theory of Culture and Religion' *Worship* 61 (1987), 493-509. The quote is found on p. 508.
[102] Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church* trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1989), 164. Cf. *Lumen Gentium* 2.

for all persons are *contingently* compatible.'[103] We are unfinished creatures who easily misread and misunderstand the thrust of revelation, particularly in the confusing milieu of incompatibility and incommensurability that constitutes our contingent existence. Linked to this point is the fact that there is almost the rejection of an eschatological dimension in Girard's description of 'revelation and recognition'. If only we understood the message of the gospels then transformation would be effected. Surely the Christian tradition has always highlighted what is to come and in a sense embodied this hope in fulfilment of its practice. 'The church is the sacrament of the world'', claims Edward Schillebeeckx, 'precisely as the sacrament of salvation which is offered to all men - she is hope not only for all who belong to her; she is also, quite simply, *spes mundi*, hope for the whole world.'[104] Yet this hope is precisely hope because it presents itself in the midst of the messiness and sinfulness of the human condition, a point emphasised by Williams who suggests that

> the union of divine and human interest must be affirmed and understood at just that point where the sheer historical vulnerability of the human is most starkly shown, where unfinishedness, tension, the rejection of meaning and community are displayed in the figure of a man simultaneously denied voice or identity by the religious and political rationalities of his day.[105]

This 'unfinishedness' seems to be accepted by Girard as part and parcel of the ebb and flow of day-to-day human existence but in his analysis of Christian existence the tension is removed.[106] That is why Girard's work is relatively silent on the question of tradition. It is almost as though tradition is of no significance in the light of a perspective from which truth can be straightforwardly garnered, unhindered by the accretions of manifold historical readings and rereadings. The latter seems to be relegated to the status of a phenomenon of

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[103] Rowan Williams, 'Saving Time: Thoughts on Practice, Patience and Vision' *New Blackfriars* Vol. 73 No. 861 (1992), 322.
[104] Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Mission of the Church* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1973), 48.
[105] R. Williams, 'Hegel and the Gods of Postmodernity' *Shadow of Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion* (eds.) Philippa Berry & Andrew Wernick (London: Routledge, 1992), 78.
[106] This tendency to provide a 'thick' description of the violence of rivalrous desire and a 'thin' description of its peaceable counterpart is also present in a recent Girardian reading of contemporary cultural concerns. Cf. Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroad, 1995).

confusion that characterises the church's bungled attempts to come to terms with and practice the gospel.[107] From the *Letter to the Hebrews* onwards, Girard sees tradition as little more than the reinstatement of a sacrificial ideology that once again conceals the truth of revelation.[108] This may well be due to the fact that the emphasis on the purity of the gospel revelation bypasses the problem of a certain conflict and confusion within the Christian community itself. Girard sees the scriptures as uncovering one message in one way, while tradition may also be seen as presenting that message (if there is but one) in a myriad of ways and contexts. However, even if Girard's reading demands significant attention, the fact remains that tradition can be understood as the exploration of the significance of Jesus in the midst of the conflicting desires and narratives that Girard himself has done so much to uncover. The consequence of Girard's position is that his notion of grace, *contra* Milbank,[109] seems peculiarly intrinsicist. While this may seem on the face of it more preferable to an immoderate extrinsicism, the work of Maurice Blondel and Michel de Certeau suggest that the problem with both conceptions of the divine/human relationship is that they share the same basic error.

Certeau and Blondel represent a strain of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Catholic Christian thought that responds, first, to an intrinsicism in which it is revelation rather than grace that provides a sufficient basis for transformation or in which there occurs the objectification of dogma in modern historicism and, second, to a context in which one sees the securing of the supernatural in terms of its extrinsic status over and against nature. The latter position, so claims Blondel, mirrors the defects of the former - both positions are disengaged from life.[110] As a counterpoint to these tendencies, Certeau and Blondel conceive tradition in

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[107] Cf. R. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 224-262. Here Girard criticises 'historical Christianity' for its flawed readings of the gospels.
[108] Ibid., 227ff.
[109] J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 396-397.
[110] Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, trans. Alexander Dru & Illtyd Trethowan (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 228.

a disconcertingly radical manner.[111] If tradition comes from *tradere*, to hand down, then it is something that can be characterised (radically) as gift. Thus, the handing on is an entrusting rather than a replication, a creative offering rather than a command to secure a 'revelation' unsullied. As Certeau suggests, Christianity

> has had a series of intellectual and historical social forms which have had two apparently contradictory characteristics: the will to be *faithful* to the inaugural event: the necessity of being *different* from these beginnings.[112]

The elaborations of the Christ event, which is irreducibly 'other', 'are historically specified in being permitted by this beginning; but none is identical with it.'[113] Thus dogma, the text(s) of tradition, is, or at least ought to be, constituted in a context where the 'mediation of collective life and the slow progressive labour of the Christian tradition, are essential.'[114] Articles of faith are not the 'property' of one being or entity nor are they beholden to one vehicle of revelation - Scripture, Pope, Bishop or Council - but they belong to the whole church[115] and, importantly, only in dialogue and confrontation with the world.[116] This diversity, inherent in the 'mediation of collective life', presupposes two reference points. First, the fact that although the divine authorisation of difference in tradition means that the 'plural is the manifestation of the Christian meaning',[117] this plurality assumes (rather than consumes) the event to which it always proceeds.[118] Second, the (re)reading and (re)writing of tradition - dogma, doctrine and articles of faith - demands action.

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[111] 'By "radical" I do not understand "foundational" but rather "racinated", rooted in a dense and inextricable system of roots, of factical pregiveness, which antedates me and my attempts to disentangle it.' John D. Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 254, n.14. Cf. also Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Boston: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 101-102.

[112] Michel de Certeau, 'How is Christianity Thinkable Today?', *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader* (ed.) Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 142.

[113] Ibid., 144.

[114] Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, 269.

[115] Cf. Gerard Loughlin, 'The Basis and Authority of Doctrine' *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (ed.) Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 41-64.

[116] Frederick Christian Bauerschmitt points out that Certeau 'speaks of a "double confrontation" of the Church with its contemporaries and its tradition.' 'The Abrahamic Voyage: Michel de Certeau and Theology' *Modern Theology* 12: 1 (1996), 24.

[117] Michel de Certeau, 'How is Christianity Thinkable Today?', 144.

[118] Christianity 'is not permitted to reduce everything to one element.' Ibid., 149.

> 'The Christian movement is always a recognizing of a particular situation and the necessity of a new step forward. There is always a necessary risk in being different. It requires simultaneously a place and a "further", a "now" and an "afterwards", a "here" and an "elsewhere".'[119]

Consequently, the restlessness that characterises the practice of tradition, of being different, embodies a cultural iconoclasm. It is this practice, which, as Blondel contends, 'is confided to the practical obedience of love',[120] that responds - inexhaustibly - to the Christ event and confronts (with an 'unfinishedness') that violence and destruction characteristic of much of human existence and which Girard so adequately portrays. The hope that constitutes the Christian tradition is one that must be alive to the enactment of the intrinsic relation to its *raison d'être* with the creation and recreation of practices that 'confront' or disrupt both violence and the "soft" totalitarianism of the contemporary world.[121] But this action that constitutes tradition is not a one-way street. As Certeau realised, 'praxis always brings about, in relation to what is present and pointed out, gradual or abrupt displacements which will make possible other laws or other theologies.'[122] It is this difficult expedition, rather than a revelation that is certain to bring about an assured resolution, that is the disposition of a tradition made up of the stuttering history of a multiform community. Indeed, the history of Christianity shows that its nature cannot be univocally apprehended and that the status and standing of institutional forms has always suggested that 'what has been is no longer what has to be.'[123] The reading and writing of the Christian story, exegesis upon exegesis, highlights not only the fact that this story is the 'antitype of all types'[124] but that 'Christianity is not a

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[119] Ibid., 151.
[120] Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, 274.
[121] The term "soft" totalitarianism is that of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The 'Retreat' of the Political', *Retreating the Political*, 128. They are responding to Lyotard's discussion of the 'terror' of the 'social system' in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington & Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 63-64.
[122] Michel de Certeau, 'How is Christianity Thinkable Today?', 152. One could point to the impact of, for example, feminist and liberationist movements on the ongoing (re)constitution of Christian tradition. What this notion of tradition implies, however, is that the Church learns to converse rather than always to 'speak'. I am indebted to Paul Murray for making this point.
[123] Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 217.
[124] Ibid., 97.

body of doctrine that can be specified in advance, but a way of life and all that this implies.'[125] That is why the stage upon which ecclesial life is enacted can never be disengaged from the gospels but neither is this context, as one might say is evident with Girard's notion of revelation, a fixed and static entity.

The point of this discussion of tradition and its place and role in attending to the demands of the gospels was intended to highlight something of a weakness in Girard's understanding of revelation. Girard provides, on the one hand, a theory of subjectivity that is wholly intelligible in the context of day-to-day life, its hopes, difficulties and struggles. Yet, on the other hand, his emphasis on revelation alone as the route to the peaceable kingdom seems both myopic and superficial, if not barren. Of course there is much within tradition - dogmatism rather than attentiveness, selfish rather than faithful readings - that requires criticism and discrediting. Nevertheless, it is my contention that the Christian tradition, due to its vitality, cannot simply be dismissed nor ignored, particularly in relation to anthropology where it is particularly rich. Girard's hypothesis requires at this point to be brought into conversation with examples of that tradition in which the human/divine relationship is celebrated and interrogated. This I will attempt in due course.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to critically evaluate those elements of the Girardian hypothesis that have a direct impact on issues surrounding theological anthropology. I have shown how the charge that Girard's notion of the self is intrinsically linked to violence, particularly of an Hegelian character, is ultimately false. While it is obvious that there is a family resemblance between Kojève's desiring self and the interdividual self of the Girardian

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[125] Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 86.

hypothesis, there are also radical and fundamental differences between the two conceptions of subjectivity. This is due in the main to a lack of attention on the part of critics to the triangular configuration of desire, the equivocal status of desire in his thought and a blindness to the fact that subjectivity is only 'true' in relation to transcendence. I have also demonstrated that Girard delineates a subject who is essentially engaged, dependent and uncertain but that the exigencies of such a paradigm of existence do not result in the loss of agency. Rather I suggested, with reference to Judith Butler, that it is only in the context of a decentred self that agency makes any real sense. It is the very excessiveness of the subject that engenders subjectivity and, in Girard's terms, this exceeding is fuelled by desire. Third, and on a more critical note, I registered a sense of dissatisfaction with Girard's emphasis on the efficacy of revelation, divorced it seems to me from the kinds of concrete situations that are only too evident in his anthropological reflections. Finally, I suggested that Girard's religious thought is silent on the important issue of tradition and its place and role in living the ongoing demands of the gospels.

It is clear that while Girard's notion of the interdividual subject is far from perfect for the demands of a theological anthropology, it offers resources for the latter that the two strategies we encountered in Part One of this study do not. Neither the resituation or reconstitution of the subject provide sufficient means for the ethical, political and existential needs of subjects within socio-political contexts where fragmentation is omnipresent. The attention to interdividuality, the self as active, the primacy of mimetic desire and the existential conditions of a late-capitalist society suggest that, for all its faults, the Girardian hypothesis may enrich theological anthropology and vice-versa.. This rapprochement is the task of my next chapter.

Part Three

Chapter Six:
Towards a Theological Anthropology

Introduction

In the previous chapter I critically assessed those parts of Girard's hypothesis that are central to an exploration of theological anthropology. There I made, broadly speaking, two conclusions. In his work Girard opens up significant possibilities for a renewed understanding of the (uncertain) human subject; the self is constituted and sustained in a social, historical and linguistic context of desire-led interaction. However, I also concluded that while his anthropology may well be illuminating and challenging, much of Girard's 'theological' undertaking is simplistic and consequently insubstantial for the demands of a theological exploration. Girard's hypothesis requires theoretical enrichment. This, I suggested, could only happen satisfactorily if the Girardian hypothesis is brought into conversation with the theological tradition. The reason, and my approach in attempting this task, is very simple. In Girard's terms the gospels provide an unparalleled disclosure of the reality and form of human violence. Yet this notion of revelation is static: it is as if the way to the peaceable kingdom is characterised by an experience of sudden discovery rather than a journey characterised by uncertainty and temporality. In contradistinction to the austerity of Girard's method, in this chapter I wish to explore theological anthropology in a manner that is constantly attentive to the exigencies of desire - even with regard to divine desire. Rowan Williams provides a fine

summary of this approach when he suggests that *Christian* language can be understood as one that

> in working through concepts like penitence, conversion and hope, in its commitment to the freedom of God and God's grace to draw historical realities into a future as yet undetermined, ... resists the notion that the understanding of faith can be only a *moment* of interpretative perception with its own synchronic integrity and completeness, as opposed to a process with strong elements of risk and provisionality.[1]

I will take up the challenge of delineating a theological anthropology that embraces the 'risk and provisionality' of which Williams speaks in relation to Christian language and I will argue that this is also an inescapable dimension of Christian 'existence' more generally. The appropriate terms under which this exploration will occur are 'engagement' and 'performance'. I choose these terms because Girard's anthropology reminds us of the situated and viceral components of subjectivity. Furthermore, both terms concur with a variety of 'dramatic' readings of the gospels in which 'we are invited to identify ourselves in the story being contemplated, to reappropriate who we are now, and who we shall or can be, in terms of the story.'[2] Williams could well be describing a process of imaginative reading distinctively Ignatian in character - part of what constitutes a spirituality as a way of life, a process, I will argue, that is particularly pertinent to this interrogation of theological anthropology after Girard. Prior to an engagement with the Ignatian exercises, however, I want to explore the particularity of the Christian formation of the uncertain subject and his or her performance of the Christian 'drama' in relation to the question that informs any theological anthropology: what does it mean to be a human being in relation to God? I will respond to this question via three narrations of the uncertainty of subjectivity : first, that of the early Martin Heidegger; second, the highly distinctive work of Emmanuel Levinas; and, finally, Maurice Blondel's phenomenological exploration of action. This will inform and engender a theological reflection on the human/divine relationship that will establish the vitality of the Christian

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[1] Rowan Williams, 'The Literal Sense of Scripture' *Modern Theology* 7:2 (1991), 125.
[2] Ibid.

tradition before I return to Girard and the possibility of constructing a theological anthropology stimulated by these three narrations of subjectivity.

As a means to the application of an entirely Christian theological perspective to the analysis of subjectivity considered thus far, I will first interrogate a particularly apposite study of the performative self carried out by Martin Heidegger in 1920-21. Heidegger's early lecture course on Augustine and Neoplatonism will assist in the fulfilling aims of this chapter, to move towards a constructive theological anthropology, because his reflections prompt and inform the delineation of a particularly Christian understanding of the frame in which an anthropology can be situated and sketched.

6.1: Heidegger, Augustine and Neoplatonism

The early Heidegger's interest in Christian theology is well documented,[3] as is his claim (made in 1921) that he identified himself as a Christian theologian.[4] Heidegger's engagement with the Christian tradition was substantial and provided a way, a path as he saw it, to his magnum opus *Being and Time* which was first published in 1927. Indeed, many of the central themes and ideas presented in that work emerged during Heidegger's lectures and seminars of the 1920's in which he attempted a retrieval of what he termed 'primordial Christianity'.[5] Here, I want to examine one instance of Heidegger's attempted recovery of authentic Christian experience that he outlined in his 1921 lecture course on *Augustine and*

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[3] Cf. John D. Caputo, 'Heidegger and Theology', *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (ed.) Charles Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 270-288.
[4] Heidegger's claim was made to Karl Löwith. See the latter's 'The Political Implications of Heidegger's Existentialism' *New German Critique* 45 (1988), 121-122. Löwith actually remembers Heidegger as counting 'himself among the ranks of the "theological Christians"'(121).
[5] Cf. John van Buren, *The Young Heidegger: Rumor of the Hidden King* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 157-202; Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 149-219.

Neoplatonism.[6] In this course, as throughout this stage of Heidegger's development, the work of recovery was attempted through a study of 'factical life experience'. This experience can be defined, according to Thomas Sheehan, as

> a pre-theoretical, pre-rational lived experience of "self-exceeding", of being drawn out beyond one's ordinary self-understanding.[7]

It was Heidegger's contention that primordial Christianity provided a model for factical life experience and that his task, which led him in particular to an investigation of the Pauline letters, was one of 'explication.'[8] However, this task had been complicated by the fact that the Christian tradition had lost much of the purity of this primordial life experience in its appropriation of metaphysical conceptualisation. A specific example of this problem, considered by Heidegger in his 1921 course, was Augustine's use of Neoplatonic thought. In his exploration of Book X of the *Confessions*, Heidegger had, he believed, to do more than mere explication: the task of recovering factical life experience demanded a 'destruction' of the impurity of a Christianity overlaid with Neoplatonism in order that the experience of authentic Christian life itself might be grasped.

The thrust of Heidegger's recovery of this authentic Christianity was adequately summarised in his 1922 essay on Aristotle when he remarked that 'Christian theology, the philosophical "speculation" standing under its influence, and the anthropology that always also develops in such contexts all *speak in borrowed categories that are foreign to their own field*

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[6] Martin Heidegger, *Augustinus und der Neoplatonismus*, *Gesamtausgabe* II. Band 60, *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens* (Frankfurt, a.M.: Klostermann, 1995), 157-299.
[7] Thomas Sheehan, 'Heidegger's "Introduction to the Phenomenology", 1920-21' *The Personalist* 60 (1979), 315.
[8] Cf. Otto Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking* trans. Daniel Magurshak & Sigmund Barber (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1987), 26. For Heidegger's investigation of Galatians and Thessalonians, cf. Martin Heidegger, *Einleitung in die Phänomenologie der Religion*, *Gesamtausgabe* II. Band 60, *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens* (Frankfurt, a.M.: Klostermann, 1995), 67-125.

of being.'[9] What Heidegger attempted during this period, however, was to uncover not only the correct categories (factical life experience, concern [*Bekümmerung*], etc.) but the comportment appropriate to authentic Christian existence. These two aims can be perceived as major elements in Heidegger's engagement with Augustine's *Confessions*.

Heidegger's explication and destruction of Augustine's thought in Book X of the *Confessions* is rather complicated and at times rambling. Therefore, I will simply outline the main points of this lecture course in a straight-forward manner that risks over-schematization. I will do this by first presenting Heidegger's explication, that is, what he considers to be adequate in Augustine's exposition of the Christian life and, second, by turning to his criticisms, his destruction, of Augustine's Neoplatonic borrowings.

The course, *Augustine and Neoplatonism*, began by describing and rejecting three turn of the century studies that examined 'Augustine's relation to history and the philosophy of history';[10] these works being those of Troeltsch, Harnack and Dilthey. In place of these attempts to apply historical science to a particular object, "Augustine's life and his works", Heidegger's intention was to apply a 'phenomenological interpretation of Augustine' that sought to 'understand him and not to classify him historically.'[11]

In his application of this method to Book X of the *Confessions*, Heidegger showed that Augustine's point of departure was factical life experience. In response to the questions, 'What does it mean to seek God?' and 'On what basis do I decide, when I have found God,

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[9] Martin Heidegger, 'Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle (Indication of the Hermeneutical Situation)', trans. Michael Baur *Man and World* 25 (1992), 386.
[10] Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, 192; cf. Martin Heidegger, *Augustinus und der Neoplatonismus*, 160-166.
[11] Ibid., 195; cf. Martin Heidegger, *Augustinus und der Neoplatonismus*, 175ff.

that He is truly what I have sought?', Augustine's answer is unequivocal: 'When I look for you, who are my God, I am looking for a life of blessed happiness. I shall look for you, so that my soul may live.'[12] In attending to this happy life, Heidegger suggests, Augustine understands it in terms of *how* one can come to it rather than what its content might be. Consequently, as Theodore Kisiel suggests,

> If the happy life is thus a how of experiencing, then it can never be found even if I were to scour the whole world. It is not an object (*Objekt*) and cannot be appropriated from others. The having of a happy life, its actualization, is formally always an "own", so that the individual who experiences it is always actively involved in it.[13]

The happy life is, in Augustine's terms, understood as performance rather than content. It can only be known, grasped, in terms of, or rather *in* the actualization of, factical life experience.[14]

The radically performative nature of this happy life exposed by Heidegger is deemed by him to be an authoritative delineation of the authentic factical life experience of primordial Christianity. However, Augustine's manner of conceptualisation is not always oriented to this mode of life experience. Heidegger points to the appropriation of a Neoplatonic form of speculation by Augustine in which 'being good and being beautiful belong to Being' and in which the good and the beautiful can be 'enjoyed'.[15] In the *fruitio Dei*, 'God is enjoyed as the *summum bonum* [highest good] and he alone may be enjoyed.'[16] Here a Neoplatonic distinction is at play between that which is to be 'used' (*uti*) and that which is to be 'enjoyed' (*frui*). Theodore Kisiel, following a transcript of Heidegger's lecture course, summarises this important distinction in the phenomenological analysis of Augustine's philosophical theology:

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[12] Saint Augustine, *Confessions* trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), Book X, ch. 20, 226.
[13] Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, 199; cf. Martin Heidegger, *Augustinus und der Neoplatonismus*, 192-193.
[14] Cf. Otto Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, 26.
[15] Cf. Ibid., 27
[16] Ibid.

The object of *frui* is always enjoyed for its own sake, without reference to anything else, whereas the object of *uti* is sought for the sake of something else, as a means to some other end. The eternal unchangeable things are to be enjoyed, the temporal changeable things are to be used as a means to that end. It is a perversion to enjoy money and to make use of God. One should not worship God for the sake of money, which is the height of hypocrisy, but should spend money for the sake of God, the highest and unchangeable good, "Beauty of old, yet ever so new".[17]

This application of *fruitio Dei* by Augustine is perceived by Heidegger to be in direct contrast to, indeed, incommensurable with, the earlier emphasis upon Christian existence as factical life experience. Heidegger indicates that the *frui*, in its proper correlation with Beauty, 'incorporates a basic aesthetic moment in its sense of *summum bonum*'.[18] The beautiful, in the context of Neoplatonic metaphysics, belongs to the essence of Being. The fact that the contemplation of the beautiful, of the *summum bonum*, takes one outside of the 'troubles', concern and cares (*curare*) of life to the rarefied heights of ontological security reveals that this reposeful quietude, Neoplatonic in its character, stands at odds with the factical life experience of the Christian life. It is also, interestingly, at odds with the very confessional technique utilised by Augustine: 'This confessional character of the search for God is in fact the key to the focus on actualizing the experience of God rather than observing Him aesthetically in terms of objective content.'[19] The serene comportment typical of aesthetic contemplation is considered invalid in relation to Christian factical life experience. The reason for this judgement is all too apparent to Heidegger. As John van Buren remarks:

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[17] Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, 201. The quotation is from chapter 27 of Book X of the *Confessions*. For Augustine's analysis of the distinction between *uti* and *frui*, 'use' and 'enjoyment', cf. Saint Augustine *On Christian Teaching* (*De Doctrina Christiana*) trans. R.P.H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), Book I, chs. 22-35, 16-27. The *Gesamtausgabe* version of Heidegger's lectures differs in structure from the student transcripts that Kisiel used in his work. Heidegger's exploration of *uti* and *frui* can be found in Martin Heidegger, *Augustinus und der Neoplatonismus*, 271-273 while his fullest discussion of Christian factical life is *Augustinus und der Neoplatonismus*, 205-210.

[18] Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, 202.

[19] Ibid., 207.

> Intoxicated, asleep and darkened by these contemplative and speculative visions, the self falls away from itself into the world and closes off the historical situation of its relation with God.[20]

Consequently the Neoplatonic tradition that manifests itself in Augustine's work - as a metaphysical 'overlay' that is responsible for the alienation of the subject of factical life from God - is uncovered by Heidegger and subjected to a conceptual destruction that he pursues with considerable energy.

6.1.1: Heidegger and Religious Life

The destruction of Augustine's employment of Neoplatonic conceptualisation brings to the fore not only the demand to reassess the relationship between Athens and Jerusalem but, more importantly, significant questions concerning what constitutes an authentic Christian existence. Heidegger's entry into the phenomenology of religion and his subsequent reflections on human existence which culminated in *Being and Time* were greeted with tremendous excitement, particularly by theologians. Nevertheless, some seventy-five years on, we have to ask what it is in Heidegger's project that provides theological reflection with the resources for a renewed understanding of a Christian life. There are three points at which Heidegger encourages the radical delimitation of a theological anthropology, a process that not only circumscribes the appropriate structures of human experience but also generates the additional effect of intensifying the quest for appropriate 'grounds', if that remains an appropriate term, upon which subjectivity in a wider context can be made intelligible.[21]

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[20] John van Buren, 'Martin Heidegger, Martin Luther' *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in His Earliest Thought* (eds) Theodore Kisiel & John van Buren (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), 165.
[21] As will become clear, I am indebted in this section to Fergus Kerr's essay, 'Getting the Subject back into the World: Heidegger's Version' *Human Beings* (ed.) D. Cockburn *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements: 29* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 173-190.

First, Heidegger insists that the proper site for understanding the human/divine relationship in its authentic, primal, indeed biblical, form is in the midst of the world, rather than through the attainment of contemplative or epistemological certainty. As Fergus Kerr remarks, with reference to Heidegger's seminal work, *Being and Time*,

> To insist on affectivity, involvement and finitude - on human beings as in (or out of) tune with their situation, inescapably concerned (even if seeking to take flight), and living under the shadow of death - is to shake off the myth of the self as a purely rational, disengaged and timeless entity. The notion of the 'transcendental ego' collapses under pressure from the New Testament.[22]

There is nothing static or secure about a subject of concern, fear, resolve and 'facticity'. Heidegger's revisioning of theological anthropology is one in which the exigencies of everyday life constitute the territory of authentic existence - neither a withdrawal from the ordinary nor a simplistic transcendence of it are considered commendable or possible.

Second, Heidegger's insistence in *Augustine and Neoplatonism* on the historical and cosmic form of human 'existence', particularly in relation to the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection, should make it apparent that the concept of human being arises within, and as a response to, the 'inescapable limits'[23] of existence that one is required to negotiate. Yet this 'inheritance' of finitude may, as Kerr suggests, 'free us, as well as restrict our possibilities.'[24] Agency, as with Girard and Butler, is not mastery of or over limitation, but the very bequest of the human condition, as a gift that engenders action.

Third, there is the term 'factical life', an appellation whose determination is amply demonstrated in Heidegger's emphasis on the performance and engagement of the human in

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[22] Ibid., 181.
[23] Ibid., 188.
[24] Ibid.

relation to the divine. Even sin is understood in Heidegger's analysis of Book X of the *Confessions* as thoroughly performative: 'He who flees from God loses Him.'[25] The influence of Luther's inversion of Aristotle - Luther praised the practical writings of Aristotle and condemned the *Metaphysics* - and of Kierkegaard's passionate reappraisal of Christian existence are both apparent in Heidegger's analysis of Christian facticity.[26] Yet it is the return to the New Testament that is most fully imprinted on the early work of this Christian Heidegger in his contention that the Christian life, characterised by finitude as much as the quest for infinity, is '*terrifying* as well as fascinating.'[27]

However, there are two characteristics of Heidegger's portrait of authentic existence that, after Girard, require challenging. The first difficulty with Heidegger's project is that it consisted in a search for 'a universal ontological framework that was neither Greek nor Christian.'[28] The consequence of Heidegger's unapologetic universalism is that he actually forgets (or ignores) the distinctive nature of biblical demands. On the one hand, as John Caputo points out, 'the young philosopher was very much taken with Kierkegaard's sense that Christianity has not been brought into the world to comfort us in our old age and allow us to sleep at night.'[29] Yet this same Heidegger believed, on the other hand, that his 'destruction' of Christianity's metaphysical heritage was homologous with his 'destruction' of Aristotle which, after Luther, inverted the superiority of the *Metaphysics* over the *Ethics*. Caputo suggests that the conflation of the Christian and Aristotelian modes of factical life is fatally flawed:

> [Heidegger] seemed not to notice, or not to consider relevant, that in comparison to the Aristotelian ethics in particular, the biblical narratives are not at all oriented to the *phronimos*, the prudent man (sic), the well-educated,

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[25] Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, 207.
[26] Cf. John van Buren, 'Martin Heidegger, Martin Luther', 166-172.
[27] Theodore Kisiel, 'Heidegger (1920-21) on Becoming a Christian: A Conceptual Picture Show' *Reading Heidegger from the Start*, 185. Cf. Heidegger's comments on 1 Thess. 1:6, Martin Heidegger, *Einleitung in die Phänomenologie der Religion*, 94.
[28] John D. Caputo, '*Sorge* and *Kardia*: The Hermeneutics of Factical Life and the Categories of the Heart', *Reading Heidegger from the Start*, 329.
[29] Ibid., 328.

> moderate man of judgement, the aristocratic gentleman whom the younger aristocratic set should learn to emulate. Indeed, it was of just these well-to-do, respectable gentlemen that the biblical experience of life was most suspicious. Instead of this mainstream prudent man, the biblical attention is directed to everyone who has been marginalized by the mainstream, to everyone who is out of power, out of money, out of luck, uneducated and despised. Instead of the uprightness of the man of good judgement, the biblical narratives turn to those who are bent and laid low.[30]

After Girard one can suggest that Heidegger has forgotten the character whose life is staged in the midst of the biblical narratives - the victim.[31] The Christian conception of factical life - of existence with God - holds a particularly special place for the outcast and that is one way in which the biblical narratives undermine pretensions to a form of truth that is divorced from finitude and immersion in facticity. In his Girard-informed consideration of the place of the victim, Andrew McKenna proposes that

> Truth is not before us, in the future, lying yet to be measured or mastered; it is not above us, in the empyrean, awaiting revelation, illumination or postsurvival representation; it is not behind us, either, in our past, awaiting Platonic recollection. Truth is not transcendental; if anything, it is transdescendental, for it lies beneath us, underfoot, in the victim.[32]

Christian factical life experience is rendered distinctive because of the place of the victim, the outcast with whom Jesus consorted. 'The biblical stories' as Caputo reminds us, 'proceed from a different conception of factical life, one that was enamoured neither with rules, as in modernity, because they favoured a kind of radical mercifulness over rule-keeping, nor with excellence (*arete*), because their heart was with the outcast, with the worst not the best.'[33] One could suggest, however, that the biblical narratives do not destroy 'rules' but establish a new rule - not to simply look beneath us but to descend to the very place that 'truth' resides all too painfully.

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[30] Ibid., 329.
[31] Indeed, Caputo himself uses this very term. Ibid., 330.
[32] Andrew McKenna, 'Postmodernism: Its Future Perfect' *Postmodernism and Continental Philosophy* (eds) Hugh J. Silverman & Donn Welton (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1988), 238.
[33] John D. Caputo, '*Sorge* and *Kardia*', 331-332.

The second challenge to Heidegger's analysis of Christian factical life is just as serious. Intoxicated by the heady waters of Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation*[34] and the achievements of the Rhineland mystics, Heidegger presented throughout this period of his work a subject of factical life experience whose relationship to the divine is radically 'owned' rather than shared.[35] Of course, Heidegger was himself reacting against a sovereign subject of Husserlian phenomenology for whom consciousness was everything and the cares and troubles of existence were but petty distractions. Heidegger therefore presents a more grounded self than his predecessors:

> The subject [Heidegger's subject]is neither free nor absolute, he is no longer entirely responsible for himself. He is dominated and overwhelmed by history, by his origins over which he has no power since he is thrown into the world and his thrown-ness [*déréliction*] marks all his projects and all his powers.[36]

These appreciative words are those of Emmanuel Levinas, one of Heidegger's most prominent expositors and critics. Although, as this quotation makes clear, he acknowledges the advances made by Heidegger, Levinas is also deeply suspicious of the subject of factical life experience who is, by the time of *Being and Time*, to have become Dasein. Heidegger's weakness, according to Levinas, lies in the fact that the subject, whose existence we saw being mapped out in *Augustine and Neoplatonism*, is always solitary and has no need of, nor desire for, the possibilities that come with the encounter with another. Indeed, that which comes from outside this subject is always experienced as the property of that subject. As Levinas puts it,

'What comes from the outside - illuminated - is comprehended, that is, comes from ourselves.

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[34] Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Augustinus und der Neoplatonismus*, 282; Martin Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* trans. Harold J. Grimm *Luther's Works: Volume 31 Career of the Reformer: I* (ed.) H.J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 39-70.

[35] Cf. Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, 199. This 'experience' is 'formally always an "own".'

[36] E. Levinas, *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (Paris: Vrin, 1974), 49.

Light makes objects into a world, that is, makes them belong to us.'[37] The ultimate failure of Heidegger's phenomenological interpretation of existence, according to Levinas, is its inability to envisage an encounter with the Other which does not entail a return to the Same, the self. Authentic existence in its Heideggerian guise does not include - at least as a central and necessary component - the encounter with otherness. Authenticity is, then, determined by its solitary nature and alterity (*das Man*) inhibits efforts to establish an ethical or receptive mode of existence.[38] As a counterpoint to the 'owned', somewhat isolated character of Christian existence, the exploration of the Girardian hypothesis undertaken earlier in this study suggests that it is only in relation to, indeed because of, an otherness that mediates desire and identity that peace (or violence) is actualised.

In summary then, this analysis of Heidegger's understanding of Christian existence indicates two important issues that need to be acknowledged if the pursuit of a reappraisal of theological anthropology is to be realised. The first point reminds us that the performance - the actualisation - of Christian existence is a difficult process, enacted as it is within a worldly, historical environment. Neither the scriptures nor the Christian tradition provide a perfect model, script or blueprint which ensures that every gesture and movement is exactly befitting of the context. Rather a Christian's life is full of negotiation informed, to be sure, by both scripture and tradition but there is inherent in both, as my interrogation of tradition in the last chapter exhibited, a sense of plurality and undecideability both in terms of delimiting appropriate forms of engagement and developing the genres in which the Christian life is made intelligible. This is due, not least, to the fact that, as R.R. Reno remarks, the 'Christian ideal of transcendence resists the purity (and finality) of the solution.'[39] It is within the framework of the very perplexing and arduous nature of this life, in stepping into its midst

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[37] E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents* trans. A. Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), 48.

[38] Cf. Brian Schroeder, *Altared Ground: Levinas, History, and Violence* (London: Routledge, 1996), 98.

[39] R.R. Reno, *The Ordinary Transformed: Karl Rahner and the Christian Vision of Transcendence* (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 69.

rather than responding in quietude or withdrawal, that grace is experienced. That is the great theological challenge: subjectivity is made to shudder - indeed, is de-centred - in a landscape where ultimate destiny is validated within finitude.[40]

The second issue that requires affirmation is that alterity is intrinsic to any performance of the Christian life. This point can be made even more forcibly when the requirements of Girard's hypothesis are borne in mind. As my criticisms of Heidegger exhibit, it is the other who is outcast and victim who constitutes the privileged site of alterity for the realisation of biblical demands. Consequently, the relationality envisaged as intimately part of an analysis of subjectivity is, one might say, full of dramatic licence rather than characterised by an uncluttered (ideal) speech situation where the trouble and concerns of human existence are transcended (rather than struggled with) in a disengaged exemplary situation.[41]

In order to construct an alternative vision of subjectivity, one that not only takes into account but commences from the premise that alterity is prior to any individual form of security - ontological, epistemological or otherwise - Levinas's work requires at least to be visited in passing. It is possible that the distinctive emphasis in Levinas on the primacy of the other, born in part from his engagement and subsequent dissatisfaction with Heidegger, may provide a key to a theological anthropology in which alterity serves as the point of departure.

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[40] This does not mean, of course, that this ultimate destiny is limited to finitude. For an insightful exploration of the 'shuddering' of subjectivity, cf. Walter Benjamin, 'The Metaphysics of Youth' *Selected Writings: Volume 1: 1913-1926* (eds) M. Bullock & M.W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1996), 13-24.

[41] As I think is exemplified by Alasdair I. McFadyen among others. Cf. *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Cf. Chapter Two above.

6.2: Levinas and Alterity

On encountering the work of Emmanuel Levinas one realises that his is a 'great prophetic voice'.[42] His undermining of the sovereign autonomous self 'clears a space for a rethinking of ethical selfhood'.[43] In attempting to show that the ethical relation to the other is ultimately prior to the ontological relation to oneself, Levinas exposes the violence of the obsession with transcendental reflection and of a subject that, in its 'for-itself', marginalises and expels otherness. Replying to this violence, 'Levinas's account of the face-to-face involves the notion of the self as disjunction of identity rather than the constitution of a unity.'[44] The contrast between the self of ontological certainty and the subject of the ethical relation is heightened when one considers the manifold use of metaphors of touch in Levinas's delineation of the face-to-face relation.[45] It is this corporeal enactment of the ethical relation that is beautifully captured in Edmond Jabès' 'dialogue' with Levinas's work:

> A face asleep, a face waking, some trace of dark or light.
> To step on a trace means stepping on a face.
> We should on these paths, walk on our mouths, advance on our lips to kiss the trace. Love rules the road.[46]

In the context of the prophetic demands of the Levinasian text, I would like to consider the place of desire in relation to the other, a desire marked not by the mastery of the

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[42] The characterisation of Levinas as a prophet is John Caputo's. See his *Against Ethics: Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 80.

[43] S. Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 148. Cf. also E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* trans. A. Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 128.

[44] Noreen O'Connor, 'The Personal is Political: Discursive Practice of the Face-to-Face' *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other* (eds) R. Bernasconi & D. Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 64.

[45] Cf. especially, E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 197-201.

[46] Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Margins* trans. R. Waldrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 161.

ego but desire in the face of the other. In his 1963 paper, 'The Trace of the Other',[47] Levinas contrasts the self of the western ontological tradition with a very different 'subject of desire':

> to a subject that is thus defined by concern for himself and who in happiness fulfils his 'for himself' - we oppose the desire for the other which proceeds from a being already replenished to overflowing and independent, and who does not desire for himself. Desire is the need of him who has no more needs. We can recognize it in the desire for an other who is another [*autrui*], neither my enemy ... nor my complement .... The desire for another is born in a being that lacks nothing, or, more exactly, it comes to birth on the other side of all that can be lacking him or can satisfy him.[48]

Compelling rather than comforting, Levinas's portrayal of desire takes one beyond the confines of need and satisfaction to a space dedicated wholly to the other. No return to the same here, but an unqualified offering in the midst of desire. But who is this 'subject of desire'? Edith Wyschogrod's gloss of this text may help our investigation, for she states that

> The relation with the other does not make us happy; it puts the self into question, empties the self of itself. It calls upon all the resources of the self which we have no right to withhold from others. The desideratum does not fulfil an appetite but calls forth our generosity.[49]

It is now that we can pinpoint our desiring subject for *he* gives himself even to the point of extinction.[50] Indeed, so committed is he to the other that he risks both his motivation being misunderstood and his very physical existence. His desire is so great, so insatiable (and his need so paltry) that if destruction is the outcome of his absolute commitment to the other then

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[47] E. Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other' trans. A. Lingis *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy* (ed) Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 345-359. In conversation, Robert Eaglestone has suggested to me that this essay can be understood as an essential link between *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Cf. Robert Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism: Reading After Levinas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997).
[48] E. Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other', 350.
[49] E. Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 93.
[50] That Levinas's 'subject of desire' is thoroughly male is well argued by Pamela Sue Anderson in her unpublished paper, 'Tracing Sexual Difference: Beyond the *Aporia* of the Other'. I am grateful to Dr Anderson for a copy of this paper.

so be it. His name? - T800 or John Kruger. Yet these are just two of his many pseudonyms. He is more commonly known as Arnold Schwarzeneggar but even this is simply a cipher for a humanity that is inhuman in terms of the extent to which it will go in ensuring the priority and protection of the other.[51]

This is, of course, a caricature and it is obvious that the 'technologically-assisted efficacy in conflict and killing' - 'the mechanical terror'[52] - associated with Schwarzeneggar is wholly otherwise than the 'subject of desire' delineated by Levinas. Nevertheless, the super-heroic dedication of these characters of Schwarzeneggar's is the outcome of an insatiable desire for the (always downtrodden and vulnerable) other. Moreover, this desire is, to borrow Wyschogrod's description of Levinasian desire, 'experienced by a completely independent being who is already fulfilled.'[53] Nothing, and nobody, can change Schwarzeneggar's course in his service of the other, for his responsibility to the other is infinite and he, in his desire, is a hostage in the face of their otherness.[54]

The reason for this caricature is quite simple. Levinas, as I have already pointed out, is a prophet and, as John Caputo suggests, 'one is always in-adequate to the sayings of the prophet.'[55] Indeed, how can one respond to Levinas's 'absolutely impossible Abrahamic demands'?[56] For to present, outline or practice an ethics in the face of the ethical relation, of

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[51] For these remarks on Schwarzeneggar I am indebted to Greta Gleeson. T800 is the name of Schwarzeneggar's character in *Terminator 2: Judment Day*; he is John Kruger in *Eraser*. For a very useful guide to the messianic overtones in the *Terminator* films, cf. Sean French, *The Terminator* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), 49ff.

[52] These terms were used by Richard Roberts in his unpublished paper, 'Like Glist'ring Phaethon: Male Self-Identity in an Era of Diminishing Expectations' presented to The Centre of the History of the Human Sciences, University of Durham, 5 February, 1996.

[53] E. Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*, 93.

[54] John Hoberman vividly sketches both sides of the Schwarzenegger portrait. On the one hand Schwarzenegger 'evokes that third prophet of modernity, Friedrich Nietzsche', yet, on the other hand, 'this half-domesticated killer cyborg is the perfect dad.' Cf. J. Hoberman, 'Nietzsche's boy' *Sight and Sound* 1: 5 (NS) (1991), 24 - 25.

[55] John D. Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 80.

[56] Ibid., 79.

the event that constitutes being-for-the-other, is a failing.[57] It is this radical singularity of Levinas's project that both inspires and exasperates. To illustrate this predicament let us return to Edmond Jabès. It is not simply *very difficult* to 'walk on our mouths, advance on our lips to kiss the trace,'[58] it is impossible - and if it is possible then it has to be learned and practised. The point, however, is not to dismiss the ethical relation but, in Robert Bernasconi's words, to maintain it 'by insisting on its impossibility'.[59]

Insisting on the impossibility of the ethical relation as delineated by Levinas is not the result of a disposition for rejecting the sayings of the prophets. Rather, this insistence is due to the fact that the inversion of the subject-other configuration does not necessarily provide a route beyond its status as completely dichotomous. As Caputo suggests

> For all his resistance to totalization, and all his talk of decentering the same, the fact is that things are radically recentered for him around the Other, which is an infinite and absolute ec-center, a kind of transcendental eccentricity.[60]

Levinas reinserts the radical difference in the self-other relation in a manner that suggests not only the priority of the other, but the *absolute* priority of the other. Consequently, he modifies rather than transforms the logic of the same and, in doing so, fails to address adequately the manner in which self and other engage in a context that, after Girard, one could characterise as undecideable and uncertain. More seriously, however, Levinas presents us with an ethical relation that occurs prior to consciousness and problematizes an encounter between self and other that takes place in a historical, linguistic and cultural context. As with Hegel, consciousness represents the fall.[61] In such frameworks of identity and, in the case of Levinas,

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[57] Cf. Robert Bernasconi, 'Deconstruction and the Possibility of Ethics' *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida* (ed) John Sallis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 135.
[58] Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Margins*, 161.
[59] Robert Bernasconi, 'Deconstruction and the Possibility of Ethics', 135.
[60] John D. Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 84.
[61] Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, Volume III: Determinate Religion* (ed.) P.C. Hodgson, trans R.F. Brown (Berkely: University of California Press, 1987), 527ff. Cf. also 438n.

alterity, the 'hustle and bustle of life'[62] constitutes a terrain of radical impurity and, one might suggest, too sinful to yield a context for transformation. What hope is there then of actualizing change and of fulfilling a desire for transformation in the midst of this broken world?

To summarise: in the philosophical anthropologies outlined by Heidegger and Levinas there are serious deficiencies particularly with regard to the role of the *actual* other within the structures and parameters of human experience. There is a virtue made of the authentic solitary self that is Dasein in the early Heidegger, a universal subject who can slip in and out of Greek and Christian frameworks. In Levinas's work, there is a frightening, even sinister, self-abnegation that supplements the resplendent vision of the priority of alterity.[63] Both undoubtedly provide us with rich seams of intellectual resources that require excavation, with Heidegger finitude is perceived as a gift, an inheritance, and Levinas questions the presuppositions that saturate modern reflections on subjectivity. These thinkers remind us, moreover, that any analysis of subjectivity must account for its performative condition and its inherent effect on those with whom we engage. Heidegger, in particular, attends to the distinctive and radical character of gospel demands. However, neither attends sufficiently, I believe, to the characteristics of subjectivity in the midst of practices and the negotiations of every-day living. Indeed, an alternative framework for a theological anthropology must take account of the imperfections that are an intrinsic part of being human and the provisionality of understanding selves and others.

This provisionality, along with the thoroughly engaged nature of subjectivity, is central to one delineation of the human condition. If as Gillian Rose contends, 'No human

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62 Cf. Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, 201.

63 As I will show later, I am not suggesting that there is no place for a proper selflessness (or even a place for self-mortification) in a Christian anthropology. This can and must, however, be distinguished from a form of basic self-abnegation and tendency toward destruction.

being possesses *sureness of self*,'[64] then this statement could stand as a summary of the work of Maurice Blondel. Yet, within the context of such insecurity, Blondel discloses the state and status of human being in relation to the infinite. He achieves this through a refusal to safeguard the religious through a continued dichotomy of thought and existence and nature and grace.[65] As Jean Lacroix argues,

> by discovering in our acts an incompleteness which is not only *de facto* but *de jure*, that is to say a natural and incurable inachievability, Blondel brings to light in us a "prepared place", an "open fissure".[66]

The virtue of Blondel's work is that he perceived this 'place' and 'fissure' to be present within ordinary existence. Consequently, his thesis may well enhance the bid to develop a theological anthropology after Girard.

6.3: Action and the Supernatural

According to Lacroix, Maurice Blondel 'was attempting to discover the need of the supernatural in man's very heart.'[67]. The method that drives Blondel's investigation is not, however, epistemological but phenomenological. It is in terms of an exploration of the concrete situation of action that Blondel suggests that the supernatural is mediated. But why action?

> Action is not only a fact; it is a necessity. It is often presented to me as an obligation and it imposes unwilling sacrifices on me. I cannot advance with all the clarity I desire nor always accomplish what I set out to do. And, once performed, my actions weigh on my whole life; I am their prisoner. I can

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[64] Gillian Rose, *Love's Work* (london: Chatto & Windus), 1995, 125.
[65] Interestingly, the dichotomy between nature and grace is also apparent in nineteenth-century neo-scolasticism (both Catholic and Lutheran) and Blondel's work is a reaction to both this theoretical phenomenon and rise of historicism. Cf. R.R. Reno, *The Ordinary Transformed*, 86-94.
[66] Jean Lacroix, *Maurice Blondel: An Introduction to the Man and His Philosophy* trans. J.C. Guinness (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968), 34.
[67] Ibid., 22.

> neither abstain, nor be self-sufficient, nor find satisfaction, nor be liberated. It is this weight of necessity and heteronomy that must be justified. It must be shown that this necessity is in conformity with man's deepest aspirations, that heteronomy is the condition for authentic autonomy. All this the science of action must establish.[68]

Because action disrupts the self-sufficiency of thought yet also submits to more than an immanent explanation, Blondel saw in its 'necessity and heteronomy' a means to ensure that the dialectic of reflection and practice, thought and existence, were brought into their proper relation - an interplay that superseded both. This method is not, however, that of Hegelian sublation: action always contains heterogeneous elements that cannot be subsumed under an ideal. In Blondel's words, action

> is performed to be seen. The end knowingly pursued does not shut desire off. What we do, we still do for something other than what we think. There is a hidden surplus in the intention; and it is this enfolded tendency that is found once again in the very result of the operation.[69]

The character of action cannot be exclusively seized in either thought (intention) or deed (effect). There is always a surplus, an undecideability.[70] It is this 'surplus' that insinuates the supernatural. For Blondel the philosophy of action obtains 'certitude concerning a need, a certain need for an indeterminable Something, which is a principle of inquietude and insatiability.'[71] This need or requirement that a philosophy of action gives rise to can only be answered in relation to the divine. We are compelled, as Blondel argues, to pursue the undecideability of action to its resolution in God: 'it is because in acting that we find an infinite disproportion in ourselves that we are constrained to look to infinity for the equation

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[68] Henri Bouillard, *Blondel and Christianity* trans. J.M. Somerville (Washington, D.C.: Corpus Books, 1969), 6.

[69] Maurice Blondel, *Action (1893)*, 218.

[70] There is also a sense in which we cannot fulfil our most honest desires and this disrupts the notion of a unified, sovereign self as St. Paul knew only too well. As Andrew McKenna suggests, 'A fuller exegesis of Paul's discourse (Rom. 7: 15-20) on not doing "the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" would show that it provides a critique of autonomous agency that is as radical as anything we find in a Derridean deconstruction or a Lacanian decentering of the subject.' Andrew McKenna, 'Biblical Structuralism: Testing the Victimary Hypothesis' *Helios* 17: 1 (1990), 73.

[71] Maurice Blondel, *La Pensée II: Les responsabilités de la pensée et la possibilité de son achèvement* (Paris: PUF, 1954), 338.

of our action.'[72] Yet there is another side to the finite-to-infinite dialectic: 'On the other hand, it is because in affirming absolute perfection we do not ever arrive at equalling our own affirmation, that we are constrained to look for its complement and its commentary in action.'[73]

Action, in its 'enabling constraints', implies a view of freedom that is more intricate than a simplistic notion of autonomy. Freedom for Blondel is not coextensive with a form of securing the ends of one's own will or desire. That is to succumb to death. Rather a person is only free 'by opening himself up to another action than his own.'[74] There are echoes here of what in a Girardian idiom would be a realisation that belief in self-sufficiency is a consequence of romantic lying [*mensonge romantique*].[75] Indeed, Blondel suggests that 'we would will to be self-sufficient; we cannot be.'[76] Action exhibits our dependence on that which is other to our will and intention. There is a 'deterioration', a loss of self, in action but only in the midst of the risk of action can we progress towards our fulfilment - no wonder, then, that Blondel was calling (in 1893!) for the decentering of the self:[77]

> the action performed brings back to the being who conceived and willed it a new richness that was not yet either in his conception or in his resolution. Not all that was simply ideal in the intention eludes action; at least a part is realized in it; and this real is heterogeneous with regard to this ideal. That is why, after having acted, we are other, we know otherwise, we will in another way than before.'[78]

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[72] Maurice Blondel, *Action (1893)*, 324.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., 329.
[75] This is the myth, as Girard see it, of spontaneous desire. Cf. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), 16-17.
[76] Maurice Blondel, *Action (1893)*, 302.
[77] Ibid., 442.
[78] Ibid., 425.

It is action that demonstrates not only our dependence on and constitution by the other but the necessity of attending to the infinite. In the acknowledgement that we are in some sense other. a confession that comes in the midst of action, occurs the realisation that it is God that 'does everything': 'Not to appropriate to oneself is the only method of acquiring the infinite. It is wherever we are no longer our own.'[79] Yet this 'loss' of self, or at least the petty preoccupations that circumscribe the horizon of possibility, arises in a context not of annihilation but of a freedom to accept God as God is, not as we would want him to be.[80] It is God who creates the possibility of the response - in action - to the infinite as 'the supernatural movement cannot proceed from ourselves.'[81] It is only possible to respond, to act in faith, because of the prior gift of grace, but this active response is imperative: 'the *act of faith* should inspire *faith in acts*.'[82] It is neither contemplation nor experience alone that are the privileged site for the relationship with the supernatural. It is action that provides the latter because, as Blondel remarks, 'in the simplicity of the most common practices, there is more infinite than in the haughtiest speculations or in the most exquisite feelings.'[83]

There is something extremely ironic about Blondel's reflection on the decentering of the self: with the loss of the invulnerable autonomous subject comes a simultaneous openness to the infinite within the ordinary. In another context, Jean-Luc Nancy rehearses a notion of the exraordinarily mundane nature of this experience when he suggests that he is 'trying to indicate, at its limit, an experience - not, perhaps an experience that we have, *but an experience that makes us be*.'[84] This is exactly where Girard's thesis requires extension. As I demonstrated in Chapter Four, Girard's analysis of the interdividual self indicates that coming to subjectivity in desire-led relationships results in an 'extreme openness'.[85] We become who

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[79] Ibid., 356.
[80] Ibid., 366.
[81] Ibid., 367.
[82] Ibid., 375.
[83] Ibid., 376.
[84] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 26.
[85] Rebecca Adams, 'Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard' *Religion and Literature* 25:2 (1993), 24.

we are in our moving out beyond ourselves. Yet, while Girard has exhaustively outlined the method and repurcussions of the ecstatic nature of mimetic desire in the context of culture and conflict, he is remarkably silent about the practices that enable and facilitate such an openness in relation to the distinctive setting of the Christian Church.

In order to bring Blondel's faith in acts to bear on a Girardian analysis of the interdividual nature of subjectivity, I want to argue that the notion of deification is central here. For Blondel, deification is the basic promise of Christianity:

> *Vos dü eritis*: this saying from Genesis can serve as the inscription for either of the two cities. That is the divine promise. That is the satanic temptation.[86]

The most remarkable feature of Blondel's analysis of action is his suggestion that deification is actualised through our practices. Neither rational nor irrational, deification is realised in the midst of action because activity is initiated and voiced by the divine to which the human then struggles in desire and response. 'Each act inspired by a thought of faith begins the generation of a new man because it engenders God in man.'[87] Thus we become like him: 'Adopted by the Father, regenerated by the Son, anointed by the Holy Spirit, man is by grace what God is by nature.'[88] But this 'becoming like God' is not a participation in the divine that is actualised because of the perfect contemplation or enjoyment of God. It is the coming together of grace and nature due to the benevolence of God.

> It is through action that the divine takes hold in man, hides its presence there, insinuates into him a new thought and a new life. It is through action that the lowest and the most obscure parts which express the needs of the organism and the reverberations of the universe rise to faith and cooperate in the human

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[86] Maurice Blondel, *Exigences philosophiques du christianisme* (Paris: PUF, 1950), 134. '*Vos dü eritis*' is translated as 'You will be gods'. Cf. Maurice Blondel, *Action (1893)*, 328: 'Man aspires to be a god: to be god without God and against God, through God and with God, that is the dilemma.'

[87] Maurice Blondel, *Action (1893)*, 379.

[88] Ibid., 375, n. 1.

> and divine work that comes to completion in us. Without it the synthesis is not brought to perfection.[89]

Added to Blondel's thesis concerning the invitation to infinity that occurs in action is the contention that there are certain 'prescribed' practices that best reflect the mediation of grace in a world of sin. These mediatory practices, and the revelation that is intrinsically tied to them, take their distinctive character from their ecclesial setting and the church's tradition. Tradition is not, as we saw in the last chapter, a inert deposit of truth but a living, multiply-constituted ratification of practice and belief. Furthermore, it cannot 'be used and developed unless it is confided to the practical obedience of love.'[90] Again practice breeds practice; that of the tradition engenders practice of love, for 'without this active love of the members of humanity for one another, there is no God for man; he who does not love his brother does not have life within him.'[91] It is not simply the case, however, that scripture and tradition simply give rise to action, they both demand action and act as a guide[92], a legend or key to the mapping and performance of loving practice:

> a tradition and a discipline represent a constant interpretation of thought through acts, offering each individual, in the sanctified experience, something like an anticipated control, an authorized commentary, an impersonal verification of the truth it is for each one to resurrect in himself.'[93]

Even in the celebration of the contingency and undecideability of practice there remains a necessity for guidance so that the divine life might come to perfection in human beings. It is from the standpoint of the integral relation between faith and action that guidance,

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[89] Ibid., 380.
[90] Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, trans. Alexander Dru & Illtyd Trethowan (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 274.
[91] Maurice Blondel, *Action (1893)*, 407-408. This assertion of Blondel is a response to Leibniz's dictum: 'to love all men, to love God, is the same thing.' (407).
[92] This point is reinforced by Nietzsche's observations in *The Anti-Christ*. He suggests that 'It is not a 'belief' which distinguishes ths Christian: the Christian acts, he is distinguished by a *different* mode of acting.' Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twighlight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ* trans R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 145.
[93] Maurice Blondel, *Action (1893)*, 380.

commentary and discipline take on their dynamic character: 'no faith without practice, no practice naturally equal to faith; no revealed truth without also prescribed acts.'[94]

It is this conjunction between deification and practices that is absent in Girard's consideration of Christianity. Nevertheless, both Blondel and Girard take the human person and his or her place in the cosmos seriously and suggest that in order to know of and experience God, human beings have to start where they are, with the gift, its content and its nature. In other words, there is a 'humanist' perspective in their work. By 'humanist', I do not mean that either thinker constructs a priveleged site of epistemological or experiential certainty. On the contrary, Girard and Blondel attend to and address the specificity of being human in relation to the divine in all its provisionality and uncertainty with regard to truth.. They conceive of subjectivity as engendered within the loss of self, when the self is given over to others and the world. They also suggest that it is within the midst of human existence that the transcendent is given. This suggests that there is an element of labour - the hard labour of love - in the religious life that mirrors the incessant labour of tradition. Consequently, their 'humanism' is directed against that which dehumanizes rather than the construction of discrete identities. I want to argue that this element is largely absent from the attempts to resituate and reconstitute the subject that I outlined in Chapters One and Two. In the case of deconstruction and Marion's *via negativa*, any reflection on the place and status of the self is considered redundant; with a philosophy or theology of communicative sociality, there is a lack of recognition of the constraints within and between subjects that require negotiation. In other words, there is insufficient attention given to the constitution and instillation of forms of life that respond to contemporary fragmented existence.

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[94] Ibid., 382.

To summarise: in the thought of Maurice Bondel the relation of the subject to the infinite is delineated. Blondel demonstrates that with the constant loss of our will and our self to others and the world resides the openness to the divine. The ecstatic nature of the subject who always is beyond him or herself marks the meeting of nature and grace. This is where Girard can learn from Blondel's analysis. Girard provides an excellent and extensive sketch of the visceral, brutal and painful experience of being-in-the-world - of nature, as it were - but when it comes to grace the enthusiasm tails off. Blondel's work, on the other hand, can benefit from the more concrete, even painful, assessment of the human condition that is provided by Girard. In order to provide a perspective from which an understanding of the gift of grace - the vertical pole of the human/divine axis - can be more fully integrated with Girard's rich examination of the theatre of human interaction - the horizontal pole - I want to bring Girard's desiring subject into a theological context where the relationship between desire and the motion of grace can be discerned - the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola.

I wish to propose that the Ignatian *Exercises* offer a profound insight into how we might consider the self theologically in a postmodern context. In the first place, within the rubric of the *Exercises* we are invited to do the very thing that Rowan Williams proposed as a proper to a Christian engagement with Scripture: to 'identify ourselves in the story being contemplated, to reappropriate who we are now, and who we shall or can be, in terms of the story.'[95] Second, and more significant in this context, the Ignatian Exercises were written by a man of the late Middle Ages who was, nonetheless, standing at a 'turning point at which the interest begins to be directed towards the subjective, towards the question of salvation as it bears upon the subjective life of the individual, of the sense in which God is a 'gracious God' precisely to *me*.'[96] The exercises were written in the midst of an unprecedented fracture that was political, theological and anthropological in character. As Wenders illustrates in *Der*

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95 Rowan Williams, 'The Literal Sense of Scripture', 125.
96 Karl Rahner, 'Being Open to God as Ever Greater' *Theological Investigations* Vol. VII trans. D. Bourke (London: DLT, 1971), 32.

Himmel über Berlin, contemporary subjects within advanced capitalist societies are experiencing a fracture of equal proportions. Ignatius, then, may provide important signposts that take us across such fractured terrain, even if there is no evident solution.

6.4: Spiritual Exercises and the Christian Drama

The Ignatian *Exercises* is simply a manual of desires and their composition. In an almost Girardian manner, Ignatius recognizes that our desire is composed in relation to God, the world and our activity. It was Friedrich Schlegel who suggested that 'Whoever desires the infinite doesn't know what he desires. But one can't turn this sentence around.'[97] The manual that Ignatius designed responds to such ignorance by grounding desire for the infinite in a 'horizontal theatre' of 'combat and action.'[98] The *Exercises* represent an attempt to situate human nature as the *copula mundi*, 'the link between uncreated and created being.'[99] The human person, their body and imagination are located within the world and this world is the stage upon which the exercitant participates in 'God's self-expression in history.'[100] This paricipation is realized through composing the self in relation to the scriptures.[101]

However, the Exercises, while practiced by individuals have an ecclesial setting and can in no way be thought of as a private, disengaged affair. As Michael Buckley suggests:

> in making the *Exercises*, the exercitant is to become configured to the Church in its fundamental service and intimate experience of Christ, even more, that one comes to participate in that service and experience. In the exercitant, the

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[97] Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments* trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), § 47, p. 6.
[98] Louis Dupré, Ignatian Humanism and its Mystical Origins' *Communio* 18 (1991), 169.
[99] Ibid., 168.
[100] Philip Endean, 'The Ignatian Prayer of the Senses' *Heythrop Journal* 31 (1990), 408.
[101] Ignatius of Loyola, *Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works* (ed.) G.E. Gans (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 136. The term 'composition' is used thirteen times in the *Exercises*.

> Church is again to realize its mission in the struggle for human salvation and its radical nature as beloved of Christ.[102]

The role of the *Exercises* is to configure the exercitant to the gift of grace and to enable him or her to respond to that which dehumanizes. For Ignatius, 'The satanic, the diabolic, is the antihuman, the humanly destructive, and this sense of the relentless, cosmic struggle retrieves in the Exercises the gospel understanding of the conflict that lies at the heart of human history.'[103] Thus the desire of the Church ought to be both for Christ and for the world. There is no escape from the materiality of nature in the exercises. Knowing and experiencing the divine is a matter of repeated response and participation, 'of continuing a pattern disclosed.'[104] This pattern is the gift of the giver and our action in response is a re-enactment of this pattern. Indeed, Ignatius sees apostolic action itself

> as participating in the "outgoing" movement of God's trinitarian life. Humans are called not to rest in divine quiet but to descend with the Son into the created world for the purpose of sanctifying it.[105]

It is in this sense that anthropology is given a theocentric perspective. Nonetheless, the *Exercises* are hard work.. Intrinsic to them is the notion of *paideia*, that one is nurtured and taught in the skill of discernment through the prayer of the senses. This prayer 'is not, itself, directly an application of the "spiritual senses", but rather a pedagogy towards acquiring them.'[106] Discernment does not imply a resolution that is established once and for all, nor a pragmatic choice forced by the demands of circumstance. Rather it suggests a decision that requires the hard and continuous work of responding to 'the end for which I am created.'[107] The response is formulated in relation to the directed, contextual and imaginative reading of

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[102] Michael Buckley, S.J., 'Ecclesial Mysticism in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius' *Theological Studies* 56 (1995), 443.
[103] Ibid., 445.
[104] Philip Endean, 'The Ignatian Prayer of the Senses', 408.
[105] Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 226.
[106] Philip Endean, 'The Ignatian Prayer of the Senses', 412.
[107] Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, 130.

scripture so that the exercitant develops 'the ability to distinguish effective from ineffective strategies'[108] through which responsibility to the divine Word is enacted. And this responsibility carries with it significant implications for the Church: 'for the Church itself is a principal agent in [the] struggle against the antihuman. This religious sensibility may be almost unintelligible to a bourgeois, domesticated Christianity that possesses no sense of the Church in conflict and looks to religious experience for the secure and the soothing.'[109] If Giorgio Agamben is to be believed, then theology has done little to challenge such desires for the comfortable. In a discussion of the place and status of the sacred in classical nineteenth-century sociology, Agamben suggests that

> What is at work here is the psychologization of religious experience (the "disgust" and "horror" by which the cultured European Bourgeoisie betrays its own unease before the religious fact), which will find its final form in Rudolph Otto`s work on the sacred. Here, in a concept of the sacred that coincides with the concept of the obscure and the inpenetrable, a theology that had lost all experience of the revealed word celebrated its union with a philosophy that had abandoned all sobriety in the face of feeling. That the religious belongs entirely to the sphere of psychological emotion, that it essentially has to do with shivers and goose bumps - this is the triviality that the neologism "numinous" had to dress up as science.[110]

In contrast to this domestication of the religious, Ignatius portrays 'a Renaissance scene of combat and action.'[111] And is it not the case that Girard portrays a (post)modern scene of combat and action? It is the demands of such scenes that inspire the Ignatian commitment to the difficult labour of discernment.

Discernment is the negation of an activity - cerning - and one of the two meanings of this word is well worth exploration. The root of this activity can be found in the now

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[108] Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity*, 224.
[109] Michael Buckley, S.J., 'Ecclesial Mysticism in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius', 446.
[110] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* trans. D. Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 78.
[111] Louis Dupré, Ignatian Humanism and its Mystical Origins', 169.

redundant English verb 'to cerne'.[112] This verb means 'to encircle' or 'to enclose' and here it might indicate the way in which selves become trapped within their petty preoccupations and ultimately become shut off from that which exceeds them. Contrary to the desire to become self-sufficient, discernment is a pedagogical strategy that engenders openness in relation to our desires. The fact that Ignatian discernment is rooted in relation, scripture and tradition suggests that desire for the divine is not to be understood in isolation but directed, fleshed out, as it were, in prayerful and bodily practices. Our performance and engagement, in the context of *paideia* are a response to the divine desire for creation.

> We might say that the Christian project of discipleship, conceived as a lifelong schooling in the purification of desire, is a matter of discovering that, whatever we desire, our desiring of it is only the desire of God in the measure that it is conformed to and transformed by God's previous desire of us. Our yearning, purified, shares in that yearning from which our world is made.[113]

Divine desire is prior to human desire and it allows, creates the possibility of, the desire of divine desire.

Nevertheless, the transformation of desire, what Lash calls its purification, can only occur within the parameters of an ecclesial and social life characterised by a process of negotiation and risk. Such a risk is evident in Abraham's encounter with three angels, recounted at the beginning of chapter 18 of the book of *Genesis*. Emmanuel Levinas, reading the text through the rabbinical commentaries, suggests that the visitation can be construed as representing the relationship between the 'singular signification of God' and the 'responsibility for the other man'.[114] To illustrate this correlation, Levinas suggests, in a manner reminiscent

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[112] In the following discussion I am indebted to Paul Smith's discussion of discernment. Cf. his *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), esp. xxx.
[113] Nicholas Lash, *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 37.
[114] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Beyond Intentionality', *Philosophy in France Today* (ed.) Alan Montefiore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 114-15.

of his Talmudic studies,[115] that verse three of chapter 18 should follow verse one, and verse two become verse three. The passage now reads:

> 'The Lord revealed Himself to Abraham in the plains of Mamre, while he was seated at the entrance to his tent during the heat of the day. And he said, Lord, if I find grace in your eyes do not pass this way before your servant. As he raised his eyes and looked, he saw three persons standing before him; he ran to them from the doorway of his tent and prostrated himself on the ground. [116]

The outcome of changing the order of the verses is that the passing of the three persons is the result of an Abrahamic prayer, Adonai, Lord, 'do not pass this way before your servant'. The visitation of the Other might now be understood as a 'revelation of God'. Let us, however, read the passage as it usually proceeds:

> The Lord revealed Himself to Abraham in the plains of Mamre, while he was seated at the entrance to his tent during the heat of the day. As he raised his eyes and looked, he saw three persons standing before him; he ran to them from the doorway of his tent and prostrated himself on the ground'. And he said, Lord, if I find grace in your eyes do not pass this way before your servant.

The passage now has the title Adonai addressed to one of the visitors and not to God. Rather than revealing a direct, almost tangible, connection between the presence of God and the presence of others, the passage demands and celebrates a drama of risk in which those who we encounter may be angels, demons, or plain old human beings. The point is that our recognition, our comprehension, especially of God is 'always provisional and preliminary'.[117] Yet this is the only context in which we can attempt the practice of excessive openness - to both the other and God - and, if you like, perform the Abrahamic drama. For there is no absolute purity or finality in the encounter with another, human or divine. There is, in

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[115] Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings* trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).
[116] I have followed Levinas's version of the text. Emmanuel Levinas, 'Beyond Intentionality', 114
[117] Gillian Rose, 'The comedy of Hegel and the Trauerspiel of modern philosophy', *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 72.

contrast, the difficulty of engagement. As Cornelius Ernst so aptly puts it. 'Grace is not faceless.'[118] This is where the discernment is thoroughly appropriate - it is not a matter of uncovering truth and certainty but of embracing risk in a manner that celebrates, and is purified by, divine desire. The process of discernment suggests, *conta* Levinas, that action is not the simple effect of a revelatory cause. On the contrary, thought and action are understood by Ignatius to be integrated in response to a grace that constitutes the conditions, or engenders the possibility, of authentic freedom: 'What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I to do for Christ?'[119] The theological subject is called to respond in the theatre of nature on the basis not of epistemolgical or revelatory certainty but in the midst of a risk that self-realisation occurs in responding to grace.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined some possible theological resources which, when brought into conversation with the Girardian treatment of subjectivity, might provide the basis for a reconsideration of the theological subject. As a means to this end, I outlined Martin Heidegger's attempted recovery of authentic Christian existence in Augustine's *Confessions*. Although this Heidegger may well be described as a theological counterpoint to Jean-Luc Marion - Heidegger is obsessed with that which is given, the experience of primordial Christianity, while Marion can look no further than securing the integrity of the giver - he forcibly reminds us of the performative nature of Christian existence. Unlike Girard, however, Heidegger is not concerned with the intersubjective character of the Christian experience and this was highlighted by the criticisms of Emmanuel Levinas.

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[118] Cornelius Ernst, 'Mary: Sign of Contradiction or Source of Unity?' *Multiple Echo: Explorations in Theology* (eds) Fergus Kerr & Timothy Radcliffe (London: DLT, 1979), 124.
[119] Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, 138.

Levinas's work, prophetic though it undoubtedly is, was shown to be terrifying in its drive for the purity of the face-to-face encounter. The *absolute* priority of the other is established beyond the context of the hustle and bustle of life and, consequently, seems somewhat flaccid in the face of the difficulties and challenges of a fragmented postmodern context.

In his more explicitly theological idiom, Maurice Blondel, I argued, offers a profound and insightful analysis into the relationship between nature and grace and theological anthropology. In his examination of action he regenerates the significance of subjectivity in a theological context - not least because of his delineation of the relationship between the faith inherent in action and deification. I also conclude that Blondel offers much that will enliven a Girardian anthropology because of this emphasis on the integral relationship between God and the world. Engagement with grace is not the result of understanding a revealed truth but is related to the (given) human condition itself. Just as Girard can learn from Blondel, the reverse is also true. Girard's expansive and richly detailed examination of the configuration and exigencies of desire could only illuminate Blondel's understanding of nature - even if it seems rather dismal to insist on the inclusion of the bloody and sinister within human experience, it is unfortunately only too necessary. To do otherwise would be irresponsible.

Finally, because the weakness of the Girardian hypothesis, in theological terms at least, is its insufficient attention to the order of grace, I argued that bringing the Ignatian *Exercises* to bear on the Girardian subject may open up a stimulating route to the revisioning of theological anthropology. This arrangement not only augments Girard's anthropological studies but also highlights the performative and engaged manner in which active co-operation with God must be actualized.

Chapter Seven:
Theological Anthropology After Girard

Introduction

In the previous chapter, particularly through the work of Maurice Blondel and Ignatius of Loyola, I explored avenues through which the Girardian hypothesis might be translated into a more thoroughgoing theological idiom. The purpose of bringing Girard into conversation with Blondel and Ignatius was to examine the ways in which desiring selves who are constituted in relation to the desire of others might come into a more fitting engagement with scripture and tradition: to 'identify ourselves in the story being contemplated, to reappropriate who we are now, and who we shall or can be, in terms of the story.'[1] This sense of responding to the divine gift through scripture-informed practices is something that I wish to elucidate and begin to enact, as it were, in an albeit modest way in this chapter. I will pursue this task using three texts that open up rich possibilities for rethinking the ways in which Christian existence might be performed and the reference points for such existence. I am in no way claiming to provide an exhaustive treatment here but, rather, a series of snapshots that offer an insight into the hard labour of love that characterises a response to grace. Before I move to these short

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[1] Rowan Williams, 'The Literal Sense of Scripture' *Modern Theology* 7:2 (1991), 125.

performances or spiritual exercises, however, I want to rehearse the backdrop to their staging through providing an overview of this study's progression and purpose.

7.1: Summarising the Thesis

The point of this thesis is basically twofold: to consider the status and fate of the subject in a postmodern context and to provide a theological response that is both theoretically responsible and informed by the existential exigencies of contemporary existence in western societies. In order to meet this aim, I used, in my introduction, the ambiguous reading of subjectivity in Wim Wenders' *Der Himmel über Berlin* as a point of departure. Wenders' reading of contemporary fragmentation and his attempted resolution of brokenness loosely correspond to two major theoretical (and antithetical) approaches to anthropological discourse - the resituating of the self and its reconstitution.

In Part One I examined both of these theoretical strategies. In Chapter One I outlined two major considerations of the dissolution and resituation of the self that align a negative anthropology with a negative theology. Jacques Derrida was seen to refuse any place for the theological or religious unless they are inscribed with the terms of their own negation. Only in relation to a sacrificial and responsible economy can religion be maintained in that alterity and love constitute the logic of the gift of death. Positive religion, in contrast, is violent in its quest for institutionalisation and the composition of dogma. Jean-Luc Marion, meanwhile, was seen to take a very different approach in bringing together a negative anthropology with a negative theology. Marion's project starts from an attempt to save God from metaphysics through an alliance with classical apophaticism. Charity replaces Being as the foremost name of God in his attempt to save the deity from the clutches of onto-theo-logy. A concurrent theme in Marion's work, a motif that is pursued under the rubric of *la distance*, is the chasm that he fashions between God and God's gift – the world. Accordingly, Marion claims that

only *prayerful* discourse concerning the divine or – even better – only that which is sanctioned by the bishop can be termed *theo*logy. Any notion of subjectivity in the context of the *ecclesia* is seriously condensed if not wholly negated.

I then proceeded to assess both these wide ranging projects. In the case of Derrida, I suggested that his evacuation of the theological results in a refusal of site and situation. Consequently, using Walter Benjamin as a guide, I argued that this deconstructive approach is in danger of providing a vacuum that will be filled – only to quickly – by capitalism. This religion of a cult (without mercy) and little else is, I suggested, perfectly configured to the shape and form of a 'religion without religion'. Consequently, I asked for a more nuanced understanding of the task and status of articles of faith as a means to mapping the theological subject. In the case of Marion, I questioned his project on two fronts. First, in relation to his doctrine of God, I challenged both the success of his attempt to spurn any name of God bar charity and his disregard for the gift in his need to save the giver from any stain of metaphysics. In relation to the former, I suggested that, in the words of Jean-Luc Nancy, Marion ends up 'saying *nothing about the god* that cannot immediately be said about "event", about "love", about "poetry".'[2] As far as the latter point is concerned, I suggested that Marion's philosophical theology ignores the importance of the relationship between God and the world that is established in the doctrine of creation. God is to be saved and their is no need to consider the gift for it is irrelevant. Second, I contested Marion's ecclesiology on the basis of its exclusionary logic and its retrieval of Denys's *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*. A meta-subject is constructed in the space vacated by the subject of modernity and I suggested, with reference to Henri de Lubac, that this is an escape from the difficulties of contemporary existence rather than a solution to the fragmentation of subjectivity.

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[2] Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Of Divine Places', *The Inoperative Community* (ed.) P. Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 113.

In Chapter Two I examined a major response to the dissolution of the subject that conforms to Wenders' attempted resurrection of the self: namely, the reconstitution of the subject. Under this term I considered the contribution of Jürgen Habermas and of those theologians, particularly Alistair McFadyen, who align themselves with Habermas's theory of communicative action. Habermas offers a highly distinctive response to the crisis of anthropological discourse in that he is critical of both the project of modernity and its postmodern opponents. However, as I demonstrated, Habermas wants to bring modernity to its completion as its failure is due, in large part, to an over emphasis on one type of rationality - the instrumental and calculative reason that destroys subjectivity. This category of reason has its place, but in an intersubjective context Habermas posits the centrality of another, forgotten reason founded on communication. On the basis of communicative reason, Habermas delineates the structures and frameworks within which selves can co-exist in non-coercive relationships within the public realm. I then illustrated how Alistair McFadyen takes up the Habermasean project in his construction of a theological anthropology. McFadyen pursues his project on three fronts. First, and following Habermas, he posits a self who 'becomes' in the context of dialogue. I also demonstrated, second, that McFadyen augments this self with a secure, individual site of 'personal being' that holds the self fast in the ebb and flow of communicative interaction. McFadyen's final move is to bring a theological element into his anthropology with a discussion of the intersubjectivity of the trinity. This trinitarian God is *the* model for human relationality. In relation to the claim that a divine intersubjectivity provides an important reference point for the portrayal of an authentic subjectivity, I then considered attempts by Anthony Thiselton, Colin Gunton and Jürgen Moltmann to constitute models of sociality and intersubjectivity in conjunction with a particular model of the trinity.

In response to these philosophical and theological efforts to reconstruct the parameters of selfhood, I presented what I believed were fundamental deficiencies in the unifying aim of the communicative model - the reconstitution of the subject. First, after Nietzsche and

William Connelly, I suggested that the selves who were being reconstituted were disembodied subjects. There is a whole visceral mode of being that is neglected in the communicative framework, a mode that must both be invoked and embraced if the crisis of fragmentation is to be addressed. I then moved to the question of the status of desire in a communicative model of human relationality and concluded that, as with the visceral, desire is only acceptable if it can be tamed. If not, then desire remains a dangerous outsider in anthropological discourse of this kind. These critical remarks were, I argued, relevant to McFadyen's project as well as its philosophical progenitor. However, in McFadyen's theological anthropology there were other features that required critical attention - not least his retention of a privatised, non-negotiable site of identity that he calls a 'personal centre'. I insisted that McFadyen was constructing a solipsistic notion of the self that was at odds with his prior – post-Habermasean – claim that the subject is formed within intersubjective relations. Finally, with regard to the centrality of the social model of the trinity, I questioned the idealist assumptions of its proponents and their disregard for the heterogeneous nature of relationality. In consequence I claimed that it is imperative that greater attention be given to both the status of analogical discourse and the concrete form of human interaction.

As a way beyond the deficiencies of both these attempts to consider the fragmentation of the self sketched in Wenders' cinematic exploration I turned, in Part Two, to the very different enterprise of René Girard. Girard's distinctive reconfiguration of the subject is part of a wider theory of cultural origins and development. Consequently, in Chapter Three I considered two major elements of his hypothesis: the investigation of the genesis and subsistence of cultural and religious institutions and the significance he attaches to texts in which conflict is concealed or, in the case of the biblical tradition, revealed. There I showed the importance of mimesis in the Girardian hypothesis and how Girard perceives a violent moment as constitutive of every cultural and religious framework. Indeed, he even claims, in relation to the conception of cultural and sacrificial institutions through a violence that is

engendered by mimetic rivalry, that 'Violence and the sacred are inseparable.'[3] As an antidote to violence the victim is commemorated as both the cause of internecine strife and the agent of its overcoming. This ambivalent account of the status of the victim of the founding murder - an account that pleads the innocence of the guilty - is designated as mythological by Girard. I then showed how Girard contends that certain texts are effective in progressively revealing the innocence of the victim (texts of persecution) to the point that a full revelation occurs definitively in the Christian gospels. Girard believes that this revelation of the true status of the mythological and the sacrificial makes Christianity the only cultural framework which provides the resources for the overcoming of violence. In Chapter Four I then provided an overview of Girard's more thorough-going analysis of subjectivity. There I examined the central role of desire and its intimate alliance with mimesis in the Girardian hypothesis. Desire does not arise as a motion between subject and object but is engendered by the desire of the other. Thus the subject is dependent upon the other for his or her identity - the self is a 'self between'. I then illustrated that Girard returns to the gospels as texts which offer the only ground upon which authentic subjectivity can flourish. This is possible, he contends because of the non-violent, non-rivalrous nature of desire of the divine and the imitation of Christ.

In response to the Girardian hypothesis I strove to evaluate, in Chapter Five, its relevance for revisioning theological anthropology. In this chapter I examined three areas of particular interest to critics of Girard's project. First, I began with an assessment of a common difficulty with the Girardian hypothesis: the ubiquitous presence of all things violent. There I attempted to answer Girard's critics. Second, I interrogated the claim that there is insufficient space in the interdividual configuration of subjectivity for agency. In response I demonstrated that such criticisms are groundless. Finally, I explored Girard's understanding of revelation and I suggested that his conclusion that the gospels are uniquely efficacious in bringing about the possibility of peaceful co-existence is predicated on a misunderstanding of tradition and

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[3] R. Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 19.

the demands of Christian existence. As a rejoinder to this deficient element within the Girardian hypothesis I considered an alternative account of the vitality of the Christian tradition. Here I took Michel de Certeau and Maurice Blondel as conversation partners. This analysis of the role and fecundity of tradition also served to inform the more constructive element in this study that I began in Part Three.

This constructive component of the thesis I began in Chapter Six. There I attended to the explicitly Christian project of the early Martin Heidegger. I rejected Heidegger's project was on two grounds. First, I questioned his attempts to construct a universal ontology rather than a characteristically Christian anthropology. Second, I challenged the status of the subject of his phenomenology of religion - the radically individual figure of factical life experience. Nonetheless, I argued that Heidegger gives prominence to the performative nature of subjectivity within a Christian framework. Then, after a brief discussion of Emmanuel Levinas's criticism of Heidegger and the significance of former's delineation of the irreducibility of alterity, I examined the work of Maurice Blondel and Ignatius of Loyola. Both figures, I claimed, offer significant resources for reassessing theological anthropology in a postmodern context without compromising the distinct relation between nature and grace. I suggested that Girard could learn from their portrayal of the relationship between the human and divine dramas and of the manner in which subjectivity can be cultivated in terms of its participation in God's self-expression. I also suggested that Blondel and Ignatius might be productively augmented with Girard's attention to the (often) conflictual and forceful nature of human interaction.

With the engagement of the last chapter in mind, I would like to consider the shape and status of theological anthropology after Girard via three cameo performances or spiritual exercises. I have chosen to stage them under the title 'Making Bowels Move' because it is a common theme of all three encounters and, in addition, this title reminds us of the visceral

nature of human interaction. I have claimed throughout this study that this element within intersubjective relations is both a neglected and fundamental ingredient in an adequate theological anthropology. Nevertheless, the body is a highly problematic area in anthropological discourse and in order to contextualise my three exercises, I will attend to a major issue concerning human viscerality before I commence.

7.2: Exercising the Body

In a reflection called 'Dim Stockings' – a title that refers to a definitive movement in advertising that occurred in the darkness of Parisian cinemas in the nineteen-twenties – Giorgio Agamben uncovers the mechanism through which the body was transformed into a commodity. In the image that was presented to the audience, a troupe of dancing girls (wearing their stockings) flashed across the screen. These women were presented as individuals whose only connection was their presence in the image – each woman was filmed separately and then superimposed onto the finished celluloid product. Their conjunction and disjunction in the image, argues Agamben, gave rise to 'the epochal process of the emancipation of the human body from its theological foundations.'[4] The image served to dislocate the body from site and situation, whether historical, social or metaphysical, and presented it as a feature of the commodity: 'Neither generic nor individual, neither an image of the divinity nor an animal form, the body now became something truly *whatever*.'[5] The singularity of the body is captured in the image and, consequently, the bodily form is torn from any notion of identity bar the stockings. While Agamben wants to suggest that this commodification of the body – an unanchored, fluid, *semblance* of broken, hungry and struggling bodies – is not a wholly negative experience, he is concerned that today we live in

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[4] Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* trans. M. Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 48. Cf. Also Jean-Luc Nancy' reflection on the status of the body after the death of God: 'With the death of God, we have lost this glorious body, this sublime body: this real symbol of his sovereign majesty, this microcosm of his immense work, and finally this visibility of the invisible, this *mimesis* of the inimitable.' Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Birth to Presence* trans. B. Holmes et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 191.

[5] Ibid.

'the age of the complete domination of the commodity form over all aspects of social life.'[6] Consequently, in a move that challenges the theory of hyper-scepticism of Baudrillard,[7] Agamben suggests that 'Dim Stockings' offers important political and social lessons in western capitalist societies.

> What was technologized was not the body, but its image. Thus the glorious body of advertising has become the mask behind which the fragile, slight human body continues its precarious existence, and the geometrical splendour of the "girls" covers over the long lines of the naked, anonymous bodies led to their death in the *Lagers* (camps), or the thousands of corpses mangled in the daily slaughter on the highways.[8]

Agamben warns us that the glossy, deracinated body – and pornography is exemplary here – might deflect our attention from the difficult labour of love (politics) and the visceral nature of human interaction. The demand for discretion in all things bodily is vindicated by Jean Améry's portrayal of his experiences of torture in Belgium in 1940. What the commodified body does not reveal is that, in Améry's terms, 'Body = Pain = Death' in the context of torture.[9]

This caveat is powerfully communicated by Agamben and, in the three 'Spiritual' exercises that I will outline in the next section, I will take full account of its force. Consequently, the exercises will, following Ignatius, take seriously the performance of Christian existence by way of the integration of the senses[10] (body) in prayer (spirit) through imagination and reflection (mind) on the status of desire. The purpose of this performance, as Ignatius suggests, is to (re)constitute the self in relation to the scriptures.[11] I hope to expose

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[6] Ibid., 49.
[7] Cf. Jean Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra' *Art & Text* 11 (1983), 3-47.
[8] Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 50.
[9] Jean Améry, *At The Mind's Limit* trans. Sidney & Stella Rosenfeld (London: Granta, 1999), 34.
[10] Cf. Philip Endean, 'The Ignatian Prayer of the Senses' *Heythrop Journal* 31 (1990), 391-418.
[11] Ignatius of Loyola, *Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works* (ed.) G.E. Gans (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 136.

the irreducible nature of this theological subjectivity and the necessity of attending to the variety of registers through which it is formed and performed. However, it is important to stress that the category of the body, which I believe is an essential ingredient in any investigation of contemporary subjectivity, is a largely neglected field of enquiry within theological anthropology.[12]

As with desire, the body has been understood as a dangerous outsider or a threatening alien presence to any serious consideration of the nature of being human, although recently more and more attention is being paid to the corporeal nature of religiosity.[13] This innovation is due, in part at least, to the important contribution of recent French theory through its prominent treatment of the bodily nature of subjectivity and the latter's exclusion from theology, philosophy and psychoanalysis. This strategic engagement with embodiment often occurs while stressing the subterranean and concealed manipulation of bodies in the discursive examination of subjects. There are two recent contributions to our understanding of the body that will aid our investigation. The first is recent feminist thought. Luce Irigaray is exemplary here in that she challenges any notion that structures of desire and exchange can be analysed without an understanding of which (or whose) bodies are implicated in these economies.[14] In addition, Julia Kristeva reminds us in *Tales of Love* that a particularly significant characteristic of Christianity is the prominence it gives to a body which, although annihilated, changes the very terms through which a sacrificial economy operates: 'Not only is the sacrifice temporary (the body of Christ will be resurrected in all its integrity)' but this resurrection serves to recover the body of the faithful in its own fullness and integrity.[15] This thematic returns in

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[12] Exemplary here is Pannenberg's prioritisation of the internal, conscious ego. The body, to be sure, is considered to be one's own but this fact is only mediated by one's experience of the world. Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Metaphysics and the Idea of God* trans. P. Clayton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 53. Cf. Also Chapter Two of this study.

[13] Cf. For example, Sarah Coakley (ed.) *Religion and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and Philip A. Mellor & Chris Shilling, *Re-forming the Body: Religion, Community and Modernity* (London: Sage, 1997).

[14] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies* trans. G.C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), esp. 75-88.

[15] Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love* trans. L.S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 142

Kristeva's challenge to, and revisioning of, feminist ethics in relation to the cult of the Virgin. The expurgated body of motherhood is realigned with Mary in a parallel column (within the text) that reflects the experience of *embodied* motherhood and its exclusion from the text of the tradition.[16] These two thinkers question the evacuation of bodiliness from the examination of subjectivity and do not eschew the erotic and visceral nature of human interaction.

The second strand of recent French theory that has been instrumental in retrieving the body is Michel Foucault's reflections on the importance of understanding the significance of bodily regimes in any analysis of truth and belief. There are two major terms with which Foucault approaches his subject, 'technology' and 'governmentality'. The first of these terms – technology – refers to the taking-place of the self. It is an active and vigorous crafting of the self in that a technology 'seeks the conditions and the indefinite possibilities of transforming the subject, of transforming ourselves.'[17] The second term – governmentality – refers to more direct demands on conduct. 'The contact point, where the individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves, is what we can call, I think, government.'[18] The contact point may well be desire, space or practice but governmentality is an 'art'[19] that is prevalent in any social context. Crucially, this art is not that which is always imposed by a hegemonic power but is often pursued in order to craft alternative, resistant forms of life and practice.

These recent theoretical reflections on the status of the body are a significant challenge to any constructive attempt to engage with the standing of the self in a theological context. Consequently, I want to insist that, as with desire, the full force and significance of human

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[16] Ibid., 234-263.
[17] Michel Foucault, 'About the beginning of the hermeneutics of the self' *Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault* (ed.) J. Carrette (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 161 n.4.
[18] Ibid., 162.
[19] Ibid.

embodiment has been depreciated in modern theological anthropology as individual identity has been predicated on the internal constitution of the subject in self-consciousness. Christianity, however, has always had a complex relationship with and attitude to the body. While, particularly in late antiquity, the body was seen as problematic, it was nevertheless understood as the vehicle for a new being-in-common that was inscribed with an eschatological anticipation. One example of this transformed understanding of the role and significance of the body is supplied by Peter Brown who suggests that Origen 'was prepared to look at sexuality in the human person as if it were a mere passing phase.'[20] The body, in this context, was a site at which the transformation of the body politic was clearly demonstrated. A concomitant of a future-oriented attitude to sexuality is a transformation in intersubjective practice. This is not simply true of the church of late antiquity but, according to John Zizioulas, remains a major feature of the unique nature and constitution of the *ecclesia*. Zizioulas contends that the body affirms a '*separation* from other unities or "hypostases"'[21] in its natural state and that in the context of redemption 'the constitutional make-up of the hypostasis should be changed' or adapted for a 'new mode of existence.'[22] The suggestion here is that the body is transformed in its inclusion in the body of Christ. However, in the analysis of Zizioulas it is the ontological transformation that is emphasised. He is not concerned to pursue the practical, experiential, and indeed visceral elements of the being-in-common of the church– ecclesial intersubjectivity is engendered through ontological change. Here, for all the importance of an ontology of personhood, I am concerned – after Girard – to explore bodily, desire-led practices that characterise a theological anthropology within the context of late- or post-modernity. The aestheticization of the body,[23] as Agamben avers, is part of a wider cultural shift that requires a theological response that is related to bodily and desire-led practices. While ontology is an important area of enquiry in theological

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[20] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 168.
[21] John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: DLT, 1985),51.
[22] Ibid., 53.
[23] Cf. Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 219-223.

anthropology it tends to maintain the status of the latter as a culturally 'safe' discourse. I wish to suggest that in the face of the aestheticization and commodification of the body, Christian practices must stage - to borrow Jon Savage's phrase - a 'theatre of provocation'.[24] My next task is to expose three such stagings.

7.3: Making Bowels Move

I attended to a bodily understanding of subjectivity in Chapter Two. There I borrowed William Connolly's notion of the 'visceral modes of appraisal'[25] or judgement through which intersubjectivity moves. This provides, I argued, a way of thinking self–other relations beyond the confines of Habermas's communicative reason. In response, through an examination of three biblical passage, I want to consider the shape and pattern of a theological anthropology that attends to the various 'registers' which, as it were, constitute a subject in a Christian environment. Consequently, I will consider the performance of the self in relation to the body and desire in a manner close to the method of the Ignatian exercises that I visited in the last chapter. There the exercitant is 'composed' through the use of the imagination: he or she recrafts themselves in relation to the scriptures.[26] This composition brings together imaginative reflection on the datum of revelation, the cultivation of desire through the desire of divine desire and the living re-enactment of a response to divine self-expression. Furthermore, as I suggested in my engagement with the *Exercises* in the last chapter, a recurring theme of the Ignatian vision is the requirement of embodied struggle against that which dehumanizes. In these three exercises, this existential struggle is a pivotal consideration in both reflection and action.

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[24] Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock* (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), 240.
[25] William E. Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 27.
[26] Ignatius of Loyola, *Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works* (ed.) G.E. Gans (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 136.

The biblical passages I have chosen to stage are, respectively, 1 Kings 3: 16-28, Song of Solomon 5: 2-6: 3 and Luke 15: 11-24.[27]

7.3.1: 'Her Bowels Yearned upon Her Son'

The Judgement of Solomon is a celebrated and much-quoted narrative. The passage concerns two women who come to the King in order that he might arbitrate in a dispute. The discord between the two women centres on the identity of a child. Both women have given birth to sons within the space of three days. The claim of the woman who gave birth first is that her child has been stolen and replaced with the cadaver of the second woman's son who died on the night of his birth. The second woman disputes this account and claims that the baby is rightly hers for she bore him. An argument ensues and each party continues to plead her case. Solomon calls for a sword and suggests that as each woman continues to place a legitimate claim on possession of the baby, the case can only be decided equitably through the allotment of half the baby to each woman. The child's body is to be divided and distributed justly. However, the text tells us that the woman whose son was threatened with dissection acted in a singular, if not peculiar, manner.

> But the woman whose son was alive said to the king - because compassion for her son burned within her - 'Please, my Lord, give her the living boy; certainly do not kill him!' The other said, 'It shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it.' (v. 26, NRSV)

The mother's plea to resolve the conflict is a form of answering that is antithetical to the 'throat-cutting' of the distributive justice proposed by Solomon, a justice that is measured in its coming to decision. Central here is not a reflection on universals, freedom or voluntarism but the integrity of the infant other.

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[27] All biblical references and versions are taken from *Bible Works 4.0* by Hermeneutika.

This integrity, and the concomitant desire to see the child live rather than die. is not situated in the midst of a normative agenda but at a threshold that presents a passage through which justice continuously enters - a dispensation signified as 'because compassion for her son burned within her.' The Hebrew here, *nikmeru rahamay alaw*, rather than simply signifying the presence of strong emotion presents the desire for the child in thoroughly visceral terms: 'her wombs (sic) grew hot on behalf of the child.' The term *nikmeru* suggests that the viscera were burning: the word is also used to describe the heat of an oven.[28] It is, however, the 'wombs' that are of significant interest here. The King James version renders this passage as 'for her bowels yearned upon her son', while the Douai-Reims version suggests 'for her bowels were moved upon her child.' Wombs or bowels, the term *nikmeru rahamay alaw* offers a thoroughly embodied response in which the *viscera* (the term of the Vulgate) are moved beyond the mother and towards the son in an ec-static movement of love. A desire for the child that comes out of the womb is literally (or viscerally) advanced in a movement of the wombs or the bowels, a responsive and responsible action that is a liminal (yet physical) generosity. Justice here is a suspension (dispensation) of statutes, of the Law, and not a distribution (dispensation) of desserts. To be just is to become the gift bodily, a gift engendered by the desire for the other, a desire that is ultimately desirable because divine desire is understood and experienced as gift. This desiring goes beyond the confines of the altercation to the point of its resolution and, in its motion towards the body of the child, becomes a generous composure.

Making bowels move, then, is a technology - to borrow Foucault's term - not of the subject, but of a taking-place of the self because of and through the other. It is a theme, or practice, that is echoed by Agamben. He recounts how

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[28] David Clines, ed. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew Vol. IV* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 429. I am grateful to John Sawyer for assistance with Hebrew and Greek translations and for many helpful conversations on the subject of viscera.

> Towards the end of his life the great Arabist Louis Massignon, who in his youth had daringly converted to Catholicism in the land of Islam, founded a community called Badaliya, a name deriving from the Arabic term for 'substitution'. The members took a vow to live *substituting themselves* for someone else, that is, to be Christians *in the place of others*.[29]

According to Massignon, this 'substitution' is not a means of compensation, an attempt to bring others up to the measure of the righteous, nor is it concerned with correction. On the contrary, it is an ecstatic repositioning of the self by '*exiling oneself to the other as he or she is* in order to offer Christ hospitality in the other's own soul, in the other's own taking-place.'[30] Thus, the space of hospitality which exceeds one's own place is 'an empty space offered to the one irrevocable hospitality.'[31] This exceeding is situated within an economy of desire for the other and of the other.

This excessive and irrevocable hospitality is performed by the child's mother. However, the text of the Judgement of Solomon suggests that all Israel - because of the wisdom of Solomon's judgement - stood in awe and perceived the wisdom of God active in the work of the king. Nevertheless, it is the mother of the child who is famous in a reading of the text as a spiritual exercise. It is not the ruse of distributive justice that ensures the infant's bodily integrity, but the mother's rejection of violence that can only be understood as a visceral form of engagement with her son. The passage prompts an understanding of subjectivity that is right and proper only in that it exceeds the self and encompasses or embraces the taking-place of the other. The bowels or wombs enact a graceful response, a taking the place of the other that occurs in a motion towards and with the other that is engendered by a desire that encompasses both.

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[29] Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 23.
[30] Ibid., 24.
[31] Ibid.

7.3.2: 'My Bowels Yearned for Him'

Such a graceful response is also evident in that beautiful love poem, The Song of Solomon. Chapter 5:2 -6:3 recounts the visit of the lover to his beloved.[32] In short, the male lover comes to the room of the female beloved, knocks at the door and requests entry. She, naked and bathed, resists but, after the incident recounted in verse 4, she yields to her desire. The beloved woman opens the door but her lover has flown and she searches for him even though she forfeits her dignity in the process (v. 7). But she remains 'faint with love' (v. 8) and tells of his beauty and magnificence: 'My beloved is all radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand' (v. 10).

For Bernard of Clairvaux, the status of the naked woman is one of comprehensive sinfulness.[33] Yet, there is, in Bernard's terms, the possibility of redemption from sin in the selflessness of her bearing and behaviour.[34] The 'liquid myrrh' that drips from the woman's hands in response to her lover represents, for Bernard, the status of the Christian as one who bestows his or her very self upon others. The active movement of the myrrh suggests, in short, the

> dew of mercy, overflowing with affectionate kindness, making yourself all things to all men yet pricing your deeds like something discarded in order to be ever and everywhere ready to supply to others what they need, in a word, so dead to yourself that you live only for others - if this be you, then you obviously and happily possess the third and best of all ointments and your hands have dripped with liquid myrrh that is utterly enchanting.[35]

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[32] Francis Landy suggests that the first verse of Chapter 5 is significant in that the male desire for the female lover is consummated in fulfilment. Landy further suggests that there is something deeply egotistic about the course of this journey of enjoying her 'fruits' to the point of satisfaction. Cf. Francis Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983), 107-109.

[33] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs I: The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, Vol. 2 trans. K. Walsh (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1971), Sermon 3: 3, p. 18.

[34] Ibid., Sermon 10: 6, p. 64.

[35] Ibid., Sermon 12: 1, p. 78.

There is a disinterestedness in her giving that Bernard sees as an exemplary form of Christian giving. However, it is interesting that Bernard ignores the male lover's role in this affair *and* the woman's response that is exposed with reference to the movement of her bowels. This part of the text is a central, visceral moment that give weight and significance to the form of erotic giving. Verse 4 reads

> My beloved put his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him. (KJV)

The first part of the verse is particularly obscure. Is the passage referring to a response of the woman that is stimulated by the sight of the man? The answer is yes, but Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubi suggest that what is seen is not simply the hand. They suggest that in ancient Near Eastern literature and hieroglyphics, the hand is synonymous with the erect penis and that the interchangeability of the hand and penis is related to the active, fecund role of both of these bodily parts.[36] While they speculate on exactly what the text might be referring to – is it masturbation? – the point is that the scene is highly erotic. One lover moves forth towards the other on the basis of a visceral response ('my bowels were moved') and this desire for the other is a pivotal feature in the composition of a loving subject who exceeds herself.

The erotic economy that is examined here runs counter to suggestions that love in relation to the divine is agapeic rather than erotic.[37] The erotic leads human beings beyond themselves and before others. In the sexually-obsessed contemporary west, eros is trapped within an understanding of instant satisfaction that is narcissistic in character.[38] The Song of

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[36] Silvia Schroer & Thomas Staubli, *Die Körpersymbolik der Bible* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 1998), 187-188.

[37] The most famous example being Anders Nygren's analysis. Cf. His *Agape and Eros* trans. P.S. Watson (London: SPCK, 1953), esp., 52 where Nygren suggests, after distinguishing a selfless Christian love (agape) with Greek eros, that 'There is no way which leads over from *eros* to *agape*.'

[38] Cf. Mark Vernon's discussion of Foucault's insistence that what we need is not to be liberated sexually but to be liberated from the hegemony of 'sex'. Mark Vernon, '"I am not what I am" – Foucault, Christian Asceticism and a "way out" of Sexuality' *Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault* (ed.) J. Carrette (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), esp. 199-200.

Solomon presents a wholly different performance of the erotic that takes one out of the self-indulgence of, and fixation with, 'sexual satisfaction' and 'techniques' designed to attain the maximum pleasure for *oneself* to a bodily practice of love. In this love poem, eros leads one into a quest or journey of discovery in which love is the primary factor. The desire that is fuelled by the desire of the other entices lovers into a bodily identity – an 'I' - that is predicated on the other and results in one 'dripping with myrrh' - an identity that is given for and because of the other. Nevertheless, the text does not reject the bodily, and gloriously instinctual - some would say animalistic[39] - form of eros that is an intrinsic element in the composition and performance of love. The relationship between the lovers is full-blooded, to say the least.

Taking Ignatius as a guide, the bodily response in the verse 4 can be contrasted with the woman's humiliation in verse 7 where she is beaten, and wounded. As with Jean Améry's understanding of his experience of torture, the bodily abuse of the other results in the 'dissolution of the world' or even, the 'de-creation of the created world.'[40] The composure of a self who responds erotically to the desire of the other is also the *creation* of a way of life that counters and questions dehumanizing practice in the performance of a grace-ful love. The body can, potentially, be absolutely separated or utterly dissolved in violence but the erotic comportment exposes the body of the other and desires its embrace, not its complete decomposition or its unqualified detachment.

7.3.3: 'All His Bowels Move'

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[39] I am alluding here to Gerard Loughlin's discussion of Balthasarian erotics. Cf. his 'Erotics: God's Sex' *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (eds) J. Milbank, C. Pickstock & G. Ward (London: Routledge, 1999), 147-148.

[40] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 45.

The final of my three exercises is performed in dialogue with the desire of the father in Luke 15: 11-24. There is no need to recount the story but, for the purpose of this reading, the significant action is the son's return to the father after the former's self-imposed exile. The text suggests that the son makes his return to his Father's house in the hope that he will be accepted back as a hired hand (v. 17). 'So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him' (v. 20. NRSV). The father's response, *esplanchnisthé*, suggests a form of pity that is severe in its connection to the movement of the guts.[41] Again, the viscera is a central motif (confirmed by the Vulgate). The father is viscerally moved in response to the return of his son. His inner and outer movement is as if it is one as this gut-wrenching experience that exceeds the father is at the same time a motion towards the child: 'he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.'

The theme of the embodied, visceral performance is echoed in *The Scottish Psalter's* paraphrase of the story of the Prodigal Son. The father's ecstatic corporeality is characterised as a being-in-common that is rendered thus:

> The father sees him from afar
>
> and all his bowels move.[42]

The passage places hospitality, the provision of a space that is contrived by means of a bodily movement, at the centre of Christian practice. And participation in a Christian life concerns the formation or composition of certain instincts that require constant rehearsal and cultivation in order that they can accord with the hermeneutic of the gift that distinguishes intersubjectivity in this context. If 'making bowels move' is a technology that is appropriate

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[41] Cf. H.G. Liddel & R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* 7th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1883), 1416.
[42] Church of Scotland, *The Scottish Psalter and Scripture Paraphrases* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), 217.

to the delineation of a theological anthropology then this hermeneutic is predicated on the father's desire to move out towards and embrace the child. A transformation of the self is performed in the movement that leads to the embrace with the other.

Conclusion: The Composition of Hospitality

Each of these three exercises in reading and performing scripture suggest that Christian existence requires a particular composition that is antithetical to the inherent guilt of capitalism that I outlined in Chapter One, in my criticisms of deconstruction's negative anthropology. In contrast to a resituation of the self that is predicated on the non-experience of death, these exercises reconfigure the subject on the basis of a hermeneutic of gift that is enacted. This (re)composition of the self is an on-going process that requires both hard work and an openness to risk and provisionality - a point that I pursued in the last chapter with regard to Levinas's reading of Genesis 18. Here I want to emphasise a notion of subjectivity that takes place beyond one's own place in that a hospitable space is opened up by the desire of and for the other. Its reference point is generally called the Kingdom of God but this space is, to borrow Agamben's characterisation of the purpose of Badaliya, 'an empty space, offered to the one irrevocable hospitality.'[43] And the other name for this space is 'ease'.

> The term 'ease' designates, according to its etymology, the space adjacent (*ad-jacens*, *adjacentia*), the empty place where each can move freely, in a semantic constellation where spatial proximity borders on opportune time (*ad-agio*, moving at ease) and convenience borders on the correct relation.[44]

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[43] Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 24.
[44] Ibid., 25.

This place of ease or love cannot be either delimited or formalised. There is no measure to its temporality or its spatiality. It can, however, be practised and the ease with which the protagonists of the three passages above move their whole being to and for the other provides one visceral technique, marked by the movement of the bowels, that is wholly appropriate to the immeasurable. Their desire moves them compassionately and physically beyond both petty preoccupations and rivalry towards the possibility of enacting a wholly different 'interdividual' subjectivity.

This theme of irrevocable hospitality and external desire is echoed by Girard in his discussion of the status of the Kingdom. He suggests that the Kingdom is a place of love that is characterised by the elimination of violence. Violence is a 'closed kingdom' in which the other is a threat.[45] There is no taking the place of the other except through the dissolution of the other. For this reason, Girard suggests that 'the real human subject can only come out of the rule of the Kingdom.'[46] Only in relation to the enactment of the unrepresentable, of that which is 'without price',[47] can subjectivity be realised. This space in which subjectivity is at 'ease', however, is not a utopia but the that which gives birth to a desire which takes subjects beyond themselves because it constitutes their very being. And it is on the basis of this desire that one can begin to speak of a theological anthropology.

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[45] R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* in collaboration with J-M Oughourlian and G. Lefort (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 197.
[46] Ibid., 199.
[47] Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The Insufficiency of 'Values' and the Necessity of 'Sense'' *Cultural Values* 1:1 (1997), 128.

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