Mimesis and Desire

An Analysis of the Religious Nature of Mimesis and Desire in the Work of René Girard

By Per Bjørnar Grande
Høgskolen i Bergen
(Bergen University College)

CONTENTS

Part 3. Mimesis in Religious Thought. Comparing Mimetic Theory with other Religious Theories in the 20th Century

Part 4. Girard's Christology

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Professor Emeritus René Girard for including me with such ease in the Colloquium of Violence & Religion group at Stanford University when, in 2001, I received a three-month scholarship from the American-Scandinavian Foundation. Thanks too to Martha Girard for letting us stay at their home in Stanford. Thanks also to Professor Karstein Hopland who encouraged me to delete the less relevant chapters, delve more deeply and critically into the texts, and see both the religious and theological nature of Girard's work. I would like to express my gratitude to the Andrew E. and G. Norman Wigeland Scholarship offered by the American-Scandinavian Foundation, for sponsoring me during my three months of supervised research at Stanford, and to Ursula Phillips (London) for helping me to improve my English style. Finally, thanks to Anna Emilie Grande to whom I dedicate this work.

Foreword

Mimesis seen from a Girardian point of view is the force governing all human relationships and cultural life. The hypothesis that people are mimetic had been scarcely elaborated before Girard's theory had been worked out (and it is still in the process of being worked out). And Girard's main hypothesis: *culture is formed by mimetic desire and thereby transformed into scapegoating*, indicates a new theory on cultural origins and development. Before Girard's work, neither mimetic desire nor the scapegoat mechanism had been given any central position in explaining the principles governing people and culture.

The importance of mimesis as a generative concept makes it worthwhile to attempt to give a systematic analysis of mimetic desire in itself and of mimetic desire as closely discussed in relation to mimetically oriented thinkers of the past and of the present day. Cultural phenomena seems to have been limited by rather static interpretations, not least religious phenomena would seem to have been limited by non-mimetic, idea-oriented interpretations. Some of these phenomena could be given a somewhat different validity when seen from a mimetic point of view.

Most religious scholars and theologians who are preoccupied with, or who have commented at least on Girardian theory, focus their attention on scapegoating. Their interest in mimetic desire may be strong, but there seem to be some difficulty as how to reflect mimetic desire into the tradition of the science of religion with the same ease as the victimage mechanism. Mimetic desire, although highly interdisciplinary, is usually considered to be an aesthetical conception, a concept exclusively developed from literary analysis. The emphasis on mimesis in literature has caused certain misunderstandings regarding to Girardian mimesis. Mimetic desire is *not* something exclusively found in particular novels. The fact that certain novelists have been able to reveal mimetic desire, does not mean that mimetic desire is in any way confined to literature. Mimetic desire is, according to the theory, *the* basic drive in humans, and therefore a phenomenon present in all aspects of society. From my understanding of mimetic theory mimesis would appear to be the fundamental factor in understanding religion. The scapegoat mechanism must clearly be an effect of mimetic desire, making mimesis the primary factor engendering scapegoating. Therefore, in my view mimesis is the most

fundamental factor, not only because it precedes victimizing, but also because it can, from a certain perspective, also engender all kinds of religious phenomena.

I have primarily chosen to relate mimetic desire to different religious themes. One reason for choosing to work on Girardian mimesis is that there has been less research done on the relationship between mimesis and religion than on religion and victimizing. Another reason for choosing to work on mimesis is that because, as the most fundamental and important principle in Girardian theory, it influences, even governs all the other themes worked on. Mimetic desire is therefore the most generative concept by which to understand and discuss Girard's religious themes.

Thinking religion as a part of mimetic desire means thinking religion primarily as a force exerting an influence in society. And it is my view that religious thought devoid of mimesis may mean missing out on certain generative aspects of religion and, simultaneously, convey the somewhat exotic feeling of something vaguely distant, important perhaps for understanding people in the past or from more primitive backgrounds, but not something that really grasps the structures of daily existence.[1] Rituals, myths, sacrifice, evil, apocalypse, which are typical religious motifs, have often been seen as metaphysical concepts and autonomous ideas, devoid of any mimetic structure. These highly essential phenomena should be seen as being linked to one another, as well as to other less central religious phenomena. Mimetic desire could be interpreted as one way of mediating such phenomena. In the field of theology there seems to be a similar problem with regard to introducing mimesis. The study of rites, myth, sacrifice, sin, evil, good, God, Christ and the Paraclete are usually regarded, if imitative at all, then imitative in a Platonic way, and therefore presented as representations. But rites, myths, sin, evil and other theological motifs, might turn out to be more concrete and relevant if related to desire and acquisition. Theology has often shown great respect for philology and philosophy, but has somewhat disregarded anthropology and psychology, thereby, at times, giving the student, if he or she comes from a Christian environment, a familiar feeling of 'monologues in heaven' or, if he or she comes from a more secular background, a rather distant feeling of ‘monologues in heaven.’ This, however, does not mean that mimesis will necessarily bridge the gap between religious studies and secular culture – although I think it could have beneficial effects, perhaps even reinvigorating the study of

[1] This feeling is not necessarily the fault of religious studies. It can also be the result of structures, trends and values

religion and theology by integrating the cultural context into a more religious mode of thinking, and vice versa. If the science of religion and theology have a communication problem, mimetic desire could perhaps function as a kind of bridge in mediating religious phenomena as anthropologically relevant.

In the second part of my book (Part 2) I wish to discuss mimetic desire in relation to two main mimetic forms: mimesis as acquisition and mimesis as representation. This discussion is highly important for understanding the nature of mimetic desire and also for determining to which kind of tradition Girardian mimesis belongs. When I deal with philosophical and literary texts, religious motifs are accentuated, though, not so much as ideas, but more as expressions of mimetic desire. Also my attempt in Part 2 to understand desire is vital on order to comprehend the special nature of mimesis. Desire in Girardian theory produces a somewhat different understanding of desire than what is usual among most modern scholars. I will discuss this below.[2]

Scholarly work on mimesis, however, is not new. A great deal of work, especially in the field of literary criticism, has been directed towards mimesis. This kind of mimesis is mostly seen as representational mimesis. Girard uses mimesis differently. He does not dismiss mimesis as representation, but he emphasizes two distinct traits in his own understanding of mimesis: firstly, mimesis as *desire*, [3] and secondly, mimesis as *acquisition*.[4] Girardian mimesis, however, also departs from the classic understanding of mimesis by using it in a generative manner, as a motivational desire.[5] Instead of showing how fiction is a representation of reality (like Auerbach), Girard seems to want to show that texts of fiction have been essential to the

---

in our society, that encourage a somewhat indifferent attitude towards imitation, often taking it for granted.

[2] In my attempt to compare mimetic desire with mimetically oriented thinkers of the past, Plato and Aristotle are important because they were some of the first writers ever to comment on mimesis. Hegel is also central as he is one of the first philosophers to discuss desire in human relationship. Also Hegel has a way of thinking history and religion in history which provides helpful background to understanding mimetic theory. Derrida becomes important, both in the way he sees the deconstructive force of mimesis and in the (different) way he attempts to deconstruct mimesis. The thinkers presented tend to view mimesis mostly as representation. De Rougemont, however, is different. My reason for discussing his book, *Love in the Western World*, is that Girard's initial work is very close to De Rougemont's understanding of erotic love as a negative desire, a desire for death. De Rougemont's analysis of the hero's desire for hindrance corresponds very much with metaphysical desire. *Love in the Western World* seems to have inspired, even sparked off some of Girard's insights into mimesis. In other words, I have tried to identify and present Girard's imitation of De Rougemont's work on the decay of Western love.

[3] *Things Hidden*, 283-298.

[4] Ibid., 7-10, 26-27.

[5] Concepts such as desire and repetition are so closely linked to mimesis that they are, in my view, only different configurations of mimesis.

discovery of a desire which is mimetic, interdividual, acquisitive and violent.[6] Erich Auerbach's work on mimesis[7] can, superficially, be seen as a starting point with which to compare Girardian mimesis. Both begin by locating mimesis in literary works, and both identify changes in society via literary analysis. But, when considered against a background of understanding mimesis and desire, Auerbach's work appears limited as it focuses mostly on literary style. It seems as though mimesis is formed by literary style and not vice versa. The scholarly work of Gebauer and Wulf (*Mimesis. Culture, art, society)*, however, clearly interprets mimesis as desire. Gebauer and Wulf aim to give a general historical and chronological presentation of mimesis. Gebauer and Wulf locate mimesis in different writings and social systems, focusing on the immediate, symbolic, irrational, violent and world-building nature of mimesis.[8] Methodologically, their starting point is a combination of Mary Douglas' theory on *social pressure* and Nelson Goodman's theory on *worldmaking*.[9] Girardian mimesis, however, is clearly an important part of their concept of mimesis.[10] But their emphasis is not strong in relation to mimesis and religious life. Also their understanding of Girardian mimesis is somewhat limited in that they seem to regard mimesis as something one can adopt and which differs from the original.[11]

Mimesis is the central theme in this book in that all other themes are analysed in the light of mimesis. I have chosen to work with what I consider to be Girard's most fundamental concept. This, however, does not mean that I am attempting to analyse all the different phenomena which relate to mimesis.[12] My attempt is primarily to analyse the concept of mimetic desire, and understand its relevance, mainly in relation to religious phenomena. However, mimetic desire is a concept which, if it is to be given fundamental importance, needs to be seen in relation to how other scholars use and understand such concepts as

---

[6] But these texts are, despite their fictional character, anything but fictional in the way they explain the different driving forces of human existence. Not only works of fiction, however, but religious texts are crucial, both in order to understand how cultures are regulated by sacrifice, and how they are morally changed by the forces of mimetic desire. These texts, however, are not only texts representing reality, they are also *texts driven by mimesis*. In this respect religious and literary texts both present mimesis and, at the same time, are represented by mimesis. This makes mimesis in writing a complex phenomenon, as there is no straight forward representation, but a representation of events which are intricately interwoven, not only in themselves but also from the point of view from which they are written, with different mimetic impulses.

[7] Erich Auerbach. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Lit*erature (New Jersey: Princeton U..P., 1974.)

[8] Gebauer & Wulf. *Mimesis. Culture-Art-Society* (California: University of California Press, 1995), 315-320.

[9] Ibid., 15-21.

[10] Gebauer and Wulf, in their historical analysis of mimesis, endow Girard's work with three chapters. See Gebauer & Wulf *Mimesis,* Chapter 18, 19, 20.

[11] Ibid., 245.

[12] Such a central, fleeting and contagious concept as mimesis implies many different expressions, influencing many phenomena, many more than Girard himself has written about.

mimesis and desire. An attempt to compare Girardian mimesis with other thinkers' use of mimesis, does not only shed light on Girard's position, it is also an attempt to understand different expressions of mimesis and desire.

My approach when analysing Girardian mimesis is somewhat phenomenological in that I try to describe a variety of phenomena engendered by mimetic desire. 'Phenomenological' is understood here a part of a philosophy of religion, in that I investigate the logical and epistemological content of mimetic desire. The phenomenological approach is visible when I discuss important terms, systematize different views and assess the validity of Girard's various arguments[13] in an attempt to describe them devoid of prejudice and unnecessary presuppositions.[14] An advantage of such an phenomenological approach, in relation to mimetic theory, is that it is focused exclusively on essential relations and structure*s*, and not on particular facts or events as such. Nor is it focused on factual accounts of origins.[15] In this respect, a phenomenological approach facilitates a presentation and discussion of the interdividual and structural nature of desire. Also the act of acquiring phenomena in *intentional acts* corresponds to the *acquisitive* way in which mimesis operates. However, Husserl's scientific ideal seems so divorced from social reality[16] that its method needs to be supplemented. Especially in the context of interpreting mimetic theory, phenomenology lacks a centre and a relational system.

Husserl's understanding of the psychic structures in humans, the access to immanent experiences,[17] would, from a Girardian point of view, be seen as resulting from mimetic desire. Both Husserl and Girard see motivation as taking place in the mind and are somewhat reluctant to explain motivation and desire biologically. This corresponds with the way I understand mimetic desire.

My book does not deal with comparative religion or with the treatment of religious themes between different religions. It does, however, compare the thought of religious thinkers. To be able to relate mimetic theory to other kinds of religious theory, I will try, after analysing

[13] Antonio Barbosa da Silva. *Can Religions be Compared?* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 1986), 7-8.
[14] M. Farber. *The Aims of Phenomenology: The Motives, Methods, and Impact of Husserl's Thought* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1966), 37.
[15] Ibid., 13.
[16] Gavin Flood. *Beyond Phenomenology. Rethinking the Study of Religion* (London and New York: Cassell, 1999), 30.
[17] Roman Ingarden. *Innføring i Edmund Husserls fenomenologi* (Oslo: Tanum, 1970), 90-96.

certain aspects of mimesis and desire, to discuss mimetic theory as a religious theory within the tradition of thinkers closely associated with the science of religion (see Part 3). There have been very few attempts to place and compare Girard's religious thinking within the context of the science of religion as such. And perhaps it is here that he primarily belongs - more than in anthropology, psychology or theology, especially if the science of religion were to be more open towards theological perspectives.[18]

In Part 3 my aim is primarily to compare some of Girard's religious themes, mainly mimetic, to certain crucial motifs in the work of Otto, Durkheim, Eliade, Berger and Bultmann, as they are close, in some ways, to Girard's overall project (solving the riddle of religion). At the same time they are all highly representative of the mode of religious thinking in the 20th century. They also represent, more or less, a synthesizing and universalizing manner of thought. [19] This makes it possible to compare their projects *in toto*, not as to whether their theories are true or represent ultimate truth, but as to how their theories deal with mimesis and desire and thereby throw light on mimetic theory. Both Otto and Bultmann, alongside their theological approaches, have roots in the German *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*. In this respect they, like Girard, operate from within a context of religious studies, although one can hardly say that any of them, and least of all Bultmann, restricts themselves, from a phenomenological point of view, to keeping within the boundaries of the science of religion. But as Flood emphasizes in *Beyond Phenomenology*, both theology and the science of religion are kinds of writing *about* religion,[20] and one should take into consideration, before dismissing a *dialectical approach* to religion and theology, that the science of religion has

[18] According to Gavin Flood, the religionist, who makes the believer's point of view paramount, holds a theological position. (Flood. *Beyond Phenomenology*, 69.) This surely indicates that most scholars of religion, especially those influenced by the phenomenology of religion, write in a theological manner.

[19] I have chosen not to attempt to make an extensive comparison between Girard and Freud, despite claiming Freud as one, if not *the* one, most important thinker for Girard. Without Freud's theory, with its highly original focus on desire, there would perhaps have been too many formal obstacles within the humanistic field to developing a theory such as mimetic desire. Girard should acknowledge that he, if not in content, then in approach, stands on Freud's shoulders. And in relation to religion, Freud clearly represents a challenge to Girardian theory. Raymund Schwager has perhaps done most work on showing Freud's relevance to Girardian theory. (See Schwager. *Must there be Scapegoats?*, N.Y./Herefordshire: The Crossroad P.C./Gracewing, 1-42.) There was, however, in connection to the Innsbruck Conference on Passions (June 2003), a certain focus on mimetic theory in relation to psychoanalytic theory. At this conference Werner W. Ernst's article 'Theory of Drives and Mimesis: Controversial Positions between Freud and Girard' questioned Girard's dismissal of instincts and inherent drives. Ernst also attempts to separate desire from mimesis. Eberhart Th. Haas's article 'Freud and/or Girard? Psychoanalysis and Christianity,' entailed a positive and harmonious psychoanalytic interpretation of certain Christian themes. (See internet-address: theol.uibk.ac.at.cover/.) I do hope, one day, someone will do extensive work on mimetic theory in relation to psychoanalytic theory. All the same, Freud's religious views (with the exception of the hypothesis of a founding murder, the superego, and his anthropology based on people's lack of free will) represent, in my opinion, some of the weaker parts of his work.

[20] Flood. *Beyond Phenomenology*, 19.

drawn heavily on Protestant theology, in that Otto has been the starting point for so much of the phenomenology of religion.[21] It is therefore a certain paradox in the fact that religious scholars deeply embedded in phenomenology, define themselves at the same time so negatively in relation to theology. On the other hand, post-modern theology tends to be marked by a certain disregard towards secular rationality, even attempting to place theology outside a general, cultural frame. In my view the dialectics between the science of religion and theology can have a meeting ground based on a phenomenology of society. A phenomenological approach today, however, would necessarily mean expanding its boundaries to include social and historical perspectives. In this respect, phenomenology today can hardly function in an invigorating way if the sociological and hermeneutical perspectives are not included.

The attempt to discuss the theme of mimetic desire in relation to the religious thinkers mentioned above is basically an attempt to see how mimesis is treated in their works. But I also discuss their different theological positions in relation to Girardian theory. Bultmann, by the way, is also included because of the relatively unfair treatment Girard has given him. He needs, in my view, to be restored - within a Girardian context.

My overall aim is to show that Girard's theory is primarily a religious theory based on a mimetic understanding of life. The fundamental core of Girard's religious views is found in a mimetically based christology. In this respect I wish to approach mimetic desire from different angles in an attempt to clarify the theory's uniqueness and interdependence. I would like to think that in so doing the concept mimesis has become clearer in its own right and that I have also, by discussing so many expressions of mimetic desire, revealed the relevance of the concept. I also hope that my analyses will show how mimetic desire engenders different religious phenomena. This analysis of mimetic desire also means criticizing Girard's treatment of mimesis. If mimesis always leads to victimizing, then the theory becomes much too narrow and restricted. As already suggested, I should like mimetic desire to be placed more at the forefront of his theory, sometimes even at the expense of the victimage mechanism, as I think that mimetic desire is more basic and fundamental, and, when given primacy, would make the theory much more flexible and wide-ranging.[22]

[21] Ibid., 18.
[22] The danger of this attempt, however, is that the theory could become too loose and general.

Instead of merely postulating a christology from the anthropological findings in mimetic theory, it seems fruitful to view mimetic theory as essentially founded on religious belief. Therefore, I will interpret Girard's anthropology from a religious perspective. This is, I suspect, a more authentic way of understanding mimetic theory than trying, as is usual, to go from anthropology to religion, and then find the answers to these quests in Christianity. Turning Girard's approach around seems to be a necessary undertaking because of the religious ideas and motifs that come to the fore. I also suspect that the method of going from anthropology to christology is a cunning attempt to make the theory more acceptable to the (unconscious) despisers of religion. But in doing this, the whole hypothesis of a religious origin seems to have been postponed to a later stage, thus making mimesis and desire appear as secular phenomena. Therefore, my interpretation is based on seeing both mimesis and desire in a religious context, in order to understand the anthropology in mimetic theory. Thus mimetic desire can be seen as something worked out from christological reflection and driven by Christian belief and ending up with what one might call a Christian anthropology.

Although mimetic theory puts a great deal of emphasis on sacrifice, a more differentiated mimetically minded interpretation could broaden the cultural scope of the theory. Firstly, the idea of sacrifice has basically been deconstructed. It no longer holds the same absolute grip on our society. Secondly, it seems to be more appropriate to put the mimetic dimension, especially in the religious area, more to the fore, as mimesis is more common and generative, and less limited to a specific time and a specific situation in history. If the sacrificial attitude is more or less abolished in the Western interpretation of Christianity, the imitative dimension seems to take precedence and one can identify a development from sacrifice to imitation.

Thus Girard's christology or christological reflections may be used, in so far as I can figure out, as basic background for interpreting mimetic theory. Mimetic desire can therefore be seen as something worked out from a Christian anthropology. My aim, in contrast to the tendency to focus on Girard's theory as a general anthropology (which it could possibly be seen to be if the religious elements were censored) is to interpret mimetic theory as basically worked out from christological reflections and driven by Christian belief. This, however, is intended less in a missionary vein than the reader might suspect. My basic assumption here is that our

culture is so totally engrossed in Christian orthodox and heterodox motifs that it is impossible to separate Christian culture from a general culture. Also, Girard has been writing, from the late 1950s, from the perspective of a born again Catholic.[23] There is nothing, in my eyes, which makes his theory less scientific if these presuppositions are brought out.

From the perspective of 'where I stand,' I should say that I have always felt more comfortable with Girard's mimetic theory than with his scapegoat theory. Although I see his theory on the victimage mechanism as brilliant and highly relevant,[24] it has never attracted me to the same degree. I do, however, think the scapegoat theory has a certain universal relevance, but I do not think that it is so common in everyday life as Girard postulates it to be. There are, in my view, many, many examples of mimetic interaction which do not lead to scapegoating. As I discussed above, I assume Girard's christology to be the basis or axiom for mimetic theory. Such a hypothesis indicates that mimetic theory is a religious theory centred round a non-sacrificial interpretation of the Passion.

[23] See Girard. *Quand ces choses commenceront…,* Entretiens avec Michel Treguer (Paris: arlèa, 1994), 190-199.
[24] Anyone who has put his nose inside a classroom or an office cannot be ignorant of how extremely near at hand the scapegoat mechanism can be. But there are, in contrast, families and larger unites that live together relatively free of scapegoating one another.

Part 1

Introduction

Chapter 1. Mimetic Binds and Scapegoat Mechanisms. Introducing Mimetic Theory

The French-American literary critic, religious scholar, anthropologist and philosopher René Girard (b.1923) is known today as one of the most influential and controversial contemporary thinkers. During the course of forty-five years Girard has developed an interdisciplinary cultural theory based on research in the field of literary theory, anthropology, the science of religion, philosophy, psychology and theology. [25]

Girard's system is extremely ambitious as he tries to re-think the founding principles of human culture from basically two structures: *mimetic desire* and *the scapegoat mechanism*. According to Girard himself, his system has been developed at a most inconvenient time.[26] The great systems, which flourished in the 19th century, appear to have vanished with Freud. Today there is an immense scepticism surrounding this kind of thought.

Girard's system is a scientific hypothesis. On a par with Darwin's hypothesis of evolution Girard's aim is to provide a coherent theory on cultural origin and development. He does not claim to have found the only truth concerning human development, but he postulates a hypothesis, capable of integrating a number of facts that make historical phenomena plausible.

In 1961 Girard published his first book *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (*Deceit, Desire and the Novel*). [27] It was an analysis of *desire* in the novels of mainly Cervantes,

[25] See Per Bjørnar Grande. 'Syndebukkmekanismer og mimetiske bindinger – en presentasjon av René Girards teori,' Kirke og Kultur 5 (1991): 451-456.
[26] 'Saddam Hussein er både en forbryder – og en syndebuk.' Interview with Girard in the Danish newspaper Information, March 15 (1988).
[27] *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins U.P.,

Stendhal, Flaubert, Proust and Dostoevsky. Even if the word mimesis was not yet in use, the starting point of Girardian theory was a reflection on *imitative desire*. In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel,* the basic understanding of desire is a desire *according to the other*. The most common denominator in the European novelistic tradition is, according to Girard, the revelation of *metaphysical desire*. Metaphysical desire is contrasted with spontaneous desire and comes about when the hero desires an object via a *mediator*.

The mediator plays a central role in Girardian thinking. If desire were not afflicted by a mediator there could be some possibility of desiring freely. But so long as there is a mediator present, there cannot be any linear desire. The mediator can receive and hinder desire. He/She transforms desires into secondary and rivalistic desires. The desire between subject, object and mediator is labeled *triangular desire*.

In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* Girard concludes that there is no such thing as autonomous or spontaneous desire. All desires are interdependent and mediated. The nearest you can come to a free, spontaneous desire is through religious conversion, through imitating Christ. This freedom and spontaneity, however, is mediated.

The consequences of desiring through a mediator leads to rivalry materialized as jealousy, hatred and envy. The fact that desires are not original but mediated, creating secondary desires, means that desires have become *metaphysical*. During the time-span from Cervantes to Dostoevsky and to modern-day mentality, the complexity and intensity of metaphysical desire has been enhanced. Don Quixote's external mediation is neither hidden nor very complex. He proclaims to the whole world that his mediator is the knight Amadis de Gaul. According to Girard the society surrounding Don Quixote is rather healthy as regards metaphysical desire. People clearly see the madness in Don Quixote's imitation. But since the 17th century the effects of metaphysical desire have become more contagious, which has led in turn to an intensifying of desire in order to hide the role of one's mediator. Stendhal is important in this context because of the way in which he reveals an intensifying and hidden way of desiring. In *The Red and the Black* Stendhal describes the mimetic game of hiding desire in order to provoke desire. Thus the act of imitation has become much more hidden

---

1966.).

than in the days of Don Quixote. Julien Sorel, the hero in *The Red and the Black*, punishes himself (by putting his arm in a sling) for revealing his imitation of Napoleon.

Girard claims, from his reading of selected classics, that over the centuries there has been a development from *external* to *internal* mediation, from an external imitation of for example saints and knights to a more internal imitation of the ordinary person in the street. Thus the effect of metaphysical desire becomes graver, more intense and more hidden.

> *In our days its nature is hard to perceive because the most fervent imitation is the most vigorously denied. (Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, 15.)*

People wish to live with the illusion of spontaneous desire and believe that they do. It is this illusion concerning one's autonomy, which, according to Girard, some novelists have been able to reveal. The difference between the romantic novelist and the romanesque or realist novelist is based upon their different approaches towards the mediator.[28] The romantic writer will show and propagate the mediator's presence, often as a rival. But he will not reveal the mediator's role in mediating desire. The romantic writer believes in the autonomy of the characters and, according to Girard, is himself governed by a desire for autonomy. The romantic lie consists in seeing desire as spontaneous and linear. The realist novelist both presents and reveals the role of the mediator. The mediator is revealed as the decisive factor in the protagonist's desire. The realist novelist is, according to Girard, the most trustworthy explorer of desire, a desire which Girard labels *desire according to the other*.

Through a reading of certain selected novels Girard discovered that desire is neither primarily based on the subject or on the object. If desire were something inherent in the subject, it would be possible to attain autonomy. Then desire could be something original and individual.[29] If desire were based on the object, desire would be based on a spontaneous attraction towards different objects, such as money, houses, cars etc. Contrary to these views Girard claims that desire is not spontaneous, individual or primarily provoked by objects, but that desires are mediated through what other people desire. There is no such thing as original desire, only mediated desire.

[28] The difference between romantic and realist literature is not a difference according to epoch. The difference is based on an approach towards desire. There is, however, in Girard's work, a preference for novels written in the realist tradition.

In the depiction of the psychology of mimetic desire, Girard's reading of Proust has been of great importance. In *In Search of Lost Time,* Parisian society, not only the upper classes (the Faubourg Saint-Germain), but all layers of society are revealed as being ridden with metaphysical desire. Proust's insights into his characters reveal different forms of hidden imitation. Especially among the aristocracy and the literary salons, the secrecy, the snobbism, the role-playing leads to a subtle but brutal hindering of desire. The genius of Proust, according to Girard, is how he reveals the different layers of desire as a hidden desire towards the other. Desire for the other is sublimated into arrogance, snobbism, of a coquettish worship of art and artists.[30] Everyone is frantically trying to convince the others of their autonomy. Proust, instead of writing in the vein of contemporary thought, reveals the illusion of autonomous desires and brings in the captivating effect of the mediator, the other. According to Girard this process of hiding the role of one's mediator is the process of turning men into Gods in the eyes of each other.[31] Seeing the other as godlike is only possible through the process of metaphysical desire.

Already in this first major work Girard presents himself as a Christian thinker. Metaphysical desire is the consequence of our having pulled the gods down from heaven, making the sacred flow over the earth.[32] Simultaneously with the secularization process there is the process of anthropological resacralisation, of being possessed by the mediator and divinising him. Girard concludes this tour de force of desire by seeing metaphysical desire as a consequence of having lost or having resigned from transcendental faith, while true freedom lies in choosing the divine model.[33]

Girard's work can, at first glance, seem rather independent of contemporary theory. But one must remember that desire was a theme very much à la mode in post-war France. The starting point of metaphysical desire is the discovery of human weakness. The concept of internal weakness seems initially to be tinged by existentialistic thought, but actually the process is understood differently since the emphasis is on *the other*. This inner weakness can very easily lead to different kinds of possessive reaction towards one's mediator. The mediator becomes both model and hinderer. What often happens is that the model will begin to desire, especially

---

[29] See Jørgen Jørgensen. "På sporet av den tabte oprindelse," Paradigma 4 (1990): 44-45.
[30] See especially chapter IX (The worlds of Proust) in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*.
[31] Ibid., Chapter II.
[32] Ibid., 62.
[33] Ibid., 58.

in the long term, what the subject itself desires. And inevitably the mediator will transfer his desires, from the object to the subject. This model, where both the subject and the mediator desire each other's desires is called *double mediation*. This intensifies the rivalry. In the process they become more and more alike, while they frantically profess their difference. (Metaphysical desire makes people profess their uniqueness, their difference, while the opposite is actually the case.) According to Girard, Dostoevsky, especially in *The Eternal Husband*, reveals the mechanism of double mediation.[34] In the process of desiring intensely the desire is transformed, often to such a radical degree that one loses sight of the original object. In the end all desires point towards the mediator.

In the same way as Proust, Dostoevsky places the mediator in the foreground and relegates the object to the background.[35] According to Girard, Dostoevsky pushes the disastrous effects of the mediator to an apocalyptic level. Dostoevsky is the author who goes furthest in revealing the ontological sickness of metaphysical desire. By endowing his characters with the most intense desires and lumping them together in the most unfavourable conditions, he is able to reveal the culminating effects of metaphysical desire (murder, madness and suicide). By showing the ultimate consequences of metaphysical desire, Dostoevsky is able to invert the scene in a convincing manner, by introducing the divine alternative, the Christian model, the imitation of Christ. The insight that, whilst one is possessed by the other, there is no true religious life, only the act of becoming one another's gods and rivals, seems to stem primarily from Girard's reading of *The Possessed*.[36]

Before presenting the next stage in Girardian theory (the scapegoat mechanism) I will try to give a short summary of mimetic desire in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*. Mimetic desire is, as I have mentioned, not a term used in this book. But all the ingredients, the basic psychology based on the concept of the other, is already present. Mimesis in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* is based upon a desire according to the other. There is no hint of any biologically preconceived mimesis. Instincts tend to limit the desire for acquisition, for example among animals. Among humans there are no such instinctual dominance patterns that prevent acquisitive mimesis.[37] Girard criticises Freud's understanding of desire as object-related, and

[34] Girard. *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (London: Athlone Press, 1987), 338-347.
[35] *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 45.
[36] Ibid., 59-61, 158, 162-163, 189-190, 249-255.
[37] R.J. Golsan,. *René Girard and Myth. An Introduction* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1993), 29-30.

primarily driven by two separate desires: the Oedipus complex and narcissism.[38] Girard does not see mimesis as primarily sexual (Freud) or governed by the will to power (Nietzsche). Neither is mimetic desire primarily understood in moral/ethical terms such as good and evil. Mimesis is born out of a desire according to the other and controlled by models. In this respect desire can assume any form depending on the mimetic influences. Lundager Jensen's term *borrowed desire* seems significant, because desire is seldom dependent on any inherent drive.[39] The worth of something is dependent upon the desire caused by others. In this respect desire is an interdividual phenomenon, which works according to its own laws.

In *La Violence et le sacré (Violence and the Sacred*) from 1972, Girard gives an anthropological interpretation of the sacred in myths, emphasizing Greek drama. The sacred in *Violence and the Sacred* is perceived as ways to control the violence in a society of scapegoating. According to Finn Frandsen, Girard projects his theory from the psychological to the cultural.[40] Although he begins, in *Violence and the Sacred,* by analysing the sacred, mimesis/mimetic desire is introduced and is seen as a force which leads to scapegoating.[41] In the mimetic delirium which arises when a society is afflicted or in crisis, a frenetic activity arises whereby someone has to be found responsible for this terrible situation, someone who, by being sacrificed, can restore peace. In other words, sacrifice has to come about in order to prevent a disintegrating society dissolving into violence. The conflicts, caused by mimetic desire, can reach apocalyptic dimensions where the all-against-all finds a solution in all-against-one. The choice of scapegoat can be arbitrary, but it tends to be someone marginal, who differs from the community or has some kind of weakness. This means that it may be a foreigner, a child, a woman, somebody with a physical or psychological deficiency. But it could also mean someone of high rank, for example, in some cultures, the sacrifice of a king. According to Girard, the most primitive and basic sacrifice was probably made spontaneously, in a raw and unconscious manner. Gradually it became more conscious and ritualistic. Thus there has been a certain evolution from violent to less violent types of sacrifices.

[38] Ibid., 21-24.
[39] See Lundager Jensen. *René Girard*, 10.
[40] Finn Frandsen. 'Begæret, volden og offeret,' Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift 6, Århus (1985): 85.
[41] Girard. *Violence and the Sacred* (5th Ed.) (Maryland Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 145-149.

Not only the rituals but also the myths reflect this violence. From a mimetic reading of myths, Girard claims that all myths originate in this collective violence.[42] Myths try, in different ways, to hide the violence, often by a transformation of this same violence. The last thing a writer of myths will admit is the guilt and wrongdoing of the community's violence. Myths are written from the community's point of view, meaning the sacrificers' point of view. In this respect myths have a legitimising effect on society. But usually the immolation is transformed into something fantastic and heroic. The victim is very often divinised, which indicates that the community cannot bear its own violence.

Myths try to cover up violence. But, at the same time, myths can, when interpreted rationally, from an anti-sacrificial and de-mythologized point of view, be read as texts of victimizing. Myths, usually, in a hidden way, refer to some sort of violent origin. It is from such a suspicious reading Girard uses mythical texts to discover and uncover collective violence. In this way myths can be seen as an attempt to hide reality. Myths both displace and refer to violence in a society. According to Girard, violence is the force which displaces and mythologizes reality. Seen in this perspective violence is the birth of culture, since expulsion creates difference and division, an inside and an outside, a them-and-us, a society.

Religion expresses this birth of culture in a logical way. In order to prevent a community from going under in violence, one establishes a surrogate victim in order to re-establish peace. In this way religion upholds society. And because the victim is capable of bringing peace, he/she is often divinised. Sacrificial religion is therefore a force capable of bringing order to a society, an order which is peace-oriented yet requires violence. In this respect the community does not worship the killing, but the peace which is a consequence of the killing. One might say that Girard defines religion as the attempt to prevent violence by the aid of the surrogate victim. In 1972, when *Violence and the Sacred* was published, Le Monde wrote that someone had finally given a coherent, rational and atheistic theory on the nature of religion.

A scandal arose in 1978 when Girard's main work was published. In *Des Choses cahées depuis la fondation du monde: Reserches avec Jean-Michel Oughourlian et Guy Lefort (Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World)* the author presented both himself and his

[42] To get the best systematic presentation of Girard's understanding of myth, see Chapter 3 (What is a Myth?) in *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985), 24-44, and Chapter 5 (Mythology) in *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, (NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 62-70.

work as something far from atheistic. On the contrary, his work was constructed around the sacrificial revelation in the Gospels. Girard's view on religion as sacrificial was seen from a non-sacrificial Christian point of view. *Things Hidden* became something of a sensation, especially in France. In academic circles, scholars began to use the concept of the *Girardian system*.

In Book I of *Things Hidden,* Girard tries to develop a fundamental anthropology based on the scapegoat mechanism. The most fundamental difference between human and animal is not, according to Girard, primarily intelligence, but the way humans ritualise and divinise killing. Humans are not capable of killing, and therefore must ritualise and make sacred its murder.

In Book II, Girard discusses the Judaeo-Christian scriptures. From these texts, he claims, a new understanding of violence is revealed. Thus in the Old Testament one finds violent, sacrificial texts, where God participates in the violence, but, at the same time, it is in the Old Testament that a new understanding of violence and sacrifice is revealed – especially in certain texts of the Prophets.[43] Certain texts in the Old Testament reveal that the violence which men claimed to be divine, was in fact purely human violence.

The final revelation of violence as human violence comes in the New Testament. The reason for this revelation is partly the result of the shift in perspective. The authors write from the point of view of the persecuted, not from the persecutors point of view - the latter being typical for myths. This means a new point of view is introduced. By writing from the perspective of the persecuted, allegedly divine violence is revealed as human violence. Violence is displaced, from God to man. Christ becomes a victim precisely because he tries to reveal the violence in society. The innocent becomes the guilty. In this way, from the perspective of the New Testament writers, an absolute injustice occurs. The innocent becomes victimized, and the peacemaker is crucified. This perspective is so acute in the story of Christ, that people became aware of the innocence of the scapegoat. Therefore, the Passion functions as an uncovering of victimization, thus indicating a new religious approach. The Passion refers to a non-sacrificial God who allows the sun to shine on the godly and ungodly alike. The God manifested in Christ's life is a non-sacrificial God who shows undifferentiated love towards everyone.

[43] *Things Hidden*, 154-158.

In *Things Hidden* the sacrifice of Christ is seen from a non-sacrificial point of view.[44] The sacrifice is not God-willed, but a consequence of Christ's revealing the violent structures in a sacrificial society. And this revelation of non-violence, of a non-violent God, makes society less able to function according to the scapegoat mechanism. The glaring injustice makes some people proclaim the victim's innocence, and by such a proclamation, the victimage mechanism loses its efficiency. Scapegoating requires unanimity. Dissent makes the victimage mechanism less efficient. In this respect the sacrifice of Christ, seen in the context of the history of mentality, makes people aware of the victim's innocence and enhances their concern for victims. People, by interpreting the Passion from a non-sacrificial point of view, have thus propagated a non-violent God who shows the deepest concern for the victim. From this non-sacrificial point of view, one might also regard secularization and demythologization as two important consequences of Christ's sacrifice.

The sacred god, based on victimization is actually based on the sacrificial principles of society. The god which is praised as a sacrificial god, is a god of persecution. Actually, according to Girard, this god is a projection of human violence. This understanding of a sacrificial god, nevertheless, continues, in historical Christianity alongside a non-sacrifical conception of God. But this god, created out of mimetic desire, demanding violent sacrifices, is the god of this world. This structure of mimetic desire, leading to victimization and murder, Girard actually calls Satan. Satan is the structure which leads to murder.[45] As this structure is so dominant in the world, it may be problematic to claim that Christ rules the world. However, he rules over those who denounce sacrifice, who choose to imitate Christ's love and obedience towards his Father. By revealing the structures of this world, Christ also reveals how the system destroys itself.[46] In trying to trace scapegoats, one will oneself be scapegoated by others. The victimage mechanism, especially in a less sacrificial society, means reciprocal violence.[47]

In this respect the passive, non-violence of the Passion, expresses a clear logic: if God were to reveal his holiness through worldly power (sacrifice), he would, at the same time, act according to the destructive principles of this world, which would only confirm these principles built upon

[44] Ibid., Book II, Chapter 2, 180-223.
[45] Ibid., 162, 418-419.
[46] Girard. *Job. The Victim of His People* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1987), 157-160.
[47] The reason why lesser sacrificial societies create reciprocal violence is that victimization is not legitimate and the attempt to scapegoat somebody will easily lead to revenge. Such revenge would be more difficult in a society

violence. By renouncing worldly victory, Christ's passion represents a lasting victory, the victory of love, which does not require sacrifice.

In Girard's anti-metaphysical theory there are few speculations on God's existence. The true religious attitude lies in the radical message of love, in the imitation of Christ.[48] Christ is the only model without violence, and therefore the only way to a loving God. Natural religion is thus revealed as being built upon scapegoating; in other words as a false, projected godhead, developed and attracted by human violence.

In Book III of *Things Hidden* Girard attempts to develop an interdividual psychology built upon mimetic desire. By re-using and developing further the basic understanding of imitation in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel,* Girard attempts to interpret some classic psychological illnesses. The Oedipus complex, the death wish, narcissism, sado-masochism, paranoia etcetera are interpreted as different forms of mimetic binds, caused by violence. These complexes and illnesses are not necessarily something inherent, but are usually activated by different mimetic games. The Oedipus complex for instance, is not regarded as something inherent in the child, but something that appears when he or she imitates the father's (or the mother's) jealousy and aggression.[49] Therefore Girard blames Freud for seeing the child as guilty, since he or she only imitates the mimesis of the parents. Such complexes are not, according to Girard, biologically founded in humans, they are consequences of some kind of violent mimesis. Many illnesses and complexes can be seen as variations of mimetic desire. They are therefore neither static nor refer necessarily to the early years of childhood. Human psyche changes according to its mimetic models.

If one regards mimetic theory in relation to the history of philosophy, it entails a critique of philosophy as an attempt to avoid mimetic desire. According to Girard, philosophy is just as interwoven into sacrifice as religion, but, by partly expelling mimesis from the discourse, and by avoiding seeing the fundamental drive in sacrifice, philosophy becomes a new kind of secularised sacrifice.[50] Plato's act of postulating truth as something independent of mimesis, has lead philosophy and, partly, theology into a rather lifeless world of ideas, thereby losing

---

dominated by the scapegoat mechanism as everyone would agree on the guilt of the scapegoat.
[48] *Things Hidden*, 206, 430-431.
[49] Ibid., 352-367.
[50] Ibid., 263-270.

the most vital force needed to understand human existence. Therefore Plato and the majority of thinkers since Plato have interpreted true existence in the light of which ideas are right, without paying attention to what engenders these very ideas. According to Girard, existence is a mimetic game, often dominated by the delusions of metaphysical desire, culminating in different forms of victimizing. Conflict can therefore, in an academic setting, materialize itself as a struggle for the right ideas, often without any sensitivity towards the desires which have formed them. In that respect the academic tradition, ridden with the illusion of being outside mimesis and sacrifice, becomes deceptive and lifeless - and sacrificial.

Finally, it is important to view Girard's understanding of culture as evolutionary; not in a teleological manner, but as seeing culture evolving in ways that attempt to avoid violence. The revelation of the scapegoat mechanism has, in modern society, dissolved many prohibitions and created an atmosphere of liberty, wealth and differentiation, often as a consequence of the fulfilling of individual desires. Our Western culture today benefits from the loss of sacrificial structures, lavishing in differentiation and individualism, but, at the same time, the effects of mimetic desire, necessarily create new scapegoats in other parts of the world. In this respect concern for victims has become acutely global.

Chapter 2. Positions on Mimesis and Scapegoating among Girardians

Violence and the Sacred is often the starting point among theologians and religious scholars for understanding Girardian theory. It is therefore understandable that there has been a tendency to give scapegoating and violence priority and that many scholars after giving a general description of mimesis, tend to neglect the mimetic principle that lies behind scapegoating and violence.

In *Violence and the Sacred* Girard devotes his first five chapters to sacrifice before mimesis is introduced in chapter six under the heading: 'From Mimesis to the monstrous Double.' In chapter five, when interpreting Euripides' *Bacchae* Girard dismisses psychological motivation in order to understand rites.[51] But by deleting psychological motivation, both in its conscious and unconscious form, also means not drawing out the full consequences of mimesis, the force which motivates sacrifice. This, in my view, marks a deviation from the primacy of the mimetic principle in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, where desire towards the other is clearly motivated by a mimetic-psychological force. Paisley Livingston has tried to restore the motivational factor inherent in mimetic theory by claiming that mimetic desire belongs within an intentionalist psychology.[52] Tuning down the psychological motivation in concepts such as mimesis/imitation only makes the theory more rigid than it needs to be.

Making mimetic theory more coherent means seeing scapegoating as only one of many outcomes caused by mimetic desire. This tendency to see scapegoating as existing prior to mimesis and the only outcome of it is refuted by Girard in an interview in 1978, where he claims that unanimous victimage is only one mimetic phenomenon among others.[53] But in *Violence and the Sacred,* Girard, by giving the scapegoat mechanism primacy, runs the risk of overexposing violence. In this work he claims that 'mimetic desire is simply a term more comprehensive than violence for religious pollution.'[54] Such a claim means that mimetic desire is practically the same as violence. This claim can be seen to be furthered in the work of Hamerton-Kelly when he interprets mimetic desire to mean the same as violence, thereby

[51] *Violence and the Sacred*, 132.
[52] Paisley Livingston. *Models of Desire. René Girard and the Psychology of Mimesis* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1992), 24-29.
[53] Interview with Girard in *"To double business bound"*, 199. (Originally an interview in "Diacritics", 8/78, 31-54.)

omitting the far-reaching cultural implications of mimesis.[55] This tendency to link mimesis and violence together, meaning almost the same, means in the long run diminishing the mimetic phenomenon, which encompasses so much more than violence and scapegoating. And this overexposure of violence and scapegoating is exactly what has been the case among most Girardians.

In *Must there be Scapegoats?* Raymund Schwager starts by analysing sacrifice and violence. In this work the presentation of mimesis comes after the initial discussion on sacrifice. Schwager locates the challenge for theology in scapegoating as it is depicted in *Violence and the Sacred*.[56] Although Schwager uses mimesis in order to explain the role of the scapegoat, the priority he gives to the scapegoat mechanism becomes more and more clear.

> *All human activities therefore acquire their basic structure from the event that makes peace in the community possible in the first place. Girard sees in the scapegoat mechanism the only process that gives structure to society and religious ideas. Yet he expressly maintains that the sacred contains all the other fascinating or threatening forces.* (Must there be Scapegoats?, 26)

Gil Bailie in *Violence Unveiled* incorporates a mimetic understanding of how culture has arisen and developed. But, although mimesis is central to his understanding of culture (even the source of the cultural build up),[57] he seems to end up by claiming that violence is the force which makes culture both possible and impossible.

> *(…) civilization-made-possible-by-violence ("history") becomes civilization-made impossible by violence (apocalypse).* (*Violence Unveiled, 115.)*

Bailie like most scholars with a theological approach, tends to see mimesis as identical to metaphysical desire. This inevitably leads to viewing mimesis as basically a destructive force.[58]

In *Violence and Difference* Andrew McKenna compares Girard's with Derrida's understanding of violence. McKenna sees mimesis (like Derrida) as contradicting any notion

---

[54] *Violence and the Sacred*, 148.
[55] Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly. *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 132-152.
[56] Schwager. *Must there be Scapegoats? (*NY/Herefordshire: Gracewing/The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000), 2.
[57] Gil Bailie. *Violence Unveiled* (NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 115.
[58] See Gil Bailie. *Violence Unveiled,* chapter 6, "To Know the Place for the First Time"

of essence, devoid of any internal self-sustaining identity.[59] Mimesis in *Violence and Difference* is interpreted primarily as violence. McKenna claims that mimetic desire paves the way towards a violent destiny.[60] When discussing the structure within terrorism, he sees the sickness of terrorism as mimesis, which, in my view, means giving mimesis an exclusively negative interpretation.[61]

In Lundager Jensen's book, *René Girard,* there is an interpretation of Girardian theory which claims that certain regulations and prohibitions indicate a pre-cultural principle. This pre-cultural principle refers to violence.[62] Violence is the originary principle as it is the reason for the rise of culture, Lundager claims.[63] But violence and conflict cannot be the originary principle if it is generated by something else. There seems to be something more originary, more basic than scapegoating and violence, which simultaneously is the generating principle behind these two phenomena. This principle is mimesis.

By claiming that both Girard and most Girardians have given the scapegoat mechanism priority and interpreted mimetic desire to mean something violent in itself, does not mean, however, that I do not agree that mimetic desire can easily lead to rivalry and violence. However, mimetic desire should not mean the same as desire. Desire is, in my understanding, the negative version of mimesis. Thus, I would agree with Borch-Jacobsen's understanding of the violent consequences of desire.[64]

> *Desire is violence because it is a desire for a being of its own, a desire for self-possession, and as such, an allergic, murderous desire.* (*The Freudian Subject*, 90.)

By focusing on what generates violence and scapegoating, mimesis may be revealed as the originary principle. In my view both violence and other kinds of conflict stem from mimesis. It is the imitation of the other that creates violence, not violence that creates imitation. Therefore, in order to understand religion, one should see mimesis as the force which leads men into the act of scapegoating. The act of placing scapegoating or victimizing prior to mimesis seems to have created a certain precedence, making mimesis look as though it were born out of sacrifice. This tendency to begin with sacrifice has somewhat distorted the

[59] Andrew J. McKenna. *Violence and Difference* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 158.
[60] Ibid., 160.
[61] Ibid., 158.
[62] Lundager Jensen. *René Girard*, 36.
[63] Ibid., 36-38.

flexibility and multi-layered potentiality of mimetic theory, making society look as though it were governed by violence and not by other more moderate mimetic possibilities. If mimesis is seen as emerging only in the aftermath of sacrifice, this would mean that human nature is not basically mimetic. If one places mimesis after sacrifice, mimesis cannot explain crises and violence, but only the process whereby the victim is transformed into something sacred.

In Paisley Livingston's work *Models of Desire. René Girard and the Psychology of Mimesis* the mimetic seems to be given a certain primacy, but he blurs the concept somewhat by claiming (even using Girard as his authority[65]) that mimetic desire was not originary mimesis.[66] The first kind was conflictual and acquisitive, he claims. [67] But the conflictual and acquisitive must be seen as both mimetic and desirous. If desire was not mimetic or mimesis did not contain desire, the whole concept would not, in my view, be very relevant as regards human mimesis. Livingston creates an unnecessary dualism surrounding the concept of *mimetic desire*. In order to fathom the generative, violent and symbol-making function of mimesis, one ought to incorporate the acquisitive and conflictual into Girard's use of the concept mimetic desire.

The only (Girardian) scholar who questions the priority given to scapegoating is Eric Gans. Gans in his article 'Mimetic Paradox and the event of Human Origin' seems to indicate that any kind of origin has to begin with mimesis. Gans sees the intensification of mimesis as the developing and evolutionary force in both animalistic and pre-human life, which, later on in history, sparks off culture and humanizing projects.[68] But despite denying that there is any major difference between his general anthropology and Girardian theory,[69] Gans seems to part with Girard when claiming that language and culture began with the deferral of violence.[70] (Girard argues that culture has its origin in the actual violence of spontaneous scapegoating.) However, whether culture arose by deferring violence or by spontaneous scapegoating, mimesis is capable of motivating violence. The strength of Gans' work would seem to be the way he uses mimesis in order to make sense of everyday phenomena. But his understanding of language as the originary sign is, in my view, too subtle a theory of origin, because I would

---

[64] See Borch-Jacobsen. *The Freudian Subject* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford UP., 1988.)
[65] Interview with Girard in "Diacritics", 8/78, 31-54. (See also *"To double business bound*", 201.) I interpret this passage such as Girard is saying that mimesis is also common among animals.
[66] *Livingston. Models of Desire. René Girard and the Psychology of Mimesis*, 105-108.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Eric Gans. 'Mimetic Paradox and the event of Human Origin', Antropoetics I, no 2, (December 1995).
[69] See Gans. 'COV&R The Third Time.' Antropoetics No 263 (June 22 – 2002.)

assume that mimesis among humans in its most raw and basic form did not require language. Gans' anthropology, based on language theory, seems to lay too much emphasis on mimetic re-presentation in order to enhance the generative aspects of mimesis, even if his position is theoretically elaborated into a general anthropology. The challenge in Gans' general anthropology seems to be to make the generality of mimesis more generative. Anyhow, Gans' position as regards giving mimesis priority is an important correction and supplement to the development of Girard's theory. By giving mimesis priority Gans, in my view, takes mimetic theory back to basics.

Thus, mimesis must be seen to be the primary force if we are to make sense of a development from more violent cultures to less violent ones. Without mimesis there can be no culture and no religion. And cultural transferences, among them the act of turning exclusive religious beliefs into religious 'melting pots', would be quite unintelligible if we did not take into consideration the influences and contagion brought about by mimesis. Although H. Kühn could be right in claiming that sacrifice is the oldest form of religious *action*,[71] the phenomenon or action, all the same, is generated by mimesis. The primacy of mimesis is the basic assumption in this book. This does not, however, directly contradict the approach of Girard and many Girardians, but my focus does mean tuning down the scapegoat mechanism in order to understand Girard's religious theory as being basically mimetic.

[70] Gans. 'The Unique Source of Religion and Morality.' Contagion, vol.3 (Spring 1996): 52.
[71] H. Kühn. *Das Problem des Urmonotheismus*, Abh. Mainz (1950): 17, 22.

Part 2

Mimesis-Desire-Religion

Chapter 3. Girardian Mimesis: A Question of Representation

3.1 Originary Mimesis

The term *mimesis*[72] is known to have been first used in the 5th century BC.[73] According to Gøran Sørbom, it can be traced back to artistic sources where it was manifested in magical rituals and dances.[74] Sørbom refutes the thesis that the originary understanding of mimesis was representation and not imitation.[75] In the 5th century mimesis referred to external objects, without becoming the object's double.[76] But at the same time, in the practice of magic rituals and dances, objects or things were imitated, which meant that there was an attempt to be identical with the object. Both the expression *mimesis* and the relating words have probably been used in the context of the Dionysian Cult-dramas,[77] which again reveals the close connection between religious rituals and the development of drama in antiquity. All words related to mimesis are traditionally connected to imitation.[78] From the originary concept one can, according to Gerhard Else, derive three main meanings of the word:[79]

1. To mimic. A direct mimicry of men and animals through appearance, action, song and dance.
2. To imitate. A more general imitation, which is not expressed through direct mimicry.

---

[72] According to Sørbom *mimos* is the original word from which the verb *mimeisthai* is derived. The words *mimesis*, *mimema*, *mimetes* and *mimetikos* are in turn derived from *mimeisthai.* All these words are traditionally connected with imitation. *Mimeisthai* denotes the activity of imitating, representing and portraying. Gøran Sørbom. *Mimesis and Art: Studies in the Origin and Early Development of an Aesthetic Vocabulary* (Uppsala: Bonnier, 1966), 12-13.
[73] Ibid., 18.
[74] Ibid., 13.
[75] Sørbom tries to refute or modify Koller's theory that the verb mimesthai originally means representation (Darstellung) and expression (Ausdrück), not imitation. (Sørbom. *Mimesis and Art: Studies in the Origin and Early Development of an Aesthetic Vocabulary,* 14-17.)
[76] Gebauer & Wulf. *Mimesis*, 42.
[77] Herman Koller. *Die Mimesis in der Antike. Nachahmung, Darstellung, Ausdruck*, Dissertationes Bernenses Ser.1, Fasc.5. Bern (1954): 119.
[78] Sørbom. *Mimesis and Art*, 12-13.
[79] Gerald F. Else. *Imitation in the Fifth Century*, Classical Philology vol. LIII, 2 , 1958, 79.

3. To represent. To represent a picture of a person through a material form, for example, a statue, a picture and so on.

Gebauer and Wulf in their book *Mimesis: culture, art, society* mention the following three concepts as characterizing the originary concept of mimesis.

1. Expression
2. Imitation
3. Representation

Gebauer and Wulf's definition contains only a minor deviation from Else's in that the word 'expression' is used instead of 'mimicry'. Otherwise they seem to agree as to the basic concepts of 'originary' mimesis.

According to Lars Erslev Andersen, originary mimesis is understood not only as a realistic imitation or copying of things, but also as metaphorical or symbolic expression of things.[80] This indicates the representational side of mimesis, which seems to have been a part of the 'originary'concept. But, according to Gebauer and Wulf, no essential mimetic core can be traced through the historical investigation of mimesis,[81] and, I would add: finding the originary meaning of a word does not mean that it is the most precise designation of a phenomenon. Thus the originary use of the word *mimesis* is not only a realistic representation or copying of things, but also a symbolic and metaphoric representation. However, the word's originary meaning covers the three main understandings of modern mimesis, both as representation, imitation and as (symbolic) repetition.

3.1.1 Girard's View on the Origin of Mimesis

Girard is largely in tune with those researchers who lay emphasis on *imitation* as the core nature of mimesis, although this concordance is not primarily philologically motivated. Girard does not approach mimetic desire from the oldest sources, even if he does start by dismissing Plato's concept of mimesis because it lacks appropriation.[82] Girard begins rather at the very opposite end of the line: he starts with the contemporary meaning or usage and develops an understanding of mimesis through a phenomenological approach on how desire works. And from this phenomenological approach he reflects, more loosely, on the origin of mimesis. Girard's concept of origin, however, goes further back than the original use in language of the

[80] See Lars Erslev Andersen. *Allegori og mimesis* (Aarhus: MODTRYK amla, 1989), 62.
[81] Gebauer & Wulf. *Mimesis,* 7.
[82] Things Hidden, 8.

concept. Mimesis is seen in relation to hominization with the claim 'that the power and intensity of imitation increased with the volume of the brain along the entire line that leads to Homo sapiens.'[83] Thus increase in brain volume meant increased power of imitation.[84] This means that Girard's inductive hypothesis, based on the evolution of the mind, is not rooted in philology.[85]

3.2 The Contemporary Understanding of Mimesis

When comparing the originary understanding of mimesis with the contemporary understanding, we see that most modern concepts of mimesis are linked to the originary concepts such as imitation, expression, representation and mimic. All these concepts are included in the modern understanding of the word *mimesis*. However, mimesis in the modern world is linked to *desire*. The concept of imitation is especially linked to desires and drives, giving mimesis a darker and crueller meaning. Rivalry, another basic concept in modern mimesis, is hardly part of the originary understanding of mimesis.[86]

3.3 Links between Girardian Mimesis and the Originary Concept

What links Girardian mimesis to the originary concept is that mimesis is not restricted to the aesthetic or ethical realm. In its development, especially the development from Plato to Aristotle, mimesis became (relatively) restricted to literature, art and music.[87] And from the *Nicomachean Ethics* on, imitation was also regarded as decisive in ethics. The primitive understanding of mimesis, the act of miming can be located in Girard's analysis of double mediation, of the subject becoming identical with the mediator (and vice versa) in an act of doubling. Double mediation has a structural link to the originary concept of mimetic doubling, the difference being the time span and the heightened degree of conflicts motivating double mediation. However, primitive doubling is conscious and an act of free will, which is clearly not the case when desire is involved. Thus Girardian mimesis lays much more emphasis on the unconscious and desirous part of mimesis. In

[83] *Things Hidden*, 94.
[84] *Things Hidden*, 94-95 and "*To Double Business Bound," Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology*, 201.
[85] One problem concerning scapegoating and the increase of brain volume is that the brain of Neanderthal man was the same size as that of Homo sapiens. If scapegoating is seen to be something exclusively human, then the brain theory seems a little problematic, depending, of course, on what one defines as human.
[86] The first notion of mimetic rivalry, however, is found in Plato's *Dialogues*.
[87] Gebauer & Wulf. *Mimesis,* 25.

this respect, locating the origins of the word *mimesis* is only helpful in understanding Girardian mimesis to a limited degree.

3.4 What is Representational Mimesis?

According to Mihai Spariosu, the term *mimesis* is generally used to describe either the relation between art and nature, or the relations governing works of art.[88] This could also stand as a definition of representational mimesis, especially if we were to expand the definition to include the *attempt to represent reality*. One of the best examples of work on representational mimesis is Auerbach's book *Mimesis*, where the author sees the classical novelistic tradition as representation of reality. Art is seen as representing reality or giving reality a new presentation. In this respect, representation clearly has a repetitive dimension. According to Auerbach, the main forms of representational art in the Western tradition are the Greek and biblical representations. Auerbach focuses on how great writers interpret and represent reality. For Auerbach, mimesis is a representation of history, style and reality.[89] In representational mimesis, especially as interpreted by structuralists and deconstructionists, representation does not necessarily refer to any reality other than the text itself.[90] Representational mimesis can function just as well as intertextual representation, or something without reference or sign.[91]

---

[88] Mihai Spariosu (Ed). *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory, vol.1* (Philadelphia/Amsterdam, 1984), Editorial introduction, I.

[89] See Gebauer & Wulf. *Mimesis*, 10.

[90] Structuralism especially is sceptical about locating the text's referentiality in some concrete reality. One could regard the last forty years as a deconstruction of the sign, where the reference to reality in literature is limited to the text itself. Mimesis as representation, however, was basically, at least up until the 1960's, mostly an attempt to locate the representation of reality. And the further one goes back in history, reality and representation become more or less one and the same. Historical criticism has been an important factor in relativizing the most straightforward relationship between representation and reality. All the same, in most religious thought, until today, there has been a clear notion that religious texts ultimately refer to a religious reality. From Kierkegaard onwards the element of representing truth indirectly has grown stronger, along with cautiousness towards thinking that truth is something that can be immediately reached. This tradition, though, goes back to the cautiousness of negative theology towards statements on ultimate reality, a tradition which, in textual scepticism, was further elaborated in nominalism. This scepticism relating to text and reality, linking nominalism to structuralism, shows structuralism as the ultimate scepticism in its dismissal of textual representation of reality.

[91] Past rivalries in finding the most significant references to reality seem to have turned into a new kind of rivalry: how to be the most sceptical in reference to reality. The task is now to locate different forms of representation without claiming to refer to 'reality.'

3.4.1 Representational Mimesis in Girard's Work

Girardian mimesis basically contains representation (and repetition), but *mimesis is itself the engenderer of representation and repetition*. In this respect mimesis is both fundamental and irregular, as it cannot be controlled by a process of representation.[92] Traditionally mimesis has been taken to be more or less synonymous with representation, but in Girard's usage the term *mimesis* embraces a much broader range of phenomena, such as patterns of action and interaction, personality formations, beliefs, attitudes, symbolic forms, cultural practices and institutions.[93] According to Livingston, Girard's emphasis lies on a primitive, non-representational mimesis.[94]

Lacoue-Labarthe, as a mimesis-oriented thinker, also claims that Girardian mimesis does not contain representation.[95] Let us consider this. In Girard's early writings there is little discussion concerning mimesis as capacity for representation, although imitation becomes intertwined with representation in all forms of human culture.[96] In *Things Hidden* the focus is less on how mimesis represents reality than on mimesis as a desire which changes the outlook on the world. This does not mean that Girard does not consider mimetic representation. In an interview in 1996, Girard claims that at the beginning of human history, mimesis must have consisted basically in reflexive imitation.[97] Thus representation has come as a development, and it 'may have taken hundreds of thousands of years, or longer to reach the representational capacity of humanity.'[98] This confirms Livingston's claim that Girard sees originary mimesis as basically primitive and non-representational, but it does not mean that Girard interprets mimesis today as non-representational. There is actually no argument in Girard's work saying that mimesis does not contain representation. Instead of limiting mimesis to representation only, he puts desire before the act of representation.

3.4.2 Representing Essential Truth

In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel,* fiction is believed to be capable of representing vital reality, as in the works of novelists such as Cervantes, Proust, Flaubert and Dostoevsky. These writers not only describe or represent reality, they also reveal the hidden essence of reality:

---

[92] Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography: mimesis, philosophy, politics* (Harvard U.P., 1989), 105.
[93] Livingston. *Models of Desire*, XII.
[94] Ibig., 29.
[95] Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, 105.
[96] See *The Girard Reader*, 33.
[97] Ibid., 269.

the mimetic principle. When considering the problem representation-referentiality, Girard clearly represents the realist's view as regards textual analysis, but it is a realist's view attuned to a tradition of hermeneutics and historical criticism – even if he must be seen as one of the most optimistic in relation to deciphering structural history. Girard does not, however, show the same optimistic approach to actual or historical history,[99] even though he draws a rather maximalist conclusion regarding the relatively minor possibility of recapturing history.[100] When dealing with myth, Girard claims that it always seems to refer to some kind of real event, even if the event is not as the myth describes it. He is extremely confident about the structural potentialities, trusting in rationality and a commonsensical attitude, a rationality that also implies that thinkers should opt out of certain limiting frames of research, and focus on more generative aspects of the "science of man". This optimism is not only limited to structural history. In *Things Hidden,* there is also a certain optimism as to humans' ability to solve the riddle of religion.

> *As religion recedes and allows us to consider it in perspective, what was once an insoluble mystery, guarded by formidable taboos, begins to look more and more like a problem to be solved. (Things Hidden, 3.)*

By using mimesis, especially in relation to the victimage mechanism, Girard wishes to uncover structural history and show how the hominization process has been governed by mimesis. In this respect his work deals with how mimesis functions in history, but not, however, in the representational manner of Auerbach. Girard does not regard mimesis primarily as a textual mimesis of reality, but more as mimetic reality of reality. In other words, *texts are mimetic because reality is mimetic*. This does not mean that texts are not mimetic representations of reality, but this is seen as being so obvious that there is hardly anything there to discover. In this context, Girard's work criticises the limiting of mimesis to

---

[98] Ibid.

[99] Girard distinguishes between historical history and structural history. His scientific project is based on structural historical analysis, which means that by using the appropriate scientific tools or motifs (mimesis, scapegoating) one can uncover central drives in human societies. Girard is especially keen on using hypotheses for this purpose.

[100] 'The notions man and humanity will remain at the centre of a complex of questions and responses for which there is no reason to denounce the name 'science of man'. But a displacement is occurring, due in part to new disciplines, such as ethology, and due in part to structuralism itself, insofar as it designates for us, however negatively, the precise domain in which the question of man will be asked, and is in fact being explicitly asked. This domain is that of the origin and genesis of signifying systems. It is already recognized as a definite problem in the life sciences, although of course it is encountered there in a somewhat different form; it is the problem of what is called the process of hominization. We know that the problem is far from being solved, but no one doubts that science, one day, will succeed in resolving it. No single question has more of a future today than the question of man.' (*Things Hidden*, 6-7.)

representation, which is, perhaps, most explicit in his criticism of Plato's concept of mimesis.[101]

When Girard speaks of Plato *limiting* mimesis to representation, he does not mean, however, that representation is connected vaguely to mimesis. On the contrary, representational mimesis has become more common the more capable human beings has become of living symbolically. The limitation of representational mimesis or, more precisely, the limitation of those who see mimesis only as representation, is that they fail to see mimesis as the actual driving force behind representation. Mimesis is a drive, and in writing and representing something, texts become governed by mimesis. In this respect mimesis as representation has eliminated the problem of desire. According to Gebauer and Wulf, Auerbach neglects completely the mimetic power-principle in history.[102] This is precisely the problem with limiting mimesis to representation: mimesis would then have no drive, and history would not be influenced by mimetic desire. In a work such as Auerbach's, the acquisitive and rivalistic elements of mimesis are reduced to representations of reality. They are not seen in relation to any governing power principle.

Auerbach shows mimesis through the representation of reality. He does not analyse or define mimesis. Nor does he locate the desirous and disruptive side of mimesis. On the other hand, in his analysis of the *New Testament*, he comes very close to an understanding of something mimetically potent. Auerbach contrasts the non-realistic descriptions in the literature of Greco-Roman antiquity to the literature of the *New Testament* by claiming that the former has a static image of the world devoid of everyday life,[103] while the texts in the *New Testament* do not operate with static, non-mobile concepts.[104] Auerbach does not, however, attempt to locate the force which generates dynamic descriptions in the biblical texts. If Auerbach had gone one step further in his brilliant but tame analyses, he might possibly have located the key to these textual differences. Auerbach comes so extremely close in some places to discovering mimesis as the underlying principle of representation, that his work (first published in 1946) has brought us one step nearer uncovering mimetic desire.

---

[101] 'When Plato speaks of imitation his examples are limited to *representation* - to types of behaviour, manners, individual or collective habits, as well as to words, phrases and ways of speaking.' *(Things Hidden*, 8.)
[102] Gebauer & Wulf. *Mimesis*, 10.
[103] Auerbach. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, 33.
[104] Auerbach claims that the New Testament texts refer to ordinary people and describe people from all layers of

3.4.3 Mimesis and Deconstruction: Derrida and the Deconstruction of Mimesis

Another set of thinkers who have located mimesis primarily as representation, are the deconstructionists. When compared to Auerbach's understanding of mimesis, however, Derrida and other deconstructionists have been more eager to analyse and interpret mimesis as a concept and phenomenon. (Auerbach never analyses the concept mimesis.) Mimesis is clearly seen as a central concept in the process of deconstruction. According to deconstructionist theory, mimesis dissolves existing orders and hierarchies.[105] Mimesis can be seen as a tool in breaking down logocentric thinking. The floating nature of mimesis dissolves established structures engendered by binary classifications. Derrida's own concepts such as *pharmakon*, *supplement*, *hymen*, *between* and *trace* are only capable of having their oscillating character because of to their mimetic character.[106]

Both Girard and Derrida, like so many other contemporary thinkers, criticize Plato's idea-world. They are critical of the belief in an inner wisdom, or inner revelation, which may be attained from outside the act of imitating. Girard has criticized, as mentioned above, Plato's dismissal of mimesis as falsified copying and the lack of considering mimetic acquisition. Derrida, on the other hand, interprets Plato's mimesis from a slightly different angle, questioning the inner truth, the *aletheia* of essential forms which are free of mimesis. The privilege of the spoken word, as both origin and self-preserved truth, needs to be deconstructed, while mimesis actually prevents the unproblematic reference to the ideal, the essence.[107]

3.4.3.1 Copy and Original

Let us take a look at Derrida's critique of mimesis as copying and doubling of the original. In the second part of *Dissemination,* entitled 'The Double Session', Derrida uses Mallarmé's prose-text *Mimique* to demonstrate the free, floating and non-copyistic nature of mimesis (even when there is initially a concrete copying of a plot). Mallarmé's prose-text *Mimique* is a story taken (imitated) from a story by Fernand Beisier, about a husband who kills his unfaithful wife by tickling her to death. According to Derrida, some literary critics regard Mallarmé's version as a rather uncomplicated mimetic copying of the 'original story'. Derrida claims that Mallarmé's re-telling of the story is so different, so far from the 'original', that

---

society, which was unthinkable in the Greek and Roman literary tradition. (See Auerbach. *Mimesis*, 44.)
[105] Gebauer & Wulf. *Mimesis*, 305.
[106] Ibid.

there can hardly be any imitation in a copying sense, as Mallarmé's version lacks any clear reference to Beisier's story.

Derrida wishes to deconstruct both the notion of the original story and the copy-version. Every imitation is a *supplement*, something distinct from that which is imitated. Like Deleuze, Derrida sees the repetitive elements in writing, not as producing likeness, but as producing something different. Derrida actually goes further in 'The Double Session'. Mimesis is located as something unique in itself; mimesis with no before or after, no repetition, no imitation, no reality, no right or wrong similarity, no truth outside the mimetic. Mimesis is something in itself with no reference outside itself, and should not be reduced to anything else.[108] The result of this desire for the uniqueness of mimesis is that it becomes *indefinable*. Mimesis is unique in the sense that it is *autonomous*, even if it is anything but uncontaminated. There is, therefore, no attempt in Derrida's work to define mimesis.[109]

Girard pays little attention to non-representation, which also holds for mimesis. That mimesis is something different from all its traditional attributes, presents no problem in mimetic theory. The problem arises when mimesis is seen devoid of its desirous nature. Derrida would probably hold that mimesis could exist without desire. For Girard this would mean imitation without any engendering, which again would mean no mimesis. There is, however, the case of non-rivalistic mimesis, but, seen against the whole of mimetic theory, the imitation of Christ is no different from mimetic desire in any way other than that *the model differs*. The deliberate vagueness in Derrida's concept of mimesis, would be dismissed by Girard, not because of any need to define mimesis, but because it would blur the representational aspects of mimesis. Girard's concept of mimesis, however, is not based on any clear-cut definition of mimesis; it is more an instrument with which to uncover reality. The repetitive element in mimesis is self-evident in Girardian theory, but the distinction between direct copying and (innovative) imitation is seldom considered. The emphasis, from a normative context, is on *what* one is imitating. Thus the emphasis lies on the model.

---

[107] See Christopher Norris. *Derrida* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard U.P., 1987), 54.
[108] Gebauer & Wulf. *Mimesis*, 301-302.
[109] There is, however, more of an attempt to broaden the mimetic field when dealing with mimesis as a process. Derrida in for example 'Economimesis' clearly broadens the scope of mimesis by connecting mimesis to production and politics. (Derrida. 'Economimesis,' in Derrida et al., *Mimesis des articulations* (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1964), 55-93.)

From Derrida's point of view of relating mimesis to something undefinable, Girard's understanding of mimesis might appear somewhat moralistic, even if the starting point in *Deceit, Desire and The Novel* is a phenomenology of desire. Girard's emphasis on the model's qualities is not, however, a part of his basic understanding of mimesis. Morality comes into play when the process of mimesis reaches a rivalistic stage.

Every text stands in a mimetic relation to another text. For Derrida there is no first writing, only different imitations or repetitions of previous texts. This does not mean that there is copying without innovation; it means that writing is an intertextual game, without beginning and without end. Mimesis is a kind of productive force in the writing of texts, as every text is an imitation of previous texts. The productive force of mimesis can be seen as the way in which it multiplicates images, words, thoughts and actions without becoming tangible itself.[110] The *supplement* also refers to originality; it could even be labelled as the most original, and therefore the most liable for expulsion. Every copy (which is not direct copying) brings with it something supplemental. The supplement can, in certain expressions, be seen as the original. In this respect the original or originality will often stand in danger of being excluded from textual production-machines. This is not only a phenomenon within the borders of writing and speech, it is also a sociological aspect of writing. This has become embarrassingly clear in the 20th century, when great authors such as Proust, Joyce, Beckett, Hemingway, Golding and others, were not only initially rejected, but also, some of their best writings, even great masterpieces, were refused by publishing houses. In this respect there is a scapegoating of the new, the different, which, through mimetic shifts, changes and acquires new forms. In the late 20th century, continuing into the 21st century, however, there seems to be a tendency to reject anything which smacks of imitation. [111]

Like Girard, Derrida is also sceptical about the notion of the autonomous original, the idea of the original as something not imitated. In a way, Girard dissolves the question of originality and copying by turning everything into mimesis. Derrida, who perhaps is more

[110] Gebauer & Wulf. *Mimesis*, Chapter 23, 'The between-character of Mimesis (Derrida),' 296.
[111] With respect to literary innovation, Girard clearly leans towards classical, traditional and canonical literature, expelling the Romantic tradition from this canon, not because of lack of innovation, but because of its superficial description of desire. Despite there being a great admiration for the classics that reveal mimesis, his recipe for innovation is anything but conservative: 'The main prerequisite for real innovation is a minimal respect for the past, and a mastery of its achievements, i.e. *mimesis*. (Girard. 'Innovation and Repetition' in Substance 62/63, vol XIX, Number 2/3, Wisconsin, (1990): 19.)

conservative[112] (especially as a venerator of the classics) than is usually presented, is nonetheless eager to discover the radically new, focusing on science as being able to work on themes that are not even interdisciplinary. His involvement in the International College of Philosophy whose aim is to 'discover new themes, new problems, which have no legitimacy, and are not recognized as such in existing universities,'[113] illustrates both his involvement and belief in innovation. Such an *a priori* belief in the possibility to uncover something radically new does not exist in Girard's writings. When everything depends upon mimesis there can be no innovation outside imitation. The totally new indicates discovering something without imitating, which for Girard is 'to expect a plant to grow with its roots up in the air.'[114]

Thus Derrida is preoccupied with originality. Girard is preoccupied with origins. As we have seen, Girard has made mimesis an essence in his thought. Mimesis is originary, even, in my view, primary to violence, and the primal force in cultural evolution. Derrida has deliberately criticized Girard for this. By making mimesis an essence, Girard betrays mimesis by making it a property, he claims.[115] This also goes for the act of defining mimesis: to render mimesis as imitation, reproduction, simulation, similarity, identification, analogy, will only amputate the indefinite nature of mimesis.[116] According to Derrida, every (affirmative) discourse on origins will reveal a Theology.[117] This manner of thought, according to Derrida, makes both Girard and Plato ripe for deconstruction, as they both operate with a concept of revealed truth; Plato in claiming the Idea as truth, and Girard by discovering anthropological truth through mimesis. In this respect mimetic theory is branded metaphysical and in need of having its own concept of mimesis decontructed. Girard, on the other hand, regards mimetic origin as a starting point of a generative theory, which would, without a drive, be limited, unable to locate the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. Girard may have betrayed the essence of mimesis (by fixing it), but has, nonetheless, been able to make use of it. Derrida has no starting point, no primary force whatsoever, and it seems as though his working aim is merely to find tensions, contradictions, and heterogeneity,[118] while Girard works within the realm of synthesis, bringing together central themes such as mimesis, scapegoating and violence into one theory. To say that Derrida is a minimalistic thinker, and Girard a maximalistic thinker,

[112] Derrida as a conservative person. See Derrida/Caputo. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* (USA: Fordham Press, 1997), 8.
[113] Derrida/Caputo. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 7.
[114] Girard. 'Innovation and Repetition,' 19.
[115] Derrida. 'Introduction: Desistance.' An introduction to Lacoue-Labarthe in *Typography*, 25.
[116] Derrida et al. *Mimésis, des articulations*, 7.
[117] McKenna. *Violence and Difference*, 58.

would be justified in that Derrida's main preoccupation is to deconstruct tradition, while Girard's is to restructure it. On the other hand, there is enormous scope within the deconstructionist project for destructing the philosophic and theological tradition, even for attempting to deconstruct the metaphysics of the humanistic sciences as a whole. This aim could be described as maximalistic.

3.4.3.1.1 Supplement

Girard has reacted favourably to Derrida's concept of *supplement*, although he gives it a meaning according his own theory.[119] The supplement is, according to Girard, basically the victim, the victim's voice that has been excluded. While Girard concentrates on the exclusion of the victim, Derrida concentrates on the exclusion of writing. There is also something supplemental about imitation, as it is different from the thing that is imitated. In this respect mimesis is supplemental in nature. And when we consider mimesis in art, there is always an element of exclusion of the supplement, of that which is different and lacks a clear reference to previous art. Both Girard and Derrida focus on what is excluded: the supplements arising from scapegoating, the 'left overs' in society. But here there seems to be a certain ideological difference: Girard is more concerned about whether imitation (meaning what one imitates) is substantial and true, than about whether it is a copy or not. He does not care much about the degree of copying or innovation, so long as it reveals something which is true, realistic and commonsensical. Even if originality in Derrida's work is not primarily based on copying or advanced copying, there is greater emphasis on the supplement in writing, which has also been within the logocentristic tradition something disturbing, in need of being expelled. But the desire to expel seems to refer to something beyond writing.

3.4.3.1.2 Referring to the Victim

The question surrounding the authenticity of mimesis must, however, be seen in relation to the victim. According to Girard, Western thought has tried to efface *the trace* of the founding violence. Derrida has, according to Girard, substituted the trace for being, in the Heideggerian sense.[120] Derrida's use of trace, as far as I can see, does not eliminate scapegoating even if expulsion is modified, in my view, by the emphasis on the symbolic scapegoating of writing. Gebauer and Wulf, when discussing Derrida's understanding of (mimetic) scapegoating in writing, claim that for Derrida the pharmakeus (which also designates the scapegoat) by being

---

[118] Derrida/Caputo. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 9.
[119] See Girard. 'Origins. A View from Literature,' in Dupuy/Varela (Eds). *Understanding Origins.Contemporary Views on Origin of Life, Mind and Society* (Amsterdam: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992).

killed and expelled from the city, offers the means by which social crises are overcome.[121] In Athens human scapegoats were regularly identified and ritually sacrificed as a practical measure to preserve civil order. The pharmakos (which Derrida describes in *Plato's Pharmacy*) is, both in its etymology[122] and historical reality, the scapegoat of the city.[123] He is the victim in the desire to create a heterogenous society.

> *The character of the pharmakos has been compared to the scapegoat. The evil and the outside, the expulsion of the evil, its exclusion out of the body (and out) of the city (…).* (Derrida. *Dessimination*, 130.)

Derrida thus goes on to explain that the scapegoats' genitals were cut off in order to chase the evil out of their bodies. They were then killed in order to purify the city.[124] Derrida, in exactly the same way as Girard, sees these sacrificial acts to purify and restore the city. In his analysis of Greek scapegoating, Derrida mentions that Socrates, whom Plato explicitly designates as a pharmakos, was also made a scapegoat. And the imitative side of writing materializes in the fact that Plato began writing after the death of Socrates, imitating and representing his thoughts. Plato's writing is motivated by the scapegoating of Socrates, revealing how culture arises in a purposeful attempt to atone for violence. In this respect writing is a consequence of violence, becoming a *trace* back to the sacred violence.

Despite Gebauer and Wulf's (when presenting Derrida's understanding of mimesis) claim that Socrates' death was the sacrifice that served to establish social peace in the city,[125] Derrida does not focus on the effect that scapegoating actually has in holding violent societies together. Derrida seems more focused on the supplements arising from expulsion, and on the suspension of the binary oppositions which the pharmakos brings. In this respect Derrida focuses on the non-sacrificial effects, on the culture arising after expulsion.

3.4.3.2 Truth and Rationality

Both Girard and Derrida criticize the belief in an inner, revealed truth outside any representation. Derrida, in the tradition of Heidegger, claims that truth as a metaphysical referent is something

---

[120] Girard. *Things Hidden*, 65.
[121] Gebauer & Wulf. *Mimesis*, 299.
[122] See footnote 59, where Derrida demonstrates all the different meanings of the word pharmakon/pharmakos. Derrida. 'Plato's Pharmacy,' in *Dissemination* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981), 132.
[123] Derrida. 'Plato's Pharmacy,' in *Dissemination*, 128-134.
[124] Ibid., 132-133.
[125] Gebauer & Wulf. *Mimesis*, 299.

outside of the philosophical realm. Girard belongs to the thinkers who believe that there are (qualitative) truths to be found, and it does not matter if these are found through dismissing or neglecting the boundaries between philosophy, anthropology, literature and theology. Derrida does not directly dismiss this truth (*Mimesis resembles truth insofar as truth never resembles itself*), but has no such aim in his philosophy, even if deconstruction has, despite so many claims of irrationality, the aim of furthering rationality by deconstructing it within traditional rationality (a rationality which is not rational). But it seems legitimate to ask whether revealing irrationality is not also a question of revealing untruth? It does not seem, however, plausible that the deconstructionists can reveal the irrational simply by taking more account of desire in their discourse. They should, according to mimetic theory, see the overall structure of the whole discourse as governed by desire. Desire has a tendency to blindfold research, also the research of the deconstructionalists and the Girardians[126] - especially if we do not take into consideration the mimetic destabilizing caused by rivalry.

3.4.3.3 Systems and Supplements

Derrida's somewhat aggressive attitude towards thinkers who profess truth and operate with synthesis, is actually what motivates his deconstruction project,[127] even if he does not avoid seeing the worth of these grand systems of thought. Derrida is far from being a positivist. His project resembles an art-scientific ideal, without his considering, like Girard, the scientific value of artists and writers. Derrida's supplement functions as a protection against a closure,[128] a closure which is a sort of unconscious aim among thinkers who consider science as something more or less finished with them. There is an element of closure in Girard when

[126] Girard's emphasis on human conceit does not, however, prevent a belief in the commonsensical. The rational and commonsensical arises when humans are not blinded by the entanglement of mimetic rivalry. Also the act of confessing one's desires will modify the romantic lie. Truth is not, however, predominant in human culture because of the desires arising from imitating the other. Truth, in Girardian theory, is something that can arise when rivalistic and violent mimetic desire is not predominant. Truth is basically religious, stemming from the Gospels, and materializing from a concern for victims. But common sense also stems from the act of not sacrificing, of loving one's neighbour. In this respect there is no total rift between Greek and Christian rationality, but, nevertheless, a fundamental difference, as the rational in the Christian sense will view rationality not as something autonomous, but as dependent on sacrificial mechanisms.

[127] Derrida is very conscious that he is not able to deconstruct philosophy and Western metaphysics from without. Deconstruction is a part of this tradition and must operate from within, but there seems to be less consciousness of the value of finding meaning, mediating concepts into larger meaningful units. There is, however, in my view, something a little cowardly in a project of one-sidedly criticizing the weak points of different theory builders. There seems, from my subjective point of view on this issue, to be a kind of subtle, academic 'jealousy' in the way grand theories are dismissed because of their weaknesses, while, at the same time (un)consciously refusing to see the theory's value as a whole. The end of (creative) thinking would actually soon be at hand, if the academy dogmatized deconstructionism, as in the end there would be no other thing left than to deconstruct each others' deconstructions, which would mean the rivalry of doubles put into system.

[128] McKenna. *Violence and Difference*, 16.

he indicates the process of the death of philosophy, and sees the death of literature in the emptying of all mimetic games.[129]

3.4.4 Academic Self-Effacement

There is something both profound and slightly comical in the way academics today dismiss their own profession as thinkers. Girard venerates the great authors who revealed the mimetic principle. Derrida sees an academic ideal in the subjective, non-teleological, playful and open way writers such as Mallarmé and Blanchot describe their experience. There seems to be a dialectic consisting of humility towards one's own metier's limitations and the praising of fiction. When this self-effacement becomes too dominant, it seems to stem from academic rivalry. At the same time, there has been a profound discovery of the scientific and structural value of literary texts, which really consists in the deconstruction of certain positivistic ideals, which, since the 19th century, apparantly enhanced human science.

3.5 Enemies of Mimetic Essence

3.5.1 Lacoue-Labarthe

As we can see, Derrida clearly regards mimesis as representation, although mimetic representation has no definitive essence attached to it. Desire in Derrida's thinking does not seem to be so decisive that representation becomes secondary, which is the case in Girard's work. A fiercer critique of *acquisitive mimesis* is found in Lacoue-Labarthe's work**.** According to Lacoue-Labarthe, Girard objects to the view that mimesis contains representation and can be controlled by a process of representation – or (re)presentation.[130] This is, as we have seen, clearly an exaggeration. Mimesis as a representation of reality is, however, not the essential element in mimetic theory. Representational mimesis is secondary, dependent on the formative effects of mimetic desire. Lacoue-Labarthe also claims that Girard holds representation or repetition to be original (originary),[131] which, from the point of view of deconstructing originality into mimetic parts, is indeed Girard's position. It would not be precise to say that Girard regards representation as originary. It would be more accurate to say that representational mimesis refers to originary mimesis, which is mimetic desire. If,

[129] In an interview he actually claims that Virginia Woolf in *The Waves* rounds off the novel by making everything into a total floatation of mimesis. (Golsan. *René Girard and Myth*, 134.)
[130] Lacoue-Labarthe. *Typography*, 105.
[131] Ibid., 113.

however, Lacoue-Labarthe interprets Girard's view on representation and repetition as intertwined with the mimetic process, he is right about representation/repetition being originary.

4.5.1.1 A Triangle of Enemies

Lacoue-Labarthe claims that mimesis has no essence, only representation.[132] This is the same view held by Derrida in his Introduction to Labarthes' book *Typography*, which is a deliberate critique of Girardian mimesis.[133] Both Derrida and Lacoue-Labarthe regard Girard's concept of mimesis as referring to an ultimate signifier. Derrida claims, through a reading of Lacoue-Labarthe, that Girard wishes to appropriate and identify mimesis, and by that very act, betrays its essence.[134] (Mimetic essence must therefore mean something floating and undefinable.) Lacoue-Labarthe claims that Girard's mimesis is conceived as assimilation (primitive doubling),[135] where, in actual fact, the doubling will never become doubling. As Deleuze claims in *Difference & Repetition*, there is never a total correspondence in imitation.[136] The essence in every repetition is, according to Deleuze, non-mediated difference.[137]

4.5.2 Mimesis is Pre-Representational

As we have seen, Girard operates with a concept of doubling, one which takes place only in the later phases of mimetic desire. The act of miming (an example of primitive doubling) is far from the Girardian concept of an essential mimesis – as it is totally conscious. Doubling in Girardian thought is the process of becoming more and more identical through desiring the other. This does not mean that there are not numerous differences between the subject and the model. Girard's point is that mimetic desire creates greater symmetry between the desiring parts. Desire has a tendency to turn people into doubles as they become more and more afflicted by the same desires.[138] If this were primitive doubling, it would also be, according to

---

[132] Ibid., 116.
[133] In *La Mythologie blanche* and *Economimesis* Derrida approaches mimesis as a version of classical metaphysical ontology based on analogy, resemblance and similarity. (See Arne Melberg. *Theories of Mimesis.* Cambridge U.P., 1995, 5.) But Derrida is not blind to the eruptive aspects of mimesis. According to Spariosu, Derrida marks an important stage in the historical concept of mimesis and representation because he reveals mimesis as one of the most effective power-instruments regulating and controlling the interaction between scientific and non-scientific discourse. (Mihai Spariosu (Ed). *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory, vol.1*, 77.
[134] Derrida. 'Introduction: Desistance' in Lacoue-Labarthe. Typography, 25.
[135] Lacoue-Labarthe. *Typography*, 120.
[136] Deleuze. *Difference & Repetition* (London: The Athlone Press, 1994), 22-23.
[137] Ibid., 25.
[138] See *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, Especially Chapter III and pp. 104-106, 168-173.

Girard, a common, contemporary doubling. In this respect, Girard's *modern mimetic version is also primitive*.

According to Lacoue-Labarthe, there is no faculty that is not taken from representation. Everything begins with representation.[139] For Girard everything begins with mimesis. Mimesis is pre-representational.[140] Representation is something that comes much later in human history. There is, generally speaking, a fundamental breach between Girard and most contemporary French philosophers on this issue, which I think points to a basic difference concerning their worldview. Girard, as a religious thinker, considers reality as basically something *a priori* and attainable, while Lacoue-Labarthe clearly sees reality as something construed, claiming that maintaining the religious means the denial of representation, as this denial is belief.[141] He also criticizes the claim that there is something prior to representation.[142] Lacoue-Labarthe's claim that everything begins with representation seems indicative of a modern type of nihilism. Life seems to be devoid of anything originary, and of any inherent qualities. On the other hand, putting an extreme emphasis on mimesis, also means that everything as related to human culture depends upon various forms of imitation. This not only questions autonomous forms, it can also be seen as questioning any kind of originality. In this respect Girard, despite his proclaiming God or Christ as the ultimate signifier, deconstructs most forms of autonomous and original concepts into acts of imitation.

3.5.3 Scandinavian Anti-Mimesis

According to the Danish literary critic Niels Egebak, representation has been translated incorrectly and should mean:

-To present again

-To repeat

-To play with a mask

-Set up a scene

-Act instead of another who is not present [143]

Egebak's intention in *Anti-mimesis* is to separate imitation from representation[144] and turn mimesis from an active conscious process into a passive, unconscious process[145] where

[139] Lacoue-Labarte. *Typography*, 117.
[140] See *The Girard Reader*, 268.
[141] Lacoue-Labarte. *Typography*, 118.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Niels Egebak. *Anti-mimesis* (Viborg: Arena, 1970), 29.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid., 33.

language is the foremost mimetic force in our lives. According to Egebak, we know nothing about a reality that is not contaminated by language.[146] Egebak criticizes the whole tradition of Western metaphysics for regarding mimesis one-sidedly as imitation and copying.[147] According to Egebak, the most fundamental form of mimesis is the symbolic character of language.[148] Mimesis for Egebak is total staging, a transforming and productive factor, something re-presentational.[149]

Egebak writes that the primary duty of modern thinking is not to mix, under any circumstances, traditional mimesis (copying) with representation, and to point out when there is a confusion.[150] Representation is the complete opposite of imitation.[151] Modern thought has not, as Deleuze proclaims, emerged from representation, but, on the contrary, from the failure of imitation and copying. [152]

Egebak seems to attack from all directions, without having any other aim than to cherish the symbolic and representational character of language.[153] His approach is anti-mimetic as regards imitation. Also, his attitude to representational mimesis seems dubious, as it does not attach any influence in representation to identity. Deleuze is wrong, according to Egebak, when he proclaims that identity is primarily a definition of a representational universe. Deleuze should, according to Egebak, have substituted representation with imitation.[154] As I understand him, Egebak first proclaims mimesis as representation in a productive sense, as the opposite of imitation (imitation meaning doubling), but in the case of identity, he dismisses the productive force of representational mimesis by claiming it to be an act of imitation. Also the emergence of modern thought is rejected as a product of representational mimesis. His view that modern thought is the product of imitative failure, indicates that representation is not productive (as regards to modern thought) and imitation is only productive as a failure. This is clearly an anti-mimetic point of view. The anti-mimesis is not primarily manifested in dismissing mimesis, but in *capturing its force in the negative*. But if the productive force in relation to modern thought is a failure of imitation, this must mean that modern

[146] Ibid., 79.
[147] Ibid., 34-35.
[148] Ibid., 69.
[149] Ibid., 83,102-103.
[150] Ibid., 30.
[151] Ibid., 31.
[152] Ibid.
[153] In relation to language Egebak dismisses Tel Quel (who one would, generally speaking, have thought were his closest allies) for considering representation in writing one-sidedly as imitation (mimesis). (See Egebak. *Anti-mimesis*. 61-62.)
[154] Egebak. *Anti-mimesis*, 30.

thought is generated by mimesis. Can this in turn indicate that the products of representation also are the result of imitative failure?

3.5.3.1 Egebak's Copernican Turn

According to Egebak, imitation is not that which produces reality. If one should talk about imitation, one must claim that it is 'reality' which imitates the models, not the other way round.[155] And here we finally come to Egebak's Copernican turn: *We don't imitate a meaning, we are imitated by the meaning which already is present.*[156] But what is the already present meaning? Can it possibly be representational meaning? It seems so. According to Egebak, representation destroys analogy as it produces an *other* reality, different and heterogeneous.[157] Mimesis for Egebak creates identity, while representation creates differentiation. The productive force, therefore, is representation.

Egebak's argument seems to move in a circle where one statement gradually becomes deconstructed by another, making the arguments subtle but, on the other hand, making the argumentation somewhat one-sided and lifeless. In my view, this is often the consequence when one tries to explain mimesis solely as representation without analysing the act of representing. Because of the eruptive nature of mimesis, one has to establish all kinds of supplements in order to fathom obvious mimetic traits. The problem when mimesis is presented as representation is the way in which *desire is excluded from the concept of mimesis in order to make it something controllable*. Thus the essential force of mimesis is omitted. This turns mimesis into a metaphysical concept, devoid of its formative and generative power. In this respect presenting mimesis solely in the representational tradition *can be seen as an attempt to get rid of mimetic desire*. On the other hand, representation is seldom exactly the same as what it represents. In this respect representation is productive. And if the failure to represent means producing something different from a copy, representation produces differentiation. But the whole process must be seen as imitative, a dialectical process where mimesis creates both heterogeneity and homogeneity.

3.5.4 From Reflexive to Representational Mimesis

If 'originary' mimesis is interpreted to be mimetic desire, the problem of explaining the transition from reflexive to representational mimesis, arises. This is not, of course, something

[155] Ibid., 35.
[156] Ibid., 33.
[157] Ibid., 32.

that can be located historically, but must have been a gradual evolution as regards its representational capacity. Livingston claims that there is a crucial problem concerning how non-representational forms of mimesis can generate symbolism and cultural institutions.[158] Livingston distinguishes between imitative and emulative forms of mimetic desire, a distinction he claims corresponds to Girard's emphasis on the difference between external and internal mediation.[159] [160] The later development of representational mimesis must, according to mimetic theory, be marked by a religious representation, Christ's representation of God, the non-violent and non-sacrificing logos. This representation of the logos, the true ontology, also meant the uncovering of sacrificial violence, the antithetic representation of God (what religion has represented as a sacrificial god), which is nothing else but human violence.

> *The word of Christ is at work in this whole long process toward humanity and representation. Representation is still distorted, as it still distorts or disguises the violence stemming from originary mimesis.* (*The Girard Reader*, 269.)

Girard's point here seems to be that Christ reveals the content of human violence, not only by revealing the violence done against him as such, but by revealing a violent structure, both historically and in his contemporary milieu, and finally by representing a non-violent God. Showing Christ as the representation of a non-violent deity is a quite common motif, even if its most radical and non-sacrificial consequences are seldom thought through. Girard has tried, in his writings, to purge all violent elements associated with God and transfer them onto humanity. He has also emphasized more and more Christ's role in revealing historical violence by showing the symmetry between Christ's destiny and the destiny of the prophets.[161] Christ is seen as representing, in a revelatory manner human violence; violence enacted because of mimetic rivalry, leading to sacrificial constructions, in order to prevent the truth concerning human violence coming to light.

---

[158] Livingston. *Models of Desire*, XIX.
[159] Ibid., XVIII-XIX.
[160] The problem with referring to the vocabulary in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* is that it is used to locate the transformation of desire over the last 400 years, while the evolution of representational mimesis covers a time span of thousands of years. There is of course the possibility of claiming structural similarity, that the last 400 years reveal a basic evolution concerning desire, but it would seem that the development into internal mediation could only happen within the frame of an individualized society, and that mimesis, especially before the Renaissance, must have been of the more external kind. I should have thought, however, that the growth of a representational mimesis is the product of a more intensified mimesis (parallel to the growth of intelligence), controlled in time by the prohibitions of the scapegoat mechanism, and gradually, through the fall of the sacred and the rise of individuality, transformed into internal desires.
[161] See *Things Hidden*, 158-179 and *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 25-26, 85-86.

Christ for Girard is the key representational figure because he represents a non-violent and loving God. In this respect representation is of great value, but in order to really understand the representational power of the Christian message, Girard advocates the imitation of Christ, an active mimesis in order for human beings to be transformed by love.[162] In this respect Christ's representation of the Father, which cannot be seen as non-mimetic, should be activated by imitation. Thus, the representation of the Gospels requires, on human beings' behalf, some sort of imitation.

Lacoue-Labarthe claims that Girard does not see Christ's destiny as mimetic or sacrificial.[163] This view is very much at odds with my own view. I will attempt to show in this book that nearly everything normative in Girardian theory, amounts to an imitation of Christ. Admittedly, Girard did not directly emphasize the imitatio Christi-motif strongly in *Things Hidden*, although it is clearly present in this work (see pp. 206 and 430). It is most clearly elaborated, though, in Part One in *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*.[164] But Christ's destiny, according to Girard, is clearly mimetic as the crucifixion is seen as the result of mimetic conflict in Jewish society. Lacoue-Labarthe is, however, right in that Girard, right up until the late nineties, did not interpret Christ's death as a sacrifice.[165] [166] The imitation of Christ, however, is recommended as a way out of sacred violence. In this respect Christ materialises a representational image of the Father, which can be reached through imitation. Imitation and representation are both central in Girardian mimesis as it relates to Christ. From a deeper perspective, one must therefore reject Lacoue-Labarthe's understanding of Girard's christology as being non-imitative.

3.6 Mimetic Representation Contra Mimetic Desire

If mimesis is a desire, it should be seen as a more basic and primary phenomenon than representation. Representation implies control and consciousness, something taking place after the events. Representation is similar to the Kierkegaardian *gjentagelse*, which gives the events retrospective meaning. Mimetic desire on the other hand is unconscious, involuntary,

[162] *Things Hidden*, 430-431. *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 13-14.
[163] Lacoue-Labarte. *Typography*, 110-111.
[164] *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 13-15.
[165] Lately Girard has gone back on this, claiming that Christ's death was a sacrifice even if there was no God-willing sacrifical force behind the events. This more positive view of sacrifice is still seen in a non-violent context.
[166] 'I have come to be positive about the word 'sacrificial,' so I would like first of all to make a distinction between sacrifice as murder and sacrifice as renunciation. The latter is a movement towards freedom from mimesis as

uncontrollable and the driving force of the events. While representational mimesis is indirectly motivated through a certain distance from the events, mimetic desire is manifested directly as the force behind the events.

The attempt to recreate events brings us to another important aspect of mimesis, namely its repetitive patterns. When describing mimesis as representation or copy, repetition becomes central in the sense that something is presented once again, either through a text or through some other medium. In this respect every kind of representational mimesis seems to be repetitive. This repetitive act is really quite obvious as each kind of cultural enactment has a repetitive structure, more or less pronounced, manifested either as some sort of cultural repetition or repetition of nature. The latter does not mean, however, that one is copying, as Plato indicated, something that is more real. Representing is always in some way copying, but often in an original way, as there is always some unique factor involved which, among the best representers, creates something fundamentally new, substantial and important. The representation does not necessesarily have to be inferior to what is imitated; on the contrary *it can be more important*. Gebauer and Wulf claim (in relation to acting) that 'repetition of a gesture gives prominence to qualities that originally played no special role in the action being imitated, qualities of time and space, of rhythm, of the execution of the movement,'[167] thereby emphasizing the supplement in something that is repeated.

There is also the fact that the greater insight one has into some great and original work, the more one is able to locate the influences. Originality seems to be based more on subtle ways of putting together imitated concepts than is often thought. There is therefore the element of repetition in all cultural products. If, however, a text or painting is very similar to the one being repeated, one would call it a copy. And because of our Platonic arrogance towards the copyist, combined with a fetishist approach to originality, originality tends to be praised however insignificant it is. For the same reasons copying is dismissed, even if the copy is done with great skill. In my view the latter kind of representation can be of great value, for example in the icon-tradition, which is heavily dependent on repetition.

Girard seldom uses the word repetition, but there is a strong repetitive element in desiring what the other desires. When dismissing the Oedipus complex, Girard claims that it cannot

---

potentially rivalrous acquisition and rivalry.' (*The Girard Reader*, 272.)
[167] Gebauer & Wulf. *Mimesis,* 316-317.

make repetition understandable.[168] The theory of mimetic rivalry dissolves the concept of a biological archetype, by establishing a general theory of rivalry around an arbitrary model - which can be the father, but just as likely the brother, sister, mother, uncle, friend etc. Mimetic theory, according to Girard, is not only capable of explaining the first rivalries, but also the repetition of rivalry, as rivalry will always be potent when there is an object thought by both parties to be desirable. Even if the actual materialization of the desire is manifested in different forms, desire is repeated from the model's desire. The repetitive elements which are the result of our first and most fundamental encounters, are rather obvious. But the process of repetition is incredibly complex. One does not always repeat straightforwardly; one can react just as often against the encountered mimesis. But reacting against does not mean that one is not mimetically influenced, and one will repeat in essence, despite outward differences, what one reacts against. (For example the daughter who declares that she is not going to be like her mother, while the rest of the world can see just how alike they are.)

3.6.1 Repetition, Doubling and Violence

If one goes back to Girard's primal construction of desire, the triangular desire, there must be some kind of wish (desire) in the subject to repeat something which the subject thinks is inherent in the model. As desire is based on a wish to attain something via the model, there must be a desire to repeat. Thus, the desirous acts are repetitive, but the problem with repetition is that it often leads to reciprocal violence, a violence where one part imitates the other's violence, escalating into graver forms. Also the concept of the double, the process of doubling desire, is a process whereby the subject and the mediator repeat each others' desire. This repetitive dimension, so forcefully dismissed by Plato, has kept people rather ignorant as to the powerful role of the model. The secrecy attached to internal mediation becomes the taboo surrounding the repetition of the model. Cultural scandals, when caught in the process of naïvely imitating someone, have brought about very complex kinds of imitation, consisting of differentiation and pluralization as regards imitating models, which, at least partly, could be seen as new ways of concealing the desire to repeat. The process of increasing differentiation and the problem of discovering anything basically new, can partly be seen as the desire to conceal repetition. The problem in the fashion industry, for example, of creating one leading trend, is a sign of both repetition and the frantic desire to conceal repetition.

[168] *Things Hidden*, 358.

3.6.2 Repetition, Education and Morals

There is, however, one area where mimetic repetition may still be recommended and fairly open. This is in moral education, even if the imitation is not built upon any kind of immediate repetition. Especially in the teaching of morals to children, one sees the immense importance of what and whom one imitates, and of whose desires one repeats. While this tendency to repeat is not just limited to morals (repetition is an obvious everyday phenomenon), it is mostly within the realm of morals or ethics that such repetition is openly recommended. The act of repetition in order to apply a moral standard, is not new. Already in Aristotle the idea of imitating a good person is seen as the way to personify *arête*. The various relationships between disciple and master are built on the principle of being able to repeat the qualities of the master. In religious education this has been fundamental, as well as outside morals and ethics, right up until today. Repetition in art is still not *comme il faut*, even if the trend in Post-Modernism is more openly imitative than in Modernism. In sport, however, the repetitive dimension is openly displayed.[169] The repetitive elements in sport reveal the difference between copying and imitating. Although both belong to mimesis, copying is imitating without internal rivalry. Therefore, copying is open and external, and does not often involve any fundamental psychological desire to shape one's personality. If, however, the desire to be identical with a sports star for example, becomes acute outside the realm of sport, a more complex psychological and personal desire is immediately present, and the desire to expose the influence will become more concealed. In this respect sport represents one of the few areas where people can legitimate their desire to repeat the acts of their models, precisely because the repetition is primarily based on skill, not personality or identity.

3.6.2.1 Repetition and Remembrance

When dealing with repetition, remembrance becomes inevitable. Imitation is not only imitation of the present. Actions are always responses to previous encounters. We imitate past experiences, and thereby repeat the past – although seldom in a direct copying way. Repeating the past is structurally so complex that it seems limited to every individual mimesis. In the same way as Kierkegaard and Proust regarded recurrence as a part of every person's personal history,[170]

---

[169] The desire to be as good as this or that football hero, to buy the same equipment as one's favourite team, to hug in the same fashion as the professionals (when they have scored), is fairly openly copied. The sports-icons speak with remarkable frankness about who their heroes are, and who they admire among their contemporary colleagues. The reason for this mimetic openness is due to the fact that this repetition is *external*, it does *not reveal any personality-desire or any deeper layer of identity*. In this respect there is a difference between copying and imitating.

[170] Robert Champigny. 'Proust, Bergson and Other Philosophers' in *Proust. A collection of Critical Essays* (N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), 130.

mimetic theory emphasizes the same individuality through the sheer complexity of repetition due to interdividuality. This is perhaps the reason why Girard has never written anything on mimesis of the past, mimesis and time. Another reason could be Girard's scepticism towards thought based on metaphysical premises. But mimetic theory analysed solely as imitation of the present, limits the scope of mimesis. Girardian theory lacks any analysis of the mimesis of the past. Acts, especially later on in life, are, in my view*, mainly motivated by imitation of past experiences.* Imitation caused by remembrance consists of a development whereby, as a child, one imitates naïvely and reacts openly to all present impulses, but when one gets older, and imitation is more internalized by past experiences, one's personality becomes less shaped by present mimetic encounters. Imitation becomes more and more a response to past experiences, taken from our so-called inner life.

3.6.2.1.1 Retrospective Mimesis

People tend, as they grow older, to become less mimetically open. This is partly because mimesis or, more precisely, the mimetic models, have become so deeply internalized within the subject. After a number of years one often grows more immune to new mimetic models (which does not mean that one does not imitate new models). One's responses or acts are governed by *internal mimesis*, through the different mimetic configurations that have shaped one's life.

In fact this evokes Bergsonian philosophy in relation to mimetic theory. And within that framework, locating imitation as a response to past experiences, will necessarily bring mimetic theory closer to classical metaphysics. The advantage of introducing a *retrospective mimesis* is that it can explain mimetic behaviour *without mimetic models being present*. Remembrance is a mimesis of the past, and the subject is a representation of past mimesis. The grown-up person lives his or her life mostly by responding to past mimesis. Such accumulated mimetic feedback, which is the accumulation of past experiences, can be seen as the core of our so-called inner life, where the reactions and responses we give in everyday life are governed by past mimetic experiences. This does not mean, however, that human beings are defined by their past, but it will mean that present actions will always be marked by the mimesis of the past. In this respect *mimesis should be reflected in relation to time*. This has, as far as I know, never been done in relation to mimetic theory. Retroactive mimesis is an important supplement to the immediateness of mimetic theory. Also, retroactive mimesis may give substance to psychological representation governed by mimesis.

Chapter 4. Girardian Mimesis: A Question of Acquisition

4.1 Mimesis or Imitation

According to Girard, the originary understanding of the word mimesis does not contain the absolute, precise connotations of his usage of the word, but he chooses the Greek word *mimesis* because it contains conflictual aspects.[171] Imitation is, according to Girard, an exhausted word,[172] used too much in the context of gestures, behavioural and non-conflictual patterns.[173] If the word imitation were not so closely linked to connotations of gestures and behaviour and had included conflict, he claims he would have preferred it to mimesis.[174] But Girard is not consistent: he tends to substitute the word mimesis for imitation or imitative desire, thereby focusing on imitation as desire and something acquisitive.

> *If imitation does indeed play the fundamental role for man, as everything seems to indicate, there must certainly exist an acquisitive imitation, or, if one prefers, a possessive mimesis whose effects and consequences should be carefully studied and considered. (Things Hidden, 9.)*

Girard uses different terms at different times, strategically and depending on the context. Sometimes imitation is used in a neutral way; at other times it indicates conflict. According to Livingston, it is important to make a distinction between mimetic desire as acquisitive (appropriative) mimesis and as conflictual (antagonistic) mimesis.[175] Livingston's claim is that appropriative mimesis is not necessarily antagonistic. Girard interprets mimetic desire as incorporating both the acquisitive and the antagonistic elements, although there is, within the stages of mimetic desire, a process from acquisitive to conflictual mimesis. Mimesis starts off as something acquisitive and is transformed into conflictual mimesis.[176] The conflictual element is something secondary. If, however, it had been primary, Girard's theory would have presupposed an evil world, something like a Manichean universe where conflict is a central driving force.[177] The transformation from acquisitive to conflictual mimesis is caused by desire. Desire is the factor that makes conflictual mimesis work. In other words, mimetic desire is always acquisitive. It is not

---

[171] *Things Hidden*, 18.
[172] Ibid., 18.
[173] Ibid., 16-17.
[174] Ibid., 16-17.
[175] Livingston. *Models of Desire*, 11.
[176] *Things Hidden*, 29.
[177] Girard denies that humans have an inherited violent instinct. See "*To Double Business Bound,"Essays on*

necessarily conflictual, though it is always potentially conflictual. In the realm of rivalry, however, it becomes conflictual.

It is *conflictual* mimesis which primarily concerns Girard. Girard has never dismissed good mimesis, but he has seldom used the term, and has especially avoided the term good mimesis in connection with the term desire. Thus, acquisitive mimesis is the least specific and exclusive of all mimetic forms. It has, in fact, an affinity with instinct; the more basic and cruder forms of acquisitive mimesis especially can be seen to be related to instinct. In the animal world acquisitive mimesis is basic, and violence is the most natural consequence. And even in certain higher forms of animal life acquisition is regulated by hierarchies. As in more primitive human societies, the dominant male ape renders acquisitive mimesis impossible.[178] But in animal life mimesis is much less metaphysical and symbolic – even if one comes across examples of struggle that continue after the struggle for the female is over.[179] Mimesis among animals usually stems from the acquisition of necessary, life-sustaining objects. The fact that humankind expands the boundaries of an object-oriented mimesis is explained as the consequence of having an enlarged brain.[180]

According to Livingston, Girard's anthropology is based on acquisitive mimesis.[181] Acquisitive mimesis means, in Girardian terms the desire for an object possessed by others, not because of the object's inherent value, but because of its being desired by someone else. Girard denounces all mimetic theory that claims the primacy of the object.[182] In this respect acquisitive mimesis is specifically human. By the same token, he denounces theories that claim any primacy for any particular form of desire. In this respect Girard dismisses the primacy given to libidinal desire in Freudian theory and the Hegelian desire for acceptance[183] (even if the latter resembles Girardian desire). Acquisition in Girardian mimesis is mimesis *according to the other's desire*, and the other's desire can take numerous forms. According to

---

Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology, 201.
[178] *Things Hidden*, 91.
[179] "*To double business bound," Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology*, 201.
[180] Ibid. (See also *Things Hidden*, 94-95.)
[181] See Livingston. *Models of Desire*, XIII.
[182] Already in the first chapter of *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* Girard introduces his new theory on desire by changing the emphasis, from the object to the mediator. '(…) everything becomes clear, everything fits into a coherent structure if, in order to explain envy, we abandon the object of rivalry as the starting point and choose instead the rival himself, i.e., the mediator, as both a point of departure for our analysis and its conclusion.' (*Deceit Desire and the Novel*, 13.)
[183] "*To double business bound," Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology*, 201.

Girard, it is obvious that acquisition or appropriation is prevalent in the behaviour of human beings, and that such behaviour can be copied.[184]

> *Place a certain number of identical toys in a room with the same number of children; there is every chance that the toys will not be distributed without quarrels. (Things Hidden, 9.)*

Thus, when Girard operates with the concept of acquisitive mimesis, he puts the object in the centre. The object, however, is the centre only because it is desired by the other.[185] Consequently, the object is secondary to the other, even though it is in the centre. It is the other who gives the object value and prestige. It is difficult to locate what value Girard gives to the object, but value clearly depends on the transformation of the object brought about by the mimetic processes. The author Knut Hamsun gives an example about value as being totally dependent on the other's desire, an example which perfectly summarizes Girard's view.

Når en ting ligger på marken har den ingen værdi for dig. Det er først når en anden kommer og vil ta den op at den får verdi for dig og da griper du ind. (Hamsun. *Benoni,* 151.)

When a thing lies on the ground it will have no value for you. But when somebody else takes it up from the ground, it suddenly becomes valuable. Then you act. (My translation.)

Thus value is nothing inherent or static; rather it is regulated by mimetic desire. On the other hand, everybody knows that there is a great difference between a stick and a human being; it is only desire at its most extreme that does not acknowledge that fact. The metamorphosis of desire is so strong that in extreme cases the least objectively desirable things are loaded with the utmost value, while prestigious things are devalued. It is only outside desire, within the realm of reason and ethics, that one can clarify the hierarchical distinctions between material objects and human objects.

Initially, there is always an object in Girardian mimesis, but in the mimetic process, where imitation becomes more and more rivalistic, the object seems to lose its value, and mimesis becomes totally focused on the other. In other words, there is a process from object to mediator. Girard does not explain this process in terms of the object's value or lack of value. It is a consequence of rivalry or mimetic rivalry, which gradually escalates and becomes more and

[184] *Things Hidden*, 8.
[185] *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, Chapter I (Triangular Desire).

more intense. And the object's value is totally dependent on the context of rivalry. In other words, the value of the object is totally subjective and dependent on the other's mimesis. In this respect there is no rationality in the process of mimetic desire, or, there is a gradual loss of rationality in the process of mimetic conflict.

4.2 Plato and the Danger of Mimesis

In my view, certain aspects of Plato's thought illuminate what I would call the rivalry between mimesis as representation and mimesis as acquisition. In one sense mimesis in Antiquity is clearly representational: it depicts a static world and does not show changes as a result of everyday life.[186] In the literature of Antiquity, the instability (of fortune) almost always appears as fate.[187] With Plato, however, the reason for instability in society is rationalized and understood as mimesis. This is the main reason why Plato regards mimesis not only with suspicion, but also with contempt. It is no coincidence that mimesis is primarily discussed (and dismissed) in *The Republic*, as it is seen to be a danger to what Plato considers the ideal State.

In Plato's work mimesis is understood in terms additional to representation, imitation and expression. Plato introduces mimesis as emulation, transformation, as the creation of similarities, the production of appearances and illusions.[188] According to Gebauer and Wulf, the Platonic concept of mimesis contains no unity.[189] Before he wrote *The Republic,* mimesis for Plato was understood as metaphoric imitation and imitation of the actions of another person.[190] In *The Republic,* mimesis is also defined in relation to poetry and learning,[191] as mimetic art.

Auerbach claims that the literature of Antiquity does not reveal the underlying conditions of what it presents,[192] and alludes to this as fate or divine intervention. However, a certain awareness of governing principles begins to manifest itself with Plato. The *fear* Plato reveals towards mimesis demonstrates the conflictual and forceful side to it. Even if Plato's concept of the real is anti-

[186] Auerbach. *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, 32.
[187] Ibid., 29.
[188] Gebauer & Wulf. *Mimesis,* 25.
[189] Ibid., 25.
[190] Ibid., 31.
[191] Ibid., 33.
[192] Ibid., 31.

mimetic, imitation plays a fundamental role in Plato's phenomenological understanding of life, right down to the letters (which are formed by the imitation of motion).[193]

Girard criticizes Plato's concept of mimesis as being limited to representation.[194] Appropriation is lacking.[195] But, in my view, Plato, when emphasizing his negative attitude to mimesis, already uncovers certain conflictual aspects of mimesis, i.e. mimesis governed by desire. Such a view, however, depends on whether one considers Plato's work to be normative or phenomenological. Clearly Plato considers mimesis as a powerful force, as a threat to the stability of his ideal state. Therefore mimesis both as copying, imitating and representing is clearly forbidden in the ideal Republic.[196] But what this really shows is the emphasis Plato puts on the acquisitive and contagious nature of mimesis.

Girard claims that in Plato's work there is no theory of mimetic rivalry.[197] Plato fears mimesis more than he despises it.[198] But in so doing, he thereby recognizes its force. Plato's mimesis works both good and bad, it is a *pharmakon*. However, if one interprets Plato's anti-mimetism as grounded in a fear of mimetic disorder and violence, which, especially in *The Republic*, generates his anti-mimetism, one would make the copy-theory sound like something secondary or like *a posteriori* theorizing. According to Lacoue-Labarthe, Plato philosophizes in order to stabilize the alarming circulation of resemblance;[199] mimetism threatens society to push towards feminism and madness.[200] In this respect philosophy is logos, serving as a bulwark against the chaos of feminism and madness. This psychoanalytic interpretation of Platonic mimesis emphasizes the fear of mental disorder, which in Plato, can be extended to a multitude of areas which could potentially create disturbances in the Republic.

4.2.1 Imitating the Model

Plato's goal in his Idea-world is to establish a difference, a distinction between the original and the copy.[201] In the *Sophist* imitation is presented as a sort of production, but it is a

---

[193] Plato. *Cratylus* 426-427c, in Plato. *Complete Works* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).
[194] 'The examples he (Plato) selects for us are consistently limited to representation - to types of behaviour, manners, individual or collective habit, as well as words, phrases, and ways of speaking.' (Girard. *Things Hidden*, 8.)
[195] *Things Hidden*, 8.
[196] See Plato. *The Republic* 394e-396a.
[197] *Things Hidden*, 18.
[198] Ibid., 17.
[199] Lacoue-Labarthe. *Typography*, 122.
[200] Ibid., 129, (footnote 128).
[201] See Deleuze. 'Platon og simulakret,' Agora 2/3, Oslo (1989): 98.

production of copies, not of originals, not of 'things in themselves.'[202] Mimesis produces a thing's double, but the copy, according to Plato, is of no value. The value comes solely from the model. Thus, imitation is good if the model is good, and bad if the model is bad. But in itself mimesis has no value: the 'essence'[203] being a copy which is negative and therefore something bad.[204] Plato dismisses mimesis because of its lack of authenticity, and hands all authenticity and essence over to the model.[205] Girard, on the other hand, dismisses autonomy, and this dismissal is his starting point for the mimetic principle. There are no free zones as regards mimesis. Therefore Girard does not operate with a qualitative distinction between the model and the copy - since everyone is copying each other.[206] The model's desired qualities should be seen as having been developed through imitation. The model's role as model is a result of mimesis and cannot be considered to be privileged, or to be *a priori* more substantial than the copy. Instead of supporting the act of copying, by showing the non-identical or supplemental factor created by the act of copying the model, Girard *reveals the original as a copy*. In this respect he acts iconoclastically with regard to originality. Unlike Derrida, who tries to save the concept of originality by emphasizing the originality created by the imitator's supplement, Girard tries to save originality within the context of mimesis. Originality thus depends on mimesis, on the ability to decipher the different aspects of mimetic configurations and put the mimetic elements together in an original and fundamental fashion. This ability does not stem from any *a priori* genius, it stems from differentiated imitation, a kind of subtle mimetic mixture.

Despite the fact that Plato never comments on mimesis as repetition,[207] it is impossible to describe mimesis as representation or copy without including repetition. Also, Girard seldom uses the word repetition, but the repetitive element is present in desiring what the other desires. The desire to repeat often leads to reciprocal violence, a violence where one part imitates the other's violence, often allowing it to escalate into graver forms of violence. Plato

[202] Plato. *Sophist*, 265b.
[203] In *Cratylus.* 423d-e, 431d Plato presents mimesis as owning an inherent essence, but its representation is far from truth. See also Gebauer & Wulf. *Mimesis*, 42.
[204] See Derrida. 'Platons mimesis,' Agora 2/3, Oslo (1989): 94.
[205] An interesting fact is that the Platonic dismissal of the copy was not strong, either in the Middle Ages or in the Renaissance. This attitude of negating the copy became popular from the late eighteenth century, especially in regard to the theory of art. The mimetic principle from the eighteenth century underwent a recession where subjectivity and creativity should substitute mimesis. For example the Kantian emphasis on the artist's ability to create an original world could be characterized as non-mimetic.(See J.D. Boyd. *The Function of Mimesis and its Decline* (New York, Fordham U.P., 1980), 303-305.) From the point of dismissing the Romantic dismissal of mimesis, Girard starts off by constructing his concept of mimesis, at first as a critique of the concept of autonomy.
[206] In this respect, when dealing with people's ability to copy, Girard is an extreme post-modernist.

must have seen this too. If not, why should he forbid the representation of mimesis, if there were no danger of the acts being repeated? The reason for his anti-mimetic approach is precisely because of this repetitive dimension. Plato does not want anyone to repeat bad deeds in his ideal state.

Girard's concept of the double, the process of doubling desire, is a process whereby the subject and the mediator repeat each other's desire.[208] This repetitive dimension to mimesis is, however, not fully grasped by Plato, because he does not consciously connect mimesis with desire, and thereby limits mimesis to copy and representation. Although the repetitive dimension of mimesis can be seen to be a part of Plato's anti-mimesis, his rather one-sided approach clothed in moralistic terms hinders analysis and leads to rejection. Repetition can only be avoided if interdividual play is subordinated to an Ideal world, where repetition would thus seem to be an illusion.

4.3 Mimesis and Ethics

The ethical dimension to mimesis, when mimesis is seen as copying, seems obvious: when a person imitates a bad or a good model, he or she will become a part of what he or she imitates. There is, however, in Plato's work, less emphasis on the possibility of becoming a part of the good model through imitating, since imitation creates falsity. The Sophist's imitation is an imitation of the wise man,[209] but Plato does not accept imitation as a part of any wisdom. Not only is imitation false *per se*, the Sophist is also false in the way he 'forces the person talking to him to contradict himself,'[210] thus indicating the rivalry in dialogue. Plato does not, in this context, believe, as Aristotle does, that imitating a good person will lead to *arête*. But Plato's dismissal of imitating a good model is not consistent. At times Plato clearly gives the model ethical substance. In *The Republic* Plato describes the act of striving to become like one's model,[211] thus indicating that mimesis can be a positive principle in upbringing and education. In *Laws,* the ideal state is

---

[207] Melberg. *Theories of Mimesis*, 37.
[208] Livingston has pointed out that the model's desire and the imitator's desire are not the same, and those desires are governed by external factors. (Paisley Livingston. *Models of Desire*, 52-53.) Therefore, there must be a looser connection between the two. Even in the more intensified relations between subject and model, desires are asymmetrical. Desires sent out can be of so different a nature from the desires received that the intensity may be toned down by the sheer incoherence of the other's desire. If, however, one continues to develop a general anthropology based on mimetic desire, the variety of desires based on different degrees of intensification towards the other, have to be elaborated.
[209] Plato. *The Sophist* 268c.
[210] Ibid., 268b.
[211] Plato. *The Republic* 3.397 d.

described as mimesis of the noble and perfect life, [212] [213] not very different from tragedy. In Book Three in *The Republic,* from 397a to 398b, the verb 'to imitate' is used twice, once with a positive meaning, the second time with a negative meaning.[214] There is, however, a tightening of the anti-mimetic aspect between Book Two and Three and Book Ten of *The Republic*. This uncertainty in Plato's position Derrida reveals to be a textual mimesis where the frequent exchange of positions comes into play as the parts imitate the forms and borrow the paths of the opponent.[215] The Greek myths about gods and heroes are not stories one should imitate in order to become a useful member of the state. According to Lacoue-Labarthe, Plato has a resentment against the original maternal domination and original feminine education,[216] as this means bringing the children up with (destructive) myths, thus creating bad mimesis from infancy. According to Andersen, bad mimesis in Plato's work is manifested as imitation, copying and mirroring,[217] indicating that almost all mimesis is bad. Also mimetic theory emphasizes bad mimesis. In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* practically all imitation is seen as violent and destructive. And in Girard's later works, due to the fact that a more pronounced distinction between good and bad mimesis appears, there is some attempt to view good mimesis as a part of a religious and ethical ideal. In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, however, a negative movement is outlined, leading through a mimetic crisis and ending up in conversion. Such a negative mimetic structure is not present in Plato's work. The idea of becoming stronger, wiser or more human through negative experience has no value in Plato's worldview[218] because he believes mimesis should be avoided and suffering is of no value. The paradox of becoming stronger or better in confrontation with negative models is not a central motif in pre-Christian Antiquity, even if Aristotle's *catharsis* may indicate a parallel, paradoxical structure.

4.3.1 Art, Literature and Ethics

Both Plato and Girard criticise bad mimesis in their own contemporary society, as leading to a break-down of moral values. But for Girard there are no moral values exempt from mimesis, meaning that moral values can only be attained through mimesis. Since Girard emphasizes the acquisitive sides of mimesis, this leads to a certain dismissal of representation, not because representation is false but because ideas and ideals cannot change anything in human life as

[212] Plato. *Laws* 7.817 b.
[213] See Gebauer & Wulf. *Mimesis*, 32.
[214] Andersen. *Allegori og mimesis*, 60.
[215] Derrida. "Plato's Pharmacy" in *Dissemination* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 108.
[216] Lacoue-Labarthe. *Typography*, 127.
[217] Andersen. *Allegori og mimesis*, 63.
[218] Gebauer & Wulf. *Mimesis*, 33.

humans are bound to the act of imitating through their different desires. It seems to me that Plato saw or experienced the effects of mimesis in the way human beings are affected by art. Therefore, in the realm of art Plato's overall view in *The Republic* is to dismiss mimetic art as something bad, as not deserving of representation. In *Epinomis* imitative art is dismissed because it is not considered able to make a person wise,[219] while in the *Laws* imitation in art is said to be self-contradictory,[220] splitting a person's character.[221] [222] As mimesis in art is an assimilation of the good and the bad, Plato has needs to dismiss mimetic art, as imitation of bad models threatens the Republic. One could say that Plato's critique of art is consistent as regards his non-mimetic ontology, but quite inconsistent as regards his aesthetics[223] since his own Dialogues may be seen as mimetic masterpieces, evolving as a play where different mimetic responses control the action. The mimetic and polyphonic structure of the Dialogues makes it problematic to conclude that the voice (of Socrates) and the one-sided conclusion is actually Plato's own conclusion - even though that is probable.[224]

Plato criticizes mimetic art for depicting sexual desires, passion and everything that is associated with pleasure and pain within us. The argument is that art enhances these desires, while they ought to be controlled.[225] Plato does not only criticize mimetic art for depicting vices, but also for leading people to commit bad deeds. The realism and moralism in Plato's understanding of mimesis is evident when he emphasizes the force and potential contagious effects of imitation. According to Girard, Plato's rejection of tragic violence is itself violent, for it finds expression in a new expulsion - that of the poet.[226] Girard, it seems, initially has no moralistic overview of the arts but, when it comes to literature, he divides literature into romantic literature and the literature of realism, where the former propagates the mediator and the latter reveals the role of the mediator. Plato sees the work of the artist as nothing but a copy of the Ideas, an absence implying three or more steps from the original Idea.[227] [228] In relation to the concept of the Idea, one might claim that

---

[219] Plato. *Epinomis* 975d.
[220] Plato. *Laws* 719c.
[221] Ibid., 2.655d-656c.
[222] In *Laws* Plato clearly sees a symmetry between character and imitation, but in a fashion that neutralises the formative elements of imitation. (See *Laws* 2.655d-656a.)
[223] Andersen. *Allegori og mimesis*, 59.
[224] According to Lacoue-Labarthe, the reason that Plato is never present himself is that he has a secret love for Homer, and does not wish to present the dismissal of art as his own. (Lacoue-Labarthe. *Typography*, 134-135.)
[225] Plato. *The Republic* 606d.
[226] *Violence and the Sacred*, 295.
[227] According to W.J. Verdenius, it is questionable that Plato intended mimesis to mean a slavish copy. (W.J. Verdenius. *Mimesis. Plato's Doctrine of Artistic Imitation and its Meaning to us* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 2.
[228] In Book ten of *The Republic* Plato claims that the artist's representation of reality is three steps from the truth. The carpenter is only two (Plato. *The Republic*, 597b-598c), and because of the distance to truth the carpenter should be

Girard's term *mimetic desire* is devoid of any idea-concept and that the great authors reveal the interdividual mimetic game relatively independent of any *a priori* idea. Girardian mimesis applied to literary theory does not even claim, as Bakhtin does, that there is a governing idea[229] crowning the polyphonic gala of persons,[230] since there is a dynamic process at work of revealing desires, not ideas (even though it would be wrong to suggest that there is no connection between the two). All the same, it would be somewhat superficial to claim that Girard does not evaluate literature in any moral way. His dismissal of *romantic literature* (which underscores the whole of *Deceit, Desire and the Novel)* is what he sees as a lie concerning the perception of human beings' basic relation towards each other. The reason is that romantic literature does not reveal the contagious and manipulative effect of the other. Literature is truth, in Girardian thought, so long as it reveals desire, and so long as it is motivated by a non-desiring point of view. On the other hand, art is false if it hides or proclaims the mediator without revealing its destructive power. Therefore it is impossible to claim that Girard evades the moral dimension in literature; or that he regards mimetic literature as positive *per se*.

---

called a demiurge, a false creator. In this sense mimesis is the source to delusion and the more artistic the imitation is, the further away it is from truth. Plato does not reflect on how far away the writer stands from truth, but his way of representing reality is not in concordance with the Ideas. This is actually the opposite view which Girard takes as regards to the novelist. Because the novelist writings are governed by the mimetic principle, he has the closest insight into the interdividual relationships, to a profound anthropological reality. The realist novelist is regarded as a primary source of truth as he uncovers the mimetic principle. Imitating is regarded in *The Republic* as second and third-rate approach to truth and in *Phaedrus* imitation stands six stages from truth, a truth which one only can grasp through the Ideas. (This approach to mimesis has been imitated by Heidegger who defines the essence of mimesis as distance. (See Heidegger. *Nietzsche*, Vol 1 (Pfullingen: Neske, 1961), 215.) It would, however, be wrong to say that Platonic mimesis represents the unreal, as Platonic mimesis refers to a reality, but it is not an essential reality. There are also forms of art which Plato claims are mimetically authentic, as they refer to a transcendental signifier, an original Idea. (See Andersen. *Mimesis og allegori*, 64). Therefore, it is important to highlight the ambiguity in Plato's concept of mimesis, both as imitation and assimilation of the good and the beautiful, and in his condemnation of mimetic art.

[229] Girard claims in *Things Hidden* that he does not know from where he is speaking and he does not care. (*Things Hidden*, 435.)

[230] Mikhail Bakhtin. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Manchester: Manchester U.P., 1984), 18.

Girard's work deals almost entirely with the destructive aspects of mimesis. This , I suppose, is due mainly to the sources Girard uses to uncover mimesis. Both the literary and religious texts he selects are mainly texts about evil. There are few mundane solutions to the mimetic crisis as the main solution is religious in that the way to avoid violence is to imitate Christ through forgiveness and active love. Thus, Girard's work cannot be classified as an ethical theory (even though it has numerous ethical implications) and it therefore gives few indications on how to imitate in a positive manner. Plato's moralistic tone is more clearly pronounced, as he considers most mimetic expressions to be the source of conflict and disintegration in society. But Plato is not immune to the positive aspects of mimesis in upbringing and artistic education.

> *It is not only to the poets therefore that we must issue orders requiring them to portray good character in their poems or not to write at all; we must issue similar orders to all artists and craftsmen, and prevent them portraying bad character, ill-discipline, meanness or ugliness in pictures of living things, in sculpture, architecture, or any other work of art, and if they are unable to comply they must be forbidden to practise their art among us. We shall thus prevent our guardians being brought up among representations of what is evil, and so day by day and little by little, by grazing widely as it were in an unhealthy pasture, insensibly doing themselves a cumulative damage that is very serious. We must look for artists and craftsmen capable of perceiving the real nature of what is beautiful, and then our young men, living as it were in a healthy climate, will benefit because all the works of art they see and hear influence them for good, like the breezes from some healthy country, insensibly leading them from earliest childhood into close sympathy and conformity with beauty and reason. (The Republic 401b-d).*

This didactic principle or morality in the ideal world, despite the emphasis on reason and logos (God), can never be completely stripped of a mimetic content. But Plato's relative dismissal of mimesis establishes a weak link between mimesis and morals. In *The Republic* Socrates forbids the imitation of negative models[231] and only admits 'the pure imitation of a decent person,'[232] while in *The Sophist,* the Visitor concludes by holding up the sincere imitator (who imitates the wise man) on behalf of the Sophist who falls prey to insincere imitation.[233] In *The Sophist* Plato divides mimesis into belief mimicry and informed mimicry (267d-e), where belief mimicry is a deceitful imitation. The deceit of belief mimicry consists in the person (the Sophist) thinking he knows what he imitates, but in fact he does not. This insincerity is characteristic of the Sophist and is often manifested in long speeches and manipulative behaviour.[234] The sincere imitator, on the other hand, is fearful of being sure of his knowledge. He has the Socratic attitude of not knowing anything *a priori*. Thus, there is an inconsistency in the imitation of the decent and wise person in *The Republic* and in *The*

[231] Plato. *The Republic* 3.394 e+.
[232] Ibid. 3.397 d.
[233] Plato. *The Sophist* 268 a-c.

Sophist, where, in the former, mimesis is morally recommendable, but, in the latter, only turns a person into a demagogue. These shifts in point of view can only be explained through Plato's own mimetic inconsistency. In relation to morals in *The Republic*, Plato wishes to replace Homeric-mimetic thinking with analytic thought.[235] Myths are morally despicable, created by poets. Morals are not the poets' business, but the philosopher's.[236] This clearly shows Plato's aim to admit only representations of good mimesis, not because acquisitive mimesis does not exist, but because on the contrary, it exists in such a forceful and damaging way that it could destroy society. Imitation therefore, in its raw and unstable representations, must be quenched.

4.3.1.1 Violence in Art

This leads us to the question about violence and art. Plato seems to reject mimesis because he is aware of the violence it can bring forth. Plato, in an almost prophetic manner, understands that imitating violent gods, violent heroes and violent myths will create violence. Plato has no theory of *catharsis*; instead he understands the representation of myths as escalating violence. In this way Plato is perhaps the first to connect the concept of mimesis with violence. Plato does not, however, dismiss myths in a peace-activist manner; he regards mimesis as de-stabilizing, creating anarchy within the Republic. Plato wants order in the Republic, but does not see this stability as a stage towards any universal peace-process. Thus Plato's context is provincial when he dismisses mimetic contagion in order to create stability but not peace. Girard regards art that reveals the mimetic game as a kind of secular apocalypse, as a preliminary stage to religious imitation. Art therefore is necessary in order to understand the destructive sides of society.[237] But for Girard there are no ways out of mimetic desire. There are only different models creating different desires.

Against the background of 5th century BC artistic life, Plato dismisses the majority of artistic expressions. He is not, however, totally dismissive of poetry. Poetry, which pays tribute to the

---

[234] Ibid., 268a-b.
[235] Melberg. *Theories of Mimesis*, 40.
[236] Girard holds the opposite view as he emphasizes the great novelists' insight into mimesis at the expense of the philosophers. The ability which some great novelists have shown in revealing interdividual structures, is, according to Girard, a revelation of the basic structures, the logos of conflict. This does not make the novelist more moral in any way, but clears the ground for depicting morality as being based on mimetic models.
[237] This differs radically from Plato's overall view on art. Plato regards the man who has envisaged the ideal good, the ideal beauty as not interested in imitation. He does not want to become an artist (three or more stages away from truth); he wants to live a good life, which is identical with a non-mimetic, moral life. This thought is, actually, not entirely absent in Girardian thought regarding the artist's own dealing with mimetic desire. He claims that people in the artistic world who have revealed their romantic rivalry may quit literary activity altogether as a consequence of their insight into mimetic desire. (Girard. *Things Hidden*, 398.)

gods and prominent citizens, is allowed,[238] a poetry which might also be labelled as mimetic in the way gods and prominent citizens are ideals to be imitated. Arne Melberg writes that 'the purely diegetical narrator is thus allowed to stay in the city while the mimetic is rejected.'[239] In my view both kinds of art are mimetic, although praising the prominent citizen is a more uncomplicated and direct, copyistic kind of mimesis. According to Plato, the former focuses on good mimesis, the latter on bad mimesis. Plato, however, has no problems in dismissing comedy, [240] but he has far greater problems in dismissing tragedy.[241] He even goes so far as to indicate that his ideal state would be a representation of tragedy. Book Ten, which, at the beginning, is the clearest dismissal of mimetic art in Plato's work, ends with a more relaxed and more uncertain dismissal of art. Lacoue-Labarthe claims that there are signs of love towards poetry in *The Republic*.[242] There is a political element governing this relaxation, as Plato indicates a loosening up within the context of a well-run society.[243] Plato regards art from a political standpoint, thus limiting it to a function of the Republic, and if one could find arguments to say that drama and poetry would have a positive function in society, Socrates says he would gladly admit it.[244] The ideal of how art should function is, in Plato's work, a static and reactionary ideal - despite the wish to dismiss the traditional poet and replace him with a severe poet who portrays and imitates the style of the good man.[245] The reference to Egypt[246] is no coincidence, as the Egyptians' worldview was static and conservative. And in the light of a static worldview most imitation has to be dismissed, as mimesis implies all kinds of destabilizing cultural transmissions.

4.4 Dialogue and Acquisition

In *The Republic* Plato's two elder brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus raise no objections to Socrates' views on the formation of the ideal state, and *The Republic* is one of the dialogues where the polyphonic element is most suppressed. The lack of a free dialogue in *The Republic* tends

[238] Plato. *The Republic*, 607a.
[239] Melberg. *Theories of Mimesis*, 19.
[240] Music and dance are also exceptions, but only the music and dance which repeats the traditional expressions. (Plato. *Laws* 7.798e.)
[241] Plato. *Laws* 7.817a-c.
[242] Lacoue-Labarthe. *Typography*, see footnote 106, page 107.
[243] Plato. *The Republic* 607c.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Ibid., 3.398a-c.
[246] Plato. *Laws* 2.656d-657b and 7.799a-b.

towards an anti-mimetic form, and is written from the point of power view. Even if the form is dialogical, the content is driven by acquisitive desire, the desire for order and control. One might tentatively ask whether Girard adopted the dialogue form in *Things Hidden,* in order to emphasize his mimetic approach. In *Things Hidden*, however, acquisitive mimesis is propagated as the most original and fundamental form of mimesis. Despite this, there is no notion that the discussion itself is acquisitive. The dialogue is not primarily a discussion on the validity of the theory as such. This question seems to be agreed on. The aim of the dialogue is to develop the mimetic theory through analysis and comparison, and by showing its relevance to culture. The Girardian dialogue is governed by Girard in that Oughourlian and Lefort discuss Girard's themes on the basis of Girardian theory,[247] and there is very little controversy between the three. *Things Hidden* can thus be seen as containing an imitation of the Platonic dialogue-form. The lack of controversy between Girard, Lefort and Oughourlian has been criticized by Johan Asplund in *Rivaler och syndabockar* for containing no real controversy and allowing Girard to come up with all the right answers.[248] The dialogue between the three is not, however, as in the Platonic dialogues a process of persuasion which suddenly changes the worldview of the participants; the dialogue is based upon a common consensus regarding the basic principles of mimetic desire.

4.4.1 Acquisition in *The Sophist*

Girard claims that Plato does not have any theory on mimetic rivalry.[249] Although Plato has no theory on rivalry, he does give examples of mimetic rivalry. According to Plato, the Sophist's mimesis is *acquisitive.*[250] Acquisitive mimesis for Plato is bad mimesis and the Sophist's acquisitive attitude to things is compared to hunting,[251] a forceful and brutal metaphor used to describe a manipulative way of learning and taking possession of other people.[252] The distinction Girard makes between imitative and emulative forms of mimetic desire[253] is also indicated in Plato's work, even if the references are to the philosophical concepts of truth and illusion.

[247] The dialogue in *Things Hidden* is based on Girard discussing his findings with two psychiatrists well acquainted with the then evolving mimetic theory.
[248] Johan Asplund. *Rivaler och syndabocker* (Gøteborg: Korpen, 1989), 22.
[249] *Things Hidden*, 18.
[250] Plato. *The Sophist* 265a.
[251] Ibid. 219+.
[252] Ibid. 222a, 223b.
[253] Livingston. *Models of Desire*, XVIII-XIX.

However, to agree with Girard that Platonic mimesis is limited to representation,[254] and that appropriation is lacking, [255] is problematic. Plato does discuss acquisitive mimesis, but he does not express it directly. From my reading of the *Sophist* text, I cannot agree with Girard that 'Plato never relates conflict to acquisitive mimesis,'[256] as the Sophist's imitation is described as manipulative. Plato uses many potentially mimetical and desirous words, such as *selling*, *exchange*, *acquisition*, *competition, combat,* and *fighting* to characterize the Sophist.[257] On the other hand, Girard is right when he claims that Plato fails to see the essential role of desire as based on rivalry between subject and model, where the object gradually plays less and less of a role in the desire.[258] Plato does not locate the conflictual core of mimesis, i.e. mimesis governed by desire because he believes in a world of Ideas. But Plato clearly sees mimesis as a powerful force, as a threat to the stability of his ideal state. Therefore mimesis, both as copying, imitating and representing, is potentially forbidden in the ideal Republic.[259] Thus, from a Girardian point of view Platonic morality or anti-mimetism could be interpreted as a superficial interpretation on what moves a society, motivated by a fear of instability. Plato deals indirectly with acquisitive mimesis in that he sees imitation as a de-stabilizing factor in society, but, at the same time, he avoids seeing the other as engendering the acquisitive. Therefore there can be no real theory in Plato on the workings of mimesis, only a general moral description of mimetic power.

4.5 Imitating God

According to Plato, the stories told by Hesiod and Homer are untrue and bad when they describe the heroes and gods in an unfavourable light.[260] Such alleged misrepresentation is based on describing the gods as immoral and evil. For Plato, God is good and we must look for the causes of evil elsewhere than in God, [261] indicating that evil is caused by humans. Plato criticizes Homer for presenting Zeus as both good and bad.[262] This daring demythologization resembles Girard's own attempt to rid the Christian God of violence. Girard's attempt to strip Christianity of its sacrificial roots and his continual attempt to reveal the non-violence of the

[254] 'The examples he (Plato) selects for us are consistently limited to representation - to types of behavior, manners, individual or collective habit, as well as words, phrases, and ways of speaking.' (*Things Hidden*, 8.)
[255] *Things Hidden*, 8.
[256] Ibid., 15.
[257] Plato. *The Sophist* 223-226. See especially 226a.
[258] *Things Hidden*, 15-16.
[259] See *The Republic* 394e-396a.
[260] Ibid., 377d-e.
[261] Ibid., 379c.

Gospels, are, however, based on an anthropological reading of the Gospels, not on a Platonic or Neo-Platonic reading. Plato presents his daring critique as a point of view (Socrates' point of view) not as society's misreading of Homer. In the same way as Plato does, when he criticizes the author (Homer) for presenting the gods as bad and immoral, Girard claims that there are sacrificial elements in the Judaeo-Christian image of God which the authors of the Gospels have not been able to dispel.[263] But Girard's critique of the authors of the Gospels is minimal, and his critique of the violence materialized in the Christian sacrificial tradition is only loosely hinted at, never directly criticized or revealed as anti-Christian violence. Girard's interpretation of myths as both concealing and revealing the events described in them is relevant in the context of misrepresentation. Interpreting the mythological as something that hides the real reasons for the sacrifice, amounts to a critique of Greek religion. The Greek stories about the gods and heroes can be interpreted as a misrepresentation of the events. Zeus and the other gods are blamed for rape and murder. The real events are hidden within the myths, perhaps covering an actual rape and giving a certain legitimation to rape (for even the gods may act as rapists and murderers). It is this mythology that Plato frenetically tries to dismiss. Knowing the force of mimesis, Plato knows that when Homer depicts an adulterous and rapist version of Zeus, the risk will be that such acts committed by the gods could lead, among common people, to their imitating the vices of the gods. But, at the same time, it is impossible to strip the stories of divine vice and violence.[264] Therefore Plato dismisses Greek mythology precisely because he perceives the acquisitive dimension in mimesis. This understanding of the contagious nature of mimesis is the reason for Plato's anti-mimesis.

God is good and non-violent, both for Girard and Plato, though understood very differently. For the Hellenistic Greeks imitation of God was a state of mind,[265] while the Catholic Christian imitation is understood as something dynamic, focused on the interdividual and ethical.[266] Plato's concept of God or the One, is usually interpreted as an Idea that refers to the good and the beautiful. However, Plato also presents God as a caring God, caring for the person who strives for righteousness, trains to be good, and wants to be like God himself.[267]

---

[262] Ibid., 379d.
[263] See *Things Hidden*, 224-262.
[264] Stripping the stories of violence would be to destroy the stories' core, the inherent worldview. Instead Plato dismisses the stories and forbids the production of new versions.
[265] E.J. Tinsley. *The Interpretation of God in Christ. An Essay on the Biblical Basis of Christian Spirituality* (London, SCM Press, 1960), 29.
[266] This historical gap, caused by the introduction of Christianity, which provoked a shift in mentality, is the main reason for the difference between Plato's concept of God and Girard's.
[267] Plato. *The Republic* 613a.

The elements of *training and repetition indicate imitation*. Man imitates God's goodness. In *Timaeus,* mimesis is even given as the formula for the creation and form of the world.[268] Timaeus claims that the absolute being can be reached by the mind and one can imitate its nature.[269] In *Timaeus* mimesis represents a creative, acquisitive force, the force of becoming part of creation. This creative element, however, is modified in Plato's understanding of creation through his introduction of a lower representation of god, the Demiurge. Thus the creation of the world is a second rate creation, one step away from the Ideas which creation symbolically and materialistically represents as distorted reality.[270] In *Cratylus* the act of imitating nature, the forms of things by bodily movement[271] is described as imperfect compared to the imitative power of language.[272] The smallest syllable is an imitation of things.[273] Language is both a true and correct imitation of the essence of things. Thus, as regards language, imitation is a means towards truth. And language is both a true and correct imitation of the essence of things.[274] Girard does not deal with the topic of creation in relation to mimesis. Neither does he refer specifically to any theology on creation. But, as Girard separates violence from God the creator, the problem of violence in creation inevitably arises. From a purely theological point of view, Girard's understanding of creation can be interpreted as being Platonic in that violence in creation is not attributed to the real God. Girard's argument regarding original violence, however, is given an anthropological instead of a theological answer. In this way God is separated from the act of creating violence. At the same time Girard reads the Genesis myth from the point of view of God as the victim.[275] Girard's christological approach to the Old Testament means that the Old Testament is interpreted as a series of stories of scapegoating, where God is not the one inflicting violence but one who suffers violence. [276] In this way he links God to human history through Christ's revelation of innocent victims. Such an anthropo-theological thought is not, of course, present in Plato.[277] The image of a dynamic, acting and suffering God manifested in history, is

[268] Melberg. *Theories of Mimesis*, 22.
[269] Ibid., 23.
[270] Aquinas, inspired by Timeaus and the Bible, looked upon the beauty of this world as a mimetic reflection of God's beauty.
[271] Plato. *Cratylus* 423a.
[272] Ibid., 425d.
[273] Ibid., 426c+.
[274] Ibid., 430d-e.
[275] *Things Hidden*, 275.
[276] Ibid., 275.
[277] In the work of Plato there is no movement whereby anthropological insights lead to a revelation of God. Anthropology and theology are separate, and the human situation is not a starting point, a positive factor leading to God. There is however an exception in *Timaeus*, where there is a certain imitation of creation, and of the creator. But the Platonic image of the godhead is not a God participating in history; rather it requires a flight from the shifting

the main theological difference from Platonic thought, which also generates their different interpretations of logos. For Plato, God represents the good but the mimetic acquirement of the good is only mentioned in relation to a degenerated creation. A mimetic relationship between God and humans are therefore not part of Plato's theology.

4.6 Similarity between Plato's Anti-Mimesis and Girard's Acquisitive Mimesis

Even if Plato did not develop any theory on acquisitive mimesis,[278] he uses the term, and his anti-mimetism indicates the conflictual side of mimesis. In this respect there is a similarity between Girardian and Platonic mimesis (Plato's anti-mimetism) based on an understanding of conflict and instability. Plato defines acquisitive mimesis as bad mimesis, Girard, on the other hand, labels almost all kinds of mimesis as acquisitive mimesis. But what he interprets as acquisitive mimesis is, in some ways, remarkably similar to what Plato fears in mimesis. To claim that Plato's understanding of mimesis is only related to representation is, as we have seen, an exaggeration.

4.7 Aristotelian Criticism of Plato's Anti-Mimesis

In Aristotle's work too, one can detect the three main forms of mimesis; namely representation, imitation and appropriation. Appropriation does not, especially at first sight, seem important or vital (as a theme) in Aristotle's reflection on mimesis, and one might therefore claim that Girard's critique of Plato's lack of appropriation seems more valid when applied to Aristotle's understanding of mimesis. Aristotle regards mimesis primarily from an aesthetic point of view, and, as a consequence of his aesthetic preference, the understanding of the social dimension of mimesis fell, after Aristotle, almost completely into the background. One great problem with interpreting Aristotelian mimesis is that he claims mimesis to be the most important principle in human life, but, at the same time, he confines most of his analyses of mimesis to statements concerning poetics. The one-sided and positive manner in which Aristotle regards mimesis is, according to Else, an indirect assault on

---

nature of history.

[278] According to Girard, Plato does not have any theory of mimetic rivalry, even if the Greek word, mimesis, makes the conflictual aspect of mimesis conceivable. (*Things Hidden,* 18)

Platonic mimesis.[279] While Plato criticizes Homer for presenting people in an imitative way, Aristotle, at the end of the *Poetics*, claims that this is something good. Here one can, according to Melberg, sense a polemic against Plato[280] and Plato's wish to expel all mimetic artists from his republic.

In the *Poetics,* Aristotle gives mimesis a purely positive interpretation: he defines art as mimesis and the artist as creator.[281] All kinds of art are defined as mimesis, without any moralistic reservations about how mimesis is represented. Ricoeur interprets Aristotle's mimesis-concept as lived, temporary experience, as something active and creative and, therefore, something different from Platonic mimesis.[282] According to Arne Melberg, Aristotle's mimesis consists of mythos and praxis which resemble the concepts time and action, while mimesis for Plato is more image, fantasy and imitation.[283] Regarding the role of the artist, one might claim that Platonic mimesis is more passive while Aristotelian mimesis is more active. But even so, within the Aristotelian tradition, art comes after nature and reality, because the artist imitates action. Mimesis is not an originary principle – as for example in Plato's *Timaeus*, but still something fundamental and ontological. However, Melberg still emphasizes the realism in Aristotelian mimesis. In Aristotle's *Poetics* drama (tragedy and comedy) is defined as mimesis or an imitation of reality. This reality is not primarily an imitation of persons but of action and life.[284] It is not a false imitation, but a structuring of reality. In this respect one could claim that for Aristotle mimesis is, outwardly, a *fundamental structure without becoming an essential theory*.

4.8 The Violence of Catharsis

Tragedy for Aristotle is an imitation of serious action.[285] Tragedy is not reality, and the imitation is symbolic as it purges the audience of their violent impulses (catharsis). This action is based on imitation, but its symbolic performance is enacted in order to prevent imitation of tragic deeds. Contrary to Aristotle's own view, catharsis may be seen as violent,

[279]See Gerhard F. Else. *Plato and Aristotle on Poetry* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 74-75.
[280] Melberg. *Theories of Mimesis*, 17.
[281] Gerhard F. Else. *Aristotle's' Poetics: The Argument* (Leiden, 1957), 322.
[282] Paul Ricoeur. *Time and Narrative*, vol 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984-88), 31.
[283] Melberg. *Theories of Mimesis*, 44-45.
[284] Aristotle. *Poetics* 1450a 16, 1451a 30 in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume two* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1984).

because it can lead to violence. Much of the research on violence tends to claim that watching violence escalates the potential for violence. Tragedy, especially from a mimetic point of view, can just as well latch on to the violent desires inherent in human beings, as liberate them from those same desires. Aristotle, whose tendency is to write from the perspective of the good and excellent human being whose actions are based on free will, does not see any problem in imitating violence, which again shows to what lesser degree repetition plays in his thinking on people's relation to the world. Aristotle separates imitation from the pathological conditions of violence and rivalry, without any moralizing comments. Because of this and because of Aristotelian catharsis, his emphasis clearly lies on good mimesis. And the paradox is that in *Poetics* Aristotle emphasizes how fundamental mimesis is yet, at the same time, he has, ultimately, a rather anti-mimetic understanding of tragedy: tragedy should lead to anti-mimesis, an anti-mimesis of the tragic persons. Tragedy, according to Aristotle, purges the spectators of the need to imitate the cruelty of the actors, actors who again imitate the tragic heroes. One could speak of mimetic acts ending up anti-mimetically. If one interprets Gebauer and Wulf's claim that in the *Poetics* the poet 'creates something which there are no models for'[286] in a negative, or, in a mimetic manner, the lack of models stems from replacing imitation with creativity, paving the way towards a non-realistic *ars poetica.* In my view, only violence can transform reality in such a way.

However, Aristotle is, paradoxically, the first theoretician to claim that human nature is basically imitative.

> *Imitation is natural to man from childhood, one of his advantages over the lower animals being this, that he is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns at first by imitation. (Aristotle. Poetics, 1448b 5-10.)*

This text taken from Aristotle's *Poetics* is also an epitaph in *Things Hidden*. As in Girard's work, Aristotle holds the thesis that human nature is fundamentally imitative, but, even if Aristotle understands human nature as imitative, he does not expand the thesis to include many other areas of his enquiry. Nor does he develop any systematic understanding of mimesis. There exists no text in Aristotle's work which shows, in any elaborate way, how mimesis works. His understanding of human nature as imitative remains a postulate.

---

[285] Ibid., 1449b 24-25.
[286] Gebauer & Wulf. *Mimesis,* 53.

4.9 Appropriation

The indirect critique of Plato's anti-mimesis is dubious since Aristotle's concept of mimesis actually contains a much weaker understanding of mimesis. Aristotle does not consider mimesis to be a destabilizing force, leading to mimetic contagion. Human nature is mimetic, but mimetic mostly in a good way. This lack of bad or destructive mimesis may explain Aristotle's understanding of human nature as fundamentally good - which is perhaps the most basic difference between Aristotle and the later Christian Aristotelians. The understanding of mimesis as being free from conflict and desire is the point where Girard and Aristotle most differ. Girard claims that Aristotle confirms the Platonic concept of mimesis, meaning a mimesis devoid of appropriation.

> *There is no reason to exclude appropriation from imitation; Plato nonetheless does this, and the omission passes unnoticed because all his successors, beginning with Aristotle, have followed his lead. (Things Hidden, 8.)*

Mimesis in the *Poetics* is based on the understanding that literature represents reality. It is, in other words, the representative aspects of mimesis that dominates Aristotle's understanding of mimesis in relation to his *ars poetica*. The fact that Aristotle praises mimesis as a fundamental factor but, at the same time, does little to show its generative and destructive force (especially outside the realm of art) seems, in my view, to lead to a symbolic understanding of mimesis. One could perhaps claim that Aristotelian mimesis is normative (including the way in which things are appropriated), without focusing on the dynamic force and potentially terrible conflicts inherent in appropriation. In this way one might interpret Aristotelian mimesis as it concerns appropriation, as symbolic mimesis. Neglecting, or not being aware of the desire involved in imitating, leads to a symbolic version of mimetic appropriation.

But, as in the case of Plato's lack of appropriation, Girard also exaggerates the lack of mimetic appropriation in Aristotle's work. Girard seems to accept the Freudian concept of irrationality with regard to desire, even if he does broaden the field of desire to include all areas of imitation. This concept of mimetic desire is obviously foreign to Antiquity. But the concept of desire and the concept of mimesis are both present in Plato's and Aristotle's work - even if the concepts are not consciously fused together. Although Aristotle deliberately links mimesis more closely to rationality than Plato, he does not see all manifestations of desire as being on

the same level of rationality. The most desirable thing is that which is desirable in itself, not because of something or someone else.[287] Aristotle considers the goals of desire to be ethical; the good is the end or the goal of action.[288] In this respect he has a teleology linked to desire in which the goal is something good. But Aristotle does not regard desire completely naïvely: human beings can be distracted from what is really good by their desire for something that might be immediately and momentarily satisfying.[289] Desire clearly has a blind spot. The passionate man will not listen to an argument designed to redirect him, nor would he understand it, Aristotle claims.[290] This blindness, created by desire, which Aristotle only hints at, is, in Girard's work, turned into a fundamental anthropological trait. In Aristotle's ethics it is a deviation from the rational and the good. But even if Aristotle does not depict desire as mimetic, he indicates indirectly the mimetic potential in desire. Aristotle's critic of a young man with political ambitions is an example of desire run loose. The young man's vain and unprofitable goal in striving for power is not aimed at knowledge but action,[291] Aristotle writes. This clearly indicates an understanding of fruitless or, to use Girardian terminology, metaphysical desire. On the other hand, Aristotle links desire to rationality, claiming that we desire with a profound end (goal),[292] thus seeing desire as a conscious drive. Girard claims that mimesis is pre-conscious and unconscious, and, to a lesser degree, linked to rationality. Aristotle's emphasis on the positive aspects of mimesis and Girard's emphasis on the negative, make their concepts of mimesis and desire very different. However, in a passage discussing happiness, Aristotle clearly sees the rivalistic tendency in striving for happiness, when he says that people often admire those who proclaim some great thing that is beyond their comprehension.[293] Aristotle does not linger on this statement, which for Girard is the starting point for, or basis of, his anthropological understanding of acquisitive mimesis. The fact that humans admire the others for having what they themselves do not have (or they think they do not have it), is the starting point for a rivalistic and conflictual mimesis. And this desire to have what others have is also a potential minefield for becoming unhappy while striving for happiness.

[287] Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1097a 25-35.
[288] Ibid., 1097a 15-25.
[289] Alasdair MacIntyre. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality*? See Chapter VIII: 'Aristotle on Practical Rationality', Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988, 126.
[290] Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1179b 26-27.
[291] Ibid., 1094a 18 -1094b 25.
[292] Ibid.

4.10 Mimesis and Learning

As regards learning and knowledge, from Antiquity on, the imitative has been emphasized in the way disciples imitate their master. The imitation of learning was often instrumental: in the Jewish-Christian tradition the disciple learnt what the master said by heart,[294] and was supposed to imitate the life of the master.[295] But from Plato on mimesis became discredited as regards learning and knowledge. Socrates claims that mimetic learning should be avoided as it could become habitual,[296] and, as Melberg points out, the philosophical dialogue is created in order to avoid mimesis.[297] Aristotle, however, is more positively disposed towards a mimesis-learning concept. He calls the Socratic conversation an imitative form,[298] thereby indicating how the participants learn from the others, and especially how the others learn from Socrates. Plato, on the other hand, as the inventor of the Socratian dialogue, would never have called the dialogue mimetic, as that would have undermined both the philosophical ideal of anti-mimesis and the importance of the philosophical discussion.

If we take Aristotle's understanding of learning as a starting point for a more general, everyday understanding of mimesis, we find a view which differs in relation to his understanding of mimesis (from that expressed in his *Poetics).* Aristotle's view is that knowledge becomes knowledge by experiencing through custom, and he criticizes Socrates' thesis that courage is knowledge.[299] Aristotle seems to dismiss a biological foundation as regards learning and ethics. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* he clearly touches upon a theory of morals that abolishes inherent qualities, and prefers the mimetic habit when he claims that intellectual excellence is dependent on teaching. Also moral excellence is a result of habit. Thus, none of our moral habits arise in us by nature.[300] Even copulation is an act dependent on learning, he claims.[301] The mimetic nature of learning and ethical behaviour clearly corresponds to the normative parts of Girardian theory. This anti-biological ethic and epistemology may be labelled as mimetic or imitative because good habits are first and foremost created through imitating a good and excellent model. Passions on the other hand

---

[293] Ibid., 1095a 14-30.
[294] Gerhardsson. *En bok om Nya testamente* (Lund: LiberLäromedel Lund, 1973), 25.
[295] Ibid., 413-415.
[296] Melberg. *Theories of Mimesis*, 16.
[297] Ibid., 25.
[298] Aristotle. *Poetics* 1447b 10.
[299] Aristotle. *Magna Moralia* 1190b 25-32.
[300] Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1103a 14-20.
[301] Aristotle. *Metaphysics* 988a 5-7.

(appetite, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, love, hatred, longing, emulation, pity and feelings in general accompanied by pleasure or pain) are things that belong to the soul.[302] These feelings are a part of our nature and we feel them without choice. According to Aristotle, they are amoral[303] with the exception of shamelessness, envy, adultery, theft and murder.[304] We are neither good nor bad in feeling these passions. We have these faculties by nature, while we are not good or bad by nature.[305] For Aristotle it depends on how we act on these passions. Excellence is to feel fear, pity, confidence, anger, pleasure and pain at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right aim and in the right way.[306] Passions or desires are a part of human nature, but how we act upon them depends on our morals. Aristotle claims that people who are driven by pain and passion are not brave (however brave their actions may be) because they are not driven by choice.[307] Aristotle clearly sees the faults in those people driven either by too much pain or too much pleasure, but does not depict the metaphysical drive as engendering the 'too much' or the 'too little'. The temperate person acts very tightly between the excesses, indicating that only a few live a noble, non-desiring life.[308] Thus we see that in understanding passions, Aristotle mentions both the biological and irrational disposition. And in this respect he comes close to what which Girard labels mimetic desire. But on the whole passions for Aristotle are more motivated by learning and habits, which again emphasizes free will.

In the frenzy of mimetic desire a dissolution of moral values arises; not always in a banal way, but in a way where the most precious qualities of one's personality are gradually transformed, ending in nothingness or followed up by acts of destruction (suicide, murder, madness an so on). This process, in Girard's interpretation, does not have the characteristics of biological determination, as it can be stopped at any stage. But usually it continues, often disguised and sublimated, emptying the personality of spontaneity and compassion and enhancing (hidden) rivalries. This process, as it is explained in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, consists of nothing inherently genetic. The Girardian ontology is, even less than in Aristotle, based on biological presuppositions, since Girard claims that reality depends on models and the direction taken by one's desires. Girardian ontology is totally dependent on mimesis, even

[302] Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1105b 20-25.
[303] Therefore he claims that neither excellence nor vices are passions. Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1106a 3-6.
[304] Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1107a 9-26.
[305] Ibid. 1106b 7-10.
[306] Ibid. 1106b 19-24.
[307] Ibid. 1117a 1-5.
[308] Ibid., 1119a 1-19.

if the good contains an indirect, non-instinctive orientation. The indirectness of good mimesis is founded both in imitation and non-imitation (prohibition). Good mimesis, both in the work of Aristotle and Girard, would appear rather difficult to materialize. The difficulty of realizing the good is touched upon in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

> *For this reason it is a difficult business to be good; because in any given case it is difficult to find the midpoint. (…) So too is it easy to get angry - anyone can do that - or to give and spend money; but to feel or act towards the right person, to the right extent at the right time for the right reason in the right way – that is not easy, and it is not for everyone that can do it. Hence to do these things well is a rare, laudable and fine achievement. (Nicomachean Ethics 1109a 20-30.)*

In this respect Aristotle tries to avoid human beings from becoming destructive through acts of mimetic refinement. And it seems as though humans can react instinctively in a bad way. This seems somewhat different from the understanding usually given to Aristotle's emphasis on humans as being basically good.

4.11 Original Sin or Bad Habits?

Girard is clearly one of our contemporary thinkers who have discovered the radicality of original sin through anthropological research, especially if original sin is defined as violence, as Robert Hamerton-Kelly does.[309] On the other hand, if one sees Aristotle's ethics in the light of mainstream Catholic ethics, it is not certain that Aristotle differs so greatly on matters of vice and goodness. Aristotle does not (and could not) presuppose original sin. According to Aristotle, there is no basic defect in mankind. On the other hand, even without the concept of original sin, there seems to be the understanding that the average personality may be led astray as regards realizing the good. Is this lack of goodness due only to imitation gradually transformed into bad habits? It seems as though Aristotle also questions human nature as such. And this questioning may partly be seen as indicating a particular understanding of mimesis in its acquisitive form. However, neither Girard's nor Aristotle's work concludes that human beings' repeated bad deeds emanate only from destructive models. In Girard's work there is clearly a notion of a sinful nature. Original sin is thus linked to imitation. Habits and upbringing are, nonetheless, only weak and, at times, even insignificant methods of repressing evil, especially if it is not based on modelling. And even if it is based on modelling, it is never

[309] Robert Hamerton-Kelly. *Sacred Violence. Paul's Hermeneutic of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 9, 88-119.

based on the model's own personality, but on the model's desire.[310] The act of changing models is the only way to be released from the reciprocity of mimetic desire, which again underlines the importance Girard lays on imitating Christ.

A certain lack of inquiry into what generates destructive habits leaves Aristotelian thought somewhat devoid of any theory on evil (except bad habits). The lack of 'evil' in Aristotle's work, is partly due to his emphasis on the freedom of the will, a freedom Girard basically denies, as mimesis is not something one can choose, especially not the mimesis of habits, as they are primarily based on the mimetic models of childhood and adolescence, meaning models that are not chosen.[311] Aristotle, however, depicts a situation of repetition, where the son strikes his father because the father has been struck by his father before.[312] Aristotle says that there is a reason for such behaviour, without touching upon the mimetic cycle as the explanation for this kind of violent repetition.[313] At the same time one could claim that Aristotle describes the disastrous effects of repetitive mimesis without using such words.

Aristotle claims that there is a certain lack of reality in desire, since desire is separated both in time and nature from the desired object.[314] The relative distance in desire is also the reason why desire can be good or bad, depending on the choice of objects.[315] This shows that Aristotle does not have a theory on desire as such. Desire, in Aristotle's work, is dependent on the objects. This, needless to say, is fundamentally different from the Girardian understanding of desire according to the other. Aristotle could be said to be one of the instigators of the classic understanding of desire as being aroused by objects. And it is basically this approach to desire and mimesis that makes Aristotle's anthropology more positive and optimistic than Girard's.

[310] *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 13-15.
[311] My postulation that Girard undermines free will is contrary to what Girard himself claims in an interview with Rebecca Adams in November 1992. (See *The Girard Reader*, 62-65). When viewing free will in relation to mimetic desire, this freedom seems very restricted.
[312] Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1149b 4-13.
[313] Ibid., 1149b 4-13.
[314] Ibid., 1175b 25-35.
[315] Ibid., 1175b 29-36.

Chapter 5. Mimesis and Violence

6.1 Desire and the Destruction of the Self

The reason why mimesis is so closely associated with violence is that it easily leads to rivalry. Violence always seems to be mingled with desire,[316] and, even if it is 'righteous', a response to some kind of injustice, violence is often located in some sort of rivalry.[317] Terms such as imitation, identification, and comparison do not have to turn out to be violent – even when a great deal of competition is involved. In this respect I disagree with Hamerton-Kelly that connecting mimesis with desire means that mimetic desire is violent, thus restoring the insight of Heraclitus that violence is the source of all.[318] The all-decisive factor is the shift from competition to rivalry, from being allies to becoming enemies. The transition from being competitive friends to rivals comes as the result of desire. Desire is the generative force behind violence, the snake that turns friends and lovers into rivals. Traditional societies tried, and often very successfully, to protect individuals through prohibitions and taboos. These prohibitions and taboos were directed against any kind of activity which could possibly unleash violent rivalry. The killing of adulterers, thieves and foreigners can be seen as a way of ridding society of pollution, and cleansing it from the potential imitation of bad desires. In this way the society's violence functions in a protective and anti-mimetic way. The violence against transgressors is a kind of mimetic anti-mimesis, a way of telling people to follow the rules of society so that they would become mimetically immune to the forces that threaten society. Violent victimizing appears to fulfil a generative function by preventing transgressions, 'cleansing' morally and restoring peace. But, at the same time, it bears (unconsciously for the participants) a similarity to what one wishes to expel, namely the feared violence and pollution of the person(s) victimized. Despite attempts to expel violent transgressions, the attempts themselves are quite similar to the violence they are trying to exorcise. Both Freud and Girard have seen that those who conduct a rite of sacrifice are

[316] See *Violence and the Sacred*, 145.
[317] In cases where injustice and exploitation have been done against a community, desires are often initially sparked by the exploiters. This rivalry can also be manifested as rivalry among the exploiters, which is then materialized into further exploitation and easily calls for violence among the exploited victims, because of the rivalistic desires among the persecutors.
[318] Hamerton-Kelly. *The Gospel and the Sacred*, 132.

projecting onto the sacrificial victim qualities that reflect some of their own innermost concerns.[319]

In demolishing the victim they are symbolically annihilating aspects of themselves. What is destroyed is destructiveness itself: the feelings of violence and hostility that lie behind attempts to carry out violent activities. Such feelings are antithetical to the ties of friendship that bond a community together, and feelings of violence towards one's peers and associates must be banished if a closely knit community – such as a tribal brotherhood, a spiritual fellowship, or a modern nation – is to survive. (Jurgensmeyer. 'Is Symbolic Violence Related to Real Violence?,' 3.)

Sacrificial violence, seen from a modern, non-sacrificial standpoint, is a kind of suicide. By killing the other, one also kills something in oneself. Modern societies are full of these projections of one's own desires onto the other, which expose the modern variant of scapegoating and which are often less physically and more psychologically violent yet still victimizing in their attitude of projecting. This Freudian act of projection resembles the act of doubling, the intense mimesis of the other that creates doubles. From a Girardian perspective it is double desire that leads to violence. [320] The imitation of each other's desires will sooner or later lead to rivalry, and then to violence.[321] This doubling does not only have to involve two people; it can be two groups, two countries. But the effect is always negative. Schwager explains it in the following terms.

Whoever is desirous has to expect that the others will too. Whoever succumbs to rivalry arouses the same passion in others. Whoever resorts to violence is imitated in his or her actions until, sooner or later, the deed falls back upon his or her own head. (Schwager. Must There be Scapegoats?, 81.)

This excellent description of reciprocal violence shows just how inevitable the escalation of violence is. There is something organic in mimetic rivalry; the contamination is so strong that the way out of violent conflicts seems to require a change of heart, an act of forgiveness in order to stop the never-ending cycle. The process of violence, as we can see, is only different variations on the structure of metaphysical desire as described in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*. It is the desire between the subject and the mediator in different configurations. And the initial object, which started the rivalry, seems to get lost in the turmoil. Girard explains this escalation of violence as an increase in resistance.

---

[319] Jurgensmeyer.(Ed) 'Is Symbolic Violence Related to Real Violence?' in *Violence and the Sacred in the Modern World* (London: Franc Cass, 1992), 3.
[320] 'Mimesis and Violence' in *The Girard Reader*, 12.
[321] 'The more a tragic conflict is prolonged, the more likely it is to culminate in a violent mimesis; the resemblance between combatants grow ever stronger until each presents a mirror image of the other.' (*Violence and the Sacred*, 47.)

The more desire is attached to resistance the more it is oriented towards violence. (Things Hidden, 334.)

According to mimetic theory, there is little rationality in violence because, in exactly the same way as in rivalistic love, violence seems to be motivated less and less by any object, and more and more focused on reciprocal violence. There is, of course, a rationality attached to the balance, the reciprocality, but the objects, which are usually seen to introduce and motivate violence, gradually become less motivational.

> *Any object at stake in conflict will ultimately be annulled and surpassed, and acquisitive mimesis, which sets members of the community against one another, will give way to antagonistic mimesis, which eventually unites and reconciles all members of a community at the expense of a victim. (Things Hidden, 95.)*

5.2 Mimesis Engenders Violence

Thus mimesis is the force which both begins and ends violence. And in this respect mimesis is primary to violence. First there is mimesis; violence then stems from the inevitable conflicts aroused by mimetic desire. In this respect violence is always caused by mimetic desire. Violence is not originary. It is a by-product of mimetic desire. [322]

Violence is mimetic rivalry itself becoming violent as the antagonists who desire the same object keep thwarting each other and desiring the object all the more. Violence is supremely mimetic. ('Mimesis and Violence*' in The Girard reader, 12-13.*)

If there were a violent inclination in human beings, violence would have been instinctual and one would not label it as violence. Calling it violence means that the killing is not instinctual but is related to moral problems. The specificity concerning humans and killing is this lack of ability to kill without consequences, and without the accompanying moral and religious implications. This is the result of an expanded mimesis. Human violence has no braking mechanisms against intra-specific aggression. This means, according to Burton L. Mack, that rivalries and conflicts, once unleashed, cannot stop short of manslaughter.[323] According to Girard, the growth of violence among human beings is a result of mimetic activity linked to the increase in brain size.[324] This does not mean that human nature has become more violent, on the contrary, but it does mean that increased intelligence makes violence more effective

[322] 'Mimesis and Violence. Perspectives in Cultural Criticism' in *The Girard Reader*, 12.
[323] Burton L. Mack. 'The Innocent Transgressor: Jesus in Early Christian Myth and History,' Semeia 33 (1985): 139.

and far-reaching. Also, the fact that human beings have no instinctual stoppage mechanism makes violence complex and seemingly irrational because of the vast range of violent expressions caused by the variations in conflictual mimesis.

When discussing mimesis in relation to violence, almost all variations of violent mimesis can be labelled acquisitive. There is a tendency to interpret mimesis as representation when the level of conflict is low. If, however, the level of conflict rises, it would seem that everything revolves around acquisition. Thus mimesis should be related to the desire to acquire goods, not least to obtain things which are difficult to obtain. But Girard only follows up to a certain point economists who attribute violence to the scarcity of essential objects,[325] as the connection between scarcity and violence is relative. In some cases there is only a minor degree of scarcity before there is violence, and in other cases there is no scarcity whatsoever. This means that the relation between violence and scarcity must be understood in the context of desire rather than in relation to the scarcity itself. Girard, however, has never related his understanding of mimesis to a real discussion related to the scarcity of goods. Clearly, scarcity is taken into consideration too little in mimetic theory, especially in the global perspective. This might possibly be because it would weaken his mimetic theory. The external desires due to scarcity of food and other goods are, in certain areas of the world, motivated by the *desires to survive and not by metaphysical desire.* Mimetic desire, when not confined to desires in the Western world,[326] would, I suppose, become less related to internal mediation, as the individual in most parts of the world is more regulated by sacrificial institutions.

5.3 Violence and Desire in Myth

To grasp the acquisitive nature of mimetic violence, it may be important to introduce Girard's understanding of violence in myth. Violence, from a historical perspective, is, from a Girardian point of view, actually (textually) mediated through myths. The problem, however,

---

[324] *Things Hidden*, 94-95.
[325] *The Girard Reader*, 10.
[326] Knut Kolnar, although supporting Girard's view on mimetic rivalry and the mediated nature of mimesis, criticizes Girard's understanding of desire as being too dependent on a certain historical epoch. (See Knut Kolnar. *Det ambisiøse selv,* Avhandling til dr.art.graden, Trondheim: Filosofisk institutt, NTNU, 130.) But, in my view, even if the work on desire starts with the European context, I can see few reasons as to why his theory on mimesis and violence should not be universally applicable (despite the enormous variations in mimetic forms). The reason for this is the common human tendency to imitate. Also the numerous historical documents concerning scapegoating indicate that this is a global phenomenon.

when interpreting Girard's understanding of myth, is that it differs radically from the phenomenological understanding of myth. Girard's understanding of myth is hardly able to give a thorough account of what myth mean in general,[327] as there are myths which are not describing a victimage situation. Also, the fact that Girard seems to give certain myths or narratives in the Judaeo-Christian scriptures an ontological privilege, makes his understanding of myths suspect from a religious scholar's point of view - even if he would probably claim that his understanding of myths is phenomenological. According to Girard, some stories in the Bible are not mythical because they do not build upon a sacrificial and violent ontology which transforms reality into fantasy.[328] This, in my view, makes his definition more strategic than phenomenological. I cannot see that Girard is primarily trying to tell us what myth is. Rather he is telling us what is mythical and what makes myths.

Mimesis and violence play such an important role in Girard's understanding of myths that without the presence of violence and mimesis, a myth would not be a myth, but either a straightforward true story, or a fairy tale. Instead of seeing the homogenity of myth in common textual structures, like Lévi-Strauss, [329] Girard sees the homogenity of myth in the violence from which it stems and tries to hide. Myths try to cover up the violence which has been inflicted by divinizing the violence and transcribing the events in such a way that the violence of the society is not revealed as such.[330] Myths function in a society both as legitimation and preservation.[331] In this way Girard's understanding of myth corresponds to that of Durkheim when the latter claims myths hide more than they reveal.[332] According to Girard, one cannot trust the myth's message, one has to uncover layers of mythology in the myths to discover the real accounts hidden in myths.[333] Golsan, in his book on Girard and myth, writes that while Girard 'shares the view that myths are not precise accounts of historical occurences, he does argue that they originate in real or historical events.'[334] Thus, one of the most important features in Girard's understanding of myths is that there are real

[327] Girard attempted to give a new and general understanding of myth in *The Scapegoat.* See Chapter 3. 'What is a Myth?'
[328] Girard. 'The Bible is not a Myth,' Literature and Belief 4 (1984): 7-15.
[329] Claude Lévi-Strauss. *Myth and Meaning* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995). See chapter four 'When Myth Becomes History'. See also 'The Structural study of myth' in T.A. Sebeok. *Myth – A Symposium* (Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1958), 83-84.
[330] See *The Scapegoat*,23-99.
[331] Mariasusai Dhavamony. *Phenomenology of Religion* (Rome: Gregorian U.P., 1973), 140.
[332] Ivan Strenski. *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth century History* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1987), 138.
[333] See *The Scapegoat*, 23-99.
[334] Golsan. *René Girard and Myth*, 61.

events behind sacrifices.[335] Despite his suspicion about the messages of myth, Girard believes they refer to violent historical events.

All myths...have their roots in real acts of violence against real victims. (The Scapegoat, 25.)

One of Girard's main hermeneutical challenges has been to find out how myth was transcribed.[336] The attempt seems extremely hypothetical, built on an extraordinary confidence in modern rationalism as a tool with which to demythologize the non-violent cover-up. The hermeneutics of suspicion is so acute that Girard actually claims that myth basically tells the opposite of what really happened. This claim is only possible when seen from a non-sacrificial standpoint, where the sacrificer's point of view is questioned. The view that myths will always, in some way or another, refer to some kind of sacrificial event, differs dramatically from Levi Strauss' concept of myth as language without any necessary referentiality. The sacrifices or murders are the events from which the myths are compiled. Mythology partly distorts this reality, often by turning it into fantastic events, which shows a certain inability to cope with violence. Violence engenders myths, and turns the real events into something fantastic. As in a war, the real facts are censored. Violence distorts reality, and myths are one way of doing away with or transforming the actual events. At the same time, myths are often the only source for uncovering the events narrated, and it is through a suspicious reading that one can decipher the reality behind myths. This process of being able to go behind the myths to discover real events, reveals Girard's belief in a structural thinking which is not governed by desire.[337]

Myths are linked to sacrificial crises and thus to violence. Girard is totally attuned to Mariasusai Dhavamony's claim that the most important function of myth is to establish a sacred reality.[338] The mythmakers are imitators of the norms of society; they are a kind of spiritual storyteller who produces myths within which a society can function. Both myths and rituals are rationalizations of the sacrificial crises that threaten to make their society dissolving into violence.

Myths are the retrospective transfiguration of sacrificial crisis, the reinterpretation of these crises in the light of the cultural order that has arisen from them. (Violence and the Sacred, 64.)

---

[335] *The Girard Reader*, 12.
[336] See Chapter 6, 7 and 8 in *The Scapegoat.*
[337] In a way Girard's trust in structure, science and rationality should make it more problematic to claim that everything is governed by mimetic desire as mimetic desire contains so much irrational behaviour.

5.4.1 Myth and Ritual

Myths come into play following the sacrificial crises, and are interpretations of the mimetic turmoil which a society has gone through. But because the mythmakers imitate the norms of society, and tell/write from a society's victimizing point of view, mimesis is not drawn from the events themselves. There is actually an anti-mimetic tendency concerning the real event, which explains the blurred report of reality. The act which should be imitated is the act of *divinization, which is enacted through ritual*. Mimetic theory, when considering myths should, in my view, embrace Malinowski's claim that the power of myths does not stem from what Durkheim called the collective force, but rather that myths stem from the imitation of each other.[339] This, as I see it, is going one step beyond a sociological reference when looking for the source of myths in mimetic desire. Ritual is a symbolic imitation of the events (sacrifice) as described in the myths.[340] In this respect there is a much simpler mimesis to ritual. Ritual re-enacts the mimetic crisis and the transformation brought through by the victimage mechanism. This theory is not new though; already in the book *Myth and Ritual: Essays on the Myth and Ritual of the Hebrews in Relation to the Culture Pattern of the Ancient East*, published in 1933, myth is seen to be the story which the ritual enacts.[341] In this way ritual does not necessarily imitate the real acts, but the acts described in the myths. Ritual is a mimetic representation of myths. (It can also, possibly, be the other way round: myths can be imitations of rituals.)[342] Ritual can be seen to be a rationalized, simplified and purified version of myths. One could say that myths transcribe and transform violent mimesis. In ritual, the violent mimesis is often removed when the violent acts are represented. Rituals seem, more openly, to represent the official version of the myths. Therefore, in rituals the censor's position is much weaker, because the myths have already censored the events. The myths have already done away with the original violence, while the rituals present the crisis in order to emphasize the way out of chaos into a new, differentiated existence. Therefore the

---

[338] Mariasusai Dhavamony. *Phenomenology of Religion*, 150.
[339] Ivan Strenski. *Four Theories on Myth in Twentieth century History*, 52.
[340] Girard seems, in *Violence and the Sacred,* to agree with the anthropologists Hubert and Mauss in dismissing relating myth to ritual, and ritual to myth. (See *Violence and the Sacred*, 90). But as far as I can see, this is exactly what he does in his analysis of sacrifice as the centre in myth and ritual. (*Violence and the Sacred*, 90-96.) In later works he more or less admits this: In an article called 'From Ritual to Science' Girard writes: 'Far from opposing rites from myth, as is done today, we must bring them together as was always done before. We must recognize in the rite the operation of mythological speech, but without seeking to make the latter the original of the former, or vice versa. The original is elsewhere.' (Girard. 'From Ritual to Science,'in *Configurations*, Johns Hopkins U.P., 2000, 172-173.)
[341] Blackman/Hooke. *Myth and Ritual: Essays on the Myth and Ritual of the Hebrews in Relation to the Culture Pattern of the Ancient East* (London: Oxford U.P., 1933), 3.
[342] According to Walter Burkert, ritual probably is far older in the history of evolution than myths since it goes back even to animals. (Walter Burkert. *Homo Necans*, 31.)

imitation of the sacrifice through ritual is also largely preventive.[343] The attempt (in myth) to hide violence may be seen as the desire to establish a mythic representation. The act of purging the myth of its acquisitive and raw origin, is simultaneously an act of turning myths into representations of violence, not of violence in itself. This again underlines my view that representation is often established to moderate mimetic violence. But in so doing, it runs the risk of covering up the real violence.

5.4.2 The Anti-Mimetic Tendency in Myth

Myths are anti-mimetic towards the actual violent events, because they are restricted by the sanctions of society. Myths tend, just like rituals, to legitimate society. In this respect the killing (narrated in myth) is transformed. When claiming that there is an anti-mimetic tendency in myth, I mean that the myth, based on the persecutor's point of view, is usually written from the standpoint of a warning, of not enacting the violence. This is clearly the case regarding tragic myths, for example the Oedipus-myth. On the other hand, there are myths which require imitation. Myths of fertility, for example, clearly require imitation, as this fertility must be renewed. Girard's understanding of myth only considers violent myths.

For Girard myths are not basically concerned with identity and world-explanation, rather they function as a way of upholding society by means of a *cover-up*. Myths do not encourage violence. On the contrary, they seek to hide the real violence. (Therefore they are mythical.) But, on the other hand, they do not intentionally reveal violence either. Rather, they indicate violence. Myths are violent in that they try to hide the persecutor's violence. The violence is the act of writing from the persecutor's point of view. Myth, despite its violent norms, hides a society's guilt at having killed the victim(s). It is this urge to hide the murder which makes myths anti-mimetic, and, usually, does not directly encourage violence. Nevertheless, such cover-up myths are violent in that they legitimate the killing (despite rewriting the cause). Myths, as they are written from a society's point of view, are mimetic in the way that they seem to propagate and uphold the norms of the persecutors in a society. Thus, violent events are not described from a totally non-mimetic point of view; rather, mimesis is primarily based on the mimesis of society, and the events can only be made mimetically acceptable when transformed by these norms. Myths are representational as regards the events, but the mimesis that dictates the myth is secondary, engendered by the norms of society. When historical

[343] *Violence and the Sacred*, 102.

'reality' becomes transformed into myths (and rituals), it becomes mimetically acceptable.[344] *In fact myth and ritual represent the community's cultural foundation*. But myth, compared to ritual, is usually more complex textually, so there will always be room for heretical presentations of a society's myths, even if this is more an option for the modern scholar than for the individual in a traditional society, regulated as the latter is by a set of rigid norms. However, taking this heretical possibility into consideration, I would agree with Lévi-Strauss (against Girard) that myths have a more individualized tendency than rituals.[345] The myths presented from the persecutor's point of view may be seen as an attempt to hide the acquisitive tendency in the original. The mythmakers, however, expose and rewrite the events as representations of reality. In this way the mythic texts need to be demythologized in order to be seen as myths. By questioning the representation, the acquisitive dimension in myth suddenly exposes itself beneath the layers of representation. This is evident in the representations of the Passion where the death of Jesus is described as violent and sides with the victim against the aggressors. The aggressor's violence cannot easily be mythologized.

Demythologization in mimetic theory is based on the victim's revelation of violence. The victim's revelation of violence can only be a revelation so long as there is the understanding that the victim is innocent. By means by which Girard deconstructs myths is reflection on the Passion narrative. Through the Gospel stories of Jesus' innocence, the innocence of other passions and sacrificial deaths is illuminated. However, this intertextuality is hidden in Girard's work. He never explicitly tells the readers where he is speaking from. In *Things Hidden* he claims that he does not care to know where he is speaking from.[346] But now, as the theory seems to be fully developed and the Christian roots are more to the fore, the Passion drama plainly seems to be the main hermeneutical tool upon which the theory rests. This is, of course, more directly evident in relation to the scapegoat mechanism than to violence and myth. But if Girard had not seen violence and myth from a non-sacrificial Passion-perspective, he would probably *not have had such a negative view on both*.

---

[344] According to Gebauer and Wulf, the great problem in Girard's understanding of myths is that Girard claims that all myths of cultural origins are encoded representations of real events in which order is established as the result of originally violent acts. Gebauer and Wulf claim that there is little basis for locating any original event: '(...) the analysis of the mythical series of events as crisis of the religious institutions is undertaken in regard to a text that does not exist, but must first be produced. The extant mythical texts are systematically distorted; they must be read anew with the distortion filtered out.' (Gebauer & Wulf. *Mimesis*, 262.)
[345] See Lévi-Strauss. *The Raw and the Cooked,* London: Jonathan Cape, 1970, 53.
[346] *Things Hidden*, 435.

Both myth and rituals must, in mimetic theory, be seen in the context of desire. The urge to hide desires means disregarding mimesis. Especially myth can be seen to be desirous; both in transforming the victim and in covering up of violence.

5.5 Acquisition and Rivalry

5.5.1 Mauss: Anthropology and Rivalry

Let us shift the perspective from myth to conflict, in order to grasp the acquisitive dimension in violence. Conflict can be seen as an initial stage of violence. In psychology, sociology and anthropology mimesis is understood, more than in philosophy and religion, as acquisitive mimesis, an acquisition which also is based upon the other. Marcel Mauss' work, *The Gift*, illustrates the acquisitive basis of human societies in a most intriguing way. The strength of Mauss work (a work on how primitive societies are governed by the laws of exchange) lies in the emphasis he puts on rivalry in the act of exchange. Mauss shows that all kinds of gifts (within the societies he has researched, mainly Polynesian) are based on a system of *reciprocity*. This reciprocity, which governs different kinds of exchange, clearly contains acquisitive elements. The balancing of accounts can contain virtually anything. This indicates a system of mimetic reciprocity. Mimesis, contained in the receiving of a gift in an attitude of reciprocity, could be labelled a mimetic bind. This double nature is, as Mauss writes, already inherent in the word *gift*, which in Germanic languages can mean both a gift and a poison.[347] In receiving a gift all kinds of obligations are required. In this respect, reciprocal mimesis means surrendering to the laws of society. Also religious sacrifices are built upon a principle of reciprocity. When there is reciprocity, the system, according to its own laws, is governed by good mimesis. And when there is some kind of breach, bad mimesis is always near at hand. Among the Polynesian clans refusing to give, failing to invite, or refusing to accept, is tantamount to declaring war, indicating that violence is near at hand whenever there is a breach in reciprocity.[348] Mauss writes in his *Conclusion* that throughout a considerable period of time, in a considerable number of societies (up until modern times) there was no middle way: either one trusts completely or distrusts completely, either one gives everything or one goes to war.[349] The rivalry is not only limited to necessities, there is rivalry in all spheres, not

[347] Marcel Mauss. *The Gift* (London, N.Y.: Routledge, 1990), 81.
[348] Ibid., 17.
[349] Ibid., 104-105.

least in the act of generosity; the will to outdo the other with presents and feasts[350] is also imbued with the same mimetic rivalry.

Mauss talks about the ability to attract and dazzle the other person.[351] At certain potlatches there is a rivalry over who is the richest and the most madly extravagant. Mauss clearly perceives rivalry in generosity, and cunningly concludes that 'everything is based upon the principles of antagonism and rivalry.'[352] In some instances there is a violent transcending of the reciprocal system of giving and returning gifts. Instead of a controlled reciprocal mimesis, there is a purely violent mimesis where one destroys in order not to give the slightest hint of desiring one's gift to be reciprocated. Mauss gives an example from the American Northwest where houses and thousands of blankets are burnt, and the most valuable copper objects are broken and thrown into the water 'in order to 'flatten' one's rival.'[353] This indicates a development from a rational and upholding mimesis based on reciprocity, to a violent, almost apocalyptic frenzy. In such cases it is *insufficient* to restrict mimesis to *reciprocity*. Mimesis based on exchange is only one part of mimetic desire. The more destructive examples given by Mauss indicate the metaphysical and non-materialistic forces in human societies. As long as there is reciprocity, everything is fine. But a breach in etiquette, a lack of honour (which is just as important in some primitive societies as in modern ones)[354] transforms the rationality of a mimetically based exchange system into other, destructive, forms, indicating that acquisitive mimesis can mean something more and something worse than mere mimesis based upon exchange. The system of gifts, of exchange, has a balancing function, but its reasons and its dialectical nature are far from rational.

Mauss' research is limited to particular cultures, but, as he indicates, many of these phenomena or mechanisms have something universal about them.[355] And daringly, within an anthropological context, he claims that it is possible to extend his observations to our own societies.[356] In fact, it is difficult to find anything more universal than rivalry and violence even if the forms vary greatly. The strength of Mauss' research lies in the way he sees the

[350] Ibid., 20.
[351] Ibid., 36.
[352] Ibid., 47.
[353] Ibid., 47.
[354] Ibid., 48.
[355] Ibid., 59.
[356] Ibid., 83.

rivalistic tendency in all kinds of exchange,[357] and therefore regards rivalry as something inevitable. Mauss' work on exchange clearly corresponds to the acquisitive nature of mimesis. It would appear to be one of the anthropological works which most clearly address mimetic conflict and rivalry. His research on exchange, in relation to gifts and commerce, shows, from an anthropological point of view, the acquisitive side to human coexistence.

5.5.2 The Economy of Rivalry

Girard does not limit rivalry to any specific object. He emphasizes rivalry in love, which indicates this special area as being potentially rivalistic.[358] According to both Lacoue-Labarthe and Derrida, mimesis has always been a problem in relation to economy. When the economy is a part of the picture, there are possibilities for both rivalry and hatred, Lacoue-Labarthe writes.[359] And the economy, alongside love, is the most common ground for rivalry. Economic rivalry, in its initial stages, has something clearly rational about it; for example, when applying for a job. If I don't persuade the committee that I can do a better job than the other applicants, I will be without work, meaning I will have less money, less social contact, a less bright future and so on. Economic rivalry in its initial stages is a kind of rationale for survival, a survival arising from a scarcity of goods and scarcity of jobs. When, however, rivalry is not based on survival, but on prestige, it becomes a part of metaphysical desire, a desire based on the other, on having a more exclusive car, house, boat than the other. The objective value, if one can use such a term, plays an entirely secondary role; the aim is to beat the rival in an ongoing economic race where things play a symbolic and highly decisive role. In economic rivalry, when scarcity is the problem, rivalry seems profound, and when we analyse the relationship between the economy and mimesis, money is very easily transformed into the cause of rivalry. The interesting fact is that it is the initial, more rational stages of economic rivalry that are the most violent. The scarcity of jobs, food or other goods will often spark off violence, while using the economy to enhance prestige, is, in a modern society at least, not directly violent, even if this kind of rivalry creates scapegoats among the rivals who do not make it, and also exploits suffering people in the Third World to an even greater degree.[360]

---

[357] Mauss' attempt to synthesize and show certain universal traits in his research actually corresponds to Girard's approach. There is, however, a tendency in Girard's work not to mention those critics with whom he is in tune. Instead his texts are written against a background of adversaries.

[359] Lacoue-Labarthe. *Typography*, 124.

[360] Although suffering people in the Third World are only indirectly a part of the metaphysical rivalry in the Western world, they become, partly, when considering the economic systems, the scapegoats of our metaphysically motivated mass consume.

5.5.2.1 Rivalry, Christianity and Capitalism

From an historical point of view, internal desire has become more acute, while external desire has, because of the lack of absolute and common collective goals, clearly weakened its effect on society, which means that in contemporary society it is difficult to motivate and stir desire around an external rival. And even if firms manage to create a rivalistic atmosphere towards other firms, all kinds of internal rivalries will arise within a group. This tendency is clearly not new, but the individuality stemming from the sacrificial breakdown, has made rivalry more internal, less clear cut, less based on collective desires. The sacrificial breakdown which clearly moderates scapegoating, however, produces more subdued, individual versions of expulsion. When the illusive balance between us and them crumbles, rivalry creeps into all private areas such as families, friendships, rivalry with relatives and colleagues and so on, leaving no stone unturned, unless there are prohibitions and ethical norms to stop the rivalry creeping in and disintegrating the smallest social entities.

This makes ethics and, in moderate forms, prohibitions so acute in the modern world. Without the sacrificial checking and balancing of our desires, desires threaten to rule the making of the world. Religion often questions different forms of desire, helping people quit desires which do violence towards the self and the other. But Christian mimesis, an imitation of Christ in the Western world, does not seem to propagate prohibitions against rivalry in itself. Violence brought about by the freedom to rival anyone and leading sometimes to a scapegoating, where people fall out of competitive niches, can, in fact, be seen as a modern form of victimizing. From such a point of view, the imitation of Christ consists in seeing Christ in any victim brought about by capitalism. The encouragement of this relatively new global ideology seems to create victims out of a market system where the most brilliant, the most lucky and, at times, the most brutal possess the greatest value.

Chapter 6. The Religious Nature of Desire

Men often want to love where they cannot hope to succeed;
they seek their own undoing
without being able to compass it,
and, if I may put it thus,
they are forced against their will to remain free.
La Bruyere

6.1 Religious Roots of Desire

6.1.1 Desire Stems from the Victimage Mechanism

Before we can go any further in discussing the different forms of mimesis, we must try to understand the role of desire in mimetic theory. The discussion on desire is not only an attempt to locate Girard's understanding of desire, but also to discuss the nature of desire in itself. Desire in mimetic theory has not been directly considered as something emanating from the religious realm. Rather it has been interpreted as something purely psychological and therefore removed from the religious parts of the theory. This has lead to the theory being divided into two separate parts: the mimetic part, which is secular and psychological and the religious, which is theological and based on the victimage mechanism. By making Girardian theory look as though it is split into a secular and a religious part, or into a mimetic part based on literary criticism and psychology, and a scapegoat part based on anthropology, the science of religion and theology, mimesis tends to be omitted, consciously or unconsciously, from the religious foundation which generates the theory.

I will, however, argue also that Girardian desire is based upon a religious understanding of humanity. The nature of mimetic desire seems, to my mind, to be based on falsely represented images which, through imitation of desirous models, create urges and drives that turn people away from religious belief and yet, at the same time, function as replacement for religion. In this respect all kinds of desires may be seen within the religious realm. But before I can draw any conclusion about the nature of desire, I will attempt to analyse the nature of desire in mimetic theory.

Firstly, desire in mimetic theory is distinct from instincts. Desire is fundamentally and exclusively human, as it is originally linked to the scapegoat mechanism. Desire is also

essentially and exclusively mimetic.[361] If desire were not mimetic it would be instinctual. Desire is inherited and learned,[362] but it is not primarily biological as it is released by the victimage mechanism. If it was biological it would also encompass all kinds of 'natural' desires or needs, but Girard tends to use the word desire in a way as to distinguish it from normal biological satisfaction.

> *Once his basic needs are satisfied, man is subject to intense desires. (Violence and the Sacred, 147.)*

Desire can be described as the drives which emerge from a non-biological source, from the *victimage mechanism*, and is, according to its nature, interdividual. According to Eugene Webb, desire *'is always reaching past its ostensible objects and finds little or no real satisfaction in them'*[363] There is a certain lack of clarity in Girard's thinking as to how to describe the role of desire before and after the revelation of the scapegoat mechanism. Within the context of mimetic theory, desire may be seen as a more modern phenomenon which arises after societies are no longer regulated by the scapegoat mechanism.[364] Desire then functions as an individual and advanced form of victimizing. A problem arises as to how to describe desires in 'primitive' societies regulated by the victimage mechanism. Clearly it is desire that ignites and motivates the expulsion of the victim. Therefore desire related to scapegoating must also be labelled desire. So what is the difference between the desire before and after the revelation of the victimage mechanism? Or, in other words, what is the difference between the desires in 'primitive' societies and modern societies? To be able to understand the differences between modern and 'primitive' kinds of desire, one needs to differentiate between desire before and after the revelation of the scapegoat mechanism. In establishing the victimage mechanism as the catalyst, transferring collective desires to individual desires means that sacrifice does not change desire as such, but turns desire into more individual expressions. The development (made possible by sacrifice) into hierarchical societies based on different forms of us and them, inside and outside, which are not necessarily violent in a physical manner, indicate what I would call a certain shift from instinctual desires to more mental desires.

---

[361] *Violence and the Sacred*, 146.
[362] Ibid., 145.
[363] Eugene Webb. Philosophy of Consciousness. Polanyi, Lonergan, Voegelin, Ricoeur, Girard, Kierkegaard (London and Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 184.
[364] 'Desire can be defined as a process of mimesis involving undifferentiation; it is akin to the process of deepening conflict that issues in the mechanism of reunification through the victim.' (*Things Hidden*, 287.)

6.1.1 Desire and Passion

I will return to the questions arising around the transference of desire. But before I do that, I will pose another question: What should one call desires which cannot be labelled either as instincts or bad desires? Either Girard does not think that such desires exist (which would be close to a world view of total negativity) or he should distinguish between desire and mimetic desire. (Mimetic desire would thus contain both negative and positive desire.) Girard also uses the word passion, but the term seems to refer uniquely to a religious context. Passion, in my view, could be used anthropologically to denote positive human desires, the desires that do not lead to violence but to love instead. Using the term passion with an anthropo-religious connotation, referring to good desires, would prevent our looking upon desire as something purely negative, which in turn would prevent a demonizing concept of desire.

6.1.2 Desire, Drive and Motivation

Desire begins in rivalry for the object.[365] In this respect desire has nothing specifically human about it. Thus, the starting point of desire is nothing specifically or fundamentally human. But mimetic desire is built upon a desire *concerning the other*; this is something fundamentally human, especially given the fact that involvement or desire has no reality as such. One could claim that desire is a distinctively human phenomenon that can develop when a certain threshold of mimesis is transcended.[366] Desire can, in its most common configuration, be understood as a drive, as a motivating factor. Drive and motivation often include an understanding which incorporate instincts. Especially the use of the word 'drive' today, in an everyday linguistic context, is related to the Freudian understanding of desire, that is the libidinal desires. Motivation, on the other hand, is more related to an understanding of desire as being of the mind. Girard's theory is not, however, exclusively a theory of the mind. Rather it is a theory of desire, where even our self-understanding is governed by desire.[367] Mimesis is something pre-rational and not only limited to the mind. Also, one has to take *intention* into consideration when discussing desire, though I would not agree with Livingston that mimetic desire belongs to intentional psychology,[368] because mimetic desire is seldom very conscious. Desire, according to Livingston, can be interpreted in a cognitive and motivational way. It can mean both a sensuous wish or that which motivates an action. If desire is a disposition, it leads only

[365] *Things Hidden*, 294.
[366] Ibid., 283.
[367] Livingston. *Models of Desire*, 24.

occasionally to action, Livingston claims.[369] If, however, we regard desire as a motivational factor, it must clearly stem from mimesis. But motivation can also imply duty, meaning that mimesis or desire can be good mimesis. If desire is defined as motivation, it could hardly be described in such negative terms as Girard does. Clearly, motivation and the initial stages of desire seem to correspond. On the other hand, motivation does not necessarily indicate the acquisitive and rivalistic elements in desire. But motivation is also mimetic, based on the other. All the same, motivation is not restricted to negative imitation, sparked off by jealousy, hatred and admiration for the other. If Girardian theory had linked desire totally to motivation, it would have meant that every motive would eventually lead to destruction. There are reasons for claiming that desire, according to mimetic theory is motivation stripped of its religious and ethical ideals. This, however, would suggest that the religious person has more profound motives than the non-religious, which again would be to opt out of anthropology and psychology and create a separate theological niche for the religious. This would again be contrary to mimetic anthropology. Nevertheless, it reveals a gap, something missing in Girard's understanding of a *mundane or secular mimesis* which is good even though its reference is not religious.[370]

6.1.3 The Dynamism of Desire

Desire in mimetic theory is not static and therefore cannot be fixed except in stages. And the stages of desire are stages of worsening. The stages of desire, from being fascinated by the rival to the final stages of being possessed by the same rival (imitating destructive desires), can be explained by the increasing intensity of imitation of *the other*, an intensity which gradually becomes more and more conflictual. There is a direct line from fascination to rivalry to conflict to hate and eventually to madness/murder/suicide.[371] It is, however, not the one stage but the *process as a whole* that explains desire. Desire in its initial stages is often what, in everyday language, one labels as desire because of its semblance of vitality and creativity, while the later stages of desire are often ignored and given other names. Actually they are only the ripened effects of desire. Therefore, desire can only be grasped in a process, where each stage is seen to be in line with other stages. But if there is a stage where desire is

---

[368] Ibid., 29.
[369] Ibid., 19.
[370] However, mimesis, in my interpretation, is, finally, motivated by the Christian religion. But this does not mean that one should restrict Christian influences to the religious realm, despite, as I will attempt to show, mimetic desire basically stems from a religious context, both in its negative and positive expressions.
[371] 'The dynamism of mimetic desire has always been oriented towards death and madness.' (*Things Hidden*, 414.) 'Mimetic desire thinks that it always chooses the most life-affirming path, whereas in actuality it turns

most poignant, it is clearly in the later stages, the stages of conflict, violence and illness. Therefore desire must be linked to and defined in relation to these negative phenomena. There seems to be a tendency in Girard's thinking to describe both good and bad desire as mimetic desire, while the purely bad desire is either described as metaphysical desire or only desire. There is also a development from using mimetic desire to denote something purely negative, to using it to describe all types of desiring. In *Things Hidden,* however, the word desire is still almost always used in a purely negative way, denoting the development of a competitive structure in society after the victimage mechanism has been revealed.

> *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 unanimous and can trigger such a resolution.* (*Things Hidden*, 288.)

Such a negative understanding of desire makes the term 'mimetic desire' problematic. The Austrian psychoanalyst Werner W. Ernst has tried to solve the problem by separating mimesis and desire totally.[372] This solution would, I admit, initially, make the concepts look more logical. But, at the same time, desire cannot, from a Girardian point of view, be seen as devoid of mimesis. However, the desire to imitate is not necessarily something bad, but desire itself is bad as it, according to Girard, means a negative or double-binded preoccupation with the model. One solution in relation to understanding the Girardian concept *desire* is that mimesis and mimetic desire are both good and bad, whereas desire is only bad. In the late 1990s Girard expressed discontent with the word desire. He called for alternative words because desire connotates too much the sexual or erotic. The goal should be to find words that would express the whole personality. Girard has loosely suggested terms such as *drive, élan vital, and project*.[373] These words, however, do not convey the negative connotations with which Girard has endowed desire. *Élan vitale* is a thoroughly positive, life-affirming concept. 'Drive' and 'project' are more neutral, but blur the connection Girard has established between desire and scapegoating.

---

increasingly towards the obstacle – toward sterility and death.' (*Things Hidden*, 415.)

[372] 'We claim that only the concept of mimesis that has utterly been dissolved from desire allows us to see unequivocally the appropriate way of approaching the (pre-ceding) data of this world and of the universe (God). Any form of contamination with desire or wish produces an ego-centered harmony which threatens to undermine transcendency of the model and its imitation. Mimesis has nothing to do with desire and, therefore, it has nothing to do with rivalries. Desire on the other hand, has to do with rivalries (..) (Werner W Ernst. 'Theory of Drives and Mimesis: Controversial Positions between Freud and Girard.' (See http://theol.uibk.ac.at/cover/.)

[373] *The Girard Reader*, 268.

6.1.3.1 Mimetic Desire and Desire in the Bible

In my view, desire in Girard's work is closely linked to the prohibitions in the Ten Commandments, based on wanting something to which one is not entitled, and which will do harm both to oneself and others if the desire is acted upon. Especially the ninth and tenth commandments function as prohibitions against desiring things belonging to the other. The prohibitions in the commandments provide a kind of *a priori* basis in the Christian world for an understanding of desire. These prohibitions concerning desire, however, give no elaborate explanation of the process of desire. They merely state that breaking the commandments means breaking away from the will of God. Both the analysis of desire in mimetic theory and the negation of desire in the Ten Commandments calls for the need for prohibitions.[374] In the Hebrew Bible (*Old Testament*), however, there is more an attempt to warn against desire than describe the phenomenon. In the New Testament, meanwhile, there is a certain attempt in the *Epistle of James* to give a more elaborate description of desire.

> *But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death. (The Epistle of James 1, 14-15.)*

In this passage there is a process, from individual desires to submission to the same desires, to sin and finally to death.[375] This process clearly follows a similar pattern to the process of metaphysical desire: desire for an object, desire for everything which owns or leads to the object, rivalry for the object, rivalry leading to death. This biblical understanding of desire is, in my view, already outlined in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel.*[376] Girard's work on desire can be seen as an attempt to make a biblical anthropology coherent and vital, a way by which to interpret modern, secularized society from a mimetic point of view. One should not underestimate the missionary strategies in Girard's work.

6.1.4 From Sacrificial to Non-Sacrificial Desires

---

[374] *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 14.

[375] A similar development of desire is outlined by Hamerton-Kelly when he claims that it begins by wishing to be like the rival, then wishes to conquer the rival (envy) and finally to destroy the rival. (Hamerton-Kelly. *The Gospel and the Sacred* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 134.)

[376] In Girard's first major work (*Deceit Desire and the Novel*) desire is outlined, but within a much more narrow scope than in *Things Hidden*. *Deceit Desire and the Novel* is limited to a discussion on the development of desire, from the 17th century until mid 20th century. Desire in *Deceit Desire and the Novel* is understood as a desire to imitate a mediator. In this book Girard introduces a paradoxical movement from an external and transparent imitation, to an internal and hidden imitation. The paradox is that this hidden, internal mimesis is more fundamental and possessive and much more intense than the external imitation in the 17th and 18th century. Desire in the early stages of Girard's work is understood as the desire to be as the mediator. And the desire towards the mediator is seen as a consequence of desiring man instead of God.

In order to continue my argument on desire as being derived from the biblical context, I will look at desire in relation to the victimage mechanism. Both before and after the sacrifice there is preoccupation with the model, first a desire not to be like the model, and then, after the deification and the veneration, to be like the model.[377] In other words, both before and after the revelation of the victimage mechanism, desire is founded on the other. The great difference between 'primitive' and modern desire is that 'primitive' desire is more closely linked to a collective desire and is not necessarily based on the individual's emotions. Sacrificial desire is sacrifice, while non-sacrificial desire is desire evolved from sacrifice but leading to more subtle, individual and differentiated forms of sacrifice. Briefly, non-sacrificial desire[378] is a prolonged effect of sacrifice. Also non-sacrificial desire has a tendency to be less violent. It could be exemplified by the transition from leaving unwanted children to perish in the forest to abortion. Thus, desire could be interpreted as modified sacrifice. The hypothetical character of the transition from sacrificial to post-sacrificial societies is clearly problematic, since as these changes take place at very different times in history and, in due course, many post-sacrificial societies also tend to revert to the scapegoat mechanism.

In *Deceit Desire and the Novel* Girard claims, in an existential vein, that an internal weakness or want is what generates desire.[379] This has, however, not been elaborated any further in later works, perhaps because it would provide a notion of a prefixed anthropological state *before* mimesis. From *Things Hidden* on, the only pre-fixation is mimesis. But mimesis also represents an internal weakness; a need to imitate others in order to exist and develop. It is this dependence which different kinds of autonomous thought try to hide, overlook, minimize or despise. Mimesis represents the need for the other, while desire is a perverted form of this need for the other. Desire is the dualistic and never-ending movement from fascination to disdain, and back to fascination again. Girard's initial work on desire was an interpretation of desire in the great European novels. Even if the notion of desire, and especially the configuration of triangular desire, was developed through an analysis of fiction, Girard has always claimed that these desires are the desires of everyday life. Great novelists such as Cervantes, Flaubert, Dostoevsky and Proust have not invented these desires in any way;[380]

---

[377] Girard used the word 'mediator' in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*. Later he switched over to the word 'model' which can, perhaps, be seen as part of his gradual effort to develop a more general theory.
[378] Non-sacrificial desire means desire *after* the gospel revelation of the scapegoat mechanism. This concept, however, is not very precise, as it does not mean that scapegoating has ended. What it does indicate is the changes as regards to desire after revealing the victim's innocence.
[379] *Deceit Desire and the Novel*, 282.
[380] There have been attempts to limit the discoveries (on desire) worked out *in Deceit, Desire and the Novel* to

they are discoverers of the most banal and fundamental drive in human life. It is, according to Girard, this ability to show and reveal the most common desires that makes them into geniuses and scientists of interdividual psychology and anthropology. [381]

6.1.5 From Ritual to Individual Desire

The transition from ritual to individual desire refers to the most basic and most astonishing transition in Girard's reflection on desire. This hypothesis tries to make sense of the transition from sacrificial societies to post-sacrificial societies. In the process of ending scapegoating, sacrificial mentalities become more individual. James Alison clearly supports this thesis of seeing desire as a part of an individualization process in a post-sacrificial society, when he claims that 'desire is the "interdividual" living out of a sacrificial crisis without public resolution.'[382] Thus, we can see that even when the scapegoating systems are revealed, scapegoating has not vanished. There is, however, a metamorphosis from collective to individual desire, and this latter desire (stemming from the scapegoat mechanism) materializes into individual rivalry and violence. In extremely chaotic periods of history post-sacrificial societies[383] revert to systems of sacrifice - Nazi Germany being perhaps the most obvious and violent example. It is, however, important to emphasize that a post-sacrificial society does not have to be less violent, even if the revealing of the scapegoat mechanism constitutes a revealing of violence. In extreme cases such as World War II, violence can actually grow more severe, because certain collective regulations and prohibitions that

---

fiction. Girard's aim, however, was clearly an attempt to locate the desires of the *real world* by a systematizing of the novelists' discoveries. Lucien Goldman, for example, interpreted mimetic desire as basic to the novel genre, limited to a historical period and a specific social milieu. But, according to Girard, desire, as it is developed in the great European novels, has the most profound referentiality to reality. The attempt to locate and limit Girard's theory to the realm of fiction, has helped inspire Girard into developing a more anthropological theory on desire. In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* desire is located in imitation, mainly in the imitation of the model. But there is no claim of any mimetic totality as the emphasis is on the triangular structure of amorous desires. Imitation of good models is hardly emphasized. In this respect one could claim that desire in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* contains only bad, metaphysical desires, and ends up having no existence. Imitation is also a more inner, psychic phenomenon in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, and there is no scapegoat mechanism or theory on violence to invigorate imitation into a total theory on the human condition. The great benefit of the mimetic hypothesis developed from *Things Hidden* onwards, compared to the looser reflections on imitative desire in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, is that the later works locate a basic structure and a clear tendency. The limitation of desire in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* is its dominant psychological character, while the force of the fully developed theory on mimetic desire succeeds in integrating and rationalizing large amounts of historical data around one basic structure.

[381] Girard's genius, in this respect, is his being able to turn these insights into a *negative theology* (without readers feeling that it is theological) based on a Christian anthropology. The terrible process of becoming more and more entangled in the desires of the mediator, entails a Dantesque structure, built upon the structure of descent into hell and ascent towards salvation. Thus desire, in its crudest forms, must be seen as the transformation of human existence, caused by transforming the imitation of Christ into imitation of one's neighbour. In other words, desire is the human condition without God.

[382] James Alison. *The Joy of Being Wrong* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 14.

[383] A post-sacrificial society is not a society devoid of sacrifice, but a society where the victimage mechanism has

operated in a sacrificial society have disappeared and individual desires play a more obvious and therefore powerful role. There is also the fact that post-sacrificial societies permit a greater degree of competition, which leads to a more advanced technological stage, which in turn creates more potentially destructive weapons. The process of killing with ever more effective and longer range weapons can be seen as an attempt to rid a community of direct violence, but in using more technological weapons, violence is actually escalating. The paradox is that non-sacrificial desire seldom legitimizes violence, while, at the same time, it is potentially extremely violent. This violent consequence of modern desire can be linked partly to Paul Virilio's theory of *dromology*,[384] where speed is seen as violence, and where secular violence operates with enormous speed, thus distancing and modifying the guilt of the killer. Mimetic theory, however, is clearly different from the theory of speed. According to mimetic theory, the superiority of modern, desacralized culture is shown in the way it modifies violence and is, in actual fact, less violent (imagine the consequences of atom bombs in Antiquity) than previous sacrificial societies, even though modern society has the means for mass destruction. However, desire should be seen as playing a part in technology, not the least in the misuse of technology, and the process of accelerating speed, meaning more potential violence. In this respect speed can be seen to be connected to desire. But, on the other hand, speed, from a mimetic point of view, cannot be seen as a direct consequence of desire.

6.2 Desire and Violence

Desire in mimetic theory should be closely linked to violence.[385] The danger in doing this, however, is to fuse desire and violence together as one and the same. This would be to obliterate the process, as desire is usually anything but violent in the initial stages. The initial, seductive stages of desire are marked by the fascination with models. This stage is rivalistic but not necessarily violent.[386] It is very doubtful that every desire leads to violence, for example the desire to win in competitions. It seems more likely that most desires or drives are

---

been revealed as such. In this respect my introduction of this term can easily be misinterpreted.

[384] Paul Virilio. *Speed and Politics. An Essay on Dromology* (New York: Semoitext(e), 1977).

[385] 'Violence is always mingled with desire.' (*Violence and the Sacred*, 145.)

[386] It may also be worth mentioning that Girard presents the etymology of the terms 'competition' and 'rivalry', claiming that philology is on his side, as the *competitors* are those who run or walk together, while *rivals* are those who dwell on opposite banks of the same river. This philological statement indicates that Girard does not consider competition to be desire. But, on the other hand, Girard seems extremely aware of how easily competition, as a result of very minor changes in the mimetic game, end up by turning competitors into rivals, positioned on opposite sides of the river. (See *Things Hidden*, 11.)

channelled into non-violent, even highly creative forms. But if these drives are positive, can they then be labelled as desire according to mimetic terminology? Girard seems to turn the question around. Instead of claiming that all kinds of competitive and rivalistic desires are violent, he *links* competition and rivalry and makes them only secondary to desire, as potential desire. The reason for his moderating the tendency to explain all types of production as caused by desire is that desire must be introduced in order to explain cultural advancements. And by defining its double nature, desire can be used to reveal human development.

> *All kinds of connotations relating to conflict, competition and subversion cluster around the term desire, and help to explain the amazing success the word and the thing has had in the modern world. (Things Hidden, 284.)*

This quotation is, however, not quite representative of the more negative attitude Girard displays towards desire in *Things Hidden*. In this work the word 'desire' has basically negative connotations. In most cases desire is not described as something creative or lifegiving; on the contrary, desire is the force which leads men to destruction and death. In *Things Hidden* desire is linked to a theory on the satanic, the force or structures that lead to scapegoating. Just as Satan is the seducer, the force which initially gives the impression of leading people into something wondrous but, eventually, turns out to be violent and murderous, so too desire gives the illusion of victory, but ends up by leading people into conflicts, mental agony and murder. The symmetry between the satanic processes and desire makes it logical to conclude that desire and the satanic in mimetic theory stem from the same thing. The problem, however, which arises when attempting to fuse desire and the satanic, are the comments Girard makes on the desacrificial and demystifying effect of desire.[387] Thus desire in mimetic theory must be seen to be the prolongation of scapegoating after the scapegoat revelation. It is not scapegoating itself. This also makes desire less satanic. It is important to be precise that Satan in mimetic theory is not transcendental and, therefore, can be located within anthropological structures.[388] But if desire is seen partly as a force of demystification where desire and the satanic are seen as one and the same, the satanic should also have positive effects. This would lead, however, to a concept of the world, where evilness also contains some good. This is not totally out of place in mimetic theory because the satanic is seen as the force behind the scapegoat mechanism, and the scapegoat

[387] *Things Hidden*, 285.
[388] 'Our being liberated from Satan's bondage means that the supernatural power of Satan and his demons is an

mechanism clearly has, and especially has had, some positive effects. Any attempt to mix the concept of Satan with the concept God would, however, be the opposite of what Girard intends to achieve when he writes in theological terms.[389]

Would it be too simplistic to fuse the concept of the satanic with desire? Desire could be seen to be mimesis devoid of religious imitation. But does this mean that desire is purely satanic? First and foremost desire, like the satanic, leads to scapegoating. But scapegoating does, as is especially emphasized in Girard's later works, moderate violence. In this respect, scapegoating, when seen against a background of total violence, has something beneficial about it. Scapegoating, however, seems to have nothing to do with God's nature, but is, at least historically, a preliminary step towards revealing the victim's innocence. There is in mimetic theory a mingling between the ways of God and the ways of the world. In the same way, secular desire is not something totally distinct from Christian imitation. From a mimetic perspective it is deviated transcendency, the worship of the rivalistic model instead of the non-rivalistic man-God, Jesus, whose imitation is not acquisitive.[390] The lack of desire does not in this case, stem from the subject, but from the model. It is the model which differs. But even if the structure of desiring a desirous model appears identical to the imitation of Christ, the results differ. Desiring a rivalistic mediator leads to (spiritual) death, imitating Christ leads to (spiritual) life. As we can see desire in mimetic theory somewhat lacks coherence. This is partly due to Girard's shift in interpreting sacrifice.

6.3 The Nothingness of Desire

---

illusion, that Satan does not exist.' ('Satan' in *The Girard Reader*, 209.)

[389] Girard has commented suspiciously on the Manichean idea of evil, meaning evil or violence attaining something good, and that humans must participate, to some extent, in evilness in order to reach truth and knowledge. It seems more likely that Girard interprets Jesus' revelation of the satanic, of the scapegoat mechanism, as conquering the evil from inside, by not becoming evil or partaking in the evil, but in conquering the scapegoat system and stopping its use by showing its inherent violence. The theological understanding would be that Jesus turns the evil of scapegoating into something good by revealing the innocence of the scapegoat. In *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* Girard tries to give an anthropo-theological explanation to the Greek Fathers' concept of 'Satan duped by the cross.' (*I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 148-153.) The main idea is that desire is entrapped in desire, meaning that it cannot think outside its realm, outside the logic of power and violence, which again means that making Jesus a scapegoat, seemed, from the point of view of desire, to be a victory, but this victory actually marks the end of the scapegoat mechanism. Jesus reveals scapegoating as a violent act, thus revealing its origin. In other words, Jesus' death seems, from the perspective of persecution, to be a fulfilment of righteousness. But this righteousness is a different kind of righteousness, as it reveals, not the persecutors' righteousness, but the victim's innocence. This mentality introduces a new humanity, based on concern for the victims. This is for Girard the explanation of the concept 'Victory of the Cross', meaning the end of the satanic and the revelation of love.

Girard claims that desire is *nothing* or, more precisely, *leads to nothingness*. It is nothing in that it has no substance. The deeper one penetrates into the process of desire, the more symbolic, blurred and sterile the desired objects gradually become in the mind of the subject. Also, the references to reality become more and more blurred. The process of imitating through desire is what Girard calls *skandalon*. Skandalon is the process whereby the ongoing desire for pleasure results in pain, again and again. Skandalon is this attraction that leads to wounding.[391] In other words, it is the process of desiring through desirous models, which eventually leads to nothingness. Thus the content of desire is metaphysical. This means that desire has no substance, but, on the other hand, has the most extreme effects on individuals. The concept of metaphysical desire (as used in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*) is not precise in locating the scope of mimesis, but it is perhaps the most precise concept as regards locating the process and goal of desire, as desires make human beings lose contact with reality.

Desire ends up being something totally metaphysical; having no substance at all, and leading to a nothingness which resembles death. It does not primarily refer to physical death but to a spiritual death, where all that really exists in the mind of the subject is conflict. Within the logic of desire, the problem is the model. In this gradual process towards a death-ridden existence, desire does not understand that the problem is desire itself. When desire has the upper hand in human relations it is always the desired and despised model which is the problem.

> *And he (the subject) automatically transforms the model's desire into a desire that opposes and frustrates his own. Because he does not understand the automatic character of the rivalry, the imitator soon converts the fact of being opposed, frustrated and rejected into the major stimulant of his desire. In one way or another, he proceeds to inject more and more violence into his desire. (Things Hidden, 413)*

The model is the metaphysical object. The reason for its metaphysical existence is that the subject thinks the model has something which he himself does not have. It is this emptiness, this void combined with a desire for fullness, which creates the model's metaphysical attributes.[392] This emptiness or void, which Girard never attempts to explain[393] (except in terms of imitating

---

[390] *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 12-18.
[391] See *Things Hidden*, 162, 322, 416-31; *The Girard Reader*, 161, 198-99, 215-16; *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 16.
[392] *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 66.
[393] From a theological point of view it would seem relevant to interpret this void as lack of love, and that voids are created by this lack. The human condition implies lack of love, but the enhancement of this lack of love occurs when the God of love is replaced by loveless and rivalistic models.

the model), is the nearest he comes to reflecting in terms of existentialist philosophy. The void is something deeply and exclusively human and is reminiscent of the Sartrean existence *pour soi*. The metaphysics of the model also consists in the fact that the model will not respond in a way that will fulfil the subject's desires. On the contrary, if the model is itself caught up in the death-ridden process of desire, it will do its best to prevent the subject from fulfilling its desires. This game of mediating desires is contagious. The mimetic effect indicates a process of making the other identical with one's own desires. This, however, only enhances the desires' desire to overcome the other(s) as obstacles. The desires will not only be doubled, they will be spread contagiously to all areas where desire finds other desirable desires. The epidemics caused by desire indicate a weakness or, at least, a lack of clarity in Girard's system-model. The insufficiency of the theory concerning the subject-model-obstacle is, especially in *Deceit Desire and the Novel,* that the model is described as one single person, whereas different models appear and reappear every time there is somebody present who seems to embody something which the desiring subject desires. In most cases there is a mixture of the many desiring one another in numerous configurations. Triangular desire, although the most fundamental and most common desire (especially in the context of loveless love), is just *one of numerous variations*.[394] In this respect James Alison is mistaken when he claims that all mimetic desire is triangular[395] as this configuration is only a (basic) starting point. Mimetic desire contains all kinds of mimesis of the others, in an endless complexity of interdividual desires. It is like the germs described in Raskolnikov's dream, spreading out into infinity, and turning everyone affected into deceitful doubles. Thus, the system is more complex, more plural than the original models described in mimetic theory. A system where mimesis involves greater plurality needs to be elaborated.

Desire is, as has been noted, the consequence of the mimetic crisis. [396] It is the negative effect of desacralization, of desacralization on a more individual level. In a way, desire marks the continuity of the scapegoat mechanism. Desire is the modern mark of victimizing. It is

[394] Girard's first attempt to understand rivalry was by locating desire as a triangular structure. Since the elaboration of triangular desire in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, this has been his most elementary and model for rivalry. The triangular structure makes rivalry inevitable, as there will be at least one of the three desiring parts that will not have his or her desires fulfilled. The paradox, though, is that in triangular desire absolutely all parts become losers if the process intensifies. Up to a point (the point of external desire), however, sentimental love-stories contain a certain truth: to unite in love means one is left out. But this is only the case when rivalry is loose and external, governed by prohibitions. If one looks at the principle behind triangular desire, the initial scarcity makes rivalry understandable. In a group of four, for example, the chances for being left out, diminishes - as in all other numbers except three. This case of numbering, of people involved, however, has no primary importance to the Girardian concept of rivalry, but it is, on the other hand, an interesting fact that the triangle is not established by chance when describing desire and rivalry. The triangle is clearly the most common number when expressing conflictual desires.
[395] Alison. *The Joy of Being Wrong*, 9.

something that encompasses all areas of modern life, and the lack of love for others is caused partly by desire.

> *(…) it is the acute mimetic rivalry with the other that occurs in all the circumstances we call 'private', ranging from eroticism to professional or intellectual ambition. (Things Hidden, 288.)*

But a society governed by desire is, in my view, still preferable to one where people live enclosed and regulated by the victimage mechanism. In the modern world, mimetic desire is intense because the barriers have been pulled down and differences eradicated.[397] There exists a kind of dialectic between sacrifice and mimetic desire, where desire has the upper hand all the time. The more the victimage mechanism is revealed, the more intensely and individually mimetic desire can flow. In this respect desire is a continuity of the destructive effects of scapegoating, *without the regulating mechanism*. Desire, though, can be stabilized at different levels according to the individuals concerned, but it lacks the resources of catharsis and expulsion.[398] Instead of the resentment inherit in religious prohibition, the obstacle gradually turns into a rival,[399] and one can talk about external obstacles becoming internal. As a result desire in the modern world is much more invisible, intimate, subtle and individual than desire regulated by sacrificial societies. According to Oughourlian, desire is the movement by which mimesis gives autonomy and individuality to humans.[400] The difference between sacrificial desire and the desire predominant in the modern world is that modern, non-sacrificial desire lacks the resources of catharsis and expulsion.[401] There is a sort of automatism in the way that desire flows as the regulating and cathartic resources vanish.[402]

6.4 Secularization and Desire

The difference or shift from a sacrificial world to a post-sacrificial world is clearly a consequence of moderating sacrifice and thereby enhancing secularization. Thus secularization can be seen as the consequence of the Christian revelation. The Gospels'

---

[396] *Things Hidden*, 288.
[397] Ibid., 284.
[398] Ibid., 288.
[399] Ibid., 286.
[400] Jean-Michel Oughourlian. *Un mime nommé désir: Hystérie, transe, possession, adorcisme* (Paris: Grasset, 1982), 24.
[401] *Things Hidden*, 288.
[402] Ibid.

renunciation of scapegoating and violence could be seen to be the origin of the modern. The taboos and prohibitions, the notions of a vengeful God have lost their absolute power, and a new, less sacrificial notion has arisen. The notion of a God hanging on the cross praying for the forgiveness of his persecutors creates a new mimetic climate. This act of desacralization is the decisive moment when a new and less sacrificial mentality is created among people. This is the decisive moment in the origin of a new and modern mentality, meaning a mentality of desacralisation. The movement towards a society that avoids sacrifice is similarly the force behind secularization, which implies a world no longer dominated by the scapegoat mechanism. The modern world is, because of desacralization, capable of absorbing high doses of undifferentiation.[403] This non-sacrificial development has created an atmosphere where desire and rivalry have a legitimacy (especially in the West) completely unheard of when compared to earlier generations. Especially the freedom among ordinary people to act according to their own desires, has been given an enormous boost.

In this context Girard seems undecided as to whether desire is good or bad. The double effect of desire becomes, in various contexts, quite prominent in his thought. Girard claims that desire '*liberates us from the mystic terror, the purely maleficent form of sacralization, that dominated centuries of Puritanism and a certain direction of Freudianism, and in our own day with a whole host of epigonal movements so devoid of real creativity that they seem more pathetic than dangerously misleading.*'[404] Despite the emphasis given in these utterances to the double effect of desire, the somewhat astonishing thing about this statement is the positive significance desire is given in relation to demythologizing sacrifice, even though modern atheistic substitutes are dismissed as rather futile.[405] Girard's view on secularization could be said to be in tune with that of Gianni Vattimo when the latter claims that the boundary for secularization is where it trespasses against love for one's neighbour.[406]

In the statement on desire, quoted above, Girard claims that desire liberates humans from certain maleficent forms of sacralization. In other words, desire has a positive effect on certain sacrificial phenomena. This liberation can be seen to be a heightened awareness of violence. These positive effects are modified by the claim that many new desirous and non-sacrificial approaches end up rather lifeless and sterile. The statement, however, makes it

[403] Ibid., 284.
[404] Ibid., 446.
[405] In most other statements desire is regarded as the negative effect of secularization.

difficult to claim that Girard in *Things Hidden* regards desire in a totally negative way. There is also the fact that he is not consistent when distinguishing between desire and mimetic desire. At times these concepts are blurred, sometimes meaning the same and, in another context, meaning something different. In the following lines Girard uses the term mimetic desire to describe the positive effects desire has had on the modern world.

> Everything that makes our world the most energetic and creative that has ever been in art, politics, modes of thought and, especially, science and technology is a consequence of the liberation of mimetic desire. (Things Hidden, 285.)

Desire in mimetic theory can, when linked to the process of permitting rivalry and demystification, be seen as a creative force. It is therefore essential to focus on the liberating effects of desire, in order to understand the double effect of desire. One of the liberating effects of desire consists in tolerating rivalry.

> *Modern society is extremely refined and developed in the symbolic sense. It can permit and encourage growth of mimetic rivalries that are normally forbidden to man. (Things Hidden, 93.)*

Rivalry in a sacrificial society has to be controlled by strict prohibitions in order to avoid violence. In a desacralized world desire is let loose. The consequence is enhanced rivalry and a speeding up of production. The threat from violence is less strong. Toleration towards desire can only materialise when violence is moderated, or aggressions have been channelled.

In Girardian thought this kind of desacralization constitutes a progress, but progress not in any straightforward way such as the liberals imagined it. Firstly, the victimage mechanism is seen as partly beneficial since it has regulated society and limited violence. This also means that violence is less motivated by contingent and absolute violence. Secondly, the deconstruction of prohibitions creates a world of individual rivalry, which leads to new and differentiated forms of violence. The tensions caused by heightened rivalry can also lead to creativity, for example in the technological field, which in due time may lead to mass destruction. Thirdly, when the prohibitions and penal systems are modified, the incitement to commit lawless and immoral acts becomes easier. The liberation of desire creates a freer society, but desire is still there, and creates new kinds of problems. The liberation of desire demands that individuals are able to control their desires, and so the question arises: can a society dominated by desire, control undesirable desire?

---

[406] Gianni Vattimo. *Belief* (Stanford California: Stanford U.P., 1999), 62-65.

6.4.1 The Gospel's Liberating Effect

From a superficial point of view, it might seem as though desire had engendered a non-sacrificial, liberal society. This, however, would imply that desire embodies tolerance, openness, love and forgiveness. This is hardly the case when desire is seen as a negative product of desacralization. In most cases Girard does not consider desire as the prime engine behind desacralisation. He claims that the Gospels have revealed the scapegoat mechanism, and, as a secondary consequence of this non-sacrificial mentality, desire has evolved, both liberating and damaging at the same time. Therefore, it is not desire that is the primary force behind modern society. In fact, according to mimetic theory, it is religion. Religion is both the force behind the scapegoat mechanism and the revelation of the scapegoat mechanism. And because of the latter, the Christian demythologization of scapegoating has engendered the mentality of the modern world. Thus, the side-effect of the modern is the flowing of desires. Therefore, in my view, it is absurd to try to understand mimetic theory without considering religion as a motive in the way desire works.

When interpreting desire in relation to religion, due to the emphasis mimetic theory puts on the Passion of Christ as a revelatory mechanism, one needs to understand the shift in desire evoked by this new mentality. Before post-sacrificial societies appeared, desires were checked and balanced through the scapegoat mechanism and one can speak of collective desires being channelled into victimizing. In a sense Girard is saying that desires understood in a individual way are only possible in a post-sacrificial society, which also means that individuality can evolve only as the victimage mechanism has been revealed.

6.5 The Desire to Hide the Effects of Desire

Girard has adopted Bateson's phrase 'double bind', which was originally used to understand mental problems, mainly schizophrenia.[407] Girard uses the phrase in order to understand interdividual psychology and desire, and claims that this structure should not be limited to mental illness; it is a basis for all human relationships.[408] The double bind is manifested in

[407] See *Things Hidden*, 291-93.
[408] *Violence and the Sacred*, 147.

mimetic theory as a desire to 'be like me, not to be like me, copy me, not to copy me.'[409] The feedback people give, when dominated by desire, operates on the level of contrasting signals, creating obstacles and dreams of initiation, and then again new obstacles. But desire described in a desirous manner will tend either to ignore the obstacles or deify them. According to Oughorlian, descriptions of desire, where the obstacles are not revealed as such, are romantic tendencies, which '*do not understand the role that others play in the formation of desire.*'[410] Therefore, in the modern world especially, desire is presented without obstacles, sometimes retreating into sacrifice by turning obstacles into something semi-sacred.

Modern advertising presents triangular desire as healthy competition, and the double binds are basically prescriptions for how one reaches and conquers the object; not for how the desires are transformed towards the model. When the focus is on the model, the emphasis lies on his or her superiority and ability to control and manipulate the other desiring people involved. In this way desire is presented through desire, obliterating or deifying most of the negative aspects caused by rivalry.

Desire in the Girardian sense is basically desire according to somebody else's desires.[411] This makes desire acquisitive in nature, while the more popular view; that desire is evoked by the object, easily turns objects into representations of desire. The dismissal of desires as being primarily drawn towards the object's inherent value, indicates that desire is motivated by desire. If there was a straight line from the subject to the object, it would mean that our lives would be totally rational, on the verge of being instinctual. Girard, on the other hand, claims that all our desires stem from the other.[412] This other can be virtually anyone outside the object. It does not even have to be human, even if the primal reference always turns out to be human. It can be what we have read, seen on television, heard at a lecture and so on. It is always imitated. And all imitation, which is rivalistic, is desirous, based on a want. The fact that desire is represented by a more symbolic reality than core interdividual scenes, reveal the representational potentiality stemming from desire. But despite the tremendous ability which modernity has displayed to transform desire into cultural images, representational mimesis is, according to my understanding of mimetic theory, only a secondary effect of desire,

[409] See Ibid.
[410] Oughourlian. *Un Mime nommé désir: Hystérie, transe, possession, adorcisme*, 32.
[411] See *Violence and the Sacred*, 145.
[412] See 'Metamorphosis of Desire' in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 83-95.

manifesting its force by producing symbols. These symbols, however, should be seen to emanate from mimetic relations.

6.6 The Weakness in Desire

Desire is initially a weakness; it consists of an urge to acquire something which one thinks others have. This, however, is not the main weakness; the main weakness is to think that if one has what the other person seems to have, one will be fulfilled. In the act of desiring, the other's weakness is not taken into consideration, since desire makes people blind to the underlying desires of desire. Therefore, the desiring subject always has the feeling that it is pushing its head against the wall. He or she does not consider the fact that the other either desires the same object (and the last thing he or she will do is let the subject have it), or he/she will begin desiring the desires of the subject in a rivalistic manner, and thus, rival the subject on the basis of the subject's desires. In both cases rivalry will have the upper hand, and the chances of achieving what one desires, is minimal.

In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel,* it seems as though the subject has a chance to fulfil his desires so long as he does not fall into the hands of the mediator. In this work, the other plays a decisive, but not a total role in the act of desiring. In Girard's later works all desires are labelled mimetic. This does not mean that there is always a clear-cut rival present; it means that all desires for objects are mediated. In most cases there is no principal or material reason for not being able to fulfil one's desires. But so long as rivalry is predominant and the others' desires are intensely bound to the subject's desires, fulfilment is indeed very difficult to achieve. There is also the fact that one does not know what one really wants, that the desire for something only hides something deeper and more profound, the something which desire keeps one away from.

The other prohibits the fulfilment of desire, while, at the same time, the desire for objects is also imitated through the other. The human situation is a double bind in that both the initial desire and the later prohibitions are based upon the other. The chance of opting out of these mimetic games, when they are motivated by desire, is impossible. The only way out is to renounce desire, or, more precisely, renounce rivalistic desire. This, according to Girard, is extremely difficult, often painful, and its process is structurally the same as a Christian

conversion.[413] And even if one does convert from double binded rivalries, there will always be rivalry in one's life. The difference is the revelation of one's own destructive desires and the decision not to enhance the double binds, the illusory desires that perpetually haunt individuals.

Mimetic theory sees the main weakness of desire in the fact that humans are not only unable to fulfil the goals set out by desire; they also invert the goals into the opposite.

> *Modern people imagine that their discomfort and unease is a product of religious taboos, cultural prohibitions, even the legal forms of protection. They think that once this confinement is over, desire will be able to blossom forth. (Things Hidden, 285.)*

When reflecting in a desirous manner, one sees only the negative sides of all prohibitions. Seen from a desirous point of view, prohibitions only exist to hurt or modify the life of individuals. Desire creates an anthropology of freedom, a freedom that says that if everybody follows one's heart's desire, everybody will be happy. Mimetic theory, in deep contrast to this view, claims that it is desire that actually creates the need for prohibitions. Desire leads to conflict; it splits up relationships, and in extreme cases causes murder and madness; the prohibitions are set up to avoid such consequences.

[413] See 'The Conclusion' in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 290-314.

6.6.1 From Collective Illness to Individual Illness

Madness according to Girard, involves the disappearance of the object and the persistence of rivalry in its pure state.[414] In a society governed by the victimage mechanism, madness is the preliminary state when there is total disruption in society, when violence and anarchy threaten society. Madness in a collective manner is total violence, the frenzy of all against all. In this kind of madness there are no regulatory mechanisms, no rules, no prohibitions to stop the violence. In this respect the scapegoat mechanism saves society from madness and total violence by channelling aggression onto the scapegoat. In such a society, scapegoating clearly has positive implications: in minimizing violence, restoring peace and calm, and preparing a way to establish prohibitions. (One might claim that the scapegoat mechanism is the origin of differentiation.) Madness in a sacrificial society is clearly collective madness, where violence is something that affects the whole of society, and can be cured by scapegoating. In this respect one could say that scapegoating acts as a *pharmakon*, both as something destructive and as a remedy.[415]

In the process of developing into a post-sacrificial society, violence and scapegoating lose some of their grip on society. Instead of desires being channelled, desires spring forth, or to be more precise, take hold of individuals. And in a society not governed by the scapegoat mechanism, aggressions that were previously directed against the victim, are now directed towards oneself and the others. Scapegoating is transformed into individual desire, and desire develops according to the same structure as scapegoating - from rivalry to conflict and ending in violence. Mental illnesses can be seen to start when the model's feedback is in any way violent. This violence, it should be emphasized, is mainly psychological, especially in its preliminary stages. The subject's desires, which can be desires for practically anything, are given a violent return. The model's feedback is dominated by variations on the 'be as me, do not be as me,' creating all kinds of different mental problems.[416]

Firstly, Girard's theory attempts to show how the victimage mechanism generates all the different forms of desire and symptoms of psychopathology.[417] In a way, desire is a mental illness in itself, as it expresses a want, something unattainable. But this, however, is too static

[414] *Things Hidden*, 48-49, 348-349.
[415] See *Violence and the Sacred*, 95.
[416] Girard elaborates these different mental agonies in Book III of *Things Hidden*, when he discusses and compares mimetic psychology with traditional psychological concepts. (See *Things Hidden.* Book III: Interdividual Psychology, 283-432.) In this work Girard sees all mental problems in relation to mimesis. It is not my task, however, to repeat these new definitions of mental illnesses in the light of mimesis; my task here is to discuss the relation between mental illness and desire.

a description of desire. Desire is more clearly perceived in the process where the symptoms are aggravated.[418] Desire generates the double binds in which it gets caught.[419] It changes or transforms obstacles into models.[420] Desire aggravates all symptoms.[421] In principle desire spares no-one. Also the model falls victim to the contagion of desire.[422] The model himself becomes more interested in the object which he designates as a result of the subject's imitations. But soon the focus is no longer on the object. It is instead directed towards the subject's desire. He himself falls prey to his own contagion.[423]

Desire gives the illusion of success, while in reality one sinks deeper and deeper into the hands of one's rivals. In desire, one refuses to understand why the model changes into an obstacle, even though one sees clearly that this change always take place.[424] Governed by desire one increasingly interprets the humiliation and disdain as emanating from the model's superiority. Desire gives people the masochistic feeling that to undergo such humiliations is merely a preliminary stage in achieving what one desires. But gradually the desire for the initial objects grows weaker, the desires get more and more focused on the obstacles; and in the end there are no objects left to desire, there is only rivalry.

This process is an anthropological description of the descent into to hell, a Sartrean hell, where hell is the other. But in all the different stages, there is always a chance to opt out of the process. First and foremost there is religious conversion, a change of model, to a non-violent, non-rivalistic and therefore loving model, the model of Christ. There is also the possibility of using one's rational faculties to avoid this possession of the other. Rationality is to be able to decipher the process of madness, and enable people turn to more life-giving models. Understood in a secular sense people can rid themselves of mimetic contagion through work and non-desiring interests.

> *Being rational – functioning properly - is a matter of having objects and being busy with them; being mad is a matter of letting oneself be taken completely by the mimetic models, and so fulfilling the calling of desire. (Things Hidden, 311.)*

---

[417] See *Things Hidden*, 289.
[418] Ibid., 304.
[419] Ibid.
[420] Ibid., 327.
[421] Ibid., 304.
[422] Ibid., 299.
[423] Ibid.
[424] Ibid., 327.

Mental stability or instability depends on relationships with others. If desires are strong enough, the other becomes a model, and if the model itself is contaminated by desire, rivalry will begin. But mimetic theory only interprets mental problems in relation to bad or desirous models, and, in my view, does not take into consideration the great complexity of mental problems caused by the dialectic between good and bad mimesis. Even good mimesis can cause mental problems, especially through the loss of good mimesis, the good model. If for example a father or a mother dies when a child is young, the lack of mimetic models can cause the same mental problems as preoccupation with a bad model. Therefore it is not sufficient to explain mental problems as being generated only from rivalistic desire, they can often be generated by the loss of a good model - manifested as a loss of love. In this respect it is important to expand the focus of mental disorder to include good mimesis, especially when we consider that it is often the less desirous who become victims.

6.7. The Role of the Object

In mimetic theory everything is decided by the relationship towards the other. But it would seem that when considering normal, everyday relations, the object is more to the fore than mimetic theory suggests. Everyday coexistence seems to be governed by a greater rationale, whereby the desire for the object plays a more decisive role. There therefore seems to be a need for a certain modification of the theory of desire according the other. Firstly, in everyday life the value of the object seems to be governed by certain inherent laws of value. Gold, for example, has always been associated with to desire, because of its intrinsic and stable value. People will, especially in the initial stages of desire, desire things of stable value and not desire things which are absolutely absurd - so long as desire is not extreme. The fact that people in Europe prefer to live in town centres, while people in the USA prefer to live in the suburbs, is one example I have encountered among Girardians to illustrate the non-rational and interdividual side of desire. But there are objective reasons for this. In the centre of European towns it is usually safer, and for example in London or Paris, the buildings are of high quality. In the suburbs, meanwhile, there is often poverty. In the USA violence and poverty is more prevalent in town centres, while wealth and safety are more prevalent in the suburbs. Also, the fact that more people work in the suburbs makes the American choice rational. These rather banal examples show that desire is usually built around objective criteria. As I see it, the desire according to the other departs from the rational when the relationship towards the other passes a certain threshold of intensification.

Asplund criticizes Girard for having forgotten conflicts of *real* worth.[425] There is, admittedly, something in this critique, especially when we consider the initial stages of conflict. Although the mimesis of the other will always be a part of any desire, the desire according to the other is seldom detached from rationality. The tendency, from *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* to *Things Hidden,* has been to endow the object with less and less value. This needs to be modified. In my view, Girard's understanding of desire has two weaknesses: Firstly there is a lack of clarity between desire and mimetic desire. I will propose defining desire as the *negative version of mimetic desire*. Secondly, desire is, when conflict is not intense, also *object-related*.[426]

6.8 The Religious Nature of Desire

Desire as a phenomenon is, as we have seen, a reflection both on the prohibitions against desire in the Ten Commandments and on the New Testament's understanding of desire as leading to death. The religious framework of Girard's work is evident. Desire, which appears to be both modern and mundane, is, in mimetic theory, primarily understood in the context of Jewish and Christian ethics. Girard's work on desire marks no point of departure from the religious understanding of the nature of desire. Its modern redress does not mean that desire has only certain religious implications; it means rather that the basic understanding of desire is born out of the dialectic between Christian ethics regarding desire and the modern, secularized version of desire, where the latter refers to an understanding of desire in which autonomy is questioned. Thus, if desire basically is seen through the lens of Christianity, it should not surprise us if the source of mimetic desire is also religious in origin. The imitatio Christi understanding of Girard's thought, is cleverly subdued by anthropological language. But once this language is stripped of its literary and anthropological context, one cannot avoid seeing the theology underlying the whole mimetic project. Therefore it seems ridiculous to try to limit the religious dimension in Girard's thought solely to the victimage mechanism.

---

[425] Johan Asplund. *Rivaler och syndabockar* (Gøteborg: Kørpen, 1989), 93-94.

[426] Further objections to Girardian desire are, as I see it, minor. The scarcity of objections is due to the fact that I am primarily in tune with Girard's basic understanding of desire: desire is, in my view, not primarily aroused by the object but by the other. In this respect Girard has been able to dismiss desire as something *a priori* as in erotic desire, desire for recognition, desire for power etc. Thus the Girardian scope of desire will principally be much wider and more complex than previous understandings of desire, as desires can take almost any form. And it is this liberation from a pre-conceived understanding of desire, which makes it possible to analyse desire in all its different configurations.

6.9 Desire in Hegel's Master and Slave

6.9.1 Teleology

It may seem as though Girard's understanding of desire is closely related, in some ways, to Hegel's understanding of desire evoked by the hindrance of the other. The similarity, which is based on the emphasis on interpersonal relationships, might also be seen to stem from a common religious understanding of Original Sin. Girard has been labelled a Hegelian Christian[427] because of his emphasis on the way history has been shaped by Christianity through its revelation of the scapegoat mechanism. Also, the evolutionary aspect in Girardian thinking seems, loosely speaking, to have certain links with Hegelian dialectics. The way in which the revealing of the scapegoat mechanism has created a favourable climate for science and rationality, seems to have structural similarities with Hegel's Weltgeist. But Girard's system is not teleological in precisely the same way: in his attempt to locate historical development in mimesis there are coincidences on every level.[428] The closest Girard ever gets to clear cut teleological thinking is when he analyses the laws and historical effects of desire. These laws, which are structural yet at the same time 'meaningless,' seem to be decisive for a teleological meaning, especially as a culmination of apocalyptic themes.

In this section on Hegel I will not delve into comparison between Girard and Hegel on how history evolves since it is somewhat removed from my main discourse. Instead, I wish to compare mimetic desire with the mimetic understanding of the relationship between master and slave. In other words, I wish to compare their understandings of desire and conflict.

6.9.2 Desire in *Phenomenology of the Spirit*

The desire for the other in *Phenomenology of the Spirit* resembles Girardian desire. Desire in *Phenomenology of the Spirit* is governed by objects, and the main object is the other. According to Hegel, the other is a prolongation of self-desire. In mimetic theory, the primary understanding of triangular desire concerns the other's desire, not the other as such. The other is a person desired through interpersonal relationships. In Hegel, there is less emphasis on the objectivity and concreteness surrounding the interpersonal relationships between the master and slave. It does seem rather unclear, if this really is a description of human relationships in that it refers to real

[427] J.-M. Domenach. 'René Girard, Le Hegel du christianisme' in *Enquête sur les idées contemporaines* (Paris: Seuil,1981).
[428] See 'Saddam er en forbryder og en syndebuk', An Interview with Girard in the Danish paper Information, March

people participating in desire. My interpretation, however, presupposes that this is a theory on interpersonal relationships.

Hegel's concept of desire is primarily self-consciousness. He defines self-consciousness as desire.[429] The human's initial stage of being is a desiring self-consciousness. In this initial phase of existence desire is directed against the self. Self-consciousness is, as Allan Wood claims, a desire, a striving of the ego against otherness.[430] This self-consciousness has an instinctive need to preserve its autonomy, and is, initially, in direct contrast to mimetic theory when the latter claims that a human's desire is always directed towards the other. Desire towards oneself is, according to Girard, initially mediated. On the other hand, Hegel's analysis of master (lord) and slave (bondsman) marks a decisive step towards considering the other in philosophy.

Hegel's dialectic of master and slave resembles the triangular configuration. The Girardian subject clearly resembles the slave's search for recognition. And the master resembles the mediator in his reluctance to give any recognition. However, in Hegel's description of the master and slave, the master's self-consciousness is mediated by the slave.[431] The desires arising from his self-consciousness will provoke antagonistic desires when confronted by the other's desire. The satisfaction of desire is only preliminary and brings no real satisfaction, because it creates no freedom in relation to the object. On the contrary, new objects are continually required for its satisfaction.[432]

This self-consciousness can only acquire freedom by means of another self-consciousness.[433] The fluid self-consciousness is a mimesis of the other; the doubling of desire, the 'I' that is 'we'.[434] But Hegel lays more emphasis on the *acknowledgment* of the other, the process of recognition or harmonization, where the master acknowledges the slave. In Girard's understanding of relations dominated by desire, there is no resolution within the relationship between the subject and the mediator. Resolution lies in the changing of mimetic models. The process outlined as triangular desire is a process whereby desire continually provokes a fragmentation of the self. There is no development towards real recognition of the other because the relationship is based primarily on

---

15, 1988.
[429] Hegel. *Phenomenology of the Spirit.* (166) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
[430] Allen Wood. *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1990), 84.
[431] Hegel. *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (190).
[432] Ibid., (175).
[433] Ibid.
[434] Ibid., (175-176).

rivalry, signifying a relationship developed through hate, envy and jealousy. But the paradoxical development of creating maximum difference when, in reality, the rivals become more and more alike, has a structural similarity with the Hegelian process of acknowledgement of the other. In mimetic theory, however, there is an asymmetrical development,[435] since the rivals produce the conceited thought of being totally different from their rivals, while in reality rivalry and negative identification create similarities.

6.9.2.1 Double Desire versus Triangular Desire

Similarity as a structure in rivalry is a basic part of Hegelian dialectics, but Hegel lays less emphasis on the mediator. The third person is not vital in Hegel's understanding of desire. Neither does Hegel lay any emphasis on asymmetrical development (where the desire to profess uniqueness creates similarities) - even when the master's acceptance represents a change from violence to concern. In the mimetic triangle, there is a gradual worsening in the relationship between the subject and the mediator. The Hegelian understanding of the relationship between master and slave contains a resolution, a process of acceptance, which ends with the master accepting the slave. These basic differences results from a different concept of desire. Even if Hegel propagates a dialectical development, desire is basically a *subject-subject relationship*. This subject-subject relationship has a double structure. It means that the mediator plays no decisive role, only the other - understood as a part of a linear structure - can change desires.

> *Thus the movement is simply the double movement of the two self-consciousnesses. Each sees the other do the same as it does; each does itself what it demands of the other, and therefore also does what it does only in so far as the other does the same. Action by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both. (Hegel. Phenomenology of the Spirit (182).*

The doubleness shown here is a process of double desire, the one desiring and imitating the other. This is for Hegel the process towards mutually recognizing one another.[436] This might also have been an excellent illustration of the doubling of desire in mimetic theory, exemplifying the process whereby the subject's desire is imitated by the mediator; but the process of doubling in mimetic theory is no process towards liberation. On the contrary, it leads to the intensification of desire, to an enhancing of the mimetic bondage. Hegel interprets desire as a means to a goal. The struggle

[435] Dag Norheim writes that in Hegel the conflictual starting point is based on a difference which is done away with in a more fundamental likeness, while in Girard's work there is a movement from a stable, harmonious and differentiated starting point to a more undifferentiated, disharmonious and conflictual relationship. (Dag Norheim. 'Mimesis og metafysisk begjær. En undersøkelse av subjektets status hos Nietzsche og Girard', Hovedoppgave (Master Degree), Teologisk Fakultet, Universitetet i Oslo (1991): 86.)
[436] Hegel. *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (184).

between life and death, where there is a striving towards the other's death[437] is the way in which the master and the slave acknowledge each other. Girard has a more negative view of desire, as it only leads deeper and deeper into existential degradation and suffering. While desire for Hegel is the foundation of self-consciousness,[438] metaphysical desire for Girard is the deceitful road towards a fragmentation of the self, towards death. Thus, in Girard's later works, there is an anthropology based solely on mimetic desire, and this deceitful path is labelled bad mimesis. There is, however, a conclusion that results from Girard's triangular structures. In the last chapter of *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* entitled "The Dostoevskian Apocalypse," Girard shows, through an analysis of different novelists' conclusions, that desires reach a culmination, either through murder, suicide, mental illness or conversion. The former three are consequences of the triumph *of* metaphysical desire. Conversion, on the other hand, is the triumph *over* metaphysical desire. Conversion can be seen to lead to a certain acknowledgement of the other, but acknowledgement is not the main element of the conclusion. The conclusion is basically a renouncement of metaphysical desires, indicating a shift in models. The mediator is replaced by the model of Christ. The conclusion is reached by substituting models, which can, secondarily, also lead to love of the mediator, not as rival, but as the biblical norm of loving one's neighbour. Hegel's acknowledgement is here replaced by Christian love. But when Hegelian thought is stripped of its abstract language, however, one may conclude that Hegel's acknowledgement has a clear affinity with the Christian concept of loving one's neighbour. Although Hegel's conclusion is religious, even Christian, it contains an anti-mimetic goal: the Spirit's total knowledge revealed as a dream of absolute (in)sight.[439]

6.9.3 The Role of the Object

Neither Hegel nor Girard put any great emphasis on the objects desired. But in the preliminary stages of the relationship between master and slave, the master's independence is based on his control over things.

> *The lord puts himself into relation with both of these moments, to a thing as such, the object of desire, and to the consciousness for which thinghood is the essential characteristic. (Hegel. Phenomenology of the Spirit (190)).*

[437] Ibid., (187).
[438] Alexandre Kojève. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel. Lectures on the Phenomenology of the Sp*irit (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980), 37.
[439] Lacoue-Labarthe. *Typography*, 127.

The rivalry over the object, which Girard claims is provoked by the other's desire, gives the master his independence and a certain superiority over the slave. In Girardian terms, one might say that the master assumes the role of the mediator. But Hegel does not interpret this injustice or (feigned) superiority as desire according to the master's desire. It is rather the desire to be accepted by the master. The master's need to be accepted by the slave is not based on the other's desire, it is based on a general need for acceptance. In this sense the conflict is not ultimately mimetic.

6.10 The Metaphysics of Desire

The Girardian understanding of rivalry between subject and mediator could possibly be interpreted as the Hegelian struggle for acknowledgement between master and master, an acknowledgement which is impossible because it leads to a desire provoking brutality.[440] (Humans can only, in their original state, exist as master-slave.[441]) On the other hand, interdividual desire plays a vital role in Hegel's dialectical thought, because the slave's desire is not based on the desire for the master's things (possessions) as in Marxism, but on his acknowledgement.[442] Thinghood is thus secondary both in Hegelian and Girardian thought. And both Hegel and Girard locate desire in relation to the other in metaphysical and non-biological categories, even if Hegel's self-desire is more founded on biology, because it is directly related to maintaining and reproducing life.

6.11 Love in the Western World: Girard's Imitation of De Rougemont's Concept of Love

6.11.1 De Rougemont's Love-Theory

Hegel limits the conflictual relationship to mean a desire between a master and a slave. There is, as mentioned above, no third party, no mediator manipulating the desires involved. Nor is there any attempt in Hegel's work to depict the structure of erotic desire. In this respect there is a fundamental difference between Girard and Hegel on how desire works. Therefore, to be able to understand more about the sources of and influences on mimetic desire, the love theory of Denis De Rougemont seems exceptionally relevant as it is, perhaps, the only theoretical work which Girard openly and extensively uses in order to develop his theory on

[440] Kojève. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel. Lectures on the Phenomenology of the Spi*rit, 46.
[441] Ibid., 43.
[442] Kojève, however, interprets the master's role towards the slave as a catalyst towards freedom. (Kojève. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel. Lectures on the Phenomenology of the Spirit*, 7.)

triangular desire. Not only is De Rougemont's work on erotic desires in the West highly illustrative in relation to mimetic theory, it would also seem to be the basis of his understanding of how desire functions through obstacles.

In De Rougemont's *Love in the Western World* there is a historical and chronological analysis of the Western concept of love, from the Tristan and Iseult myth and up until early 20th century. According to De Rougemont, the Tristan-myth expresses a love for love, not a love for the other person involved in love-making. It is a narcissistic love where the lover's self-magnification is emphasized more than the relationship with the beloved.[443] The love which is developed in Romance literature is a love through obstacles, even of obstacles. If there were no obstacles, there would be no love. So in reality there is no love, only love for obstacles. Within this masochistic realm of love for obstacles there is, according to De Rougemont, a pathological fear of falling in love in a simple, straightforward manner.[444] According to De Rougemont, this myth was bound to change attitudes towards adultery in the West,[445] which he sees, among other things, as materialized contempt for marriage.[446] This myth which De Rougemont calls the *passion-myth* magnifies and divinises unhappy, non-sensual love and is actually a love for nothingness, for death.[447]

De Rougemont considers the development of the passion-myth as the source of decay in the realm of love. He mentions the eternal triangle in desire as the usual configuration of loveless love.[448] The source of this loveless, self-inflicted love is located back to dualist religion: from Gnostic and Manichean religion, to the Celtic and Cathar religion, spreading through Romance-literature and gradually becoming a part of the Western, everyday concept of erotic love. In Chapter 16 ('The Myth Withdraws into the Human Breast') De Rougemont develops the idea that internal, private desires have grown out of the influence of external desires depicted in literature.

The dualism regarding Eros as both divine and, at the same time, a frenzy, is, according to De Rougemont, a Platonic legacy.[449] This dualism in love became common in 12th century

[443] Denis De Rougemont. *Love in the Western World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 260.
[444] Ibid., 267-268.
[445] Ibid., 276.
[446] Ibid., 275.
[447] Ibid., 38 ff.
[448] Ibid., 232-235.
[449] Ibid., 61.

France, at the very time the country was invaded by dualistic religion. This sparked a powerful rise of the cult of love. [450] It was in this century marriage became an object of contempt. Instead passion was glorified.[451] According to the Cathars, yielding to a purely physical sensuality was the supreme and original sin, and to love with pure passion was the pure virtue.[452]

6.11.2 Literature and Desire

In a highly daring section of the book De Rougemont claims that it is especially literature which has affected the European concept of passion,[453] while he dismisses philosophy as a force which has changed European mentality.[454] De Rougemont moderates this view a little later in his book, by claiming that passionate love is an imitation inherited from European culture but in particular from literature.[455] This means that the passion-myth must be seen in the broader context of culture. Because of the influence myths and religions have had, both European literature and our passions, ignorantly and perversely, employ a terminology of passion.[456] Although literature is very much to blame for this perverted understanding of love, it still emanates from religion.

> *Our language of passion comes down to us from the rhetoric of the troubadours. It was supremely ambiguous rhetoric. Its symbols of sexual attraction were the product of Manichean dogmatics. Little by little, as it was gradually separated from the religion in which it originated, it passed into manners, and became part of the common language. (Love in the Western World, 166.)*

De Rougemont claims that the passion-myth generates violence, and he interprets the slaughter of the Colonial Wars and the World Wars in the 20th century as consequences of this myth.[457] In a world where love has been perverted into self-love and desire for obstacles, there are no limits to such activities, created in order to avoid real love. Nationalism is, according to De Rougemont, caught up in the same desires, where private passions are projected into a sterile and loveless concept of a nation.[458]

---

[450] Ibid., 112.
[451] Ibid., 71.
[452] Ibid., 135.
[453] Ibid., 173.
[454] Ibid.
[455] Ibid., 224.
[456] Ibid., 151.
[457] Ibid., 263-264.
[458] Ibid., 260-263, 268.

6.12 Comparing Girard's and De Rougemont's Love Theories

In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel,* De Rougemont's theme of obstacles is highly praised.[459] De Rougemont is commented upon as one of the few thinkers who have reached novelistic insight.[460] He has seen not only the significance of the obstacle, but also the double structure of desire: the same movement which makes us worship life, actually hurls us into negation and (inner) death. This revelation of desire, where negation of life is depicted as vitality, is praised in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* as De Rougemont's masterful insight.[461]

Girard takes up De Rougemont's understanding of *desires produced through obstacles* and borrows Levinas' term *metaphysical desire* to describe deviated desire.[462] He also elaborates a more technical device for illustrating the way it works, by introducing the triangular structure of subject, object and mediator. Girard gently criticizes De Rougemont for not seeing the interdividual element in the desire for obstacles.[463] De Rougemont has, according to Girard, revealed the fundamental content of desire, but his analysis is lacking in structure. Desire for obstacles is for De Rougemont a subject-object relationship. The obstacle is something inside the subject (hero). Access to the object is obstructed by something in the subject's own mind, by the deceitful ideas of love brought forth by myths and heretical religion. As the obstacles are the result of heretical ideas, and not something concrete and contemporary, De Rougemont does not illuminate the mechanism which links myth to mind.

Girard does not emphasize the ideological representations of desire. He focuses on the other as obstacle. The other is the obstacle hindering the fulfilment of desires. But the hindrance is mainly brought about by the subject's fascination with or weakness towards the mediator. Therefore, the problem is not rivalry in the most banal, linear sense. By claiming that it is not a straightforward desire for the object, an uncomplicated rivalry for the object, Girard also

---

[459] De Rougemont is mentioned in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* on pages 48, 108, 165, 177-179, 192, 226, 285, 287.
[460] De Rougemont. *Love in the Western World*, 226.
[461] *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 287.
[462] The deceitful Romance literature is labelled Romantic literature, while the development that De Rougemont analyses as moral decay, Girard analyses as a gradual intensification of metaphysical desire. De Rougemont uses the word passion for a love which is in search of obstacles, while Girard uses the word metaphysical desire when the desires are mediated. De Rougemont uses the word desire when there is sensual love not driven by obstacles. This in Girardian terminology is called spontaneous desire. These terminological differences do not hide the fact that they describe the same phenomenon of desiring through obstacles.

inevitably claims that the problem is mental. The subject and mediator gradually become obsessed by each other, and desires shift, from the object to each other. If there were a direct struggle for the object, the reason could be explained in purely biological terms.

6.12.1 The Lack of a Mediator

Girard's introduction of the *mediator* is the basic difference between De Rougemont and Girard regarding desire. It is also the point at which they part as regards an anthropology: De Rougemont regards cultural changes to be the result of different ideas, while Girard gives mimesis the prerogative to be the dynamic force behind ideology. In this respect De Rougemont is Platonic (despite his anti-Platonism). On the other hand, De Rougemont's theory on the passion-myth indicates imitation. From the 12th century onwards the myth is spread through literature until it becomes the common (unconscious) erotic ideal. This development of the passion-myth and the gradual decay of marriage, have been engendered by mimesis. Desire, according to De Rougemont, could be seen as ideas which have a loveless influence on the individual. Neither the interdividual nor the biological aspects of desire are taken much into consideration. Therefore, the human drama, in the case of De Rougemont, becomes a drama of ideas.

6.12.2 Girard's Imitation of De Rougemont

Girard imitates De Rougemont's idea of the gradual decline in love. This gradual intensification of desire is the process which Girard calls the internalization of metaphysical desire. Both Girard and De Rougemont regard this concept as a gradual decline and intensification. Historically, Girard starts from the 17th century with Cervantes and ends up in contemporary society. De Rougemont goes further back in history to locate the roots of thwarted love in Iranian religion, Platonism, Orpheism and Manicheism. De Rougemont's description of the process of internalization and intensification of desire, dwells more on the generalizing effects of desire, especially when he approaches the modern age. But for De Rougemont it is especially heretical religion and Romance literature which are to blame for this perverted concept of love, that takes place in everyone's minds.

Even if both Girard and De Rougemont operate with a process of intensification and contamination of desire, they view literature and myth in very different ways. While De

---

[463] *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 177-178.

Rougemont regards passion-literature to be the source of the phenomenon, Girard regards literature more as a mirroring of such phenomena. Rougemont emphasizes more the influence of literature, while Girard, contrary to De Rougemont, emphasizes literature's ability to reveal the processes of desire. Girard thus regards literature in a much more positive light, not as the source of contamination, but as the revelation of the contamination. This is, however, only true with regard to the great realistic writers. The Romantic writer is, according to Girard, caught up in the mire of metaphysical desire and can only depict or propagate desire, not reveal its structure. Therefore, one could say that Girard's critique of Romantic literature is rather similar to De Rougemont critique of Romance literature: both weave the lies which enhance the desires for loveless love.

6.12.2.1 Eros and Agape

Instead of localizing this cul-de-sac of desire in heretical religion, Girard locates it more generally as deviated transcendency. Even if De Rougemount and Girard take orthodox Christianity[464] as the norm for love, Girard interprets the love-relationships based on obstacles as a degradation of *agape*. Rougemont goes further in claiming that carnal love has no aspect of deification.[465] Passion is not a deviation of agape, it is a by-product of Manicheism.[466] The God of Eros is, according to De Rougemont, an antagonism against the God of love. This dualism between Eros and agape, is also confirmed in *Things Hidden* through the very positive reference to Anders Nygren's *Eros and Agape*.[467] De Rougemont claims at the end of *Love in the Western World,* that Eros is saved by agape, meaning that the selfishness of erotic life can be atoned for by agape.

6.12.3 Naturalistic Sensuality

Girard begins from a broad perspective of deviated transcendency. His analysis does not mention historical heresies as the source of metaphysical desire, nor does his analysis refer to naturalistic ideas of love. De Rougemont claims that naturalistic sensuality is of the same nature as Romance-desires, only sublimated to fit into a more animalistic ideal.[468] He regards

[464] De Rougemont is pronounced about his Christian views and sympathies. However, the intertextuality of Girard's later works and later comments on his Christian development, indicates that Catholic religion is already the background and norm in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*.
[465] De Rougemont. Love in the Western World, 313.
[466] Ibid., 316.
[467] *Things Hidden*, 277.
[468] De Rougemont. *Love in the Western Wo*rld, 186.

it as just as illusory as the Romantic and idealistic tradition.[469] It indicates aspiration for the sublime, but viewed from the animal side. [470] These animalistic ideals, according to De Rougemont, have been internalized in modern ideologies, in the minds of humans and become a glorification of instincts here below.[471]

In the context of De Rougemont's anti-Naturalism, Girard's theory is lacking as it fails to comment on the cynicism of Naturalism, on the animalistic tendency in love. Girard's revelation of the Romantic lie actually seems, from the broader ideological perspective of De Rougemont's analyses, somewhat one-sided, as there is no location of the roots of desire and no critique of the more contemporary, naturalistic kinds of desire.[472]

It would, however, be unfair to characterize Girard's lack of critique of naturalistic ideology as passive support for it. Firstly, his theory is not based on any biological axiom. Secondly, Girard's critique of Nietzscheanism indicates that the naturalistic worldview is conflictual in the extreme.[473] Thirdly, there is a critique of Freud's biological explanation that desire stems from the sexual. There is, partly, an anti-Naturalism in Girard's attempt to disassociate desire from any biological assumptions.

6.12.4 Girard's Debt to De Rougemont

De Rougemount's concept of obstacles gives Girard the initial and necessary tool for analysing triangular desire, in that De Rougemont emphasizes the obstacles in desire. De Rougemont's understanding of a loveless love is the starting point for Girard's theory of desire. Girard introduces the mediator without the help of De Rougemont, and elaborates what De Rougemont merely mentions as the eternal triangle, in a more scientific and structural way. In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* Girard imitates De Rougemont's historical scheme of a gradual intensification and decline in love. Girard's debt to De Rougemont is mentioned, but when we consider to what extent the historical perspective, theory of obstacles, internalization of desire, analysis of the love/hate sprung from deviated

[469] Ibid.
[470] Ibid.
[471] Ibid., 237.
[472] It could be that this Naturalism, in Girard's view, is regarded as sensuality acted out according to nature and therefore sanctioned as a healthy realism. But naturalistic ideology operates, like Romanticism, with the idea of a straightforward access to nature, not as something mediated. Thus, the naturalistic approach is manifested as a belief in desire without a mediator, illustrated for example in *Madame Bovary* in the figure of Rodolphe when he seduces Emma Bovary.
[473] See Girard. 'Strategies of Madness - Nietzsche, Wagner and Dostoevsky' in "*To double business bound*", 61-83.

transcendence, all from De Rougemonts work, then one must claim that De Rougemont's influence on Girard's concept of desire, especially in relation to erotic love, can hardly be exaggerated.

Part 3

Mimesis in Religious Thought

Comparing Mimetic Theory with other Religious Theories in the 20th Century

Chapter 7. Comparing Girardian Theory with Other Religious Theories in the 20th Century

7.1 Attempts to Solve the Riddle of Religion

Before attempting to compare Girard's religious theory with other dominant religious theories in the 20th century, I wish to discuss the generating principles of his religious theory. This is a disputed area, still somewhat unclear, and it is of utmost importance to understand upon what assumptions his religious theory is built. The starting point of Girard's religious theory is traditionally seen as his theory on sacrifice and scapegoating. The theory, however, was developed in an anthropological vein, with references mostly to anthropological work on the theme. The reason for this is the link which such research perceives between religion and society. Thus Girard's theory may be seen as an extension of Durkheim's thesis in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* where social institutions are seen to have their roots in religion.[474] Girard's work has been labelled a religious theory on society, focusing on how religion has been formative in creating human institutions. Since *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard has claimed that society is governed by sacrifice, which, in this respect puts him, thematically, in the same category as Durkheim.

[474] See Finn Frandsen. 'Begæret, volden og offeret. Introduktion til René Girards teori om det religiøse', Religionsvidenskabeligt tidsskrift 6, Århus (1985): 81.

7.1.1 Mimesis and Sacrifice

The sacred is an important phenomenon through which many scholars have tried to come to grips with religion. As I have suggested numerous times, Girard's starting point in mimetic theory is *not sacrifice but mimetic desire*. Mimetic desire, however, has a tendency to lead to sacrifice, both in its religious and more secularized versions. Therefore, to understand the sacred requires focusing on what motivates it. According to the science of religion, sacrifice may be divided into three main forms: gift, communion and atonement.[475] Girard's understanding of sacrifice is limited mostly to violent sacrifice, where the atonement sacrifice is the most fundamental. But violent sacrifice, precisely because it is able to restore peace in a community, can also be called communal sacrifice. The aim of sacrifice, which Widengren claims can be interpreted as a union between humans and god,[476] is, according to Girard, basically a union among men. In this respect sacrifice is not what it is meant to be. It is rather a restoration of peace between people, not between humans and god. Girard seems to see all forms of sacrifice in the same light: bringing gifts, sacrificing an animal or killing a foreigner relate to the same thing, namely the act of restoring peace in a community. By going far enough back in time, even the idea of kingship could be seen to be built on this principle. The king becomes the victim of his people, for the sake of the people, as, for example, in ancient Babylonian religion.[477]

If one begins from the theory on sacrifice, religion would be seen, from a Girardian point of view, primarily as a stabilizing factor in society. In viewing religion from the starting point of mimesis, however, it would be too rash to conclude that religion is primarily a phenomenon which should be understood through social theory. Mimesis seems to have a psychological starting point, as it is built on interdividual conflict, and sacrifice may be seen as being engendered by mimetic rivalry. In claiming mimetic desire as the starting point which engenders scapegoating, it would be difficult to also claim that Girard's approach to religion starts as a theory on victimizing and violence. What usually happens is that scapegoating becomes autonomous and detached from mimetic desire, minimizing the inherent psychological forces which motivate victimaging. Thus, religion also becomes interpreted as something autonomous, a stage two, something evolving or taking form after anthropology, not interchangeable and interwoven with mimetic desire.

---

[475] Geo Widengren. *Religionens värld* (Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell, 1971), 159-187.
[476] Ibid., 159.
[477] Ibid., 168.

7.1.2 Mimesis Engenders Religion

When interpreting Girardian religious theory as engendered by mimetic desire, religion may be seen as anthropological in the widest sense of the word, as everything begins with a desire to imitate. However, mimesis is not something one would automatically label religious. Rather it seems to be something essentially human. (Essential in that it is fundamental and not based on choice.) On the other hand, imitation, according to Girard, is acquisitive, and acquisitive mimesis can potentially lead to rivalry and violence. Violence is therefore something engendered by acquisitive mimesis. Sacrifice in its most basic or primitive form is an unconscious attempt to control and limit violence. In this sense one could say that mimesis leads to sacrifice. The link between mimesis and sacrifice is of utmost importance because it brings the theory together as a religious theory. Mimesis marks the link between *anthropology and religion*. But the link is also retroactive, indicating that scapegoating dissolves into mimesis, which also indicates that mimesis is an inherently religious phenomenon. Thus mimesis must be seen as being primary to sacrifice because it is the force which ignites sacrifice.

Mimesis, understood in a religious context, is not only limited to sacrifice. From the perspective of imitatio it may also be seen as a drive towards godlikeness and a drive or desire towards some religious ideal; for example, the urge to imitate a deity, to adhere to commandments or acquire a person's good qualities or, even, someone's holy power. The imitation of Christ, for example, was, considered, both from the point of view of the Gospels and of Paul's Letters, a fundamental[478] and dynamic[479] part of practising Christianity.[480]

7.1.3 Limiting Sacrifice at the Expense of Mimetic Desire

Thus mimesis, when not limited to the realm of representation,[481] can be seen as a many-sided religious phenomenon where sacrifice is only one of the phenomena engendered by mimetic desire. Thus one can investigate mimetic desire as a religious phenomenon, starting from mimesis and emphasizing the relationship between mimesis and sacrifice, by slightly

---

[478] Tinsley. *The Imitation of God in Christ. An Essay on the Biblical Basis of Christian Spirituality*. See part II: The Imitation of God in The New Testament, 67-171.
[479] Ibid., 29.
[480] The imitatio-aspect, however, does not seem to have been seen as one of the more important aspects of religion among religious scholars. This could be because mimesis is such a floating phenomenon, difficult to slot into categories. Also, mimesis has usually been understood in a neoplatonic way as representation.
[481] From the perspective of representation, mimesis becomes a slightly self-evident concept. An idea-oriented, representational understanding of imitation which, despite the more anthropological emphasis of late (which also has been transferred to science of religion), turns religious imitation into something static, devoid of desire.

modifying the rather totalitarian character of sacrifice and by expanding the mimetic dimension in order to show that Girard's religious theory is dialectically worked out from a theory on mimesis. Another challenge is to show that sacrifice is only one religious outcome of mimesis. Mimesis can account for many religious phenomena other than sacrifice.[482]

7.2 Solving the Riddle of Religion?

Mimetic desire results in social crisis. Desire has a dissolving effect on social order. It sets human relationships in an undifferentiated state,[483] while sacrifice is capable of renewing order and establishing differences once again. Girard's theory, like the grand theories of Schleiermacher, Feuerbach, Marx, Otto, Freud, Durkheim etc, is an attempt to solve the riddle of religion. Even if I claim that mimetic theory is basically a religious theory, the theory, although developed by a person with a Christian belief reflecting on the rationale that emerges from the anthropology of Christ's life, does not in itself suppose any *a priori* religious belief. Thus it differs from theological thought in that it does not require faith. Nor does mimetic theory start out from concepts such as grace, sin, evil and so on. Mimetic theory is a more general religious theory, which, one must confess, has enormous pretensions. In *Things Hidden,* which is Girard's most important work, he clearly states his belief in solving what religion is actually about:

> *There is no enigma, however complex, that cannot finally be solved. For centuries religion has been declining in the West and its disappearance is now a global phenomenon. As religion recedes and allows us to consider it in perspective, what was once an insoluble mystery, guarded by formidable taboos, begins to look more and more like a problem to be solved. Why the belief in the sacred? How can one explain the ubiquitous existence of rites and prohibitions? Why before our own, has there never been a social order that was not thought to be dominated by a supernatural being? (Things Hidden, 3)*

In this highly secularized passage, religion, Girard claims, is about to reveal its true nature exactly at the stage when people have stopped believing in it. According to Girard, primitive society regards the world, and often society too, as having been created by the gods. From the point of primitive religion, he works out a common theory on religion which claims that scapegoating can account for numerous religious motifs. According to *Things Hidden*, almost

[482] Such as myths, rituals, adherence to dogma, ethical norms and missionary activities.
[483] Undifferentiation, especially in the modern world, has a paradoxical character. When there is a lot desire present, people tend to claim their difference towards the other, while in actual fact, they are becoming more and more similar. This process of postulating differences in a global world, where desire has been let loose, can explain the development towards a monoculture.

all religious phenomena stem from the victimage mechanism. At the end of *Things Hidden* Girard concludes: 'we have come out not simply with a particular mode of the victimage principle, but with a recognition of the principle in itself - as the only truly central and universal principle.'[484] Although the victimage principle may be labelled central and universal, there has probably existed, anyway hypothetically, societies (hunting groups) before conflict was temporarily solved by the victimage mechanism. This point is exactly what Girard himself indicates when he claims that scapegoating probably came to the fore when brain volume increased.[485] Therefore, as I see it, *violence* must be *more originary than scapegoating*. But even if violence is more originary, meaning that it existed before scapegoating time-wise (historically speaking), one might suggest that the victimage mechanism is more *basic* than violence, because the victimage mechanism is capable of restoring peace, and peace is a prerequisite for culture. Violence is only one aspect of the victimage mechanism, and as such is only a part of the mechanism essential to the act of cultural founding. On the other hand, scapegoating and violence are so closely associated that scapegoating (despite its filtering violence), also could be labelled as a kind violence.

Every society is regulated by commandments and prohibitions. Hierarchies and taboos are established in order to prevent imitation and violence, and, in this respect, religious rituals are seen as ways of reducing violence. This, however, indicates that rituals are not an end in themselves. Rules and prohibitions do not point towards anything originary, because they are cultural institutions. According to mimetic theory, societies are cultural, not natural, as the variations indicate.[486] But does this indicate that violence is the originary principle? Some Girardians claim this. At the same time there seems to be some confusion and disagreement about what the originary principle in mimetic theory really is. It could be violence, it could be the victimage mechanism or it could be mimesis. In the passage from *Things Hidden,* quoted above, the victimage mechanism seems to be the central principle. But is it the most central, or the most originary of principles needed to understand human culture? Here I agree with Lundager Jensen's claim that regulations and prohibitions (which are not themselves originary), because of their ability to avert violence, indicate a pre-cultural principle.[487] Lundager Jensen, however, claims that violence is indeed the originary principle because it is the reason for the rise of culture. I do not agree with this conclusion. Violence cannot be the

[484] *Things Hidden*, 443.
[485] *Things Hidden*, 94-95 and "*To Double Business Bound*", 201.
[486] Lundager Jensen. *René Girard*, 33.

originary principle if it is generated by something else. There seems to be something more originary, more basic than scapegoating and violence, which is simultaneously the generating principle behind these two phenomena; and it is precisely through an understanding of violence and scapegoating that this originary principle can be revealed. In my view violence, like evil, does not have any substance. It must be generated elsewhere. In the animal world, it could be called instincts. But if it is something instinctual, there is no choice when it comes to acting violently. In this respect one could claim that violence is not only (if at all) instinctual among human beings. Therefore, there must be something which generates violence. This generating principle I would suggest is *mimetic desire*. My assumption is based on the transference from rivalry to violence, where mimesis, in the process, has become intensified. The victimage mechanism depends on people's *increased ability to imitate*. Thus mimetic desire precedes both violence and victimizing. Also the fact that no one can avoid imitating, points towards mimesis as the founding principle. (Freedom in relation to violence and scapegoating is much greater.) Mimetic desire has (had) a tendency to work towards a situation of all against one, thus leading to scapegoating. But mimetic desire could have many other outcomes: all against all, clan against clan, few against many, one against one, and so on. These outcomes, however, also create violence and victims, indicating that there is a triade making up the originary principle: *mimesis, violence and victimizing*, but the most fundamental of all is mimesis.

[487] Ibid., 36.

Chapter 8. Mimetic Theory and Durkheim's Understanding of Religion

8.1 Mimetic Theory and Related Religious Theory

Research on religion today is mainly concentrated on phenomena within a limited context. In the second half of the 20th century there have been few attempts to develop a general theory of religion. But despite the scarcity of grand, general religious theories, there are examples, both within and outside of the realm of the science of religion, of scholars who have made an attempt to solve the riddle of religion. In fact, if one expands religion to include all areas of the humanistic and social sciences, there have been several daring attempts to develop more general theories on religion. This, however, means we have to go back in time, starting in the nineteenth century. One could mention Schleiermacher, Feuerbach, Marx, Durkheim, Otto, Freud and Eliade, who all attempted to explain the origin and function of religion. While Schleiermacher, Feuerbach and Freud find religious life to be something primarily psychological, located mainly in the mind and feeling, Marx and Durkheim see religions as social manifestations. However, what unites the psychological and sociological interpretations, is the reductive element, reducing religion either to essential element(s) or claiming that it is something else than what it claims to be. Another characteristic of many reductionist theories is a more or less deliberate dismissal of transcendence. In other words, religion does not refer to what the believers claim it refers to. Religion is something other than what the believers tend to think.[488]

There has been a reaction among religious scholars towards this reductionism. Scholars of religion are more accustomed to considering religion primarily as *religion*, and try to avoid seeing it as something purely located in the mind or in society. The theories of Otto and Eliade deal with religion as such, analysing religion as religious phenomena, not as manifestations of something else. Within the context of reductionism, Durkheim as well as a more contemporary thinker Peter Berger, hold what one might call a middle point of view. Despite the fact that religion as a totality is located in society, no religion is false, Durkheim claims. On the contrary: 'all are true after their

[488] This, however, does not necessarily imply that religion according to the great reductionists, is meaningless or false. According to Segal, what it means is that religion has a secular origin and function. Segal. 'Reductionism in the Study of Religion', in Idenopulos/Yonan (Ed). *Religion and Reductionism. Essays on Eliade, Segal and the Challenge of the Social Sciences for the Study of Religion,* Studies in the History of Religion, Volume 62, Leiden: Brill, (1999), 10.

own fashion: All fulfil given conditions of human existence, though in different ways.'[489] Also Berger, despite seeing religion as a social construction, claims that it is impossible to reduce religion to sheer economic and physical needs.[490]

My choice of Durkheim, Otto, Eliade, Berger and Bultmann as a background or a relief to mimetic theory is based not only on the fact that their thinking is representative of 20th century thinking. It is also because Durkheim's and Berger's theories of religion as stemming from society, correspond, in different ways, to Girard's anthropological approach, despite laying much less emphasis on the mimetic dimension. Likewise, Otto's and Eliade's work on the sacred, may be seen, from a theological and phenomenological point of view, as a preoccupation with the sources of sacrifice. And finally, Bultmann's work on myth and de-mythologization, as well as his views on historical truth, may be seen as the type of theological work that Girard has tried to refute. Durkheim and Berger discuss their work in relation to other works on religion to a lesser degree. Eliade and Otto, on the other hand, propose theories composed deep within the tradition of the science of religion. There is, however, no ruling principle to suggest that the religious specialists have come to grips with the phenomenon in a more profound or generative way than the 'pirates' from other fields of research.[491] Durkheim introduces an important distinction or demarcation in religion with the sacred-profane dichotomy, a distinction which, among scholars of religion in the 20th century, has been considered to be essential when locating the phenomena of religious studies. One could also claim, however, that Durkheim's investigation into the sacred-profane dichotomy, has created a rather absolute division between the two. Despite this rather drastic separation, Durkheim's analyses of the sacred and the profane mark a renewed attempt among scholars to interpret religion as something basically religious.

There are reasons for interpreting mimetic theory within the sacred-profane dichotomy. Lundager Jensen has given a perceptive definition of Girard's religious theory as *a system of stories, actions, rules and concepts serving as the foundation of a society in order to prevent it from going under in violence*.[492] This definition, which is built exclusively on the victimage mechanism, clearly emphasizes the social and ritual side of Girardian religious theory as related

[489] Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (N.Y.: The Free Press, 1995), 2.
[490] Robert Wuthnow. 'Religion as Sacred Canopy' in Ainley/Hunter (Ed). *Making Sense of Modern Times* (London and New York: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1986), 124.
[491] The aim of any kind of research should, in my view, not be to restrict it to one special field but to uncover a phenomenon in the most precise and many-layered way according to the phenomenon's special nature. Only within a context of interdisciplinary openness can research function in a generative way.
[492] Lundager Jensen. *René Girard*, 35.

to the sacred. There is, however, no mention of mimesis. This is quite typical when mimetic theory is discussed within a religious context. This is also perhaps because ignoring mimesis makes it easier to relate Girardian theory to traditional theories on religion. The loss, however, is that mimesis does not become an essential part of the formation of the sacred.

8.2 The Social and Sacred in Durkheim's Theory

According to Gans, Durkheim was the 'first to understand the function of the sacred bearing institution of religion in maintaining the social order.'[493] And as we have seen (from Lundager Jensen's definition of Girard's understanding of religion), this puts Girard in a Durkheimian context, viewing religion as an expression of society. And Girard has reacted positively to Durkheim's theory on religion, claiming that Durkheim regarded religion as the origin of all institutions,[494] thus indicating that he starts from similar premises. Durkheim's theory on religion, as it is worked out in *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* has been identified as the theory which most resembles Girardian religious theory.[495] According to Girard, Durkheim was one of the first to really question the Voltarian view of religion as a worldwide conspiracy of priests to take advantage of natural institutions.[496] He also praises Durkheim for rejecting the popular idea of the time that there is a fundamental opposition between primitive religion and other kinds of human thinking.[497] According to both Durkheim and Girard, the primitive mind operates with an intellectual discrimination quite analogous to ours. Both claim that the fundamental categories of thought and science have religious origins.[498] They both dismiss, initially, the idealism of religion in order to reveal its formative influence on society. The most barbarous and fantastic rites, according to both Girard and Durkheim, are always a translation of some human need or of vital aspects of social life. Social and cultural processes are at the centre of their optic.[499] Durkheim, however, sees religion as a symbolic part of society, which in fact worships itself. For Durkheim, the sacred

---

[493] Gans. 'René Girard and the Overcoming of Metaphysics.' Journal on Love and Resentment, No 256, February 9 (2002). See also 'The Sacred and the Social: Defining Durkheim's Anthropological Legacy,' Anthropoetics 6, no.1 (Spring/Summer 2000).
[494] *Things Hidden*, 82.
[495] Gans. 'The Sacred and the Social: Defining Durkheim's Anthropological Legacy,' Anthropoetics 6, no.1 (Spring/Summer 2000).
[496] *Things Hidden*, 63
[497] "*To double business bound*," 205.
[498] See Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 421, and Girard. 'Vers une definition systèmatique du sacré,' Liberté (Montréal) vol. 15 nr 3-4 (1973): 70.
[499] "*To double business bound*," 205.

principle is society hypostasized and transfigured. Society is a synthesis of physical and moral forces and brings them together.[500] According to Livingston, divinity, totality and society, in Durkheim's work, stand for the same thing: the transcendent power of the system over the individual.[501] Thus, religion is able to lift people out of their basic and rather egoistical everyday lives to a stage where they care for society as a whole.[502] Society is a system of active forces[503] which integrates people into communal life and enhances their morals.[504] This act of socializing is, however, never understood as a mimetic drive.

Durkheim sees sacrifice as a communion, a gift and an act of renunciation.[505] But, as he goes on to say, there are many examples of offerings which are not made to personal beings (deities). Therefore, offerings must have a deeper cause, a cause which, in the same context, he seems to interpret as an upholding of the seasonal rhythms.[506] (Which Durkheim from one point of view sees as an illusion.) Seen as a whole, this deeper cause, according to Durkheim, is also related to an *upholding of the communal life*. In this respect there is a certain symmetry between Durkheim and Girard: both see sacrifice as a force upholding society. Durkheim does not, however, see this upholding force in the light of victimizing.[507] He lays very little emphasis on violence.[508] Since Durkheim never mentions the role of the surrogate victim keeping a society together, Girard claims that Durkheim lacked the concrete means of showing that religion is the generative force behind human culture.[509] This critique of Durkheim shows at the same time that Girard is positive towards Durkheim's thesis that religion shapes society, but does not find in Durkheim any theory on how this actually is

---

[500] Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 447.
[501] Livingston. 'Demystification and History in Girard and Durkheim,' in Dumouchel (Ed.).*Violence and Truth,* (London: The Athlone Press, 1988), 116.
[502] In everyday life Durkheim claims that the Australian clans which he studied are mostly preoccupied with themselves. They are concerned about catching as much fish and hunting as much game as possible. But when performing rituals and other religious activities these individual and egoistical norms are transformed into a collective consciousness. (See Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 352.)
[503] Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 448.
[504] Ibid., 352.
[505] Ibid., 347.
[506] Ibid., 348-349
[507] According to Cesáreo Bandera, the crucial difference between Durkheim and Girard is the latter's introduction of the sacred victim. Cesáreo Bandera. *The Sacred Game* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania U.P., 1994), 22.
[508] Durkheim does, however, reflect on pain as generative. He mentions that violence is accepted as the idea that an organ is given sacredness by painful mutilation. Painful initiation rites test the novice's worth and make known his worthiness for acceptance into religious society. The suffering a person must endure in rituals makes him disinterested, enduring, and creates a distaste for easy living and mundane pleasures. In this way ascetism, symbolically, prepares a person for the ordeals of society. (Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* 316-321.)
[509] Interview with René Girard which first appeared in Diacritics 8 (1978): 31-54. This interview is also published in "*To double business bound,"* 199-229. On Durkheim see pp. 205-206.

done.[510] In my view, Durkheim's neglect has more to do with his not considering mimetic desire (rather than the victim's role) because a mimetic understanding of religion will force, if not necessarily, then at least probably, a certain understanding of a conflictual situation where the drive to subvert the other will lead to violence and sacrifices.

Girard has criticized Durkheim for having made the opposition between the sacred and the profane too absolute.[511] This dichotomy between the sacred and the profane has been, in the history of the science of religion, one of the most important distinctions in the process of locating and carving out religious phenomena. But as Gilhus points out, the notion of the sacred is one of the least precise, one of the most difficult concepts to grasp in the study of religion.[512] In *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning,* Girard admits that his views on religion as related to society, are closely related to Durkheim's, although, he emphasizes, his theory is far from Durkheimian.[513]

> *In Durkheim one does not find either the mimetic cycle or the single victim mechanism or the insurmountable difference between primitive religions and Christianity and Judaism. (I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, 100.)*

However, if one expands the concept of the sacred, and views it from a wider perspective than merely sacrificial rites, Durkheim's blending of sacrifice and society seems to regard the forces of society (without interpreting these forces as desire and mimesis) as something motivated by religious consciousness. Girard claims that Durkheim's fusion of the sacred and the social comes close to the basic paradox of powers and principalities[514] (what one could call the principles of power). The force which Durkheim talks about is not primarily sacrifice or founding murder. It seems to be a kind of dialectic between the sacred and the profane, where the sacred is thought more as ethics and morals than scapegoating. Clearly, Durkheim regards the sacred here as less violent and more morally uplifting than Girard, which is a typical conclusion when desire is not taken into consideration. Durkheim's understanding of the social as having a transcending effect on communal life shows an understanding of religion as a force enabling society to change. Religion is society divinized,[515] the force which enables humans to develop their humanity. His claim is that

---

[510] This critique was also raised by the anthropologist Evans-Pritchard. How does Durkheim explain that religion can produce law, science and moral? he wondered. (E.E. Evans-Pritchard. *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 53-54)
[511] *Things Hidden*, 43.
[512] Gilhus/Mikaelsson. *Nytt blikk på religionsfaget* (Oslo: Pax, 2001), 20-21.
[513] *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 100.
[514] Ibid.
[515] (www.hewett.norfolk.sch.uk/curric/soc/durkheim/durkw3.htm)

the distinctive attributes of human nature come to us from society.[516] In this respect religion is the cultural stimulus par excellence. But this cultural formation is not something initiated by violence, or by expulsion. There is no original murder creating an *us and them*. Durkheim's theory, although focused on ritual, sees religion as something which produces moral. For Girard there must have been a murder before morality. In that respect mimetic theory builds on a hypothesis of a founding murder, very similar to that of Freud in *Totem and Taboo*.[517]

If one considers Durkheim's understanding of rites as shaping individuals and groups morally,[518] there nevertheless exists the element of imitating the norms of society. Durkheim sees these rituals and ceremonies as mainly a tradition of following one's ancestors.[519] But following one's ancestors is clearly mimetic. Durkheim, however, does not use the word mimesis in this context, he uses the words *representative* and *commemorative*. The former, though, is of great interest, as mimesis is usually understood as representation. But Durkheim also calls certain rites mimetic. In Chapter Three of *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* he speaks of mimetic rites, which are rites of imitating animals in order to make them reproduce.[520] This kind of imitation actually takes us back to the basic understanding of mimesis as copying. And from a mimetic point of view copying stems from mimetic desire, but does not contain the more fundamental forms of mimesis, because copying is voluntary and only outwardly refers to a deeper, darker and more profound mimesis. Copying is often seen as something humorous since it plays on reality without actually being it. This is, however, not the case among the Australian clans when they imitate their totemic animals. Their rituals are both something undertaken in order to uphold life and to give identity. One would have to interpret Durkheim from a Girardian point of view in order to make rituals (as described in *Elementary Forms of Religious Life)* something based on mimetic desire. Durkheim himself, as a part of his critique of Gabriel Tarde, dismisses social interaction, customs and manners as something imitative. He is willing to call only copying imitative.[521] This shows the enormous gulf between Durkheim and Girard when considering the importance of imitation in human, religious life in general.

[516] Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 351.
[517] Durkheim does not reflect much on origins, although he takes it for granted that religion is the origin of society.
[518] Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 374.
[519] Ibid., 382.
[520] Ibid., 355-373.
[521] Durkheim. *Suicide: a study in sociology* (N.Y.: Free Press, 1997), 124-130.

Girard's claim is that Durkheim's thesis can be explained by mimesis and the victimage mechanism. This, however, would distort both the aim and method of *Elementary Form of Religious Life*. All in all Durkheim is not a mimetic thinker[522] because he, according to Girard, lacked an understanding of the mimetic cycle and the unanimous victimage mechanism.[523] In addition to this Durkheim does not see desire and violence as decisive themes in the formation of religion. The proposed symmetry between Durkheim's religious thinking and Girard's religious thinking, seems, on a whole, to be somewhat exaggerated.

[522] The closest Durkheim comes to a mimetic worldview is when he considers how past experiences dominates the life og human beings: 'We remain in relationship with our fellow men; the habits, ideas and tendencies that upbringing has stamped on us, and that ordinarily preside over our relationships with other, continue to make their influence felt.' (Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 352.)
[523] *"To double business bound,"* 206.

Chapter 9. Mimetic Theory and the Holy

9.1 The Sacred as *Mysterium Tremendum*

In the phenomenology of religion, Rudolf Otto's work, *The Idea of the Holy*, has been seen as groundbreaking. Otto claims that the holy (sacred) is wrath (Gr. orgè) which is the same thing as *mysterium tremendum*.[524] This holiness is not something rational, it is something totally different (ganz andere), something numinous. The fact that the holy is something totally different means that there is no gradual transition from the rational to the numinous. The holy is something both fascinating and repelling. Mysterium and tremendum is not dualistic, however, it reveals the oneness of the holy. This notion of the holy is, according to Otto, the central theme in religion. Thus it is located in all kinds of religions. Otto tries in *The Idea of the Holy* to locate different expressions of the sacred. He sees Schleiermacher's understanding of *dependence*,[525] as a reference to the numinous, even if he claims that Schleiermacher had a too rationalistic view of dependence,[526] and preserves himself from seeing the numinous as a natural, psychological state. Otto claims that Schleiermacher deepened the Christian understanding of God, but did not have the same ability to describe the numinous as someone like Goethe who, describes the divine expressively as an incredible power and force.[527] This concept of irrational energy may also be related, according to Otto, to Fichte's reflection on the *absolute* and Schopenhauer's *demonic will*, despite their error in ascribing natural attributes to the non-rational.[528] Otto's understanding of religion is of something irrational and mystical; he emphasizes power, incorporates the daemonic, and attempts to delete religion from morals.

9.1.1 The Benevolent and Violent God

Otto's attempt to locate religion as something numinous, emerges primarily as a reflection on the divine. Traditionally, the concept of a godhead is usually seen to be both outside and inside society. God often has a double role, being both beneficent and violent. Otto confirms this and,

[524] Rudolf Otto. *The Idea of the Holy. An Inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational* (London Oxford New York: Oxford U.P., 1978), 18-19.
[525] Ibid., 9, 20-21, 108, 145-150.
[526] Ibid., 20-21.
[527] Ibid., 150-154.
[528] Ibid., 24.

simultaneously, criticizes modern beliefs, especially Protestantism, for having become too one-sided, and focused solely on the rational, benevolent sides of God, and thereby believing in a godhead devoid of the mysterium. Likewise, in mimetic theory, traditional divinities are located as both benevolent and destructive. But Girard would not agree with Otto that this refers to manifestations in themselves.[529] According to mimetic theory, the experience of *mysterium tremendum* can be seen as the double bind, caused by mimesis and resulting in sacrifice. Therefore the sacred and the profane are mingled together in the act of scapegoating. The *mysterium tremendum* may partly be seen as a projection of the mimetic game, the double binded feedback stemming from rivalry with the model. When interpreted as a violent mechanism, the attraction and repulsion connected with scapegoating may be seen as the psychological effect of mimetic rivalry. Instead of adding a destructive element to the liberal Christian understanding of God (or the holy) as merely love, grace and righteousness, as Otto does, [530] Girard expels violence from the notion of God, attributing it to the field of anthropology, to the victimage mechanism caused by mimetic rivalry. Tremendum and mysterium are, in Girardian terms, the process whereby the victim is transformed from something repellent into something divine. In other words, this process can be seen as the violent process of keeping a society together. This is not, according to Girard, primarily a manifestation of God, but of human violence, and therefore a misconception. Despite this anthropological-theological misconception the sacred must, in Girard's understanding of the phenomenon, be seen as a manifestation of something essential, as Tillich claims when he defines the sacred, in an existential manner, as the most important aspect of one's life.[531]

In *Things Hidden* Girard acknowledges his debt to Otto and the German school for having located the sacrificial paradox of the sovereign victim, but he nonetheless criticizes their enthusiastic praising of the same paradox.[532] Girard claims that Otto, through the concept of the numinous, tries to make the mystery of violence acceptable.[533] This enthusiasm for the irreducible character of the numinous is, according to Girard, even seen as something valuable and intelligible. Girard claims that Otto's concept of the sacred is an acknowledgement of the violence it endows while Otto himself sees the impenetrable and

[529] See Lundager Jensen. *René Girard*, 48.
[530] Otto. *The Idea of the Holy*, 9.
[531] Tillich. *The Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957), 13.
[532] *Things Hidden*, 67.
[533] Ibid.

irreducible character of the sacred as something praiseworthy and intelligible.[534] Girard has criticized this kind of submission to religious irrationality, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, and considered it to be outmoded metaphysics. Thus the greatest difference between Otto and Girard lies in the fact that Otto accepts the notion of sacred violence as a description of God. If Otto had limited this to specific phenomena and not made it the norm, the two would have much more in common, as Girard too emphasizes violence as part of the sacred. Thus Girard claims that the victim's transference explains the numinous.

If, however, the numinous is not thought of in violent terms, but as expressing instead the many-layered depths of God, which rationality falls too short of fathoming, the later, more theologically inspired works of Girard, do not seem to be so dismissive of using more mystical concepts in order to fathom God. In this respect there has been a certain change in Girard's religious thinking. He seems less optimistic with regard to rationality, and more positive towards the concept of the sacred. This again indicates a less positive view of secularization, which he, nonetheless, clearly sees as a Christian process.

9.1.2 The Sacred in Christianity

Girard (until the mid 1990s) regarded the sacred as something religious though not religious in a transcendental way. The true God is not located within the structures of the sacred. The violent and sacrificial god is a projection of mimetic conflicts. The emphasis Otto lays on the tremendum-aspect is, in Girard's thinking, the very core of the sacred, but misleading as a description of the true God. In this respect he reduces Otto's concept of the tremendum-aspect of the holy to mainly *anthropological violence*. This reduction of religion to anthropology, however, is not so clear in Girard's later works. He is now willing to see the Christian religion as sacrificial - if not sacrificial in a violent term.[535] This could mean, when looking at Otto's concept of mysterium from a non-violent perspective, being less dismissive of Otto's understanding of the sacred. Girard, like Tillich, sees in the Christian religion a subduing of the traditional understanding of the sacred. According to Tillich, there was a questioning of the sacred already in the Old Testament, a questioning of the destructive elements associated with the sacred. The sacred as the demonic was identified with idolatry, Tillich claims.[536] Such perspectives, which do not do justice to the whole concept of God in the Old Testament,

[534] Ibid.
[535] *The Girard Reader*, 272 and Girard. *Quand ces choses commenceront*…, 169-170.
[536] Tillich. *The Dynamics of Faith*, 13-16. See especially page 15.

have also been developed in Girard's work. Girard sees the violent and the non-violent perspectives as two parallel perspectives, running through both Jewish and Christian theology: the revelation of sacred violence gradually questions the violent and sacrificial godhead. This demythologizing of the sacred, is, in Otto's work, seen as an attempt to rationalize and humanize the godhead.

9.1.3 Turning Sacrifice Upside Down

Girard, although clearly professing a rational approach to religion,[537] admits that rationality is incapable of embracing religion in its totality. Even Otto's dubious and paradoxical concept of divine wrath being part of divine love,[538] would probably not be dismissed by Girard if it did not refer to divine violence. Girard actually sees God's manifestation of Himself in relation to sacrifice, but as *sacrifice turned upside down*. True sacrifice is not the act of people sacrificing something to God, it is God being sacrificed through Jesus. But Jesus' sacrifice is not seen as something planned and willed by God; it is the result of human violence. This sacrifice though, is a passive sacrifice. In order not to sacrifice others, Jesus refuses to use violence, and thereby becomes a victim of human violence. In this respect the 'numinosity' or, more precisely, the mystery in Christ's sacrifice, contains rational elements. To repeat: the main difference between Girard and Otto is that Girard lays more emphasis on the rational element in sacrifice and, at the same time, denies the destructive elements as being part of true Christian sacrifice. Girard is, however, more positive towards Otto's phenomenology of religion than to his theology.

9.2 Violence and God's Hiddenness

The theme of sacred violence is continued in the work of Eliade, although dogmatically modified. As Eliade comments, Otto had read his Luther,[539] and was clearly inspired by the notion of the *hidden God*,[540] a manifestation which, from a human perspective, is neither rational nor peaceful,[541] revealing what at least seem to be, the darker sides of God. It is,

[537] See Girard. *Quand ces choses commenceront*…, 139-140, 196.
[538] Otto. *The Idea of the Holy*, 24.
[539] Eliade. *The Sacred & the Profane. The nature of Religion* (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich inc, 1987), 8-9.
[540] Otto. *The Idea of the Holy*, 97-105.
[541] The view that Luther's concept of a hidden God entails violence, see Per Bjørnar Grande. 'Destruksjon og demoni – en drøfting av tysk og fransk metafysikkforståelse,' Din, 1+2, Oslo (2000): 32-33.

however, this part of God which Girard, partly, claims is an anthropological phenomenon, caused by mimetic binds. This can be explained by severe violence and conflicts in society being projected into metaphysical and mythical notions. In relation to what he considers to be truly divine, Girard's project may be seen as a way of purging the images of a violent God, revealing that these stem from human violence.

In his article 'Vers une définition systématique du sacré,' Girard claims his hypothesis is able to explain the origin of ritual, myth and the sacred.[542] The hypothesis is that a transformation of the victim, from victim to deity, creates the sacred. According to Lundager Jensen, the sacred in Girardian theory is *the violent crisis combined with the remedy (the victimage mechanism*).[543] This is similar in content to what Otto labelled *mysterium tremendum*. The article, 'Vers une définition systématique du sacré' (published in 1973), however, is an extension of the research in *Violence and the Sacred*, reaching a kind of systematic definition of the sacred based upon the idea of the victim's transformation.[544] There is, however, still no attempt to introduce a Christian, non-sacrificial view as a supplementary part of religious sacrifice. In *Things Hidden*, published in 1978, Girard defines the sacred as 'the sum of human assumptions resulting from collective transferences focused on a reconciliatory victim at the conclusion of a mimetic crisis.'[545] In this definition there is still no Christian element introduced into the concept of the sacred, despite the attempt to see Christianity in the same context. The reason the New Testament texts (except The Epistles to the Hebrews) [546] give a new definition of the sacred, is that a non-sacrificial point of view motivates these texts. In *Things Hidden* there is an attempt to see the sacrifice of Christ as a sacrifice leading to non-sacrifice.[547] This attempt was already present to some extent in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (1961), despite the lack of religious terminology. Mimetic rivalry in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* is contrasted with the non-sacrificial understanding of love towards the other. This escape or transference from violent sacrifice to love can only be realized when the subject is liberated from the mediator's mimetic bind. Hence it is evident that Girard, from the very beginning of his development of mimetic theory, reflects on how the imitation of Christ is qualitatively different from imitation among men. Girard's reflection on imitation via the

[542] Girard. 'Vers une définition systématique du sacré,' 67.
[543]See Lundager Jensen. *René Girard*, 48.
[544] Girard. 'Vers une définition systématique du sacré,' 67.
[545] *Things Hidden*, 42.
[546] See Girard's argument that The Epistle to the Hebrews was not on the same non-sacrificial level as other New Testament texts. *Things Hidden*, 227-231.
[547] See *Things Hidden*. Chapter 2 and 3 in Book II: The Judaeo-Christian Scriptures.

mediator and sacrifice is, in my view, basically a consequence of his attempt to rationalize the Christian message.

Chapter 10. Mimesis and Eliade's Sacred & Profane

10.1 The Sacred Mediator

Girard continued, after *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, to develop a psychological insight into how violence and conflicts manifest themselves in interpersonal relationships. His work *Resurrection from the Underground: Feodor Dostoevsky* shows this attempt. A certain leap, however, from a psychological to a more anthropological approach towards conflict occurred from *Things Hidden* onwards, a leap which would become more coherent when further emphasis was laid on mimetic desire. The transformation of the victim may be viewed as a shifting of attitudes within the mimetic game: the change from rivalry and enmity to guilt. In my view, Girard, when dealing later on with sacrifice and the sacred, draws too little attention to his earlier work on desire as described by certain European novelists, which actually already contains, in a more generalized and psychological way, an understanding of the sacred. In *Deceit, Desire and the Nove*l, the mediator actually fulfils the same function as the aggressor in sacrifice. The mediator is capable, through the mimetic process, of changing the subject's desire. He or she is, in other words, capable of sacrificing anyone who desires him or her metaphysically. And in the eyes of those who desire, the mediator is transformed into a divinity. Also, the violence that is so important in sacrifice is present in the relationship between subject and mediator. The relationship between subject and mediator can be viewed as a more modern and individual form of sacrifice, a sacrifice for a more desacralized age. The fact that this kind of sacrifice is more psychological is likewise an indication of a more modern, secularized version of sacrifice. Thus it is important that the victimage mechanism is not isolated from mimesis, as mimesis is capable of producing new versions of sacrifice which modify physical violence and have very different outward expressions when compared to the harsher version of the past.

The transformation of the mediator, from a rival to a divinity, contains *the same process as in the case of many myths, namely the process from expulsion to divinity*. Due to the fact that there is usually not the same degree of physical violence, the sacrificial elements caused by metaphysical desire are more difficult to uncover, although the mechanism is similar. The evolution of the subject caught up in the game of metaphysical desire, is clearly sacrificial. He

becomes the victim, especially if his desires are gradually driven towards the mediator and are not solely a product of the subject's own thwarted desires. When the intensity of the desire leads to double mediation, there is a process of reciprocal sacrifice.

This relation between the sacred and the process described as metaphysical desire has never been fused together or seen as something integrated, as a unity. This is due to the fact that the victimage mechanism is usually seen, among interpreters of mimetic theory, as something relatively autonomous in relation to mimetic desire. When mimetic theory is viewed from the victimage mechanism without the generative force of mimetic desire, the theory has a tendency to lose its anthropological basis, and any flexibility in mediating between historical periods becomes more difficult. When the victimage principle is isolated from mimetic desire, mimetic theory will relate more easily to the general theories on religion, but, at the same time, it will lose its interdisciplinary and mediating nature. Also, when mimetic desire is omitted or reduced as the originary principle, this leads to isolation of the victimage mechanism. Religion is then reduced to violence and sacrifice while, if the mimetic dimension is introduced to the very centre of religious thought, mimetic theory will expand into a multitude of religious phenomena.

This more individualised and psychological understanding of sacrifice can also, however, throw light on sacrifice in primitive religions. Firstly, one can see the *sacred figure as a projection of the mediator*. In this respect the sacred figure can be demythologized into a rival, which could be either a person or, in a Durkheimian context, a clan. I would claim that sacrifice in primitive religion could also be seen as engendered by metaphysical desire, meaning the act of desiring through a mediator.

There is a tendency to omit desire when interpreting the victimage mechanism. In such cases the motivational factor will disappear when trying to understand what causes sacrifice. There is no reason to think that so-called primitive man did not imitate in an intense, rivalistic manner, despite the rules and regulations introduced by taboos and prohibitions. (Desire, in the context of a more collective mentality, must surely have been less individual and psychological, and, also, broadly speaking, more violent.)[548] And when the sacred is interpreted as projections of the mediator, the only basic difference between sacrifice and

[548] Despite the fact that modern societies have liberated themselves from many ancient taboos, the taboo against killing has become more severe.

metaphysical desire today, is that one does not invoke a godhead in the process of rivalling one's mediator(s). Despite the fact that transcendence has been deleted in the process of turning men into gods, the act of 'pulling the gods down from heaven'[549] cannot simply be seen as a secular process, it must also be seen as a mythologizing process, the equivalent of religion, by turning men into gods. The fascination (fascinans) and fright (tremendum) created by the act of imitating the mediator metaphysically may be seen as one way, perhaps the most basic way, of constructing the *sacred* in a Girardian context.

When one perceives the development in Girard's religious thinking, one has the impression of a development from anthropology to theology. But, when one looks more closely at his early work, his understanding of imitation is already closely connected to a Christian anthropology. Christian thought actually engenders Girard's starting point. There is, in my view, no question of seeing *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* as a reflection devoid of sacrifice or Christian apology. Girard's Christian thought in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* is, however, not primarily a reflection on religious sacrifice but on mundane sacrifice, a sacrifice engendered by desiring the mediator. This sacrifice, which seems mundane and psychological at first sight, is, in my view, secular sacrifice derived from religious sacrifice. In other words, this is a portrayal of the individual and violent way sacrifice works in the modern world.

10.2 Eliade and the Phenomenology of Religion

The limitation of Girard's understanding of the sacred becomes rather obvious when compared to research done within the phenomenology of religion. The manifestations/hierophanies take so many different forms that not all seem to fit comfortably into the notion of the sacred as violent and victimizing. Eliade, for example, mentions the Bantu-clan on Kilmanjaro which looks upon its sky-god as being so good that he does not demand any sacrifices.[550] On the other hand, Girard does not claim that his theory can explain all the different sacrificial features. One example of a god not associated with sacrifice does not mean that a clan is not sacrificial – as sacrifice is primarily a response to mimetic conflicts. Girard's claim, though, is no less grand because he sees all kinds of sacrifice as

[549] *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 62.
[550] Eliade. *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 48.

stemming, in one way or another (modern versions are more symbolic and distant), from violent origins.

Eliade's concept of religion starts with Otto's dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, though it focuses less on the sacred as a description of deities and more on the general characteristics of religion as such.[551] Eliade claims that the sacred is not only irrational (as Otto had claimed), it is also complex.[552] Religious phenomena belong, despite their complexity, to a universal system, he claims[553] (which explains why there are so many similar motifs in world religions). The sacred manifests itself through hierophanies, and, in the same way as Durkheim and Otto, Eliade regards the sacred as something very different from the profane, defining the sacred in a loose and all-encompassing way, meaning the opposite of the profane.[554] Eliade does not question the reality of sacred hierophanies and, thus neither reduces nor questions the truth of religious life. The religious person experiences life as sacred, something qualitative and essential. He also experiences space as sacred, divided into centre and periphery. Experiencing space as something heterogeneous means that there is sacred space which is of greater value than secular space. Sacred space operates on the assumption of there being some sort of central space, such as a mountain, a tree or a city (for example, Mount Sinai, the Bodhi-tree, Jerusalem). The profane person experiences life as less essential and less qualitative. Therefore, space for the profane person, is regarded as something more homogenous,[555] which, in a Girardian context, would be explained as the effect of desacrilized societies. Modern humans do not believe in the power generated by sacrifice, because people, especially Western people live in societies where sacrifice has been revealed as such.

When we compare the concept of the sacred in Eliade's and Girard's work, one should bear in mind the different aims and perspectives of the two thinkers: Eliade attempts to describe the sacred in its entirety.[556] Girard does not approach the sacred in all its manifestations. He mainly regards the sacred as violent sacrifice in so-called primitive religions. One could say that Eliade takes a phenomenological approach, Girard takes an essentialist and tactical

[551] Eliade. *The Sacred & the Profane. The nature of Religion* (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich inc, 1987). Chapter I: Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred, 10.
[552] Eliade. *The Sacred & the Profane*, Chapter I: Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred, 10.
[553] John Dominic Farace. *The sacred-profane dichotomy: a comparative analysis of its use in the work of Emil Durkheim and Mircea Eliade, as far published in English, a thesis*, Utrecht: De Rijksuniversitet (1982): 27.
[554] Eliade. *The Sacred & the Profane*, 10.
[555] Ibid., Chapter I: Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred. See especially pp. 15 and 22.

approach, aimed at uncovering the human mechanisms behind the sacred. Girard sees the sacred as something that primarily stems from sacrifice, from the violence of scapegoating, which is only one version; the violent, original and primitive version. This is, however, for Girard, the core of the sacred, from which all other kinds of sacred notions stem. The sacred will, in a Girardian context, relate almost always to some kind of sacrificial situation where violence has been committed and the victim has become divinized.

Violence associated with the sacred is just as common as sacrifice itself. But Eliade does not give violent sacrifices any prerogative when analysing different modes of the sacred. He does not see this kind of sacrifice as anything distinct from other types of sacred hierophany. When, however, analysing myths of creation, he sees a correspondence between human violence and the violence of the gods. As a part of their world-building, they imitate violent cosmogonies, thus becoming violent imitators of the gods when building their own world.

> *Since the gods had to slay and dismember a marine monster or a primordial being in order to create the world from it, man in his turn must imitate them when he builds his own world, his city or house. (Eliade. The Sacred & the Profane, 51.)*

Here Eliade sees the violence of the gods as something that humans imitate. Such scenarios are, according to mimetic theory, a product of scapegoating. The violence that men have committed is transformed into stories of divine violence, in order to make the violence legitimate. In a way this is an act of scapegoating and, according to Jørgen Jørgensen, God is the most common scapegoat used to hide or legitimate one's misdeeds.[557]

When discussing sacred place, Eliade sees the sacrifice of animals as signs of the sacred.[558] In order to end tension and anxiety in a group, the killing of an animal functions as a sign of sacred harmony. Eliade gives examples of clans choosing sacred places where they had killed a wild or domestic animal.[559] But Eliade seems completely unaware that this establishment of the sacred may be seen to be caused by communal conflicts. Neither does he emphasize the violence of the killing in relation to the notion of the sacred. He does conclude, however, that humans are not free to choose their sacred spots and that animals are used as signs.[560]

---

[556] Ibid., Chapter I: Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred, 10.
[557] Jørgensen. 'På sporet af den tabte oprindelse,' 43.
[558] Eliade. *The Sacred & the Profane*, 28-29.
[559] Ibid., 29.

10.2.1 Profane Man's Decadence

Eliade's phenomenological theory on the sacred is essentialistic in that he sees manifestations of the sacred as something purely religious and totally different from the profane – a view which is partly derived from Roger Caillois definition of religion in *L'homme et le sacré*. But Eliade does not view sacrifice as *the* essential part of the sacred. Eliade also accepts the believer's version of the sacred. Hence one can say that Eliade does not attempt to reduce religion to something seen only from a scientific point of view. On the contrary, he reverses the perspective and sees secular or profane man from a religious context. From this point of view, Eliade sees secular development as a negative development, as a kind of religious decadence. Modern man has debased the notion of the sacred.[561] In this respect Eliade differs from Girard, as Girard seems to operate more dialectically in relation to the secular and the religious, where the starting point of the secular is the revelation of the scapegoat mechanism, creating a climate of demystification. But this demystification is finally, according to Girard, religious. It is the God of love which through the sacrifice of Jesus, reveals the illusion of sacrifice by revealing the scapegoat's innocence. Hence there is a *structural opposition* between Girard's view of religion as demystifying itself in order to reveal its true nature, and Eliade who sees the secularization as profanation, as a kind of decadence. This decadence is for Eliade manifested in the shift from mythical to historical time. Myth, for example is seen as the real, history as the false, meaningless and sinful.[562] Eliade claims that myths and rites save humans from the terror of history; Girard claims that sacrificial rites do not save humans from terror, only limit the terror. Historical time, from a Girardian point of view, does not necessarily contain terror. Historical time means that a desacralized approach to reality has broken through. But despite their differences, both claim, from different positions, that myths and rites change peoples' ontological status.[563] One could say that Girard differs from Eliade mainly in that he has a much more positive view on modernity. This, however, is only a superficial difference. Eliade must be one of the religious thinkers for whom mimesis plays the least fundamental role. There is not even an anti-mimetic tendency in his approach. Mimesis is just not present in his way of thinking. The lack of historical consideration in phenomenology could perhaps be one reason for this, as historical thinking usually provokes

---

[560] Ibid.
[561] See John A. Saliba. *The Concept of 'Homo Religiosus' in the works of Mircea Eliade: an anthropological evaluation for religious studies*, (PhD) (Washington: The Catholic University of America,1971), 77 ff.
[562] Ibid., 95-98.
[563] On the religious aim of changing ontological status in Eliade's work: See John A. Saliba. *The Concept of 'Homo Religiosus' in the works of Mircea Eliade: an anthropological evaluation for religious studies*, 87.

some kind of thinking on how changes take place. But in Eliade's work there is no such reflection on what governs the evolution of religious ideas beyond the ideas themselves.

Chapter 11. Mimesis and World-Building

11.1 Similarity in Berger's and Girard's Religious Views

If one is willing to regard Girard's theory as related to the sociology of religion, it must surely be related initially to Peter Berger's concept of religion as a social construction, designed by humans.[564] In fact, Girard and Berger do not only have, loosely speaking, the same starting point (understanding religion initially as human needs); they also have several central themes in common regarding religion, despite the fact that they speak from different academic traditions.[565] They both see religion as protection from meaninglessness - despite Berger's emphasis on religious alienation. Both thinkers deny biological determination. According to Berger, humans have no specific biological milieu. The human situation is open and cannot be stable as regards desire.[566] Humans are the most unfinished species, and its project of world-building is never ending. Human world-building is a consequence of its biological constitution.[567] World-building is a consequence of insufficient instincts. Therefore, world-building becomes acute and absolutely necessary in order to survive.

There are, however, few instances in Berger's work where mimetic desire is introduced into the act of mediating anthropology and religious beliefs, which is, in my view, the main difference between Berger's and Girard's religious understanding. Berger does, however, claim that identity is created by the individual, who becomes what he is addressed as by others.[568] Also Berger claims that successful world-building, where the norms of society become internalized, is totally dependent upon socialization.[569] Despite there being an interdividual tone in Berger's research on the human condition, he does not focus on imitation as a fundamental desire. In fact, the notion of desire is hardly present in his theory. He does, however, see religious imitation in the traditional context of representation in that everything

[564] Wuthnow. 'Religion as Sacred Canopy' in Ainley/Hunter (Ed.). *Making Sense of Modern Times*, 123.
[565] Both acknowledge anthropology as basic in religious research. Also both show a rather unacademic flexibility as regards relating and mediating between historical epochs.
[566] Wuthnow/Hunter/Bergesen/Kurzweil. *Cultural Analysis. The Work of Berger, Douglas, Foucault and Haber*mas (Routledge, 1991), 23.
[567] Peter L. Berger. *The Sacred Canopy. Elements of a Social Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1969), 5.
[568] Ibid., 16.
[569] Ibid., 16.

here below has an analogy up above.[570] But this kind of imitation is less a drive than a response to social norms. In Berger's analysis of divine imitation there is no generative drive. The image of divine role models, for example the role of a father imitating the divine father,[571] does not contain mimesis as desire but as representation. It does have a real function, however, as it protects against meaningless. Perhaps one could call both world-building and the strategies of establishing meaning conscious desires, which represent the accepted desires of a community, where the sons imitate their fathers' norms. This means, however, seeing Berger's theory very much from a mimetic point of view.

11.2 The Sacred Emerges Out of Chaos

In Berger's work there is a great deal of focus on the sacred as protection against chaos. An essential element is the theme that the sacred enables humans to experience meaning and protect them from the unavoidable threat of death.[572] Religion for Berger is on the whole the establishment, through human activity, of an encompassing holy order or holy cosmos which is capable of maintaining order despite the continual threat of chaos.[573] Berger sees death as something that every society is compelled to deal with, and from the problem of death, religion is engendered. Berger's emphasis on death and all the marginal situations associated with death (war, natural catastrophes, abrupt social changes)[574] differs initially from Girard in that, for Berger, mimetic desire is not decisive in the process of constituting a 'sacred canopy'.[575] It is the fear of death, not the subversive nature of human beings towards other human beings, which ignites the sacred. On the other hand, on the issue of the sacred, their theories do seem to converge. According to Berger, the sacred deviates from the normal routine of life, and is seen as something extraordinary and potentially dangerous. The sacred is something which emerges out of chaos.[576] And by losing contact with the sacred, humans stand in danger of being swallowed up by chaos.[577] This is exactly the setting wherefrom Girard sees the initial stages of sacrifice; when a society is smitten by chaos, there is a frenzy of violence, differences are abolished and society is haunted by a lack of meaning. It is in

[570] Ibid., 34.
[571] Ibid., 35.
[572] Ibid., 23-24, 43-44.
[573] Wuthnow. 'Religion as Sacred Canopy' in Ainley/Hunter (Ed.). *Making Sense of Modern Times*, 127.
[574] See Berger. *The Sacred Canopy. Elements of a Social Theory of Religion*.
[575] Thus Berger lays more emphasis on the symbolic in people's dealing with life.
[576] Berger. *The Sacred Canopy. Elements of a Social Theory of Relig*ion, 26.

such circumstances that scapegoating shows its efficiency, because it restores order and brings the community back from chaos to peace. (And later turns the victim into a divinity). Thus both Girard and Berger see the sacred as something which is established when threatened by death.

In *The Sacred Canopy*, however, Berger neither connects death nor the sacred to violence. Violence does not have any privileged or essential place in his reflection on the sacred. He sees death more from a traditional metaphysical point of view, where consciousness of one's own and other people's deaths make men question 'normal life'.[578] Clearly Berger speaks exclusively from a contemporary context here, from a Western worldview, where religious sacrifice is not primarily violent, and religious practice is more centred on individual needs. It is this discrepancy in time between Girard's focus on primitive religion and Berger's focus on the contemporary which partly makes their theories on the sacred somewhat incongruous – even if Berger operates relatively freely between past and present. If, however, one were to limit Girardian theory to a contemporary Christian, westernized worldview, the modifying aspects surrounding sacrifice would play down violence to such a degree that religion, despite its mimetic nature, would look *similar to a non-sacrificial sacred canopy à la Berger's description of religious life*. This, however, opens up for viewing mimetic theory partly as a theory on modern desacrilized religion as it is manifested within the twentieth-century theological tradition, the same tradition by which Berger, despite operating within sociology and the scientific methods of sociology is clearly influenced.[579] In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard starts with an analysis of violence as such. Methodically, the analysis is based on the premise that primitive religion sheds light on violence. But his latter works show that Girard has a twofold understanding of religion: one anthropological and another based on Christian theology. However, I do not think it is stretching the matter too far to say that Girard interprets primitive religion from a Christian standpoint. Especially in his most non-sacrificial phase sacrifice is clearly seen as anti-Christian. Since *Things Hidden*, false and true religion has been regarded from the perspective of how one interprets the victim. The victimage mechanism is the stumbling block as regards truth in religion, as it can evoke either a violent or a forgiving response. And what reveals the truth is the non-sacrificial interpretation of the Passion.

---

[577] Ibid.
[578] Ibid., 23, 43-44.
[579] See especially 'Sociological and Theological Perspectives,' in Berger. *The Sacred Canopy. Elements of a Social*

11.3 Returning to a Sacrificial Understanding of Christianity?

From the mid 1990s, however, Girard's moderated view concerning sacrifice, sees Christianity as more interwoven with sacrifice, not only interwoven as part of a sacrificial milieu and setting, but also sacrificial as such. This again has made Girard regard Christianity more as a religion similar to other religions, making him more positive both towards religion as such and sacrifice. The latter is something of a mystery since Girard clearly still sees sacrifice as violence and the Christian God as non-violent. It seems to me that Girard, because he is trying to avoid a liberal, politically correct view of Christian thinking where one rather hypocritically places oneself and one's thinking on the non-sacrificial side, attempts to show that nobody can claim the luxury of not sacrificing. Also Christianity must be seen in the context of sacrifice, and interpreted in the context of religion. Thus, Christianity is sacrificial, not in a violent way but as renunciation.[580] In my view, a distinction should be made between *Christianity's sacrificial context and the non-sacrificial content, and not by again calling Christianity a sacrificial religion*. Christianity is sacrificial in form, as the sacrifice of Jesus is essential, but non-sacrificial in content as it reveals and does away with sacrificial legitimization.

Girard's moderation clearly means that Christianity is in a less exclusive position as regards other religions, but at the same time, it may have weakened the initial interpretation of the uniqueness of Christ's death. Girard's recent thinking seems to be more attuned to a phenomenology of religion approach in that he is more open to seeing Christianity as formally containing all the forms typical of a religion. But Girard's former view, his non-sacrificial interpretation, did not deny the similarity between the formal religious dimensions in Christianity and those in other religions. His non-sacrificial point was that, formally, Christianity was a religion where sacrifice was an essential part of the structure. But because Jesus revealed the innocence of the victim and the unjust violence in victimizing, his teaching was actually anti-sacrificial. This, I believe, is Girard's main religious theme. And for this reason I will still call Girard's theology, despite his recent moderations, *anti-sacrificial*. I am not especially fond of the sacrificial addition, because it somewhat blurs his main theological

---

Theory of Religion, 179-185.

[580] The Girard Reader, 272. See also Girard. *Quand ces choses commenceront…*, 169-170.

point. In my view this moderation has not been successful. Firstly, the non-violent aspect of Christianity has become less clear. Secondly, the sacrificial reintroduction has made the theory as a whole less coherent. Thirdly, it has made it less sound anthropologically. Fourthly, the risk of interpreting his non-sacrificial theology as a dismissal of sacrificing oneself for other people, was minimal. Mimetic theory, as outlined in *Things Hidden,* strongly indicated the act of sacrificing oneself for someone else. Fifthly, Girard's emphasis on the Father's non-violence and his denial of the Passion as a god-willed sacrifice, has become less clear.

Despite his moderation of non-sacrificial Christianity, Girard claims the uniqueness of Christianity on the same grounds. But this main theological point is now religious in a more general sense. There was more of a Barthian tendency in his theological reflections, before he introduced sacrifice as a fundamental part of Christianity. There was also, in his non-sacrificial phase, a rather Barthian understanding of Christianity as something that dissolved and ended religion by becoming itself a victim of violent religion. By distancing Christianity from the sacrificial, Christianity was thereby distanced from the other religions. And reintroducing sacrifice to Christianity, inevitably makes Christianity look more like a religion that is similar to other religions. Thus his later turn towards greater acceptance of sacrifice, brings his theologically motivated thinking more in tune with the science of religion.

11.4 Approaching Theology

It is important to stress, before delving deeper into the theological context, that mimetic theory is not primarily a theology. Thus all religion is seen from the perspective of the scapegoat. But the claim that Jesus is the primary break-away from sacrificial thinking, sets the Christian religion, if not in an exclusive position, at least in an original position. Most scholars, even many Girardians, begin by analysing Girard's religious theory in *Violence and the Sacred*. Remarkably few have considered Girard's religious views in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* as the introduction to and basis of his theory on religion. Such fundamental ideas as conversion from desiring the other, the sinful tendency in everyone to choose human models instead of the divine (original sin), have set a standard for all Girard's later thought regarding religion. Clearly *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* is a work written by a Christian author who claims that Christian conversion and renunciation of metaphysical desire provide universal answers. By omitting the theological potential outlined in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel,* there

is a tendency to modify the mimetic tendency in his work. This will inevitably weaken the anthropological dimension. It will also weaken the anthropological basis of his religious theory. Isolating sacrifice from mimesis in trying to understand the religious nature of mimetic theory, turns the theory into a more idea-oriented and static theory, thereby facilitating the attempt to turn Girard's religious theory into a more traditional and metaphysically oriented religious theory based on the understanding of religion as ritualistic.

11.4.1 Girard and Secular Theology

The secular theological tendency in mimetic theory is exposed by the way the death of Jesus reveals and ends sacrifice and, in this way, puts (potentially) an end to sacred religion. Girard has a certain affinity here with a God-is-dead theology when he claims that Christianity is, partly, atheistic and marks an end to religion. This is, of course, *in toto*, an exaggeration. Girard does not see the death of Jesus as an end to religion as such, but as a beginning of the end of violent religion. This demythologization is drastic, when one bears in mind that all religions contain aspects of sacrificial violence. Girardian theory therefore proclaims the death of all violent gods, a radicality in the extreme when one reflects on the consequences this would have for religious life. But viewing Christianity and other religions as solely built on and revolving around the victimage mechanism,[581] could, however, lose its anthropological force if this was not seen in relation to how rivalistic desires make human relationships generally turn into *us and them-relationships*. In omitting the religious nature of mimetic desire there is a tendency to see this new, non-sacrificial mentality as instigated by humanism. Changed mentality with regard to the role of the victim, gives modern human beings unbelievable advantages compared with people in the past (due to the concern for victims),[582] and could, by viewing mimetic desire as something exclusively secular, very easily be thought of as liberation from religion. But according to mimetic theory, this mentality has basically sprung from the effects of imitating the Passion. From this perspective the positive secularization process, whereby one imitates both Christ and Christ's concern for victims (engendered by Christ's non-sacrificial attitude on the cross) is clearly religious. But this means that religion must be seen to be part of mimesis.

11.5 Alone in the Theological World?

[581] This difference in attitude towards the sacred is not exclusively Christian.
[582] *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 161-169.

The problem with interpreting mimetic theory as part of a theological tradition is not, however, its religious offspring. Rather, it is the lack of references to a theological tradition. In fact, there is no specific theological tradition where mimetic theory or Girardian theology belongs. Nor is there any specific theologian in whom one can discover a clear influence on Girard's work. On the other hand, there are quite few theologians who have been profoundly influenced by Girard (Raymund Schwager, James G. Williams, Robert-Hamerton-Kelly, James Alison and others). Some interpreters have discovered certain basic links going back to Augustine, while Girard, in an interview, has fuelled this by indicating, loosely, that three quarters of his theory can be found in Augustine.[583] Their styles and ways of thinking, and not least the 1600 years that separate them, however, make these two thinkers very different. There are some similar theological themes, which are often similar between theologically oriented thinkers. There is also the fact that both start from fields other than theology. But classical rhetoric and modern literary criticism are not strongly related. Also, their way of writing and reflecting seems miles apart. Finally, Girard's dismissal of Platonism does not relate too well to Augustine's Neo-Platonism. Despite the formal differences, Augustine, especially in *De Civitas Dei*, sees destruction as an integral part of human desire. The work of the powerful in *Civitas Terrena* are interpreted as driven by violent desires, which stands in stark contrast to the Christian attitude of humility. Also Augustine's understanding of desire as something mental corresponds to a Girardian understanding of mimetic desire, despite the fact that Augustine regards desire as basically object-related.

> *Therefore a love which strains after the possessions of the loved object is desire; and the love which possesses and enjoys that object is joy. (Augustine. City of God, Book XIV, 557.)*

Besides a certain overall understanding of desire, the most profound similarity is, in my view, the emphasis that both Augustine and Girard lay on rationality as an important tool understanding and mediating the Christian message. I would not, however, consider Augustine a very important theological mentor for understanding mimetic theory. The fact is that Girard's theological thinking stands very isolated. Also, to frame mimetic theory according to one specific theological tradition would imply a certain insensitivity towards the fleeting nature of mimetic desire. Girardian theory, I emphasize, cannot be fixed within a specific theological tradition or denomination.

[583] Girard. *Quand ces choses commenceront…*, 196.

Chapter 12. Bultmann and Mimetic Theory

12.1 Bultmann versus Girard

Although mimetic theory stands apart from existentialist thought, I would, however like, because of the similarity of themes, to compare some aspects of Girard's theory with the same aspects in Bultmann's existentialist theology. Bultmann is perhaps the most important and (academically) influential theologian of the 20th century and therefore, alongside Barth, represents the typical theological mode which has had most impact on thought outside the theological realm. Also, Girard has commented on Bultmann's work several times, in ways I feel inclined to discuss. My references to Bultmann are limited to his work within systematic theology (dogmatics). Bultmann's existential theology, however, cannot be seen as independent from his exegetical works. The demythologization programme can be seen as a consequence of his exegetical research. It is also important to bear in mind that Bultmann was influenced by research done in the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*. This makes Bultmann's theological context, not dissimilar to Girard's. Both see Christian theology within the broader context of the science of religion.

12.2 Demythologization

Bultmann's demythologization is, as he claims, more precisely interpretation. And interpretation of the Gospels is first and foremost a hermeneutical challenge.[584] One of the great mistakes in interpreting Bultmann is to make demythologizing mean removing or deleting everything in the Gospels which smacks of mythological understanding.[585] Bultmann attempts primarily to interpret mythological understanding, not to delete everything which smacks of mythological thinking. His project is also aimed at revealing the existential content of the mythological, making it relevant for people of his own day. Interpretation cannot ignore, or, worse, dismiss the era in which one lives. Therefore, it is important to interpret the Gospels from the standpoint of a modern worldview. In this respect there are certain

[584] Rudolf Bultmann. 'Jesus Christ and Mythology', in Bultmann. *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era* (Minneapolis: The Fortress Press, 1991), 305.
[585] See 'Rudolf Bultmann – en innføring' by Rune Slagstad in Bultmann. *Mytologi og bibelforståelse* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1968), 11.

mythological worldviews within the New Testament, such as heaven and hell (as concrete locations), miracles and other kinds of divine intervention, which need to be discarded in order to make the Gospels relevant for modern people. However, Bultmann does not consider what engenders demythologization. He takes it for granted that the modern world is able to see through mythology. Yet he does not see anything in the life of Jesus which makes demythologization possible.

12.2.1 Girard's Critique of Bultmann

Girard has also pointed out the need to demythologize certain religious attitudes and worldviews. In the case of Bultmann, however, Girard claims that he 'conforms to the contemporary mob that believes only in technology, the real visible power of the world,'[586] indicating that Bultmann is a worshiper of technology and modernity. The passage Girard seems to refer to[587] is the first chapter of *New Testament and Mythology,* where Bultmann claims that there is a problem in using electric lights, radios and modern medicine, and, at the same time, proclaiming miracles.[588] This interpretation, despite Bultmann's rather crude dismissal of different mythical worldviews in *New Testament and Mythology*, could hardly be more unfair and lacking in precision. Bultmann's view on technology is quite the contrary, and paradoxically, his view on technology is actually more critical than Girard's. Bultmann came to understand modern culture as a seductive temptation leading to a false self-understanding, based on a belief in some kind of worldly powers, a belief with destructive consequences for the individual and humanity as a whole.[589] From his interpretation of Paul, especially, Bultmann tries to demonstrate the illusion of thinking that one can live authentically through a combination of one's own powers and selected resources from the world around one.[590] Faith is unattainable through scientific research.[591] Faith and modernity, according to Bultmann, are in conflict with one another.[592]

---

[586] *The Girard Reader*, 280.
[587] Girard does not refer to any specific work.
[588] Bultmann. *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic* Writings (London: SCM Press LTD, 1985), 4.
[589] Roger A. Johnson, Editor. Foreword in Rudolf Bultmann. *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, 13-14.
[590] Ibid., 32.
[591] Bultmann. 'Liberal Theology and the Latest Theological Movement,' in *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era,* 68.
[592] Bultmann 'The Relation between Theology and Proclamation' in *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, 235-239. See also Roger A. Johnson (Editor). Foreword in Rudolf Bultmann. *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, 33.

Girard's critique of Bultmann's dismissal of supernatural powers in *New Testament and Mythology* may also be seen as a critique of Bultmann's questioning resurrection[593] as something historically objective,[594] and therefore as seen too much in relation to modern rationalism. But Bultmann's example of modern humans living in an age where electricity and radio are a part of their life, does not indicate, however, that he embraces the secular, futuristic ideology of the time. Bultmann was sceptical, despite emphasizing the Christian attitude of openness towards the future, towards the tendency of finding security in technology, seeing it as a kind of modern form of idolatry.

> *We can see in our times to what degree men are dependent on technology, and to what degree technology brings with it terrible consequences. To believe in the word of God means to abandon all merely human security and thus overcome the despair which arises from the attempt to find security, an attempt which is always vain. ('Jesus Christ and Mythology', 303.)*

Bultmann's attempt to avoid any attempt to combine Christian eschatology with a belief in technology, is not, however, an attempt to reveal the Gospels' non-violence. Its aim is to reveal technology as a false mentality in securing one's life. By attempting to find security via technological means or through a conceited belief in one's own power, will only result in one's loss of humanity. In one instance, however, Bultmann sees technology as linked to violence. Because of the terrible vision arising out of modern technology, especially atomic science, biblical eschatology may, according to Bultmann, have a renaissance. In the article 'Jesus Christ and Mythology', Bultmann claims that atomic science may bring about the destruction of the earth through the abuse of human science and technology.[595]

Bultmann extends this false self-understanding to belief in rationality, seeing different kinds of objectifying modes of thought as inappropriate for theology.[596] By calling Bultmann's demythologizing positivistic,[597] Girard attempts to locate Bultmann in a category of research which Bultmann himself dismissed as irrelevant to theology. His exegetical work, like most exegetical work, can be seen, however, as having been influenced by positivistic ideals. This is not exactly the case regarding Bultmann's systematic work. Bultmann did not only see the objectifying conceptualization of a discipline such as mathematical physics as inappropriate

---

[593] Bultmann. *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, 7, 32.
[594] The interesting thing is that Girard, just like Bultmann, sees the resurrection as probable from the point of view of faith. (*The Girard Reader*, 280). But Girard will claim, however, that there is a much stronger bond between faith and rationality, faith and history.
[595] Bultmann. 'Jesus Christ and Mythology', in Rudolf Bultmann. *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, 296.
[596] Roger A. Johnson, Editor. Foreword in Rudolf Bultmann. *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, 24-25.
[597] *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 192.

for theology, he also criticized psychology, history and other human sciences of objectifying modes of thought.[598] This, however, does not mean that Bultmann claimed that theology meant opting out of the historical context. Bultmann was, one must bear in mind, primarily an exegete, and his work in systematic theology is modified by the historical problems involved in interpreting scripture. He did dismiss, though, liberal theology's belief in the possibility and importance of historical investigation, in order to uncover the historical Jesus and thereby grasp the kerygma.[599]

Girard does not consider historical criticism as binding in relation to the analysis of scripture. His non-sacrificial reading of the Judaeo-Christian scriptures considers the exegetical tradition to a lesser degree. The results of biblical historical criticism do not seem to enlighten nor determine Girard's use of the biblical texts. His textual analysis does not consider the different degrees of reliability in the textual variants of the Gospels. Girard's exegesis of biblical texts seems to be motivated by which texts best suit mimetic theory. References to the historical situation, the *Sitz im Leben*, are remarkably few. In this context, the naïvity for which Girard criticizes Bultmann's research,[600] could perhaps be used against Girard's own biblical investigations. On the other hand, Girard seems to dismiss historical criticism on the grounds that it is impossible to find out which are, historically speaking, the most reliable texts. In this respect I think Girard is too nihilistic in his attitude to historical research. For example, the criteria developed by Bultmann's pupil Ernst Käsemann, based on a comparison between Jesus' sayings and the Judaism of the time, make it possible to determine with some precision which are the more authentic Jesus-words. Käsemann claimed that the sayings which were the least common, least familiar, the most unheard of, the most radical in comparison with the religious practice and thought of the times, were those which most clearly reflected the authenticity of Jesus' sayings.[601] These attempts, however, have also been dismissed by Bultmann as he claims that from a strictly historical point of view, one cannot know very much more about Jesus. Strictly speaking, from the point of absolute certainty, one can know no more than that he was a Jew living among Jews.[602] And strangely enough, from the point of historical certainty, Girard would probably agree.

---

[598] Roger A. Johnson, Editor. Foreword in Rudolf Bultmann. *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era,* 24-25.
[599] See Bultmann.'Liberal Theology and the Latest Theological Movement,' in *Interpreting Faith for the Modern* Era.
[600] I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, 192.
[601] Jon Helèn Pedersen. *Dialogbok om religion og livssyn* (Oslo: Ad Notam Gyldendal, 1994), 315-323.

12.3 Satan in Girard's and Bultmann's Work

If one leaves aside the question of modernity in relation to demythologization and considers Bultmann's attempt to interpret biblical themes, one finds themes which coincide with some of the basic themes in mimetic theory. In Chapter 3 of *I See Satan Fall like Lightning,* Girard claims that despite Bultmann's demythologization programme, he and other theologians of the time, did not attempt to demythologize Satan. Satan, according to Girard, is the mimetic process of desire-obstacle-violence, creating all kinds of binds. Girard connects Satan with the biblical understanding of the word *skandalon*,[603] a principle built upon a dialectic of seduction and obstacle. Psychologically *skandalon* manifests itself as a double bind, something which first arouses desires but which ends up in obstacles. In other words *skandalon* is the mimetic crisis, the desire leading to obstacles, resulting in violence. In this respect Satan is the ruler of the world because he is presented as the model of man's desire.[604] According to Bultmann, the concept of Satan as the ruler of the world expresses a deep insight, an 'insight that evil is not only to be found here and there in the world, but that all particular evils make up one single power which in the last analysis grows from the actions of men, which forms an atmosphere, a spiritual tradition, which overwhelms every man.'[605] This analysis may recall Girard's analysis of Satan. Bultmann, however, does not see Satan in the light of mimesis or scapegoating; his concept of Satan as the single power, growing out of the actions of men, does show, nevertheless, a structural symmetry of evil as anthropological and stemming from one force. (Girard also explains this power as order and disorder stemming from the same force.)[606] The fact that Bultmann sees the effect of Satan as 'men being carried away by their passions, no longer masters of themselves'[607] indicates a similar understanding of the potentially 'scandalous' in desire. In fact, when we compare their understanding of Satan, there is a certain symmetry, a symmetry which I think is a result of their common anthropological focus. Also the satanic, which Bultmann claimed comes from the actions of men, has a mimetic tendency as it clearly indicates desire and passion.

---

[602] See Bultmann. *Jesus* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1988).
[603] See Girard. *Things Hidden* 416-431, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, XI-XII, 7-46 and 'Satan' in *The Girard Reader*, 194-210, 293.
[604] I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, 32.
[605] Bultmann. 'Jesus Christ and Mythology', in Rudolf Bultmann. *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, 1991, 294.
[606] Girard. 'Satan' in *The Girard Reader,* 202.
[607] Bultmann. 'Jesus Christ and Mythology', in Rudolf Bultmann. *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era,* 294.

But although Bultmann has a similar outlook on Satan as a stumbling block to desire, he does not demythologize its transcendence. Satan in mimetic theory has no transcendent power. Satan is in sum the mimetic attraction which eventually produces victims and violence. He does not have any supernatural power, Girard claims.[608] In other words, Satan and his demons are an illusion. He does not exist.[609] But this does not mean that Girard wishes to discard the concept of Satan. On the contrary, Satan is, when deleted from any real transcendence, something very real: namely, the mimetic principle which leads to violence. This concept of Satan as the prince of this world is precisely what Bultmann understood as Satan, despite his failure to demythologize its transcendental character.

12.3.1 Demythologizing Violence

This comparative analysis of Satan in the works of Girard and Bultmann inevitably leads us on to an analysis of violence in their works. But apart from a few comments on world destruction, Bultmann lays very little emphasis on violence in religion. He is inclined, as a theologian of his time, to use the more metaphysical concept of evil or evilness, and a anthropological phenomenon such as violence seems to be drowned by metaphysical language. Mythology is never related to violence, and violence is never seen to be the force which instigates mythology. Even if the main focus of Bultmann's demythologizing programme is to demonstrate the Gospels' relevance to contemporary life, there is no attempt to demythologize the violent mythology associated with God. This is remarkable as theological violence had been seen as something which the liberal theology had regarded as a problem, and which Bultmann, despite from breaking away from nineteenth century liberal theology, could clearly see was a mythological problem for the modern believer. Bultmann seems to be in tune here with Luther's understanding of the hidden God and Otto's tremendum-concept, preserving the destructive parts of God as something relevant, both in belief and as a concept of the true God. It is in this specific area where, as far as I can see, Girard's and Bultmann's theologies differ the most. Girard can, in this respect, be seen as continuing the work of demythologizing by showing the violence attributed to God as stemming from human violence.

As Bultmann lays so little emphasis on violence, his understanding of the mythical ignores violence or hidden violence. Because he does not consider mimetic desire to be a part of

[608] Girard. 'Satan' in *The Girard Reader,* 202, 209.
[609] Ibid., 209

theology, Bultmann avoids the questions as to what generates the mythological. There is no violence and no mimetic desire present, blurring rationality and objectivity. Mythology, in Bultmann's understanding, is some story, event or concept in the past which today, from a modern, scientific worldview, one cannot possibly believe in. Bultmann's main critique of myth is that it is presented as historically adequate, while objectifying stories of otherworldliness are presented as something worldly.[610] This does not mean, however, that one cannot believe in the content or meaning of the myth; it means that one cannot believe in the historical facts associated with the myth. This attempt to believe in the biblical stories, however much the fantastic and supernatural goes against a modern desacralized worldview is what Bultmann calls a *sacrificium intellectus*,[611] which is just another form of idolatry. Bultmann sees this kind of intellectual sacrifice in the light of trying to establish faith as a part of one's deeds. According to Bultmann, this is just another way of trying to secure one's life.[612]

12.4 Faith as Distinct from Theology

According to Bultmann, the question of myth is linked to historical probability. But this is in no way the central issue of myth. The mythic is seen against the concept of existential relevance. If some religious motif does not refer to anything of existential relevance it could be called mythical. In this way demythologizing the New Testament can turn out to be, despite Bultmann's denial,[613] both an individualistic and subjectivistic undertaking. Myth, however, is not mythical if it refers to something existentially relevant. Therefore, Bultmann claims that what is specifically relevant for the early Christians, can also, despite the 2000 years that have elapsed, be specifically relevant to the contemporary Christian. This, however,

[610] See Karstein Hopland. 'Åpenbaring og historie', Master Degree, University of Bergen (Spring 1972): 40.
[611] Bultmann. 'Jesus Christ and Mythology', in Rudolf Bultmann. *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, 292.
[612] Bultmann's concept of intellectual sacrifice seems at first sight to be quite far from Girard's understanding of sacrifice as scapegoating and violence. However, the act of sacrificing one's intellect can clearly be seen as a secular version of sacrifice, a development towards a more psychological sacrifice, something done in order to be accepted by (a sacrificial) god. Intellectual sacrifice can easily be seen as a moderate version of sacrifice, as it is built upon the belief that God is demanding it. The elements of expulsion and punishment are clearly present in an intellectual sacrifice. And since religion, especially religious activity following the Reformation, has been less ritualistic and more faith-oriented, sacrifice can be seen as projected more into the minds of people. The act of sacrificing one's personal religious views is still a common part of Christian sacrifice today. Especially in Protestantism this version of sacrifice has been predominant, as the focus has been, rather one-sidedly, on proclaiming the right faith. This was also Bultmann's background. On the other hand, sacrifice of beliefs and worldviews in order to believe in a non-sacrificial God, can also be seen as a way towards a non-sacrificial mentality. In this respect, calling something sacrificial will depend on whether it is motivated by violence - which is the Girardian concept of sacrifice.

usually presupposes that interpretation is able to bridge the hermeneutical gap between different historical worldviews.[614] This hermeneutical challenge made Bultmann consider historical criticism as important, not as regards faith but as regards relevance. In his article 'The Problems of Hermeneutics,' Bultmann distinguishes between faith as an existential event and theology as an interpretation of faith. In this respect there is a certain dismissal of rationality regarding Christian faith, which perhaps explains his positive attitude to Otto's concept of God as 'wholly Other.' Bultmann actually uses the biblical concept *skandalon* or *stumbling block* in relation to the attempt to turn theology into anthropology[615] - which would imply that Girard's project forms a part of this *skandalon*. This dismissal of anthropology in relation to the Christian faith makes Bultmann's project seem very far indeed from Girard's project.

From this comparison between Bultmann and Girard, one can see that both, initially, start out from certain christological premises. Christ for Bultmann represents true being. For Girard Christ represents undifferentiated love. Even if both disregard historical criticism as well as general psychology in relation to the kerygma, they differ quite considerably when they attempt to make the Christian message concrete. Girard relies more on rationality as a tool to decipher truth, while Bultmann clearly seems more open towards an interpretation of inner existential experiences. Bultmann is more open to a mystical approach towards Christianity. It is therefore essential when interpreting theological thought, which generally tends to start from christological reflections, to analyse what such and such a christology actually consists of. (Many theologians today still tend to think that we share intuitively a common understanding of what is meant by christology.) But behind these different christologies lies the difference between seeing life as formed by ideas or by mimesis. An imitatio-theology is not a central focus in Bultmann's work. Bultmann's emphasis on existence and Girard's emphasis on mimesis and violence, clearly frame a very different theological conception, despite their both emphasizing God's love (agape) as being qualitatively different from love among men. These differences, based on different christologies, seem to lead them to different conclusions.[616]

---

[613] Bultmann. 'Jesus Christ and Mythology', in Rudolf Bultmann. *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, 319-320.
[614] Ibid., 293.
[615] Bultmann.'Liberal Theology and the Latest Theological Movement,' in *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era,* 72.
[616] Beside the difference caused by the mimetic principle, Girard's attempt to fuse Christian belief and rationality,

12.4.1 Demythologizing Sacrifice?

Bultmann claims that the motif of God sacrificing his Son, is not legitimate. It is, he claims, a mythological concept, not relevant today.[617] He claims that the prophecies describing Jesus' death and suffering as willed by God must be later redactions.[618] This interpretation of the sacrifice of Jesus brings us right to the heart of Girard's theology. The reason for claiming that the sacrifice motif is not relevant any longer, must be because a middle-class person, in the 20th century, is so attuned to a non-sacrificial approach to Christianity, that seeing Jesus' death as God's action, as a sacrificial theology, becomes a demythologized concept, not relevant in theology today. This could be seen to be similar to what Girard, using other words and approaches, has tried to uncover in his non-sacrificial interpretation of the Passion. But while Bultmanns discards this motif as theologically irrelevant, Girard emphasizes that the sacrifice of Jesus reveals the real content of sacrifice. Therefore, the sacrifice of Jesus is, for Girard, most relevant as it paves the way towards a non-sacrificial theology. Thus Girard would never discard the sacrificial theme, as all his non-sacrificial interpretations seem to be inspired by the Passion drama. Also, there is, according to Girard, no society which is able to free itself from a sacrificial mentality. Mimetic theory, therefore, would be extremely suspicious of any attempt to discard the motif of Jesus sacrificing his life (and proclaiming it as irrelevant for modern human beings). According to Girard, sacrificial concepts cannot be easily discarded because they are so much a part of our existence. Firstly, there is the claim that non-sacrifice must always be viewed in relation to sacrifice.[619] Secondly, very many people today, perhaps the majority of Christians today, will interpret the sacrifice of Jesus as both instigated by God and God-willed. From a socio-phenomenological point of view, Bultmann's disregard of the motif 'God sacrificed his Son' differs fundamentally from mainstream theology. However, it seems as though Bultmann here tries to rid theology of its most precious motif in order to make the Gospels more relevant. This, however, when one considers the effects of the Passion, leads to the anti-sacrificial mentality which Bultmann proclaims. Discarding this motif, however, would mean deleting the main event from which the non-sacrificial approach arises. And from a mimetic point of view this would mean omitting the main event from which demythologization stems. However, both deny the motif of the sacrifice of Jesus as God-willed.

---

also makes their theologies somewhat different.

[617] Bultmann. 'Jesus Christ and Mythology', in Rudolf Bultmann. *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, 319.

[618] Bultmann. *Jesus* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1968), 107.

[619] *The Girard Reader*, 69-70, 272.

Girard's renewed attempt to uphold sacrifice as important in order to understand Christianity, takes mimetic theory further away from Bultmann's theology. But clearly the demythologizing project and non-sacrificial Christianity is a norm and an ideal, and as a norm there is, despite their different approaches, a symmetry between what Bultmann regards as mythological and what Girard calls sacrificial.

12.5 Concluding on Mimesis among Religious Scholars

Among the great religious scholars discussed here, mimesis is not predominant. Mimetic theory is also a minor a part of the science of religion and has not been predominant in any major work (except Girard's) within the science of religion in the 20th century. In fact, its absence is so total that there may even seem to be a certain conscious neglect. This neglect, based on the fleeting nature of mimesis, if properly considered, would enhance the inter-disciplinary nature of the science of religion. The most obvious neglect, in my view, is the failure to see how people live in a perpetual mimesis of the religious ideals, which, on the whole, dominate nearly every aspect of religious people's everyday life. The mimesis of the holy and the anti-mimesis of the profane are obviously commented on, but not as mimesis. This non-mimetic attitude necessarily makes the science of religion idea-oriented, without paying much attention to what generates ideas. On the other hand, many religious scholars have laid great emphasis on sacrifice, a phenomenon which, according to mimetic theory, is the consequence of mimetic desire.

But sacrifice is primarily seen as a representation of different phenomena, not as a consequence of mimetic conflict. The classic approach to understanding sacrifice is not mimetic, mainly because sacrifice is interpreted as such and not as a consequence of a more elementary need. In this respect Mauss' *The Gift* perhaps represents the most mimetic approach to sacrifice, before mimetic theory. Mauss' approach to the exchange of gifts means focusing more on mimetic entanglement in order to understand what lies behind ritual festivities. The reason for potential violence surrounding these rites is the mimetic nature of exchange. And one might wonder why the immense number of conflicts among humans had so little impact on the way one understands both sacrifice and rites generally. Mauss sees the mimetic nature of humans as decisive in, for example, exchange, and thus in the rivalistic

tendency in human encounters. This leads conflict and violence being emphasized (Mauss sees them arising out of exchange). All in all, when one considers religious thought in the 20th century, there has been, because of the neglect of mimetic desire, a remarkable ignorance towards understanding conflict and violence as central to the nature of religion and society. This is all the more remarkable when we consider that the Western world has been so deeply affected by two world wars. However, the global situation is now so wary of religious violence that books on religion and violence have great appeal. All the same, despite this new interest in religious violence, there does not seem to be the same interest in reflecting on the underlying reasons for the same violence. (Violence is still very much regarded as stemming from different ideologies and not from desires ignited by human relationships.) If this new interest, enhanced by the aftermath of September 11, leads to research on violence only in Islam and does not lead to renewed research into uncovering the sacrificial mechanisms underlying various theologies and other religious expressions, we will risk gaining little insight into the relationship between violence and religion.

Chapter 13. Mimetic Theory and the Science of Religion

13.1 Placing Girardian Theory in the Context of the Science of Religion

The trend in the phenomenology of religion has been to divide the sacred and the profane into two different compartments, thus preventing one of approaching religious phenomena as a dynamic element in society. By introducing violence, scapegoating and desire as central to religion, mimetic theory tries to enhance the psychological, sociological and anthropological dimension of religion. The four main branches in the science of religion (history of religion, phenomenology of religion, psychology of religion and sociology of religion) [620] are all relevant and, to a certain degree, all present in mimetic theory. Mimetic theory, like most universal theories, deals exclusively with history only when it is relevant to its purpose. In this respect most universal theories on religion are eclectic, using historical evidence whenever it supports empirically a particular theory. Despite the fact that Girard continually refers to history, his theory, especially the more hypothetical parts of it, is, as in the case of Claude Lévi-Strauss, founded on *structural history* rather than on historic history.[621] Especially his theory on origins is dominated by this kind of hypothetical-structural outlook. Calling mimetic theory a phenomenology of religion would be inaccurate, as it is drastically reductionistic, both in the way that it is highly eclectic and in its claim that religious themes can be explained outside the realm of religion. There is an ontological reduction in mimetic theory which is contrary to the phenomenological ideals of anti-reductionism and pure description.[622] Also mimetic theory is more explanative than descriptive, which is contrary to the ideals in phenomenology.[623] However, there are phenomenological approaches[624] in mimetic theory. Especially in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel,* there is a certain phenomenological approach in the way desire is described. In phenomenology, the desire (in the mind) to possess objects is clearly related to desire in mimetic theory. Also, the phenomenological attempt to reach methodically some sort of essence[625] is a characteristic

[620] See Åge Hultkrantz. 'The Phenomenology of Religion: Aims and Methods,' *Studies in comparative religion*, Temenos 6 (1970): 68.
[621] *The Scapegoat*, 28.
[622] Antonio Barbosa da Silva. *Can Religions be Compared?,* 12.
[623] Hultkrantz. 'The Phenomenology of Religion: Aims and Methods,' *Studies in comparative religion*, 79.
[624] On phenomenology as a way to understand interpersonal relationships, see Gerd Lindgren. 'Fenomenologi i praktiken,' in Starrin & Svensson (red). *Kvalitativ metod och vetenskapsteori*, Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1994, 91-110. See especially 94.
[625] Gerd Lindgren. 'Fenomenologi i praktiken,' in Starrin & Svensson (red). *Kvalitativ metod och vetenskapsteori*,

trait of mimetic theory.[626] Mimetic theory, however, both starts and ends in a transcendental and essential understanding of life. And mimesis mediates this transcendence because it can be seen as a mediating force between humans and the divine. Also the victimage mechanism is generated by mimetic desire, and mimetic desire, in my view, is basically a psychological drive. The emphasis on mimetic desire necessarily contains a psychological dimension. The chaos evolving in a society prior to scapegoating is a result of mimetic conflicts, and the violent result is no more than different kinds of mimetic desires colliding and creating turbulence.[627] By laying greater stress on mimesis, the religious dimension in mimetic theory will have more of a psychological touch about it.

Girard's approach to religion is clearly comparative,[628] especially when it comes to developing an understanding of origin, myths, ritual and, also, the sacred as such. But in contrast to many scholars of phenomenology of religion, Girard has attempted to relate his findings to a philosophy of religion, by aiming to uncover the meaning behind the sacred, the myths and the rituals - despite the fact that he has resisted any attempt to turn these findings into a coherent philosophy of religion.[629] Mimetic theory, however, is developed by consciously omitting a philosphic vocabulary.[630] Thus, more so than a philosophy of religion, one could label mimetic theory as an anthropology of religion. Firstly, mimetic theory is set against a background of anthropological works, such as Frazer, Tylor, Hubert, Mauss and Lévi-Strauss. Secondly, mimetic theory has been developed through a reading of religious

---

105.

[626] According to Antonio da Silva, there is a difference between a 'concrete phenomenology of religion' and 'essential phenomenology of religion', where the latter is less inclined to describe the beliefs of the believer as something objective and neutral, but more from a structural point of view apart from their historico-cultural contexts. (See Antonio Barbosa da Silva. *Can Religions be Compared?,* 12-14.)

[627] The problem with describing Girardian religious theory as based on psychology is twofold:
Firstly, mimesis is not primarily something going on in the mind of a person. It is regarded as more basic than what can be explained by cognitive structures. Secondly, Girard does not attempt to analyse the mind in order to understand mimesis. Rather he analyses society and the mentality surrounding myths and rituals in a society. By trying to make mimetic theory fit neatly into the compartment called Psychology of religion, means that the inter-disciplinary discourse from which the theory has been developed, would be dramatically restricted. Also, methodically, Girardian religious theory would, if viewed as narrowly psychological, be limited to a theory of the mind.

[628] Girard. 'The Bible is not a Myth', 8.

[629] Foucault suggested that Girard should, from his findings in *Violence and the Sacred*, work out a philosophy of religion. See Jørgen Jørgensen. 'Paradoksets dekonstruktion,' (An interview with Girard), Paradoks 1/91, 36-37.

[630] Girard has been critical from *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* onwards, towards a traditional, metaphysical way of depicting reality, which is also reflected in his work on religious phenomena. Philosophy of religion basically operates in a Platonic mode, classifying religious phenomena as ideas (love, evil, goodness etc) instead of locating the mimetic currents forming these same ideas. In this way the generative aspects, the intricacy of religious phenomena could easily dissolve and become clear-cut ideas somewhat lacking anthropological substance, and the interdividual configurations, which make up these ideas, would thus become uninteresting, invisible or too unimportant to investigate seriously.

myths and practice and related to a general understanding of how society functions. This understanding, however, is seen through the lens of mimetic desire, which is understood as the basic generative force behind all anthropology.

According to Gilhus and Mikaelsson, the three main horizons within which to understand religion are the essentialistic, reductionistic and hermeneutical.[631] [632] Usually, an essentialistic approach excludes a reductionistic one, and vice versa. But in mimetic theory one could possibly speak of a twofold perspective regarding the essentialistic and reductionistic approach, since religion is both truth and something other than truth, something which the believers claim it to be, but which it is not. Primarily and paradoxically, it is the violent acts of the sacred which blinds people to see what religion really is. Girard's religious approach differs from an essentialistic approach when such an essentialistic approach claims that religious phenomena are something *sui generis*, something in their own right, which should be viewed only as such. Contrary to this view Girard claims that most religious phenomena can be seen as anthropological, thus referring mainly to something other than what they nominally refer to. Religion can, however, be called essentialistic, since the sacred, the attempt to avoid or modify violence with the aid of the victimage mechanism, refers to peoples' ultimate concern. Also Girard, more eagerly than most religious scholars, underlines the essentialistic character of religion by arguing for the anthropological truths revealed by Jesus' death. Despite the fact that Girard's theory is reductionistic, aiming to demythologize the concepts of violent transcendence, and thereby provide an anthropological explanation for the concepts of violent godheads, those 'theologies' which he dismisses can also be labelled essentialistic, in so far as they also deal with religion as an ultimate concern. The act of eradicating violence through violence means that sacrifice is able to create both peace and divinities. Thus, violent theologies are essentialistic without being reductionistic.

By analysing violence in religion, mimetic theory claims that religion is not what the believers claim it to be. Thus religion must be described and understood otherwise than from the believer's point of view. There must also be a critique of religion. Girardian theory contains such a critique based on revealing the inherent violence in myths, rituals and sacred

[631] Gilhus/Mikaelsson. *Nytt blikk på religionsvitenskapen*, 20-23.
[632] Girardian theory may entail many hermeneutical consequences, but Girard has done very little work within the traditional hermeneutical context. This is partly due to his dismissal of a traditional metaphysical approach. Girard's project is interpretative, but does not consist of interpreting interpretation. Also, language and symbolism are scarcely elaborated on. In addition, Girard does not refer much to historical criticism as an aid with which to mediate between

mentalities. According to mimetic theory, religion is located within society where scapegoating regulates the acts. The more peaceful enactments of religious life are not considered. From this rather reductionistic perspective, mimetic theory cannot be labelled a phenomenology of religion.

Despite its attempt to translate and transfer meaning, mimetic theory does not consist in dismissing religious belief as did Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and other nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics of religion. Although Girardian theory is reductionistic, such ideals as empathy and understanding, so vividly stressed among phenomenologists of religion, are not alien to Girard's methodological approach.[633] Empathy and understanding, in order to penetrate an essence do correspond, however, to the ideals of earlier phenomenologists such as Scheler and Gründler.[634] The aim in present-day phenomenology of religion, however, is not to investigate the essence of religion, rather the essence of the phenomenology of religion.[635] This will clearly limit what I would call a desire for meaning, and enhance a tendency to focus on diversity and non-meaning.

Girard also seems to give Judaism and Christianity priority in relation to truth, by claiming that they are the religions which most fundamentally have questioned the scapegoat mechanism. The tendency to favour Christianity has also been used as a critique against Eliade, despite Eliade's attempt to practise *epoché*, the suspension of beliefs and assumptions as regards other religions. Girard's apology, though, is pronounced, because he sees the *anthropology of the cross* as a key to a rational understanding of both humanity and religion.[636] However, he claims that his theory does not presuppose leaps in faith. On the contrary, he claims that his basic analysis is anthropologically sound.[637] This has been eagerly refuted by a number of scholars.[638]

---

the texts' original meaning and contemporary interpretation.

[633] Girard. *The Girard Reader* (Ed. James Williams), 287, and *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, Chapter 11.

[634] Hultkrantz. 'The Phenomenology of Religion: Aims and Methods', *Studies in comparative religion*, 71.

[635] Mariasusai Dhavamony. *Phenomenology of Religion*, 10.

[636] *The Girard Reader*, 286-287.

[637] *Things Hidden*, 62-63.

[638] The overall critique among scholars, both within the science of religion and other fields of research, is the totalistic character of Girardian theory. (See among others the critical inquiries in the Diacritic-interview with Girard in "*To Double Business Bound"*, especially from 206 ff.) It has been claimed that Girard, because he reduces culture to one basic process, has created a new Platonic surrogate. (Markussen/Selnes. 'Den eldgamle sti, som onde menn har trådt,' Agora, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget (4/91): 174). Robert Greer Cohen has claimed, among others, that mimetic desire is reductionistic as regards the complexity of desire. It is also, according to Cohen, over-schematic and cannot account for every kind of human desire (see Robert Greer Cohen. 'Desire: Direct and Imitative,' in *Philosophy Today* (Winter 1989): 319.) which is a critique based on the assumption that a simplistic model could

13.2 Mimetic Theory and the Relevance to Religious Studies

Within the science of religion a certain critique has recently been raised against the tendency (especially in phenomenology of religion) to present religion in a rather sugary way. In the field of the science of religion, there seems to have been greater reluctance to discuss and present religious violence than in other disciplines such as general history and church history, where religious wars and antagonisms are indeed a focus. (This is somewhat surprising. From a populist point of view the theme of violence evokes extraordinary interest among ordinary people, and is often used as the main argument against religion.) The fact that remarkably little work has been done on the destructive sides of religion, within the science of religion, [639] could partly be because there has been a certain reluctance among religious scholars to see religion as part of general history, culture and society. Especially within the phenomenology of religion, not only all religions but also all religious phenomena tend to be presented in a positive and egalitarian manner. Considering its westernized and imperialistic past combined

---

hardly explain such a vast number of phenomena. This scepticism, however, has been directed at the generality of the theory as such. Some of this criticism is rather *a priori*, made without concrete analysis of what are considered to be the specific flaws. This kind of overall critique of a general theory is usually based on different worldviews and/or different views on academic research. As such they are ideologically valid.
In the field of theology there has been less critique of the mimetic parts of Girard's work, as there has been a rather one-sided focus on sacrifice. The tendency to turn theology into anthropology has been attacked, however, by some, among them J-M. Domenach, who claims that the project is engendered by pride, and that the Gospels do not need the academy. Robert Greer Cohen senses a heretical bent in Girard's concrete anti-transcendentalism (Robert Greer Cohen. 'Desire: Direct and Imitative,' in *Philosophy Today* (Winter 1989): 326.) while Pierre Manent claims that Girard's view on Christ's revelation leads to Pelagianism, as everything after the Passion is, according to Girard, dependent on human work. (Pierre Manent. 'René Girard, la violence et le sacré', Contrepoint 14 (1974): 169.) Girard's non-sacrificial approach to Christianity has been criticized, not so much due to any lack of rationality in his argumentations, but more from a biblical point of view, claiming that Girard is not attuned to the Gospel's message of the sacrifice of Jesus. Lucien Scubla claims that Girard's non-sacrificial interpretation is problematic as there are quite a number of sacrificial texts in the Gospels. Lucien Scubla. 'The Christianity of René Girard and the Nature of Religion,' in Dumouchel (Ed.). *Violence and Truth*, London: The Athlone Press, 1988, 160-178.) This critique has also been quite strong among Girardians. I suspect that this rather massive critique, potentially questioning the orthodoxy of the non-sacrificial interpretation has had some effect as to Girard's moderating his views on sacrifice. From my own point of view, this change of perspective seems more mimetic than rational, as the theoretical foundation and arguments of Girard's non-sacrificial position are so much stronger and elaborate compared to his new sacrificial version. There has been critique from theologians as to the limiting of sacrifice to only one kind of sacrifice. (Fauskevåg. 'René Girard om offer og ofring,' Edda 1 (1985): 32.) From the perspective of a theologian, a scholar of religious history or religious phenomenology, Girard's approach to sacrifice is limited and reductionistic, but, on the other hand, he has never tried to account for all the sacrificial variables. His effort has primarily been to show that violence engendered by mimetic rivalry motivates sacrifice. It is, I am sure, possible to broaden Girard's approach to sacrifice by bringing the mimetic dimension to the fore. The generative nature of mimetic desire, not being limited by any religious canopy, means that it can explain more modified and modern versions of sacrifice. (See Gilhus/Mikaelsson. *Nytt blikk på religionsfaget*, 48-49). In Robert Golsan's book *René Girard and Myth* there is a whole chapter describing Girard's critique of contemporary research, different critics of Girardian theory and, finally, the rather supportive research done among Girardians. (See Chapter V, 'Girard's Critics and the Girardians,' in Golsan. *René Girard and Myth*, 107-128.)

[639] When searching in Bibsys, of the 439 dissertations on religious topics found in Norwegian libraries, only Anna Swärdh's dissertation, *Rape and Religion in English Renaissance literature: a topical study of four texts by Shakespeare, Drayton, and Middleton*, Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis (2003) deals directly with the theme

with the attitude of promoting western people's superiority (a clear tendency in late 19th century anthropology, the science of religion and theology) through evolutionary models, such a tendency is understandable. But the question remains as to why religious violence, which is such a common, obvious and fundamental issue, has been so neglected? Is it out of fear of ethnocentrism? Is not this new approach also a subjective mentality, an antithesis to the periods of ethnocentrism, and guilt towards one's ethnocentric past, recently motivated by political correctness? The reluctance to deal with the obvious and highly relevant theme of religious violence, makes one wonder whether there is an underlying desire not to provoke; especially in the west there is a tendency not to provoke contemporary religions other than one's own. This desire can look at times as though it is competing with and, partly, hindering a more scientific desire to reach a more precise understanding of religious phenomena.

Both Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* and Burkert's *Homo Necans* marked, at the time of their publication (1972), an unorthodox approach to religion by emphasizing violence. Girard's attempt to uncover violence in religion is perhaps the theme which has had the most immediate impact on the science of religion. Girard's thesis on how the revealing of the victimage mechanism has created new religious and social orders and enhanced secularization, needs to be further elaborated in order to investigate how religion has been relevant to the formation of cultural institutions. Also, the highly suggestive theme, only hinted at in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (and never pursued in later works), of how an idolized sacred mentality flows over the earth when the imitation of God is substituted by imitation of the mediator, could bring, if further elaborated, some new insights into the understanding of the relationship between anthropology and religion, invigorating the rather contourless dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. Also, the attempt to compare motifs from the religious and theological approach could give a more complementary insight into different religious themes. This more eclectic approach, where the dogmatic barriers between theology and the science of religion loosen up, seeing their findings as supplemental, as different strategies towards the same goal, could make mimetic theory more relevant as there does not seem to be the same need among scholars of religion and theology today to aggressively preserve their territories in order to be allowed to undertake 'free research'. Girard's attempt to discuss different religious motifs together and view them as relevant to anthropology, the science of religion and theology, could turn out to be enriching, even

---

violence and religion. This dissertation, however, is written for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

furthering specific aspects of religious thought on its own premises. Also, the basic understanding of mimetic desire, originally taken from literature, and then transferred to religious motifs, could invigorate the study of religion. This last point I would see as potentially daring (and also necessary) in order to make the study of religion less static, more generative in understanding the dialectical and interchangeable relationship between art and religion as well as between religion and secular culture.

My overall view is that mimetic desire, if it were to become a fundamental part of a generally accepted anthropology, could make religious phenomena more relevant. The tendency to establish different compartments for the sacred and the profane has undoubtedly been beneficial as to systematizing different religious phenomena, but it seems to have been a disaster as to understanding the 'dynamics of faith' in relation to society.

Part 4

Girard's Christology

Who Jesus Christ is
becomes known in his saving action
Melanchton

We cannot think about the ideal of a humanity that is pleasing to God
other than by the idea of a man who would be willing not only to perform
all human duty himself and at the same time spread good as widely as possible
through teaching and example, but also, though tempted by the greatest enticements,
to assume all suffering, even to the point of the most ignominious death, for the sake of the best in the world
and even for his enemies.
Kant

Chapter 14. Girard's Christology

14.1 Christology as a Way to Understand Violence

The main problem among humans is violence. If people could solve the problem of violence, most other problems would also be solved. Mimetic theory localizes the problem in rivalistic desires. Every time imitation turns into severe rivalry between human beings, violence, either physical or psychological seems to get the upper hand. Before long the rivals will have forgotten what they were rivalling about. They have become doubles, preoccupied mostly with subverting the other. This is the human dilemma which seems absolutely insoluble - despite an ever increasing focus on the devastating effects of violence.

In mimetic theory, Christ is seen as the remedy for the problem of violence. To imitate through Christ, means imitating a loving and non-rivalistic model. Christ, according to mimetic theory, has played a decisive role in changing human behaviour; both by revealing the *innocence* of the victim[640] and by attempting to save humanity from an immeasurably violent existence. The Passion, according to mimetic theory, was born out of love for the other. According to James Alison, the imitation of Christ can liberate men from desiring each other in a rivalistic manner, and create a new I, which, through the act of exchanging models,

[640] On the victim's innocence, see Girard. *The Scapegoat*, *Job. The Victim of His People*, See especially chapter 21 (The God of Victims), *Things Hidden*, 141-280, and *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (see especially Introduction).

will help us give up the encompassing desire for reputation and make us capable of participating with people of poor repute.[641]

14.2 Christology Starts by Interpreting the Victim's Role in the Old Testament

In order to understand mimetic theory, one first of all has to understand the role Christ is given in relation to imitation, desire and violence. Thus, christology is fundamentally a hermeneutical task. It attempts to mediate the Jesus of the past with a present-day belief in Christ. The task of christology, according to Wolfhart Pannenberg, is to establish the true understanding of Jesus from his history.[642] Thus christology means going behind the New Testament to the historical Jesus.[643] It also tries to combine scientific knowledge with belief.[644] If the breach between science and faith becomes too evident, theology and, in this context, christology, has a problem of legitimation.

Christology usually begins with the historical Jesus. According to Moltmann, 'a universally relevant christological conception of the incarnate Son of God, of the redeemer or of the exemplary human being cannot be Christian, without an indispensable reference to his unique person and history.'[645] With an understanding of christology such as this, mimetic theory runs into a number of formal problems. Firstly, mimetic theory does not start with the historical Jesus (Jesus' life) but *with the effects of it*. It does not, however, disregard the findings concerning the historical Jesus. On the other hand, mimetic theology is seldom regulated by such findings. Hamerton-Kelly, when giving a Girardian interpretation of the Gospel of Mark, claims that 'the text has been structured by the impact of Jesus on the deep structure of human existence, and this can be discerned without certifying any simple event or saying as coming from the historical Jesus himself.'[646] This is a very optimistic view, indeed. Hamerton-Kelly seems to suggest that through the use of mimetic theory, one can decipher the core of Christianity and, at the same time, discard both general historical knowledge and the *Sitz im Leben* approach.

---

[641] James Alison. *Living in the End Times* (London, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 180-189.
[642] Pannenberg. *Jesus - God and Man* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 12.
[643] Ibid., 11.
[644] Pannenberg's christological position can be seen to be a critique of Bultmann who lets existence determine the content of christological thinking. (See Svein Rise. *The christology of Wolfhart Pannenberg. Identity and Relevance* (Lewiston Qeenston Lampet: Mellen U.P., 1997), 14-15.
[645] Jürgen Moltmann. *The Crucified God* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 103.

Christ's role in mimetic theory is primarily interpreted by means of the anthropological structures derived from the Gospels. And christology in this theory is a christology from below,[647] emphasizing a human christology.[648] The context, however, from where Girard interprets the roots of Christ's historical role, is located in different texts from the *Old Testament*.[649] Girard clearly cottons on to the christological trend of the day, emphasizing Jesus' Jewishness. In this respect Girard is in accordance with what Theissen calls the *third quest for the historical Jesus.*[650] However, the christology which can be derived from Girard's work does not, as in most exegetes of the day, emphasize the non-eschatological, cynical Jesus based on the *Gospel of Thomas* and other non-canonical literature.[651]

Christ as the key to revealing violent humanity clearly has, in mimetic theory, a regressive hermeneutical function. His words and actions illuminate the violent past of human beings. Christ sets the victim in its midst. Thus the role of the victim was already an essential part of the Jewish religion many hundreds of years before Jesus was born. Sacrifice in the *Old Testament* is at times revealed as a bloody and violent business in opposition to God's will. However, the victimage mechanism was only partly revealed. The pattern in the *Old Testament* (when we consider violence) is the same as in any story of cultural foundation. Cain kills Abel and a new culture is founded. But there is a fundamental difference in this story (compared to many other foundation myths).[652] The text *does not legitimate the murder*. Unlike the story, for example, of Romulus and Remus, Cain's violent action is not endowed with any rationale or legitimation. The killing is seen as murder and sin.[653] The murder of Remus, on the other hand, is given a rationale as he does not respect the borders marking the inside and outside of the city.

---

[646] Hamerton-Kelly. *The Gospel & the Sacred*, 14.
[647] According to Moltmann, a christology from above begins with the doctrine of God, and then develops a christology about the Son of God who has become a human being. A christology from below starts with the human Jesus of Nazareth, and from that develops a theology. The christology from above, according to Moltmann, has a general metaphysical theology as premise, while the christology from below has a general anthropology as premise. (See Moltmann. *The Way of Jesus Christ. Christology in Messianic Dimensions,* London: SCM Press, 1999, 68.
[648] Theissen/Merz. *The Historical Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1998), 560.
[649] This is, of course, nothing new. On the contrary, when considering the different christologies, derived from the New Testament or later, one must agree with Terence E. Fretheim, that, 'without the Old Testament, there would be no adequate christology'.Kenneth E. Fretheim. 'Christology and the Old Testament' in Powell/Bauer. *Who Do You Say that I am*? Essays on Christology (Loisville Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 201
[650] Theissen/Merz. *The Historical Jesus,* 11.
[651] Ibid., 10.
[652] *Things Hidden*. 144-149.

In *Ancient Judaism,* Max Weber claims that the biblical writers tended to take the side of the victim. Weber, however, does not regard this as a genuinely religious insight but sees it from the perspective of the Jews as a downtrodden people who had not been able to conquer and establish any great empire.[654] Thus resentment seems to be the reason for siding with the victim. From a mimetic point of view, concern for the victim and his/her innocence marks the most profound cultural change. It introduces a new mentality which gradually grows capable of turning a culture away from its violent foundation.

The *Old Testament* is, due to its moral concern for the victims, capable of demythologizing violence and scapegoating. At the same time there is a tendency, especially in the Prophetic literature, to subvert myth, sacrifice and prohibition. From a particular Judaeo-Christian perspective, concern for the victim paves the way for truth in a religious sense, although this truth, religious in content is worked out from a critique of religion. [655] Parts of the Prophetic literature in the *Old Testament* tend to reveal the truth underlying the scapegoat mechanism. The prophet's message, condemning violence against victims, leads to violence against those who reveal the violence. The prophet who brings the victimage mechanism to light, also tends to become the victim of the people.

The four Songs of the Servant are, in mimetic theory, seen as a revelation of the role of the scapegoat.[656] The servant's innocent suffering becomes a guideline for the people. The suffering servant reminds one of the Greek *pharmakos*, functioning both as a poison and a remedy against the poison. The difference, however, is that the servant is presented as innocent in his suffering.[657] Gans furthers this understanding by claiming that the suffering servant marks an eschatological morality by a submission of historical difference.[658] The Song of the Servant reveals its religious foundations by describing this violent expulsion from the victim's point of view. Taking the victim's point of view seems to mark a new mentality. However, according to Girard, the author resorts to mythology when describing Jahve's role as the will to bruise the servant (Isaiah 53.10).[659] In the *Old Testament* there is often ambivalence in its understanding of the victimage mechanism. The scapegoat's innocence and

---

[653] Ibid.
[654] Weber. *Ancient Judaism (*New York: The Free Press, 1952), XXIII-XXVI.
[655] For example the story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50) emphasizes the victim's innocence, and by doing so presents a story devoid of any demonic and divine acts. See *Things Hidden*, 150-152 and Girard.'The Bible is not a Myth.'
[656] *Things Hidden*, 155-158.
[657] Ibid., 155.
[658] Gans. *The End of Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 303.

God's non-sacrificial nature is, according to mimetic theory, not consistent and not taken far enough. All the same, certain fundamental traits of Christ is preconceived in the *Old Testament*: the revelation of communities built on violence, the expulsion of victims, the victim's innocence, a non-violent attitude and a suffering God, are all present. One can perhaps speak of a pre-christology in the *Old Testament*, not because of any future speculation inherent in the prophetic writings but in the way the central themes concerning the victim are presented (and later given a new meaning). The anthropological interpretation of the *Old Testament* inherent in mimetic theory actually reintroduces the disclaimed figural interpretation, not in any *a priori* way, but by presenting, in a somewhat evolutionary manner, different manifestations of the victim.

14.3 Non-Sacrificial Christology in the New Testament

In mimetic theory, the Gospels' revelation of violence is seen as reaching a more decisive stage. According to certain texts in the Gospels, the order of humanity is built on murder, and often new murders have been committed in order to conceal previous murders.[660] Jesus' fate is seen to be exactly the same as several of the prophets in the *Old Testament*. This means that the same mechanisms are at work. By killing Jesus, one is mimetically repeating the same violent past. The killing of Jesus repeates the previous cycle of innocent killings. Thus the murder of Abel, from the perspective of the *Old Testament*, goes back to the origins of humanity and the foundations of the first cultural order.[661] Christ reveals a violent foundation inherent in human culture, not only through his words, but through himself becoming a victim of violence by the act of revealing the murderous origins as something continuing in his own culture. Schwager interprets this as a universal revelation of mankind.[662] According to Schwager, the Gospels, as the only literature in the world (at that time) were able to reveal the hidden truth about the scapegoat. [663] If Christianity were merely one of many religions, the

---

[659] *Things Hidden*, 156-157.
[660] When confronting the Pharisees Christ uses them as an intermediary to expose the killing of victims down through history, from the first killing of Abel to the last killing named in the historical chronicle in the Second Book of Chronicles: *Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, that upon you will come all the blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all this will come upon this generation. (Matthew 23. 34-36)*
[661] *Things Hidden*, 159.
[662] Schwager. *Must there be Scapegoats*?, 153.
[663] Ibid., 136

fundamental mechanism would have to be hidden as it is in others[664] as this is, in essence, the foundation of religion. Thus, it is by the rejection of Christ that the scapegoat mechanism becomes visible. This means that it is a combination of rejection and non-violent reaction which provokes the revelation of the mechanism.

According to mimetic theory, the Passion highlights violent humanity. The act of victimizing and then deifying the victim is revealed as unjustified murder. As long as the victim comes across as innocent, the act of hiding the misdeed by deification does not succeed. Thus, sacrifice has, from a christological point of view, been reversed. Deification is seen as disguised murder. Thus, Christ sheds new light on the victimizing process by revealing it as murder. By using Christ as the key to an anthropological interpretation of religious scriptures, mimetic theory claims that humans' interpretation of violence and (violent) religious rites signify the opposite of what they think. Stubbornness and delusion are the determing factors according to New Testament hermeneutics, Schwager says.[665] The blindness with which humans interpret their acts reveals something terrible and sombre. In the act of killing, people think that they are acting upon the will of God. Both religiously and anthropologically, people's violent acts seem to be enacted in a state of blindness.

The whole sacrificial system begins to crumble when the victim is seen as innocent. Christ brings down the sacrificial system by himself becoming an unsuccessful victim, unsuccessful in the sense that there was no unanimous consent to the killing of Christ. On the other hand, the victim brings reconciliation and safety, restoring life to the community.[666] From this point of view, the hermeneutics in mimetic theory may seem slightly dubious. Sacrifice has served its purpose by holding a society together. The cost, however, has been murder and religious delusion. Mimetic theory seems to indicate that without a christological approach, scapegoating would probably have been seen as something good, keeping a society together by offering one victim in exchange for the benefit to the whole community. This leads us to consider the interpretation of the sacrifice of Christ in mimetic theory.

[664] Girard.'Das Evangelium legt die Gewalt bloss,' Orientierung 38 (1974): 53.
[665] Schwager. *Must there be Scapegoats*?, 138.
[666] *Things Hidden*, 143.

14.3.1 A Non-Sacrificial Christology in Things Hidden

In *Things Hidden* Girard claims that Christ's passion is not a sacrifice in any of the accepted meanings.[667] What he means by this is that Christ's sacrifice functioned neither as a regulating mechanism, nor by convincing people that it was willed by God. But sacrifice in its traditional interpretation does contain the belief that life stems from death (that is murder of the victim). Thus sacrifice is built on the belief that violence is sacred. In the Gospels the sacrifice of Jesus is presented as murder and not as a life-giving ritual. Girard does not claim that the killing of Jesus was not sacrificial. Rather, he claims that it is the meaning or understanding of Jesus' death that the Gospels present in a non-sacrificial way. Christ may be presented as the underlying principle of both mimesis and sacrifice in that he reverses both. From a theological point of view Girard concludes that the death of Jesus was *not* God-willed. This point is extremely central as it marks an attempt to deconstruct a violent and sacrificial theology which, from a historical point of view, has dominated Christendom. Sacrificial systems represent the opposite of the Kingdom of God. The Passion does not mean that God sacrificed his son for the sake of humanity. Jesus was sacrificed because his attempt to represent the Kingdom of God meant revealing violent sacrifical systems. The Kingdom of God meant a replacement of sacrifice and prohibitions by love.[668] These sacrificial systems can be located as the sacred foundation of culture. By attempting to replace a sacrificial system with non-violence and undifferentiated love, Christ became a danger to the upholding of Jewish society. But considering that the Jewish religion, more than most other religious societies, through the aid of their prophets, had begun to question a sacrificial theology, this would probably mean that wherever Jesus would have proclaimed the Gospel, he would have been eliminated.

Christ's message, in a mimetic reading of the Gospels, is twofold: firstly, it reveals the foundations of human violent origin. Secondly, Christ attempts to replace a sacrificial society with The Kingdom of God, renouncing violence and replacing it with undifferentiated love for one's neighbour. Putting an end to the mimetic crisis would mean deconstructing sacrificial violence. As the powers of the world are violent, Christ's mission is to deconstruct them, Girard says.[669] This deconstruction can only be done by someone who represents a non-

[667] Ibid., 180-185,205-215.
[668] Ibid., 196.
[669] Ibid., 191.

violent God. Christ is therefore, according to mimetic theory, divine in that he represents the non-violent and loving nature of God.[670] The mimesis of Christ becomes essential in this respect. If there were no emphasis on imitating Christ, Girard's christology would, as Milbank claims, consist only of revealing man's destructive side without any attempt to work out a mimetic understanding of the Kingdom of God.[671] Imitating Christ means becoming a part of the same loving and non-sacrificial nature of God. Violence, on the other hand, gives humans a falsified image of existence.[672] This does not mean, however, that in the realm of a false existence one cannot believe in God. On the contrary, it is *especially from a standpoint of violence that most beliefs are founded*. But these faiths refer to a sacrificial god, a god of violence. Thus Christ becomes a mediation, from a violent imitation between humans, towards an imitation of a non-violent God. In this respect Christ represents God; he gives people the possibility of peering into a realm of non-violent and life-giving existence and, finally, a way to build a human culture where violence is not the dominating force.

14.4 Revealing Sacrificial Violence

By postulating a non-sacrificial christology as a *starting point* and also as a *hermeneutical tool* in mimetic theory, it seems essential to consider the cultural climate stemming from a non-sacrificial mentality. The non-sacrificial mentality represents a secular, individualistic, differentiated and liberal society. This society, however, is vulnerable as it is not endowed with the sacrificial protections of traditional societies. Christ decodes the sacrificial system first by unmasking its violence and then making it impotent by reversing its use. It is not the victim who is guilty, but the perpetrators. By turning the sacrificial system upside down, sacrifice loses its force for the people who are capable of seeing its illusory foundation. But this was initially, from a historical point of view, a very marginal revelation which began only slowly to be integrated into the Roman world by gradually changing its violent mentality. The paradox, however, is that within a non-sacrificial society violence risks becoming worse than ever before. Without the sacrificial protections of a traditional society, violence threatens to become apocalyptic. This apocalyptic possibility is a consequence of a Christian society where sacrificial protection has, by and large, vanished. According to Girard, this difference

[670] Ibid., 218-223.
[671] John Milbank. *Theology and Social Theory. Beyond Secular Reason* (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1991), 395.
[672] *Things Hidden*, 197.

in the interpretation of sacrifice has run through the whole of Western thought. [673] The consequence has, according to mimetic theory, a terrifying prospect. Alongside the expulsion, the crumbling of sacrificial systems and violent hierarchies, one is finally faced with the apocalyptic threat of total extinction. The Christian Logos, however, by dismissing violence to the extent that it became a victim of violence, has shown its rationale in the way that culture has been changed and reinvigorated by its concern for victims. This, however, does not mean seeing Christ's role as one that unites people. Nor does Christ's role consist in forging unity by rites and prohibitions. Christ's primary function, in mimetic theory, is revelation and encouraging a violent human race, which initially stands in opposition to the Kingdom of God, to give up its violent deeds and imitate Christ's love for one's neighbour.[674] In this respect one can see the Church as something secondary, growing out of the attempt to imitate the love of Christ.

14.5 Christology is the Basis for Mimetic Theology

Girard's christology is the main presupposition for understanding mimetic desire. The whole concept of religion in mimetic theory consists in seeing violent mimesis as leading to scapegoating and, afterwards, to deification. The mimesis of Christ, however, hinders scapegoating. Christ, in both his words and deeds, can be seen to be a basic hermeneutical

---

[673] According to Girard, the pre-Socratic understanding of Logos is fundamentally violent while the Johannine understanding emphasizes the expulsion of Logos, the violent manner in which it was received. The Johannine understanding of Christ as the *Logos* is, despite borrowing the concept from Greek philosophy, in breach with the Greek meaning of Logos. (See *Things Hidden*, 263-280.) Heidegger for example, inspired by Nietzsche and Hegel, saw both the Greek and the Christian Logos as violent. (See *Things Hidden*, 265-266.) The difference, according to Heidegger, therefore, is not manifested as a totally different approach to violence. Heidegger differentiates the Greek and Johannine Logos in a slave-master context where the Greek Logos is conceived by free men and the Johannine Logos is violence visited upon slaves. (*Things Hidden*, 266.) Girard's attempt to differentiate the two concepts of Logos is partly an attempt to reveal the difference between a sacrificial and a non-sacrificial worldview. (*Things Hidden*, 263-280.) With hindsight, one might call this fundamental difference a mimetic fight between the Greek and Christian worldview. The Christian Logos is, as the Gospel of John describes it, perceived through expulsion. The divine Logos was not received by his own. ('He came to his own and his own people received him not' John 1.10-11.) The Greek Logos initiates expulsion by its violence. Different approaches to the Logos will necessarily, according to James Williams, bring about a very different attitude when dealing with victims. (See James Williams foreword in Girard's book. *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, XXII.) Clearly, Girard sees the life of Jesus and the Johannine Logos as one and the same. (*Things Hidden*, 270-276.) Both were expelled, both represented God and incarnated love. There does not seem, however, to be a direct transference from christology to ecclesiology. Girard's christology seems, initially, distanced from the role of church building. On the discussion of Christ's role, Jean-Michel Oughourlian, one of the two co-discussion partners in *Things Hidden*, gives a greater emphasis to how Christ's message, through the ages, has been changed into a sacrificial message. Thus Oughourlian cannot see that Girard's christology can correspond to the shape Christianity developed into in its historical manifestations. (*Things Hidden*, 209-210) It can seem that Girard, since the writing of *Things Hidden*, has developed his theory more in accordance to a traditional understanding of Christ as the body of the historical church.

[674] *Things Hidden*, 204.

principle in mimetic theory. Mimetic theory is born out of reflections on Christ: central motifs such as mimesis, scapegoating, violence and love seem to arise from reflecting on the effects of Christ's life. Girard's christological reflections have coloured all these motifs and they cannot be seen as isolated from a general anthropology. Thus christology may be seen as the hermeneutical principle or even the main tool for understanding mimetic theory as a religious theory. While Modernist and post-Modernist thinkers claim that their deconstruction of sacrificial and anti-humanistic thought also means a deconstruction of Christianity, mimetic theory seems to point to Christianity as the ideology which has made it possible for those thinkers to deconstruct.[675] In other words, they are unconsciously part of the Gospel revelation. *Thus it seems reasonable to interpret mimetic theory from the same perspective, namely from the ideal of imitating Christ.*

14.6 The Imitation of Christ

Imitating Christ, meaning mimesis based on Christ, is mostly discussed in the context of Christian norms. In the case of Thomas a Kempis, imitating Christ would mean transforming one's personlity into the likeness of Christ. From the point of view of mimetic theory, however, it could also mean realizing pacifist norms and ideals. The imitation of Christ, from a mimetic point of view, appears relevant anywhere where violence is in the process of being moderated. Over the last 2000 years there has been much emphasis, within Western culture, on the ideal of imitating Christ (outwardly at least), however violent and sacrificial a form a society has taken. And despite the fact that some of the most abominable sacrifices have become part of Christian culture, sometimes even enacted because of what was considered to be imitating Christ, the norm of being Christ-like remains present. Christian ideals, even in the most violent periods of Western history, were common and loudly preached, even if the pacifist and non-sacrificial ideals seem to have been crucial only of late and only enacted upon by the few. The *imitatio Christi* motif seems to have survived in some kind of overreaching fashion, throughout the ages of Christian culture, despite, at times, being understood in an idealistic and otherworldly manner.

The *imitatio Christi* motif was and is one of the most central religious motifs in Christendom, despite the fact that there has been very little pronounced knowledge of the imitative nature of

[675] Ibid., 191.

human beings. One might say, in a somewhat heterodox Freudian manner, that one of the most basic drives in European civilization has been the desire to be like Jesus, either consciously or unconsciously. One only has to think back to one's own norms at school, where practically every song and every ethical ideal had some affinity with the ideal of Christ. And for every generation, if one goes back in history, Christian ethics were presented, forcefully and authoritatively, as the ultimate true worldview.

14.6.1 Jesus' Imitation

In mimetic theory mimesis is based not only on the understanding that every human is imitative and that we imitate each other. Nor is religious mimesis restricted to humans imitating God or Christ. Mimetic theory also emphasizes, from a theological point of view, Christ's imitation of his Father. Jesus' imitation of God is basically seen as an imitation in love. There is no rivalry and no acquisition involved in the way the Son imitates the Father. Hence Christ's imitation is radically different from the imitation among men, which tends to be rivalistic and easily ends in violence. Girard emphasizes in *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* that Christ also imitates. He is not putting a stop to imitation by directing it towards himself; he invites humans to imitate his own imitation.[676] Jesus, according to Girard, does not claim to desire from himself.[677] He does not obey his own desire. His goal is to become the perfect image of God.[678] Jesus advocates mimetic desire (imitate me, imitate my Father).[679] In this respect Christ is the mediator towards God. And because of this imitation, Christ inherits the same loving and non-violent nature as God. Thus Christ is seen to be God. Theologically, the Trinity can be interpreted as a relationship based on total interdependence devoid of rivalry and acquisition. The openness between the hypostases' that make up the Godhead and the non-rivalistic manner in which the Trinity is seen to function, stand in marked contrast to the hidden and rivalistic manner in which people imitate each other. Because imitation among humans traps people into different forms of rivalry,[680] Girard focuses emphatically on the imitation of Christ. And Girard's version of the imitation of Christ may be labelled what Kwon calls a *relational interpretation*.[681]

---

[676] *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 13.
[677] Ibid.
[678] Ibid.
[679] *The Girard Reader*, 63. (An interview with Girard.)
[680] *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 14.
[681] See Soon-Gu Kwon. *Christ as Example. The Imitatio Christi Motive in Biblical and Christian Ethics*,

14.6.2 Girard's Version of Imitatio Christi

One's way of interpreting the imitation of Christ will vary according to how one understands the life of Jesus. Therefore, the importance of the imitatio motif depends on what one considers to be the main themes in Christianity. Paul's emphasis on the justification of the ungodly through faith, for example, is decisive for his image of Christ as the saviour of all mankind. Imitation of Christ is therefore the Christian's *continuation* of salvation. The central theme in the New Testament, according to mimetic theory, is Jesus' revelation of violence through his dissolving the scapegoat mechanism. This theme is therefore decisive for the *imitatio Christi* motif. From *Deceit, Desire & the Novel* onwards, there has been a certain emphasis, in Girard's work, on the *imitatio Christi* motif. One could even say that Girard's religious thinking starts with the *imitatio Christi* motif and is later developed into a non-sacrificial theology. In mimetic theory, the imitation of Christ is a direct consequence of christology as it combines a general anthropological drive with religious imitation.

This notion of a divine model devoid of violent desires was, as mentioned above, already established in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel.* In this work the road to freedom from metaphysical desire lay in choosing the divine model.[682] Girard claims that there is a qualitative difference between the human and the divine model. *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* can actually be read as a conversion story where the pains of metaphysical desire force a change in imitative models. However, the focus is much greater on the laws and structures of desire than on the liberation from these same desires. Despite this, Girard seems to advocate a conversion which entails imitating Christ, but the work does not discuss the content of such an imitation at any great length. In *Things Hidden* there is, considering the scope and emphasis on Christ in this work, little direct emphasis on the imitation of Christ. It is basically in the last two pages that Girard introduces directly the theme of imitating Christ. Girard's christological reflections have so far dealt mostly with interpreting the Gospels in a non-sacrificial manner. However, the whole discussion leads to the conclusion that imitating Christ is the only way out of a violent existence. In the section called *'The Divinity of Christ*', Girard claims that Christ is the only agent capable of helping us escape from the violent

---

(Dissertation) Uppsala: Uppsala Studies in Social Etichs 21 (1998): Chapter 9, 194-210.
[682] *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 58.

structures and freeing us from their dominion.[683] Girard connects here the themes of *non-violence* and *non-sacrifice* with the imitation of Christ.[684] Non-violence can be seen as the consequence of turning away from mimetic desire.[685] Thus imitation of Christ means mimesis without obstacles and violent opposition between doubles.[686]

Through the imitation of Christ humans can possibly avoid the danger of turning the model into a fascinating rival. Christ does not possess any form of acquisitive desire, rivalry or mimetic interference.[687] Thus, imitating Jesus is seen as a natural consequence of conversion. Neither in the Gospels nor in the other texts of the New Testament is there any professed prohibition against imitation. They recommend, Girard writes, the imitation of Christ.

> *The Gospels and the New Testament (...) do not claim that humans must get rid of imitation; they recommend imitating the sole model who never runs the danger – if we really imitate the way children imitate – of being transformed into a fascinating rival. (Things Hidden, 430.)*

However, in *Things Hidden,* there seems to be a certain reluctance towards accepting the effects of mimetic phenomena as such, a reluctance which, as a whole, is not present in his later works.[688] Part of the lack of clarity concerning mimetic desire consists in Girard's different uses of the same concepts. One passage in *Things Hidden* especially seems to blur his main view on mimesis. After recommending the imitation of Christ, Girard says that '*following Christ means giving up mimetic desire*'.[689] If following Christ means giving up mimesis or imitation, Girard is contradicting the mimetic theory that implies that the most basic aspects of human beings is imitation. The theme here, however, seems confined to giving up rivalistic imitation, the kind of imitation that is acquisitive and governed by desire. However, there are sections in *Things Hidden* which contradicts again this view of renouncing mimesis.

---

[683] *Things Hidden*, 219.
[684] Ibid., 400, 427.
[685] Ibid., 400, 431.
[686] Ibid., 430.
[687] Ibid.
[688] The problem, in relation to imitation, is that Girard in *Things Hidden*, professes, at times, a rather negative attitude towards mimetic desire. He mostly operates within a dualistic understanding of mimesis, where imitating Christ is good while all other kinds of imitation is seen as destructive. There is in this decisive work an element of renouncing the whole business of mundane imitation. However, after writing *Things Hidden,* Girard has come to take a much more positive approach to imitation as a whole. This dualism between the imitation of Christ and mimetic desire in general was later criticized by Girard because it contained too negative an approach to mimesis. (See An interview with Girard in *The Girard Reader*, 63.)
[689] *Things Hidden*, 431.

14.6.3 Imitating Christ's Role as a Scapegoat

The image of Jesus as scapegoat could be seen to be the consequence of his imitation of God. The scapegoat, however, is not something necessarily imitable. The imitable would be the attitude of non-retribution and forgiveness when one becomes a scapegoat. In this sense one has to distinguish between violent forms of imitation, which lead to scapegoating, and the non-violent imitation of Christ. Christ represents a new model, a new Adam who has deconstructed violence by an act of love. Christ is, according to mimetic theory, a mimetic model devoid of violence and therefore capable of mediating God's love. Christ is therefore the main model for good mimesis. Christ's imitation of his Father reflects a new and radical kind of love. This imitation is conceptualized in the ideal of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is an attitude where the values and distinctions of the ordinary world are overturned. [690] The mimetic rivalries concerning power, prestige and possessions are contrasted to God's values. This means that the Kingdom of God, which is not a location or place, [691] is marked by inclusion. Criteria such as clan, family, economy, gender and age are dissolved as being in any way decisive.[692]

14.6.3.1 Passion and Scapegoating

Girard's introduction of the Judaeo-Christian scriptures in *Things Hidden* seems, in relation to victimizing, to be motivated nevertheless by a more general starting point. The Passion drama becomes more than a general scapegoating scene because it changes humanity's approach towards the victim. Although Girard's introduction of the Passion may seem motivated by the more general theme of scapegoating, my investigation has led me to conclude that Girard's work is based on an *a priori* or indicated christology. I suspect that Girard's work, viewed *in toto,* corresponds to Dieter Henrich's thesis that no way leads to God which does not begin with God himself.[693] This actually makes mimetic theory look like a theology, and it is from such a theological point of view, that it seems most relevant to consider the role of Jesus.

---

[690] *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, XX.
[691] Jacob Jervell. *Historiens Jesus* (Oslo: Land og Kirke/Gyldendal, 1978). See especially footnote number 22 & 132.
[692] The people excluded in Jesus' attempt to realize the Kingdom of God, were those who found themselves too superior or too orthodox to be a part of such a group. Thus the exclusion consists in self-exclusion.
[693] Dieter Henrich. *Der ontologische Gottesbeweis. Sein Problem und seine Geschichte in der Neuzeit*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1967.

14.6.3.2 Moltmann's Christology of the Cross

In relation to the symbiotic themes of imitation and scapegoating, I wish to introduce the thought of Jürgen Moltmann. Moltmann's work on the suffering Christ clearly corresponds to Girard's scapegoat theory, although it does differ, as we shall briefly see, in its more political emphasis on the social dimension of Christ. Moltmann's focus lies on a christology from below with an emphasis on the rejected and suffering Christ. *Theologia crucis* is, according to Moltmann, not a single chapter in theology, but the point from which all theological statements are viewed.[694] In Moltmann's work, *rejection* is seen as part of following Christ and corresponds somewhat to Girard's understanding of victimizing.[695] One could say that Moltmann begins with the cross, Girard with the scapegoat. And, it must be said, finding God in the crucified does not differ much in content from finding God in the victim. According to Moltmann, the Christian outlook on the world should be that seen through the eyes of its victims.[696] Moltmann, however, clearly lays more emphasis both on Christ's suffering and on the Church's suffering. This is especially evident in *The Crucified God,* where Moltmann claims that suffering is only overcome through suffering.[697] Despite his emphasizing suffering, there is a clear non-sacrificial tone in the way suffering is understood.[698] His non-sacrificial attitude to the sacrifice of Christ becomes quite obvious when he claims that Christ's sacrifice cannot be seen in the light of the eternal return (Eliade), as it breaks out of the compulsive repetition of the cult.[699] The crucifixion abolishes the division between the sacred and the profane, he adds.[700] In a sense, Moltmann introduces a christology which is a profanation of religion by religion.

In his christology Moltmann clearly emphasizes the social dimension inherent in Christianity. Christianity is, he says, alien to the world, including the syncretistic world of present-day bourgeois Christianity.[701] He makes this claim quite concrete when he says that the idea of following Christ has been neglected by bourgeois Protestantism, because it no longer

---

[694] Jürgen Moltmann. *The Crucified God* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 72.
[695] Ibid., 55.
[696] Moltmann. *The Way of Jesus Christ. Christology in Messianic Dimensions* (London: SCM Press, 1999), 65.
[697] Moltmann. *The Crucified God*, 55.
[698] Neither in Girard nor in Moltmann does one find the image of suffering *for* Christ, suffering means rather suffering *with* Christ.
[699] Moltmann. *The Crucified God*, 43-44.
[700] Ibid., 44.
[701] Ibid., 36-37.

recognized or wished to recognize the suffering Church.[702] Moltmann's social profile actually indicates that any orthodox christology would mean identifying both Christ and his message with the poor and oppressed. Christ's suffering is not only part of this identification; it is also the result of this identification.[703]

Although Moltmann, like most theologians of today, claim that following Christ does not mean imitating him (as that could mean trying to become a Jesus oneself),[704] the *imitatio* aspect in Moltmann's theology appears to have its relevance in imitating Christ's concern for the rejected and despised. Although there is no direct imitative theology in Moltmann's work, the mimetic nature of Christ is hinted at when he claims that Jesus' centre is outside of himself.[705] This outside of oneself means in Moltmann's work more a focus on other people than on becoming, as Girard proposes, an image of God.[706] Thus, Moltmann's focus on the social role of Jesus clearly indicates a political stance[707] which is very difficult to find in Girard's work. Despite Girard's focus on victims, he never tries to give his theory any political direction. (Nor is there any critique of contemporary bourgeois Christianity.) Girard's christological reflections thus give no hint of any politicized version of Christ.

14.6.4 Following Jesus

In the wake of Girard's christology, there have been attempts to formulate a clearer understanding of what imitating and following Jesus could mean. The Gospels themselves never use the word mimesis or imitation of Jesus. The Greek noun *mimesis* and verb *mimeomai* never occur in relation to Jesus or to how people should relate to him.[708] Instead the word *akoloutheo* (follow) is used numerous times as the right response to Jesus' teaching. According to Walter J. Ong, this fact actually supports Girardian theory because it exempts Jesus' role from mimetic desire. Jesus' death

[702] Ibid., 54.
[703] Ibid., 49.
[704] Ibid., 60.
[705] Ibid., 105-106.
[706] 'The invitation to imitate the desire of Jesus may seem paradoxical, for Jesus does not claim to possess a desire proper, a desire of his very own.Contrary to what we ourselves claim, he does not claim to "be himself"; he does not flatter himself that he obeys only his own desire. His goal is to become the perfect *image* of God. Therefore he commits all his powers to imitating his Father. In inviting us to imitate him, he invites us to imitate his own imitation.' (*I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 13.)
[707] Moltmann. *The Crucified God*, Chapter 8 (Towards a Political Liberation of Man.)
[708] Walter J. Ong, SJ. 'Mimesis and the Following of Christ,' in *Religion and Literature*.vol.26, 2. (Summer 1994): 74.

and passion, are, according to Ong, different from any other sacrifice.[709] To follow Jesus means to opt out of mimetic desire. Following means a freer, more human and less mechanically copying way of practicing the calling of Jesus, Ong claims.[710] Ong's view is supported by Schwager who claims that modern theology makes a clear distinction between imitating and following Christ.[711] According to Schwager, imitation of Christ would lead to deadly moralism and immersion into an alien world.[712] Such an imitation could easily lead to violence instead of love, he claims.[713] Schwager sees imitation as something superficial, like copying Jesus in an external way.[714] But imitation or mimesis does not only imply a conscious copying. It describes the whole process of opening oneself up towards the other.

Ong claims that the word *follow* gives a more varied and venturesome meaning to the relationship with Jesus. Also, according to Soon-Gu Kwon, following is more spatial and physical.[715] Edvin Larsson, on the other hand, explains *imitation* (in relation to imitation of Christ) as intentional, willing and active.[716] Following and imitating do both indicate, however, motivation. And imitate does mean, from the context of imitative desire, that the relationship with Jesus responds to a basic desire: the desire according to the other which, in the imitation-context, is Christ.

The claim that the words mimesis and imitation are never used in the Gospels, does *not*, in my view, strengthen what Girard says about imitating Christ. It would, however, strengthen the view that mimetic desire is wholly bad, and that the phrase *mimetic desire* should be exempt from religious practice. This would imply that *imitation of Christ* would mean desire, while *following Christ* would mean no desire. Thus one could, if trying to dismiss the concept of imitating Christ, discourage people from interpreting the imitation of Jesus as containing acquisitive and rivalistic desires. On the other hand, the Gospels' lack of words such as mimesis and imitation is probably due to the authors' ignorance of Platonic and Sophistic vocabulary. Paul, who was acquainted with this vocabulary, uses the word imitate in relation to Jesus several times: In 1 Corintians 11.1 Paul says 'imitate me as I imitate Christ (mimetai mou ginesthe, kathos kago Christou), thus

[709] Ibid., 76.
[710] Ibid., 74-75.
[711] Schwager. *Must there be Scapegoats*?, 176.
[712] Ibid.
[713] Ibid., 176.
[714] It is somewhat strange that Schwager, who elsewhere puts such emphasis on the imitative nature of human beings, should interpret the imitation of Christ as superficial copying.
[715] Kwon. *Christ as Example. The Imitatio Christi Motive in Biblical and Christian Ethics*, 60-61.
[716] Edvin Larsson. *Christus als Vorbild: Eine Untersuchung zu den paulinishen Tauf- und Eikont*exten (Uppsala: Almquist & Wiksell, 1962), 17.

legitimating both himself and Christ as mimetic models and, thereby, revealing the fluid structure of mimesis.[717] Paul, on the other hand, never uses the word 'follow', which could indicate, as Betz has shown, that Paul is an interpreter of an *image-theology* of Hellenistic theological origin.[718]

The weakness in Ong's argumentation is his Platonic view of mimesis: mimesis seems to be something less genuine and cheaper than the original.[719] He seems to forget that imitating is something closely connected to the model, and, therefore, expresses something essential in the relationship with Christ. The wish for oneness is salient in the phrase *imitation of Christ*. Imitation is a necessary supplement to the word follow. On the other hand, imitation and mimesis can bring associations to the act of copying, from which the word follow is more distant. But to try to copy Jesus, or behave like Jesus, is rather futile because neither the Gospels nor Paul give any proper descriptions of Jesus' personality; his tastes, temperament, looks etc. In this respect Jesus is not in the least original.[720] The act of imitating Christ is practically impossible in the way one can imitate pop-stars and movie stars – or neighbours, because imitating Christ does not attract nor evoke those kinds of desires. Imitation can also be interpreted as a more open and many-layered type of relationship with Christ. One should remember that following often also refers to the master-pupil relationship and is, therefore, limited to discipleship. Imitating Christ thus indicates a more common and everyday relationship.[721]

Girard could, as I have indicated, have used Ong's attempt to revise mimetic theory on the theme of imitating Christ, in order to avoid the word 'mimesis' to Christ. By doing this he would both avoid using the concept mimetic desire in a religious context and, at the same time, render Christ's sacrifice unique by making it something not contaminated by mimetic desire. In fact, Girard has gone the other way. Firstly, since the mid 1990s, he has interpreted Christ's Passion more according to traditional religious sacrifice, while secondly, in *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, he claims mimesis to be both the way one should relate to Jesus, and the way Jesus related to the Father.[722] From the Son's imitation of his Father, one sees that

---

[717] 'The Corinthians through the Imitatio Pauli join in the power of the cross of Christ' (…) Also in 1 Cor 1,10 -4,13 Paul concludes with the exhortation 'be imitators of me'. Thus Paul's '*parakalein*' appears to consist of concrete specifications of his general exhortation of 'be imitators of me'. His '*parakalein*' is God's '*parakalein'* and subsequently he serves only as God's mouth, the interpreter of divine salvation.' Soon-Gu Kwon. *Christ as Example. The Imitatio Christi Motive in Biblical and Christian Ethics,* 79-80.
[718] Dieter H. Betz. *Nachfolge und Nachahmung Jesu Christi im Neuen Testament* (Tubingen: JCB. Mohr, 1967).
[719] Ong. 'Mimesis and the Following of Christ,'74.
[720] As regards to teaching and interpersonal relationships, however, his originality is remarkable.
[721] Kwon. *Christ as Example. The Imitatio Christi Motive in Biblical and Christian Ethics*, 60.
[722] *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 13.

in Girard's world *to imitate is more fundamental and essential than to follow*. To follow does not indicate the sameness, the homogeneity implied by imitation. Neither does it imply the relational aspect in the same way as imitation does. Thus Girard's work can be seen as a kind of *restoration-work as regards the genuine prospects for imitation*.

14.6.5 Imitation and Non-Violence

If one were to take the concept of imitating Jesus further into a more ethical context, Girard, especially in *Things Hidden*, emphasizes non-violence as an effect of imitating Christ. Christ is a non-violent model; he is not only non-violent, but a person who reveals violence down through the ages.[723] Imitation of Christ means for Girard that violence is revealed as such, and is not given any legitimation. By imitating Christ human beings can see that violence is violence, and contains nothing divine or transcendental. Imitating Christ means giving up physical and psychological violence, not because one will be totally liberated from violence, but because the model is totally free of it. I do not, however, interpret Girard's ideal of imitating Christ as meaning total pacifism. This would mean that one had the luxury of behaving as if the world were no longer sacrificial.[724]

14.6.5.1 Violence and Doubles

Imitating Christ in mimetic theory is primarily an individual and psychological act of breaking away from the violence of doubles.[725] People tend to live under the illusion that they can become less violent by differing from others.[726] According to mimetic theory, doubles give rise to conflict, but the desire to be different is no solution to the problem. The solution is the harder one: the humility of admitting one's sameness, even towards the loathed double.

---

[723] *Things Hidden*, 158-161.

[724] In a lecture delivered at Oxford in November 1997 Girard claimed that he had great respect for pacifists, but went on to say that pacifism can prove to be too easy a way out of the problem, hinting at the problem with pacifism when a force like Hitler comes to power. (See 'René Girard Responds to Questions.' Double Tape, New Malden Surrey: W.Hewett/Inigo Enterprises, 1998.) In a conversation I had with Girard at a Colloquium at Stanford in October 2001 (some weeks after September 11), Girard said that sometimes turning the other cheek could actually provoke violence. These more personal remarks in conversations and lectures are clearly less pacifistic than what one receives from reading his work. On the other hand, Girard never recommends total pacifism in his work. Despite this lack of any politically motivated pacifism, Girard, as regards the Gospels, has to be one of the Christian thinkers, alongside Tolstoy, who emphasizes the dimension of non-violence most emphatically in relation to Christ's message. This pacifism, however, is not based on any idealistic view of humans as such. On the contrary, the mimetic principle, reveals human beings as rivalistic and, potentially, violent.

[725] *Things Hidden*, 400, 430.

[726] Ibid., 400

This self-understanding is the first step towards non-violence as admitting one's likeness helps not to provoke opposition towards the other.

To break the spiral of violence is to imitate Christ in the way advised in the 'Sermon on the Mount'. By giving the other what he demands, or even more than he demands, the spiral of violence can be broken.[727] This understanding seems, however, to be limited to individual ethics. The act of surrendering to the violator by an active love is not emphasized to the same degree when Girard comments upon international politics. Mimetic theory, however, does not interpret mass violence as something different from individual violence, requiring different methods, but mimetic theory has not been expanded, on the other hand, by the introduction of non-violent solutions to different political situations. Neither are there inherent in the theory recommendations for any pacifistic, peace-process ideals in relation to a given political situation, although, indirectly, mimetic theory could clearly be interpreted to indicating an extension of the individual process of imitating Christ to more collective areas of imitation.[728]

14.6.6 The Content of Imitating Jesus

When speaking of imitating Christ, Girard uses terms such as innocence, childlike, non-rivalistic and non-violent - often together.[729] All these terms are regarded as antithetic to conflictual desire. An innocent and childlike manner of imitation could mean that one is not trying to acquire anything other than what one is imitating. Innocence is the act of imitating without hidden motives, an imitation based on Christ's qualities, which again is based on Christ's imitation of God. The childlike imitation of Christ is, however, a somewhat problematic concept. What does it mean? Childlike imitation could mean imitating without understanding or foreseeing the consequences. Childlike also refers to innocence, which is clearly something recommendable. According to Girard, children are mimetically open, meaning that they can imitate whatever they like, without knowing if it is good or bad.[730] This can hardly be what Girard implies by the concept of childlike imitation of Christ. Nor can childlike, in Girard's thinking, mean imitation devoid of acquisition.

---

[727] Girard. *Quand ces choses commenceront...*, 1994, 76. See also Per Bjørnar Grande. 'Vold og konflikt – en løsning.' Kirke og Kultur 3, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget (2002).
[728] The more collective and political aspects of mimetic theory could present a new and important challenge for scholars working on mimetic theory.
[729] See *Things Hidden*, 427. See also 'Satan' 197 and 'The Question of Anti-Semitism in the Gospels', 215, both articles in *The Girard Reader*.
[730] See *Things Hidden*, 290.

The example he gives about the fight over toys contradicts such naïvity.[731] Childlike imitation of Christ is therefore problematic and unclear concept for describing the quality of imitating Christ. The most positive way in which I can conceive of childlike imitation (besides innocence) is the child's unquestionable trust towards the imitative model.

14.6.7 Mediating God

A number of theological implications arise from Girard's theory on divine imitation. One is the orthodox view of Christ as being divine from birth. If it is Christ's perfect imitation of God that makes him divine, can he then be considered divine from the beginning? Will the act of imitation turn him into both the mediator and the representation of God? A rather crucial question, from a theological perspective, is whether Girard interprets Christ as being the Son of God through imitation. If imitating God makes Christ divine, which is clearly a prospect in mimetic theory, Girard's christology, according to a three-stage christology (pre-existence, existence, post-existence),[732] focuses mostly on the existent and post-existent Christ, as imitation must be seen to be an effect of Christ's life. Another question is: if Christ imitates God, is he not considered to be something beneath God? If it is through imitation that Christ becomes God, there could be reasons for conceiving of him as a mediator, something between human and God. On the other hand, if Christ's imitation of God represents the same as God, he could be interpreted as God in the orthodox sense. In fact, it all depends on how one understands imitation. If imitation is not something lower than what one imitates, there is no reason to regard Christ's imitation of God as something lesser. If, on the other hand, one regards mimesis as Plato regarded mimesis, as something lesser and more false than the original, religious imitation would have to be dismissed as a falsified imitation.[733] However, the difference between Christ and humanity, from a mimetic perspective, must be seen as a difference in degree rather than in kind.[734]

14.6.8 Imitating Christ's Non-Sacrificial Attitude

---

[731] 'Place a certain number of identical toys in a room with the same number of children; there is every chance that the toys will not be distributed without quarrels.' *(Things Hidden*, 9.)

[732] Leander E. Keck. 'Christology of the New Testament: What, then, is New Testament Christology?' in Powell/Bauer. *Who Do You Say that I am*? Essays on Christology (Loisville Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 187.

[733] I do not aim to detect any Neo-Arian tendencies in mimetic theory, because all theories emphasizing anthropology will start with the human sides of Christ. Few theological reflections and systems that start from anthropological models are, as far as I can see, able to reveal the symmetry between God and Christ in such a rational manner as the mimetic theory, as well as show the qualitative difference between Christ and humans.

[734] See John Macquarrie. *Christology Revisited* (London: SCM Press, 1998), 59.

Christ can be seen from the perspective of violence in society, as an arbitrary victim. From the perspective of revealing the victim's innocence, however, he is the least arbitrary of all victims.[735] According to Cesáreo Bandera, Christ must, from a sacrificial point of view, be expelled, as he reveals the violent injustice inherent in the scapegoat mechanism.

> *All the other victims could have been spared. Each of them could have been replaced by something else, leaving the system intact and fully operational, that is, as incapable as ever of facing up to the unspeakable truth. The only victim the sacrificial system cannot spare without immediately running the risk of self-destruction, is the one who reveals, exposes, the truth.* (*Bandera. The Sacred Game, 25.)*

This passage marvellously illuminates the effects of Christ's death. Christ's revelation of human violence is a revelation of the sacrificial system. Although Christ, as presented in the Gospels, does not perpetually criticize sacrifice and violence, the Gospels' main theme can nonetheless be regarded as non-sacrificial in that Christ's death and non-violent response reveal a religion built on non-sacrifice. Scubla's claim that non-violence and non-sacrifice are seldom mentioned by Jesus,[736] is not unreasonable when considering Jesus' teaching (although his claim is modified by a number of examples where these themes are highly acute). Jesus' attitude of non-violence and non-sacrifice is, however, most apparent from the perspective of the Passion. Seeing Jesus essentially from the perspective of the Passion, from the victim's point of view, reveals an understanding of history as determined by victimizing.[737] In such a context the meaning of history cannot be understood solely as empiricism or crude facticity.[738] Thus victimizing becomes the hermeneutical basis in relation to which one can locate historical development and meaning. Non-sacrifice, however, is perpetuated by mimesis, by imitating the non-violent attitude of Christ. In this respect the Gospels' good news, the new religion, cannot be realized without the act of imitating Christ. Thus religion may be practised, either by imitating sacrifice or by imitating the one who ended sacrifice.

The stages of mimesis have the following chronology: mimetic desire – conflict – scapegoating – violence - peace. Mimesis is the centre, around which all the other concepts cluster. Desire and scapegoating are brought about by mimesis and end in violence. Violence

---

[735] According to Gebauer and Wulf, in principle each and every person could be chosen to be a scapegoat. But the selection of one person (or group of persons) is justified in retrospect by a multitude of factual, imaginary, or attributed particularities: the evil eye, physical deformities, peculiar habits, the status of an outsider (foreigner). (Gebauer & Wulf. *Mimesis*, 258.)

[736] Lucien Scubla. 'The Christianity of René Girard and the Nature of Religion' in Dumouchel (Ed.). *Violence and Truth* (London: The Athlone Press, 1988).

[737] See Tony Bartlett. 'The Work of James Williams' in COV&R Nr 21 (September 2002): 7.

[738] Bartlett. 'The Work of James Williams' 7.

is the product of conflictual mimesis, and most cultural prohibitions are established in order to control and reduce violence. This is, according to mimetic theory, the primary function of (primitive) religion, which may be defined as an attempt to regulate a society by means of the victimage mechanism. Religion, like all ancient cultural forms, uses violence, but in order to restore peace.[739] The violence in victimizing is a means of keeping a society together after an eruption of violence. And the surrogate victim is the key to this violent mimetic process.[740]

Thus the imitation of Christ is each individual's response to the process of dissolving violence and sacrifice. In this respect imitating Christ is the individual's continuation of Christ's work. While the Passion was clearly a sacrificial phenomenon, imitating Christ can be seen as the ethical implication of the Passion. This also means that imitating Christ is the practical step forward, derived from a reflection on Christ. In this sense imitation is a response to christology and, at the same time, ethically speaking, perhaps the most important part of christology.

[739] *Violence and The Sacred*, 132-34.
[740] *Things Hidden*, 63.

Bibliography

Ainley/Hunter (Ed.). *Making Sense of Modern Times,* London and New York: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1986.

Alison, James. *Living in the End Times*, London, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996.

_____. *The Joy of Being Wrong*, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998.

Andersen, Lars Erslev. *Allegori og mimesis*, Aarhus: MODTRYK amla, 1989.

Aristotle. *Magna Moralia. The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 1-2*, Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1984.

_____. *Nicomachean Ethics. The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 1-2*, Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1984.

_____. *Metaphysics. The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 1-2*, Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1984.

_____. *Poetics. The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 1-2*, Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1984.

_____. *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 1-2*, Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1984.

Asplund, Johan. *Rivaler och syndabockar*, Gøteborg: Kørpen, 1989.

Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature,* New Jersey: Princeton U.P., 1974.

Augustine. *City of God*, London: Penguin Books, 1984.

Bailie, Gil. *Violence Unveiled. Humanity at the Crossroads*, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Poblems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Manchester U.P., 1984.

Bandera, Cesareo. *The Sacred Game,* Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania U.P., 1994.

Barbosa da Silva, Antonio. *Can Religions be Compared?*, Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 1986.

Bartlett, Tony. 'The Work of James Williams' in *COV&R* Nr 21 (September 2002).

Berger, Peter. *The Sacred Canopy. Elements of a Social Theory of Religion*, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1969.

Betz, Dieter H. *Nachfolge und Nachahmung Jesu Christi im Neuen Testament*. Tubingen: JCB. Mohr, 1967.

Blackman/Hooke. *Myth and Ritual: essays on the myth and ritual of the Hebrews in relation*

to the culture pattern of the ancient East, London: Oxford U.P., 1933.

Burkert, Walter. *Homo Nekans*, Berkeley Los Angeles London: University of California Press, 1983.

Borch-Jacobsen, Mikkel. *The Freudian Subject*, Stanford: Stanford UP, 1988.

Boyd, J.D. *The Function of Mimesis and its Decline*, New York, Fordham U.P., 1980.

Bultmann, Rudolf. *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, Minneapolis: The Fortress Press, 1991.

_____.*Jesus*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1988.

_____.'Jesus Christ and Mythology,' in Rudolf Bultmann. *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, Minneapolis: The Fortress Press, 1991.

_____.'Liberal Theology and the Latest Theological Movement,' in *Interpreting Faith for the Modern* Era, Minneapolis: The Fortress Press, 1991.

_____. *Mytologi og bibelforståelse*, Oslo: Gyldendal, 1968.

_____. *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, London: SCM Press LTD, 1985.

_____.'The Relation between Theology and Proclamation' in *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era,* Minneapolis: The Fortress Press, 1991.

Caillois, Roger. *L'homme et le sacré*, Paris: Mythes et religions, 1939.

Cervantes, Miguel de. *Don Quijote*, London: Penguin Classics, 2003.

Champigny, Robert. 'Proust, Bergson and Other Philosophers' in *Proust. A collection of Critical Essays*, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962.

Cohen, Robert Greer. 'Desire: Direct and Imitative,' in *Philosophy Today*, Winter 1989.

Contagion,Volume 1, Spring 1994, Rocky Mountains NC: Walter Ross Printing Co.

Contagion,Volume 3, Spring 1996. Rocky Mountains NC: Walter Ross Printing Co.

Derrida. *Dissemination*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981.

_____. 'Economimesis,' in Derrida et al., *Mimesis des articulations*, Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1964.

_____. 'Platons mimesis,' *Agora* 2/3 (Oslo): 1989.

Derrida et al. *Mimèsis, des articulations*, Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1964.

Derrida/Caputo. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, USA: Fordham Press, 1997.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference & Repetition*, London: The Athlone Press, 1994.

_____. 'Platon og simulakret,' *Agora* 2/3 (Oslo): 1989.

Dhavamony, Mariasusai. *Phenomenology of Religion*, Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1973.

Domenach, J.-M. 'René Girard, Le Hegel du christianisme' in *Enquêe sur les idèes contemporaines*, Paris: Seuil, 1981.

Dostoevsky, F.M. *Crime and Punishment*, Oxford: Oxford Classics, 1998.

_____. *The Devils,* Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1999.

_____. The Eternal Husband: And Other Stories, Banthans Classics, 2000.

Dumouchel (Ed.). *Violence and Truth*, London: The Athlone Press, 1988.

Dupuy, Jean Pierre. 'Totalization and Misrecognition,' in *Violence and Truth*, London: The Athlone Press, 1988.

_____. *Mimesis et morphogenese*. Paris: Seuil, 1982.

_____. Dupuy/Varela (Eds). *Understanding Origins. Contemporary Views on Origin of Life, Mind and Society*, Amsterdam: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992.

Durkheim, Emile. *Suicide: A study in Sociology*, N.Y.: Free Press, 1997.

_____. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, N.Y.: The Free Press, 1995.

Egebak, Niels. *Anti-mimesis*, Viborg: Arena, 1970.

Eliade, Mircea. The Sacred & the Profane. The nature of Religion, Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich inc, 1987.

_____. *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996.

Else, Gerhard F. *Aristotles' Poetics: The Argument*, Leiden, 1957.

_____. *Imitation in the Fifth Century*, Classical Philology, vol. LIII, 2, 1958.

_____. *Plato and Aristotle on Poetry*, The University of North Carolina Press, 1986.

Enquête sur les idées contemporaines, Paris: Seuil, 1981.

Ernst, Werner W. 'Theory of Drives and Mimesis: Controversial Positions between Freud and Girard.'(theol.uibk.ac.at.cover/.)

Evans-Pritchard, E.E. *Theories of Primitive Religion*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.

Farace, John Dominic. *The sacred-profane dichotomy: a comparative analysis of its use in the work of Emil Durkheim and Mircea Eliade, as far published in English*, a thesis, Utrecht: De Rijksuniversitet, 1982.

Farber. *The Aims of Phenomenology: the Motives, Methods, and Impact of Husserl's thought,* N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1966.

Fauskevåg, Svein-Erik. 'René Girard om offer og ofring.' *Edda*, 1/1985 (Oslo): Universitetsforlaget.

Flaubert. *Madame Bovary*, London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1995.

Flood, Gavin. *Beyond Phenomenology. Rethinking the Study of Religion*, London and New York: Cassell, 1999.

Frandsen, Finn. 'Begæret, volden og offeret. Introduktion til René Girards teori om det religiøse,' *Religionsvidenskabeligt tidsskrift* 6 (Århus): 1985.

Fretheim, Kenneth E. 'Christology and the Old Testament' in Powell/Bauer. *Who Do You Say that I am*? Essays on Christology, Louisville Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999.

Freud, Sigmund. *Totem and Taboo*, New York: Vintage Books, 1946.

Gans, Eric. 'COV&R The Third Time.' *Antropoetics* No 263 (June 22-2002).

_____. 'Mimetic Paradox and the event of Human Origin', *Antropoetics* I, no 2 (December 1995).

_____. 'René Girard and the Overcoming of Metaphysics.' *Journal on Love and Resentment*, No 256 (February 9, 2002).

_____. *The End of Culture*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985.

_____. 'The Sacred and the Social: Defining Durkheim's Anthropological Legacy,' *Anthropoetics* 6, no.1 (Spring/Summer 2000).

_____. 'The Unique Source of Religion and Morality.' *Contagion*, vol.3 (Spring 1996).

Gebauer/Wulf. *Mimesis: culture-art-society,* California: University of California Press, 1995.

Gerhardsson, Birger. *En bok om Nya testamente*, Lund: LiberLäromedel Lund, 1973.

Gilhus/Mikaelsson. *Nytt blikk på religionsfaget*, Oslo: Pax, 2001.

Girard, René. An Interview with Girard in "*To Double Business Bound": Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology*, Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1988.

_____. *Celui par qui le scandale arrive*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001.

_____. 'Das Evangelium legt die Gewalt bloss,' *Orienterung* 38 (1974).

_____. *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1965.

_____. *Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde: Reserches avec Jean-Michel Oughourlian et Guy Lefort*, Paris: Grasset, 1978.

_____. 'From Ritual to Science,' in *Configurations*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U.P., 2000.

_____. Girard's Lecture at the Colloquium on Violence and Religion in Graz, June 1997 (On private video).

_____. 'Innovation and Repetition' in *Substance* 62/63, vol XIX, Number 2/3, Wisconsin University of Wisconsin Press (1990).

_____. *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001.

_____. *Job. The Victim of His People*, Stanford: Stanford UP, 1987.

_____. *La Violence et le sacré*, Paris: Grasset, 1972.

_____. *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*, Paris : Grasset, 1961.

_____. 'Mimesis and Violence. Perspectives in Cultural Criticism,' in *The Girard Reader*, Ed. James Williams). NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996.

_____. 'Origins. A View from Literature,' in Dupuy/Varela (Eds). *Understanding Origins. Contemporary Views on Origin of Life, Mind and Society*, Amsterdam: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992.

_____. 'Paradoksets Dekonstruktion: Interview med René Girard,' by Jørgen Jørgensen', Aarhus, Denmark: Paradoks 1 (1991).

_____. *Quand ces choses commenceront*…, Entretiens avec Michel Treguer, Paris: arlèa, 1994.

_____. *René Girard Responds to Questions*, (Double Tape), New Malden Surrey: W. Hewitt/Inigo Enterprises, 1998.

_____. *Resurrection from the Underground: Feodor Dostoevsky*, New York: Crossroad Publ., 1997.

_____. 'Saddam Hussein er både en forbryder – og en syndebuk' Interview with Girard in the Danish newspaper Information, March 15 (1988).

_____. 'Satan' in *The Girard Reader*. NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996.

_____. 'Strategies of Madness - Nietzsche, Wagner and Dostoevsky' in "*To double business bound:" Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology*, Baltimore, Maryland*: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1988*.

_____. 'The Bible is not a Myth', *Literature and Belief*, 4 (1984).

_____. *The Girard Reader* (Ed. James Williams). NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996.

_____. 'The Mimetic Desire of Paola and Francesca' in *"To double business bound": Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology,* Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1988.

_____. *The Scapegoat*, Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University U.P., 1986.

_____. *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, London: Athlone Press. 1987.

_____. *"*To Double Business Bound*": Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology*, Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1988.

_____. 'Vers une définition systématique du sacré,' *Liberté* (Montréal) vol. 15 nr 3-4 (1973).

_____. *Violence and the Sacred (5th Ed.)*, Maryland Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986.

Golsan, R.J. *René Girard and Myth. An Introduction*, New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1993.

Grande, Per Bjørnar. 'Destruksjon og demoni – en drøfting tysk og fransk metafysikkforståelse,' Din, 1+2, Oslo (2000).

_____. *Etterligningens dilemma.* Sogndal*:* HSF-rapport 7/95.

_____. 'Metafysisk begjær i Dostojevskijs roman, *De besatte*,' Master Degree, Institutt for kristendomskunnskap, Universitetet i Bergen (Fall 1988).

_____. 'Syndebukkmekanismer og mimetiske bindinger – en presentasjon av René Girards teori,' *Kirke og Kultur* 5, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget (1991).

_____. 'Vold og konflikt – en løsning.' Kirke og Kultur 3, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget (2002).

Haas, Eberhart Th.'Freud and/or Girard? Psychoanalysis and Christianity,' (www.theol.uibk.ac.at.cover/.)

Hamerton-Kelly, Robert G. 'A Tribute to René Girard on his 70th birthday,' *Contagion*, Volume 1, (Spring 1994).

_____. *Sacred Violence. Paul's Hermeneutic of the Cross,* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

_____. *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.

Hamsun, Knut. *Benoni.* Knut Hamsun. Samlede Verker, Bind 5, Oslo: Gyldendal, 1992.

Hegel. *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Heidegger. *Nietzsche,* Vol 1, Pfullingen: Neske, 1961.

Henrich, Dieter. *Der ontologische Gottesbeweis. Sein Problem und seine Geschichte in der Neuzeit*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1967.

Hopland, Karstein. 'Åpenbaring og historie,' Master Degree, University of Bergen (Spring 1972).

Hubert/Mauss. *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, London: Cohen & West, 1964.

Hultkrantz, Åge. 'The Phenomenology of Religion: Aims and Methods,' Studies in comparative religion, *Temenos* 6 (1970).

Idenopulos/Yonan (Ed). *Religion and Reductionism. Essays on Eliade, Segal and the Challenge of the Social Sciences for the Study of Religion*, *Studies in the History of Religion*, Volume 62, Leiden: Brill (1999).

Ingarden, Roman. *Innføring i Edmund Husserls fenomenologi*, Oslo: Tanum, 1970.

Jervell, Jacob. *Historiens Jesus*. Oslo: Land og Kirke/Gyldendal, 1978.

Johnson, Roger A. (Ed.) Foreword in Rudolf Bultmann. *Interpreting Faith for the Moderen*

Era, Minneapolis: The Fortress Press, 1991.

Jurgensmeyer (Ed). 'Is Symbolic Violence Related to Real Violence?' in *Violence and the Sacred in the Modern World*, London: Franc Cass, 1992.

Jørgensen, Jørgen. 'På sporet af den tabte oprindelse,' *Paradigma*, 4 (1990).

Kaptein, Roel. *On the Way of Freedom*, Dublin: The Colombia Press, 1993.

Keck, E. 'Christology of the New Testament: What, then, is New Testament Christology?' in King, Ursula (Ed). *Religion and Gender,* Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.

Kofman, Sarah. 'The Narcissistic Woman: Freud and Girard,' *Diacritics* 10:3, Fall 1980.

Kolnar, Knut. *Det ambisiøse selv,* Avhandling til dr.art.graden (Phd), Trondheim: Filosofisk institutt, NTNU (2003).

Koller, Herman. *Die Mimesis in der Antike. Nachahmung, Darstellung, Ausdruck*, Dissertationes Bernenses Ser.1, Fasc.5. Bern, 1954.

Kojéve, Alexandre. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel. Lectures on the Phenomenology of the Spirit,* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980.

Kühn, H. *Das Problem des Urmonotheismus*, Abh. Mainz, 1950.

Kwon, Soon-Gu. *Christ as Example. The Imitatio Christi Motive in Biblical and Christian Ethics*, (Dissertation) Uppsala: Uppsala Studies in Social Etichs 21 (1998).

Larsson, Edvin. *Christus als Vorbild: Eine Untersuchung zu den paulinishen Tauf- und Eikontexten*, Uppsala: Almquist & Wiksell, 1962.

Lacoue-Labarthe, Phillipe. *Typography: mimesis, philosophy, politics*, Cambr. Mass.: Harvard U.P, 1989.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Myth and Meaning,* New York: Schocken Books, 1995.

_____. *The Raw and the Cooked,* London: Jonathan Cape, 1970.

_____.'The Structural Study of Myth' in T.A. Sebeok. *Myth – A Symposium*, Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1958.

Lindgren, Gerd. 'Fenomenologi i praktiken,' in Starrin & Svensson (red). *Kvalitativ metod och vetenskapsteori,* Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1994.

Livingston, Paisley. *Models of Desire. René Girard and the Psychology of Mim*esis, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1992.

_____. 'Demystification and History in Girard and Durkheim,' in Dumouchel (Ed.).*Violence and Truth*. London: The Athlone Press, 1988.

Lundager Jensen, Hans J. *René Girard*, Fredriksberg: Anis, 1991.

_____.'The Bible is also a Myth. Lévi-Strauss, Girard and the story of Joseph.' Fønix, 4 (1999).

Mack, Burton L. 'The Innocent Transgressor: Jesus in Early Christian Myth and History,' *Semeia* 33 (1985).

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality*?, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.

Macquarrie, John. *Christology Revisited*, London: SCM Press, 1998.

Manent, Pierre. 'René Girard, la violence et le sacré', *Contrepoint* 14 (1974).

Markussen/Selnes. 'Den eldgamle sti, som onde menn har trådt,' *Agora* 4/91, Universitetsforlaget (1991).

Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift*, London, N.Y.: Routledge, 1990.

McKenna, Andrew. *Violence and Difference. Girard, Derrida, and Deconstruction*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992.

Melberg, Arne. *Theories of Mimesis*, Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1995.

Milbank, John. *Theology and Social Theory. Beyond Secular Reason*, Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1991.

Moi, Toril. 'The Missing Mother: The Oedipal Rivalries of René Girard' in *Diacritics* 12:1 (Summer 1982).

Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Crucified God*, London: SCM Press, 1984.

_____. The Way of Jesus Christ. Christology in Messianic Dimensions, London: SCM Press, 1999.

Norheim, Dag. 'Mimesis og metafysisk begjær. En undersøkelse av begjærets rolle hos Nietzsche og Girard,' Master Degree, Oslo, Teologisk Fakultet (1991).

Norris, Christopher. *Derrida,* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard U.P., 1987.

O'Connor, June. 'Feminist research in Religion', in Ursula King (Ed). *Religion and Gender,* Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.

Ong, Walter J, SJ. 'Mimesis and the Following of Christ.' In Religion and Literature, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, volume 26.2 (Summer 1994).

Otto, Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy. An Inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational*, London Oxford New York: Oxford U.P., 1978.

Oughourlian, Jean-Michel. *The Puppets of Desire. The Psychology of Hysteria, Possession and Hypnosis*, Stanford California: Stanford U.P., 1991.

_____. *Un Mime nommè dèsir: Hystèrie, transe, possession, adorcisme*, Paris: Grasset et Fasquelle, 1982.

Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Jesus - God and Man*, London: SCM Press, 2002.

Pedersen, Jon Helén. *Dialogbok om religion og livssyn*, Oslo: Ad Notam Gyldendal, 1994.

Plato. *Complete Works*, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

_____. *Cratylus. Complete Works*, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

_____. *Epinomis. Complete Works*, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

_____. *Laws. Complete Works*, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

_____. *The Republic, Complete Works*, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

_____. *The Sophist. Complete Works*, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

_____. *Timaeus. Complete Works*, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

Powell/Bauer. *Who Do You Say that I am*? Essays on Christology, Loisville Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*, vol 1, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984-88.

Rise, Svein. *The Christology of Wolfhart Pannenberg. Identity and Relevance*, Lewiston Qeenston Lampet: Mellen U.P., 1997.

Roberts, Richard. 'Interpretations of Resurgent Religion', in *Theory, Culture and Society,* vol 13, 1 (1996).

Rougemont, Denis de. *Love in the Western World*, New York: Harper & Row, 1974.

Saliba, John A. *The Concept of 'Homo Religiosus' in the works of Mircea Eliade:An Anthropological Evaluation for Religious Studies*, (PhD), Washington: The Catholic University of America (1971).

Schwager, Raymund. *Must There be Scapegoats*?, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.

_____. *Must There be Scapegoats?,* N.Y./Herefordshire: The Crossroad P.C./Gracewing, 2000.

Scubla, Lucien. 'The Christianity of René Girard and the Nature of Religion,' in Dumouchel (Ed.). *Violence and Truth*, London: The Athlone Press, 1988.

Sebeok, T.A. *Myth – A Symposium*, Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1958.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men. English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, New York: Colombia U.P., 1995.

Segal. 'Reductionism in the Study of Religion,' in Idenopulos/Yonan (Ed). *Religion and Reductionism. Essays on Eliade, Segal and the Challenge of the Social Sciences for*

the Study of Religion, Studies in the History of Religion, Volume 62, Leiden: Brill (1999).

Silva, Antonio Barbosa da. *Can Religions be Compared?*, Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 1986.

Slagstad, Rune.'Rudolf Bultmann – en innføring.' In Bultmann *Mytologi og bibelforståelse*, Oslo: Gyldendal, 1968.

Spariosu, Mihai (Ed). *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory, vol.1*, Philadelphia/Amsterdam, 1984.

Stendhal. *The Red and the Black*, N.Y.: Chelsea House, 1988.

Sterrin & Svensson (Ed). *Kvalitativ metod och vetenskapsteori,* Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1994.

Strenski, Ivan. *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth century History*, Houndmills: Macmillan, 1987.

Swärdh, Anna. *Rape and Religion in English Renaissance literature: a topical study of four texts by Shakespeare, Drayton, and Middleton*, (PhD) Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis (2003)

Sørbom, Gøran. *Mimesis and Art: Studies in the Origin and Early Development of an AestheticVocabulary*, Uppsala: Bonnier, 1966.

Theissen/Merz. *The Historical Jesus,* London: SCM Press, 1998,

Tillich. *The Dynamics of Faith*, New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957.

Tinsley, E.J. *The Imitation of God in Christ. An Essay on the Biblical Basis of Christian Spirituality,* London, SCM Press, 1960.

To Honor René Girard. Stanford French and Italian Studies 34, Stanford: Anma Libri, 1986.

Traube, Elizabeth. 'Incest and Mythology: Anthropological and Girardian Perpectives,' Berkshire Review 14 (1979).

Vattimo, Gianni. *Belief,* Stanford California, Stanford U.P., 1999.

Verdenius, W.J. *Mimesis. Plato's Doctrine of Artistic Imitation and its Meaning to us,* Leiden: Brill, 1972.

Violence and the Sacred in the Modern World, London: Franc Cass, 1992.

Virilio, Paul. *Speed and Politics. An Essay on Dromology,* New York: Semiotext(e), 1977.

Vor tids filosofi. Copenhagen: Politikens forlag, 1982.

Webb, Eugene. *Philosophy of Consciousness. Polanyi, Lonergan, Voegelin, Ricoeur, Girard Kierkegaard,* London and Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988.

Weber, Max. *Ancient Judaism*, N.Y.: The Free Press, 1952.

Widengren, Geo. *Religionens värld*, Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell, 1971.

Wood, Allen. *Hegel's Ethical Thought,* Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1990.

Wuthnow/Hunter/Bergesen/Kurzweil. *Cultural Analysis. The Work of Berger, Douglas, Foucault and Habermas*, London: Routledge, 1991.

Wuthnow, Robert. 'Religion as Sacred Canopy' in Ainley/Hunter (Ed.). *Making Sense of Modern Times,* London and New York: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1986.

www.hewett.norfolk.sch.uk/curric/soc/durkheim/durkw3.htm

www.http://my.execp.com/~paulnu