Saved from Salvation: Friedrich Nietzsche in the Work of René Girard

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Abstract: Literary critic René Girard pays special attention to the work of Friedrich Nietzsche in his writing. His assessment is generally negative, and those writers who have participated in Girard's project tend to share that view. A positive assessment of Nietzsche in light of Girard's work has been neglected. In this thesis I survey and analyze themes about desire and selfhood in both authors' work, showing the value of a Girardian view of Nietzsche and a Nietzschean view of Girard, and then move to a proposal for an alternate, positive view of Nietzsche in Girardian theory.

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Introduction: The Scandal of Nietzsche

The most remarkable feature of our world is its loudly advertised repugnance for victimage, which has no equivalent in any other society. Even if our deeds do not match our principles, even if our record of persecution sharply contradicts our language, our awareness of scapegoating is unique, and it cannot be traced exclusively to what Nietzsche calls "resentment" or "slave morality," however pertinent the Nietzschean critique of our world occasionally is.

Like all good things, our concern for victims can be horribly abused, but the very abuse still indirectly testifies to the excellence of the thing abused, which is really a priceless gift to us from the Jewish and Christian scripture. Nietzsche was too obsessed with the caricature of this gift to acknowledge the existence of the original.

- René Girard[1]

 In these brief paragraphs we catch glimpses of three key themes from literary critic René Girard's work, which I will expand on. First: Modern civilization is unique, and its uniqueness, both for good and for ill, is rooted in its awareness and defense of victims – which is in turn a "priceless gift" from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Second: This awareness of victims has not always resulted in concrete actions, as the awareness is often distorted. The still existing issues of racism, sexism, and political persecution, among many others, attest to this. Girard alludes to this with characteristic understatement when he says "our deeds do not match our principles." Third: Nietzsche was the closest to undoing the distortion of this awareness and so closest to Girard's own view of this awareness, but Nietzsche failed.

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[1] René Girard, foreword to *The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred* by James G. Williams (London: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007), ix.

All of these themes will be touched on, but it is the third theme, Girard's assessment of Nietzsche, which will be the focus. That Nietzsche does come very close to Girard's view in many respects is not disputed. Nor are Girard's concerns about Nietzsche's often uncritical adoption by the academy totally rejected. What is missing from contemporary scholarship is an examination of Girard's tendency to be inconsistent and careless in his treatment of Nietzsche, who can be seen both as a proto-Girardian ally and a friend to Girard's mimetic theory. I argue that Nietzsche's work, his "gay science," -- though it does have strongly violent and pessimistic tendencies -- is a worthy and valuable ally, as well as precursor, to Girard's mimetic theory. At times it strives towards a love not unlike the Girardian ideal, as well as providing an affirmative account of desire, in contrast to Girard's generally negative assessment.

In order to make this argument, this thesis will survey and analyze themes about desire and selfhood in both authors' work, showing the value of a Girardian view of Nietzsche and a Nietzschean view of Girard, and then move to a proposal for an alternate view of Nietzsche in Girardian theory. Though the emphasis will be on primary sources, attention will be paid to commentary from scholarship on both figures.

The parallels between Nietzsche's and Girard's work are many. Both see Christianity as unique in its defense of victims; both see a social, dynamic whirlwind of desires and forces as shaping individual selves, and thus human relations and history; both see religions as created and sustained out of this whirlwind, structures which give direction to desire; and both see the major issues of the modern world as somehow caused by Christianity. What their accounts also share is an aversion to traditional notions of *redemption* and *salvation,* understood as bringing freedom from desire. While Nietzsche sees both terms as fundamentally embedded in the wish of both Christianity and Platonism for another world, Girard emphasizes that Christian redemption can have

social, this-worldly meanings that do not subdue life in this world, but help it flourish. Their shared quest is for an answer to the crisis of modernity, which is, in Girardian terms, a mimetic crisis without end, and in Nietzschean terms, the condition of nihilism. Neither believes that a simple exit from the world will suffice, as both see the self as formed out of the forces and desires in its environmental and social context. Instead there must be a new approach to suffering and to desire, one which does not seek (a false) transcendence. It is in articulating a positive, affirmative approach to mimetic desire that Nietzsche offers something valuable, which Girard rejects by reading Nietzsche in a shallow way. By deepening Girard's reading, I will show how Nietzschean thought can contribute to Girard's theory of mimetic desire. And to begin deepening this reading, first I will outline briefly the role Nietzsche plays for Girard.

From various comments throughout Girard's work,[2] it can be seen that he puts Nietzsche in the role of, to borrow a phrase from Kathleen Skerrett, his "indispensible rival."[3] Nietzsche is brilliant, yet dangerous, and is used by Girard as shorthand for many important contemporaries of Girard (e.g. Derrida) as well as influential figures (e.g. Heidegger) who are, collectively, the purveyors of an intellectual nihilism in Girard's view. He is also the figure who comes closest to Girard's own insights, as Girard sees, and so is the rival who can challenge and strengthen Girard's thinking, if engaged with.

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[2] Comments which will be examined in the coming pages.

[3] Kathleen Skerrett, "The Indispensible Rival: William Connolly's Engagement with Augustine of Hippo," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72:2 (2004), 487-506.

Nietzsche's own attitude towards rivals is worth considering for Girard: "Learning from one's enemies is the best way toward loving them; for it makes us grateful to them."[45]

Yet Nietzsche's place in Girard's work is not only the indispensible rival but also the just victim. In his insightful essay on Girard and Nietzsche, Tobin Siebers points out Girard's hypocrisy in his treatment of Nietzsche -- Nietzsche is Girard's chosen victim, a scapegoat, whose guilt is very real and whose punishment is just. There can be no exoneration[6] for him or his spiritual "sons" and "daughters" (the "French Heideggarians").[7] Of course Girard does not go so far as to fully "scapegoat" Nietzsche, who, existing only in name, can only be expelled repeatedly in name. Nevertheless Nietzsche does serve as a focal point for the trends which Girard is most concerned about, and functions as a figure that should be expelled yet venerated -- a figure of power whose figurative expulsion from the intellectual community would provide some measure of salvation for that world.

An example of this comes when Girard discusses Nietzsche's last years (after 1889), which he spent insane and unable to work, under the care of his sister. "In his later years, Nietzsche kept reviving, glorifying and modernizing more and more sinister aspects of the primitive sacred. I am convinced that this process became more intolerable as it became more radical and it led to his final breakdown."[8] Girard uses

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[4] Nietzsche's work is divided into short sections, and it is to these that I refer rather than specific page numbers. In the case of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* chapter titles will be given.

[5] Nietzsche, "Mixed Opinions and Maxims," *The Portable Nietzsche,* 248.

[6] Tobin Siebers, *The Ethics of Criticism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988),153.

[7] Girard, "Dionysus versus the Crucified," 818.

[8] Ibid, 827.

neutral language, simply referring to a "process," but, taken along with other comments, it appears Girard deems Nietzsche's fate a just consequence of his thought.[9] Nietzsche's definite crime for Girard was rejecting Christianity even as he saw its full uniqueness, which for Girard, is its defense of victims, synonymous with its weakening of the primitive sacred.

When reading Nietzsche, it is clear that he splits an imagined "authentic Christianity" from what Christianity had become in history (starting with Saint Paul), running counter to Girard's claims that Nietzsche sees Christianity's message as he does, the Girardian "true" version.[10] Nietzsche rejects the Christian god of his time, proclaims that god's death, and the accompanying certainty associated with such a god, but retains the possibility of a certain kind of Christian faith,[11] sensing that there is something more to it than he can articulate. Girard himself puts forward a view in line with this, but without an explicit reference to Nietzsche:

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[9] Another example can be found in Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World,* 310: "[I]n his work on Greek religion, despite all his intuitions, Nietzsche never uncovered the significance of the Dionysiac mania. But even a relatively ignorant ancient Greek on reading this book, would have been able to predict that the author would go mad. You cannot espouse Dionysus, in the way that Nietzsche does, outside any form of ritual, without exposing yourself to unrestrained release of the mania."

[10] An example: "Nietzsche saw clearly that Jesus died not as a sacrificial victim of the Dionysian type, but against all such sacrifices. Nietzsche accused this death of being a hidden act of ressentiment because it reveals the injustice of all such deaths and the 'absurdity' not of one specific mob only but of all 'dionysian' mobs the world over." Girard, "Dionysus versus the Crucified," 822.

[11] See Nietzsche, "The Antichrist," 39. "To this day such a life is still possible, and for certain men even necessary: genuine, primitive Christianity will remain possible in all ages."

The 'death of God' is nothing, in my view, but a misinterpretation of the tremendous desacralizing process brought about by the Christian revelation. The gods who are dying are the sacrificial gods, really, not the Christian God, who has nothing to do with them. The confusion between the two, however, is likely to continue and to become even more complete than at the present time before the true singularity of the Christian God can be acknowledged.[12]

Here we find evidence that, from a Girardian view, Nietzsche, while certainly not blameless, is not guilty of the charge of rejecting *the* Christian message so much as rejecting a Christianity whose God *is a supreme sacrificial god*. This father God holds onto all the habits of the old father-kings of the primitive sacred, but includes a command to "love the weak," and defers all possible joy to another world. To Nietzsche there is no hope for a world that serves such a god -- and no reason to love such a world. As a result, Nietzsche puts all his strength towards saving those who will listen from the "salvation" of the sacrificial god.

Along with Girard's limited reading of Nietzsche's Christianity lies the missed opportunity to view Nietzsche as a challenge to a "bad" mimetic desire. Girard's theory of mimetic desire, based as it is on imitation as the central feature of human desire, should examine Nietzsche's struggles with role models (e.g. Wagner). Yet when Girard does so, Girard is again less than charitable in his assessment of Nietzsche on this score, looking at him only as an extreme romantic figure:

[T]he real credit for the *tabula rasa* school of innovation should go to Nietzsche, who was tired of repeating with everybody else that a great thinker should have no model. He went one better, as always and refused to *be* a model -- the mark of

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[12] Rebecca Adams and René Girard, "Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard" *Religion & Literature* 25: 2 (1993): 33.

genius. This is still a sensation that is being piously repeated today. Nietzsche is our supreme model of model-repudiation, our revered guru of guru-renunciation.[13] Here Girard touches on something important -- Nietzsche's call to imitate him, follow him, but not declare him master. This is best captured when Zarathustra addresses his disciples, and when he declares that his way is only one which is available among many.[14] Taken alone, and with Nietzsche's struggles with his own influences, it does seem fair to state that Nietzsche offers a stale restatement of "be yourself" in the Romantic mold. To simply leave it at that is to do Nietzsche a disservice and to miss the great work that Nietzsche does in attempting to grow with his influences and context. In the text quoted above, Girard speaks of Nietzsche in the context of the great shift from imitating the masters of the past to becoming the master of one's own creation from a *tabula rasa*. Yet Nietzsche does not believe a totally new world is possible -- he knows that to deal with one's self now is to produce a genealogy, a story, which will link one to those who have passed. He opposes and fights against Socrates, Saint Paul, Schopenhauer, and many other men of the past in a way which does imitate them, but does not seek to reproduce them. Nietzsche "becomes who he is" through becoming, however briefly and imperfectly, those he admires and opposes. In affirming his will to power, Nietzsche proposes that we weave the many threads of our becoming into something new, instead of straining to find a final, supreme goal in one way of life, the way of some master.

In the next four chapters, I will show how Nietzsche and Girard can be read together productively, taking into consideration these disagreements, beginning with their accounts of religion and desire in chapter one. Continuing with this theme I will return to

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[13] René Girard, "Innovation and Repetition." *SubStance*, 19:62/63 (1990): 12-13.

[14] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "On the Spirit of Gravity."

the "death of God" in chapter two. In chapter three I will propose a positive Girardian

reading Nietzsche. And in chapter four I will bring this version of Nietzsche into dialogue

with some of Girard's interpreters to show how such a Nietzsche can find a place in a

Girardian community.

Chapter 1

Killed to Keep the World Turning:[15] **The Birth of the Gods**

The site where Girardian and Nietzschean thought cross most clearly and
frequently is that of religion. In this chapter, the intertwined accounts of self, desire, and
God from both accounts are examined. Nietzsche names the relation of self and desire
as "will to power," while Girard dubs it "mimetic desire." Girard's theory suffers from a
continually negative account of desire, and therefore of selfhood, something which limits
the application of his thought. I argue that Nietzsche's ideas about religion's origins and
function can serve as useful, constructive additions to Girard's mimetic theory, which
Girard overlooks and dismisses in his weak reading of Nietzsche.

For both thinkers, the "self" or center of a human being is constituted by what he
or she desires, whether consciously or unconsciously. In pre-modern cultures, as well as
within many cultures today, what is to be desired is determined by inherited tradition.
Tradition is often what could be called "religious," but it can take many forms. It offers
role models and rules which guide desire, and so leads to the development of certain
models of self. Every group has its "god," its center figure or figures, and the majority of
European culture had believed its God was *the* god, the center of centers. But this was
doubted more and more in 19th century Europe, Nietzsche's era. The philosophy of the
Enlightenment, both in its empiricist and rationalist forms, lead to new ways of thinking
about the Christian God, some of which lead to either a loss of faith in him or indifference
to him. The god who had allowed for and encouraged the pursuit of truth had been
undermined in many quarters by that very ideal, leaving many adrift and confused. In
the wake of this crisis, people sought new ways to create roles and ways of life for

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[15] Coil, "Ostia (The Death of Pasolini)," from *Horse Rotorvator,* 1986, Some Bizarre Records*.*

themselves. Some responded by trying to direct their desire intentionally (the utilitarian, "rational" response), while others believed that spontaneous, intuitive desires from deep within one's self should be followed to obtain happiness (the "romantic" response). Both responses had some success, and popularity, yet neither was able to center these cultures again, leading to an increasingly fragmentary world. Nietzsche and Girard both respond to this situation, attempting to understand it through their analysis of religion, especially the Christian religion. Girard's analysis is insightful, and, as I show here, is prefigured in many places by Nietzsche's.

René Girard's work centers on the insight that human beings do not desire without first seeing what others (appear to) desire. Girard refers to this as "mimetic desire," as humans mimic or imitate what others do. That is, we humans do not seek particular objects without first being conditioned to do so. We do have biological needs which are present even before we recognize others, but these are shaped into desires by the intervention of another. For a human to grow and change in a group, she must have role models who embody ways of acting in the world, which are also ways of desiring in the world. When learning and imitating, the role model seems to have a secret power, in that she knows what is proper to desire, and can show us how to obtain it. A parent is the easiest example to think about in this role, but school teachers, friends, enemies, and lovers all end up inhabiting the same role at some point in human lives. As a person comes to know these important figures, and approach their level of skill, the illusion of a "secret power" slowly fades. The role models are seen as quite similar, as a person now knows how to desire as they do, as well as how to compete and cooperate with them.[16]

With this in mind, we see the importance of tradition, as mentioned above, and the way that it is structured around role models. The social orders which form in a society

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[16] See René Girard, *Sacrifice* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011), 25-28.

tell each person what they can hope for, what they can desire, and also which desires are most important. Innovations come through renewal or reinterpretation of past desires. Religion, as the category of institutions which speaks of the most important desires and duties, serves as the order of orders, or, as mentioned above, the center of centers. The gods serve as transcendent role models, who hold the secret power which can never quite be obtained, as they can never be fully imitated.[17]

When many persons seek the same things, the divisions between them begin to break down as they imitate each other more exactly in an effort to outdo one another. Every action becomes more and more calculated to cause the other to stumble. Taking the limited example of two individuals, we can imagine how the competition eventually overtakes the actual objects desired, spilling over into hatred and confusion. My friend and I both wish to have a piece of cake which is unavailable anywhere else. It cannot be shared, cannot be bought. This seems exaggerated, and it is, yet this is the nature of such a struggle. It is not so much that I want the piece of cake but that I want to have the piece of cake rather than my rival. The momentum of competition causes one's conscious identity to shift more and more towards contrast with the other person. Yet that other person consistently makes decisions that mirror my own -- she reaches for the cake, watches the cake, strikes at the hand of her adversary who seeks the cake. To my horror, as well as my friend's, we realize how similar we are, that we are fueled by the same desire. The difference between myself and the other, so important in our competition, our community, and our lives, is threatened. Here the rules of our tradition may intervene to divert the competition from disaster. For example, it may be that I must defer to my friend due to her familial status, or that my career gives me some sort of

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[17] Those that do appear to "fully imitate" a god are bound for glory in a society, whether as a saint or a king.

intrinsic right to the item. But in the end the competition must be settled and somehow be seen as fair and orderly.

In the event of a natural disaster, such as a plague or fire, the rules of tradition can be pushed to the breaking point. The intense desires for safety (a certain species of the "secret power") cause fierce competition for any and all objects that can provide it, and the rules which regulate competition are strained and set aside. It is here that Girard sees the roots of religion, which I will examine in more detail shortly. To be brief, as the intensity grows, the community becomes more and more violent, with all differentiation breaking down -- a mimetic crisis. Differences that are still noticeable, even if they were insignificant prior to the crisis, suddenly are seized upon. As a result, any minor difference can put a person at risk.

For Girard, all pre-modern traditions have built into them a method for dealing with the mimetic crisis, and that is choosing a scapegoat. It is not important if the person chosen is guilty, or in some cases, if it is a person at all, as animals too can be chosen. What is important is that proper ritual (whether sacrifice on an altar or standing before a judge) is followed so that the expulsion (banishment, killing, dismemberment) of the figure is considered legitimate. When the figure is dealt with, as the "cause" of the problem, the feeling of victory and security is regained by the authorities and so by the community.

This brief sketch outlines the basic concepts of Girardian thought. The next step is to look more closely at religion, and its mimetic structure according to both Nietzsche and Girard. To begin, picture this scene: A solitary, fierce looking statue stands at the entrance of a small town. It carries a sword in its hand and it looks out into the countryside with a calm, firm gaze. The monument represents the god of the people who live in the town, as well as many other nearby towns. Stories are told about the god's

exploits, which include: defending the people, giving them laws, and establishing a line of kings. Most important among these stories is one about the god's death and resurrection. It is well known that through the great sacrifice of the god's own life, he brought the people order, and was resurrected soon after.

In Nietzsche's view,[18] this god is the guiding principle of the people, and he gives them strength, both by being an example in his deeds and by providing laws. If the god inspires and provides the people with the means to live, to expand, to grow in power, and to enjoy living, then the god is healthy. But if the god inspires behaviour that stunts the growth and joy of the group, it is a sick god, one which ought to be put down. The god represents the will of the people, which Nietzsche describes as "everything aggressive and power-thirsty in a people [...]."[19] Nietzsche's ideal for a healthy god, the Greek Dionysus, is a god who dies and is subsequently resurrected. Nietzsche sees this as a promise that life "will be eternally reborn and return again from destruction."[20] The promise inspires the people who follow Dionysus to pursue their collective will to power, as it states that life survives and flourishes despite destruction.

The "will to power" is Nietzsche's central philosophical principle, and it states that behind every action and interpretation an entity makes is a desire to expand its power. This "will" appears to be singular but is always a tangle of multiple wills, rooted in the actions and reactions of everything happening in a time and place. Therefore the origin

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[18] This interpretation is primarily rooted in the work of Julian Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[19] Friedrich Nietzsche. "The Antichrist" in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1968), section 16. Note: Nietzsche's work is divided into short sections, and it is to these that I refer rather than specific page numbers.

[20] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Random House, 1968), 1052.

of all forms of thought is a group or person's desires and life situation, and the most sophisticated and potent sort of situation for the divine is *agon* or competitions with others. A religion, and its god or gods, are a primal form of the will to power, and exist to promote the growth and success of a group. Gods can become "sick" when they no longer promote such growth, but yet remain in place, with the people still following them, leading to the degeneration of the people. As Nietzsche states in *The Antichrist,* "there is no other alternative for gods: either they are the will to power, and they remain a people's gods, or the incapacity for power."[21] What the god's laws produce are "good" insofar as they promote the life and power of the people, while what is "evil" threatens them. One can see here that ultimately for Nietzsche the will to power is "beyond good and evil," as it is the foundation of such evaluations. The god does not exist, except insofar as it promotes the people's will to power.

For Girard, in contrast, this god is not all it appears to be, and has a violent genesis.[22] His explanation takes the form of a narrative, though one that needs a brief preface. In Girard's early studies of the novels of Proust, Dostoevsky, and others, along with the plays of Shakespeare,[23] he found that the motivations of people and organizations are built upon mimetic desire. Girard contends that the texts considered to be the best of modern Western literature described a process where persons find their desires by observing what others want. The refinement of tastes, competition for

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[21] Nietzsche, "The Antichrist," 18.

[22] In my account of Girard I have relied especially on the introductions and notes provided by James G. Williams in *The Girard Reader* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996).

[23] See *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, as well as *Theatre of Envy*, Girard's analysis of Shakespeare.

resources, courtship, war -- all of these were imitative in their origin. The imitative urge was found to have a "metaphysical" quality, as people sought to be like others they thought had a more stable "being."[24] This imitation often leads to competition for objects and resources, and then to violent conflicts. The most realistic and moving narratives capture this, as well as capturing the curious fact that men and women seldom know that they are imitating others, thinking instead that their desire is original. This adds an extra layer of confusion to any conflict that occurs -- and when this gets out of hand, an entire community can find itself at odds, for reasons no one within can really understand.

This mimetic crisis underlies the violent genesis of each god. Long ago, two events occurred together: there was a great calamity in a community, and a real person (as opposed to a divine one) was killed by the community. The exact reason for the killing is shrouded in mystery for the people who honour the god, though there are always claims that the god was guilty of a crime. In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard looks at the sacred myths of a variety of cultures (though he centers his attention on Greek tragedy) and finds the presence of this pattern, known to past anthropologists, but not, in his view, sufficiently commented upon: the sacrifice of a human victim who is considered to be guilty of extreme crimes. Incest, rape, genocide, patricide – these are examples of the crimes attributed to the victims in the myths he examines. The victim is found to also be someone "marked," often by nationality or deformity. For example in Euripides' *Bacchae,* the god Dionysus is portrayed as coming to Greece from far off Asia.[25] The myths are present in sophisticated, intelligent cultures, yet the suspicion that foreignness or deformity might be the cause of the victim's selection, rather than the

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[24] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977),145-146.

[25] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 126.

grandiose charges, does not seem to factor into the accounts. Why, Girard wonders, is it now obvious to us in the modern world that these factors might be important and the charges false, yet it was not obvious to these past men and women? There is no answer at this point Girard's research. Yet he finds something still stranger -- the same attributes of being criminal and being "marked" are also present for kings in these same cultures. Further, both the kings and the mythical victims are often referred to as being gods. But what sort of god dies at the hands of his own people? What sort of king is obliged to marry his sister? Girard comes to the conclusion that all gods, and all kings, roughly follow this pattern. To become gods, first the god must die.[26] Similarly, to become king, one must be outside the usual order, "marked" as both an outsider and divine.

This basic insight, of a unity between victimhood and godhood, outsider and royalty, leads into the second part of Girard's religious anthropology, which is the function of such myths and their accompanying festivals. Girard theorizes that the victims of ritual violence are needed to bind the community together, and that the most important festivals in a culture recreate this binding effect. Theoretically, there is a scenario which brings great turmoil to a group -- a flood, a poor harvest, a drought, a shortage of game, etc. Anything that affects the majority's lives will do, as long as the community is totally disordered. In the *Bacchae,* Girard notes that Dionysus, coming from Asia, brings with him a plague, and murders a king, Pentheus, both highly significant events for a community. The victim may not have anything to do with the problem that occurs -- that is attributed later, in Girard's theory. What is important is that the foreign figure is present when the disorder occurs, and, as someone marginal to the previous order, is considered an agent of disorder. The community, in a state of high emotions and conflict due to this disorder becomes a mob, attributes all the "evil" to the foreigner, and ends up

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[26] Ibid, 315.

killing him or her. When the outsider is killed, the mob collectively senses its unity, and sees that the crisis has been resolved. In the calm that follows the killing, this group can put their life into order, assigning roles and reasserting social order. The momentous event marks a new beginning and new life for the group. After the event, this figure and his paradoxical characteristics are elevated to the status of a god. As Girard puts it: "Once it is understood that the inversion of the real relation between victim and community occurs in the resolution of the crisis, it is possible to see why the victim is believed to be *sacred*. The victim is held responsible for the renewed calm in the community and for the disorder that preceded this return. It is even believed to have brought about its own death."[27] The great power attributed to the victim both explains the initial event and hides the innocence of the victim.

Festivals begin slowly, as the community remembers the stories of their ancestors and re-enacts them to preserve order. The original event fades from memory but the central sacrifice of the god and his powers remain, as does the festival's disordered quality. A festival is a community's way of recreating the unity that comes from escaping disorder, while avoiding the recognition of the victim(s) they commemorate.

Nietzsche's and Girard's accounts both give an idea of the genesis of religions, and both emphasize the function a religion performs. Certain contrasting tendencies between Nietzsche and Girard's work are brought out. Nietzsche has a tendency to treat "truth" as a matter of victory, that is, what enhances the "will to power" of a group or person. A religion helps a group gain victory by interpreting situations and conditions in a way favorable to that group. While this is true for Girard as well, he adds a tendency to

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[27] René Girard and Jean-Michel Oughourlian and Guy Lefort, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 27 (italics in original).

resist attempts to relativize truth in such a way by emphasizing the fact that there are victims, those who are sacrificed and consumed by a group or person, and moreover that these victims matter just as much as those who are victors. A second, related contrast is the view of a god's "health." Nietzsche sees a god as healthy as long as its people are healthy and still pursuing their own growth, their will to power. Girard sees gods as unhealthy insofar as they neglect or cover over the truth of victims, regardless of the "health" of the group. Both Nietzsche and Girard show us how the basis of religions[28] can be conceived of as a sort of fiction, which provides role models and aims and so an order for a group. Religious order and ritual for both thinkers exists to fend off the mimetic crisis so that the group can live and expand, constructing notions of selfhood based in this order.

The inspiration for Girard's and Nietzsche's examination of ancient religions, especially those of ancient Greece, is the situation of modern Europe. By examining the genealogy of Christianity[29] which appears for both thinkers as an exception to their accounts of religion, they hope to find a way to better understand the ever growing mimetic crisis of the modern world (disastrous conflicts of all sorts). The exceptional quality of Judaism and Christianity is the key source of Girard's rivalry with Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, as will be explained below, the Jewish and Christian scriptures represent two religious anomalies which are brilliant but dangerous to the world -- a "slave morality" constructed by enslaved and suffering people to justify their own state. Such a strategy seems to Nietzsche to make sense in the short term. But that such a religion would continue, overtaking and absorbing other "healthier" religious views (gods of war and

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[28] Or at least all "religions" as conceived of in these schemas. There are certainly non-theistic "religions," for example, which would not fit here.

[29] In addition to Judaism.

expansion) is a mystery to him. For Girard too, the Jewish and Christian scriptures are an anomaly when compared to other religions, but a positive one if properly understood. To do this one must make reference to the ecology of religions in which they originated, seeing these scriptures as a sort of commentary on their time and place.

After *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard brings his new programme of searching for scapegoats to bear on texts outside the anthropological literature and Greek tragedies he had been examining in his previous work and so turns to an examination of the Jewish and Christian scriptures. The results of his extensive studies, conducted with his co-authors Jean-Michel Oughourlian and Guy Lefort, are revealed in his magnum opus, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World.* In the Gospels, Girard finds the same structure as that of Dionysus and other sacrificial gods, but it plays out in a slightly different key. The god-man Jesus also dies through collective violence, thought to be for the good of the people.[30] Yet, in contrast to the tales about Dionysus, his divine status is not recognized by those who kill him, but instead by those who stand by him and recognize him as innocent. The figure of Christ, presented as God, King, and Saviour, takes on these roles in a way that, unlike that of earlier figures, is notably non-violent, with love rather than violent power as the central tenet. In doing so Girard claims Jesus undermines the power of other gods and their cults, which Girard refers to as "the sacred," "primitive sacred," or "primitive religions," and which he claims are built upon unacknowledged victims. Moreover, Christ's words indicate that in his actions he is imitating his "Father," the god of the oppressed Jewish people. Girard interprets Jesus as the scapegoat who reveals scapegoats, and reads the Gospel as a text which undermines communities based on persecution. Girard's rediscovery and redescription of the Gospel message emerges from his studies in literature and mythology.

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[30] See John 11:50.

The Religions of the Sick

In contrast to Girard's renewed Christianity, the most important goal for Nietzsche is to find an *alternative* to Christianity, which, as a "sick" religion, is causing Europe to give up on life, with terminal symptoms Nietzsche names "decadence" and "nihilism."[31] His vitriol against Christianity is clear and strong: "What is more harmful than any vice? Active pity for all the failures and all the weak: Christianity."[32] Nietzsche sees Christianity as inventing a sort of guilt which paralyzes and enforces a "passive nihilism," a guilt that weighs down everyone so that it becomes evident to them there is no way to progress or change in life. Only in another life, far away, beyond the earth (and after death), can there be happiness again -- in other words, in heaven. In the meantime, life is largely a state of suffering and strife, to be endured but never embraced. The mimetic structure of desire, when mixed with such a Christianity, causes all to be drawn down into this slow death.

For Nietzsche, Judaism and Christianity are the brilliant inventions of physically and psychically weak people being dominated by other, stronger cultures.[33] Nietzsche seizes on the Jewish theme of being exiles and slaves and asserts that this condition, combined with a certain genius, drives Jewish religion. Its counter-narrative claims that those who ruled did not deserve to, that there is a different, hidden standard of victory. Once this impulse was popularized and exaggerated to the point where *all* people, rather

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[31] These themes are developed most fully in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals.*

[32] Nietzsche, "The Antichrist," 2.

[33] This paragraph and what follows are indebted to Giles Fraser, *Redeeming Nietzsche: On the Piety of Unbelief* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 79-85.

than just the Jewish people, belong to the God of the oppressed, then the whole of Greco-Roman culture becomes one which advocates weakness and consequently the expulsion (or at least disapproval) of strong passion. For Nietzsche, this is a general description of Christendom. Extending from an embrace of passivity, he sees in the Christianity of his time an unwillingness to embrace life, the end state of a long sickness. Yet he does not see Christianity as a salve for suffering as do many others who contextualize Christianity in history. Instead he sees Christianity as the greatest example of how a human group might use suffering to gain power. The popular Christianity that Nietzsche sees sets each person to be reactive rather than active and dynamic in relation to the world. As Tobin Siebers puts it, this "reactive" impulse acts against others, rather than acting (and creating) for one's self.[34]

"Slave morality" and "resentment" are two key ideas which Nietzsche develops in his criticisms of the Judaism and Christianity. "Slave morality" refers to the values of an underclass which accepts and prolongs its status because it cannot overcome the "masters" or aristocracy of the area the group lives in. The ancient Hebrew people were, as Nietzsche sees from the Old Testament (Exodus being the prime example), often in conditions of slavery and oppression, and so are examples of such an underclass. Through their history, the Jewish people created and sustained a system of values which said that the most important things were not victory, wealth, or power, which those who oppressed them had, but something different. This "something different" was composed of virtues such as humility, faith, love, and patience, which Nietzsche points out, are valuable skills to have as slaves. By inventing rituals and a god who praises and rewards these attributes, the Jewish people secretly outmaneuver those above them in society's hierarchy, Nietzsche contends, in that they begin to believe that they have something the

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[34] Siebers, *The Ethics of Criticism*,143.

powerful and strong do not have.[35]

But beneath the reassuring illusion of a god who cares for the oppressed, and says it is good and right to stay in a state of poverty, Nietzsche sees something else, which he calls by the names, "the spirit of revenge" or "ressentiment." This spirit, internalized in the Jewish people after years of oppression, which rages against being oppressed, leads to fantasies of a final judgment when those who are slaves will finally be shown to be the victors. The faith of the Jews is thus a way to compensate and deal with the life of the tribe, one based in an intellectual approach, as opposed to one of brute strength and violence. Nietzsche sees it as a brilliant invention, but also as the sign of a decline, which worsens with the development of Christianity.

When Christianity is invented by Paul of Tarsus,[36] claims Nietzsche, he creates another layer of Jewish religion, one that attempts to universalize the slave morality. After years of struggle the religion of the oppressed spreads out beyond its original context, and eventually becomes the religion of the Roman Empire. For Nietzsche this is an absurd and amazing event -- the masters of Europe, and beyond, living and paying homage to a god of slaves! Soon, the internalized spirit of revenge spreads throughout society -- one is thought good insofar as one "loves one's neighbour," which really amounts to keeping distaste and jealousy quiet. God promises good Christians blessings in another world, a world far greater than anything on earth. So everyone strives to obey and honour the clerics and government, letting themselves be defeated. A sort of defeat, or at least an aversion to glory and victory in the old Greek sense, becomes a sacred duty. One wishes for revenge against others but cannot act on it, does nothing to help oneself, and hopes for a future life of happiness, along with the damnation of enemies.

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[35] Nietzsche, "The Antichrist," 24.

[36] Ibid, 42, 47.

From a Girardian point of view, one could say this account portrays a mimetic crisis perpetually waiting to happen.

The Religions of True Fraternity

Unlike Nietzsche, Girard sees the story of Christianity (and Judaism by extension) not as a victory of the weak over the strong through subterfuge, but of the gradual *revelation* of humanity's dependence on scapegoats, along with the vision of an alternative world where all people are allowed to grow and flourish, rather than just one type of person. The problems of European history, including the modern issue of widespread dissatisfaction and resentment, are regarded by Girard as residual effects of a weakened scapegoating still present within Christianity, rather than problems within essential Christian doctrine. Girard criticizes Nietzsche's misunderstanding of Christianity, explaining:

> Ressentiment is the interiorization of weakened vengeance. Nietzsche suffers so much from it that he mistakes it for the original and primary form of vengeance. He sees ressentiment not merely as the child of Christianity which it certainly is but also as its father which it certainly is not. Ressentiment flourishes in a world where real vengeance (Dionysus) has been weakened. The Bible and the Gospels have diminished the violence of vengeance and turned it to ressentiment not because they originate in the latter but because their real target is vengeance in all its forms, and they have only succeeded in wounding vengeance, not eliminating it. The gospels are indirectly responsible; we alone are directly

responsible. Ressentiment is the manner in which the spirit of vengeance

survives the impact of Christianity and turns the gospels to its own use.[37]

Girard's ideal religion is a non-sacrificial Christianity, one which he admits has

seldom, if ever, been embodied by the Christian church in history, which, over and over

again, adopts the old ways of scapegoating. Richard Kearney sums up Girard's view of

both the folly of the old sacrificial system and the dream of the Christian community,

stating:

> A genuinely peaceful community would be one which, Girard contends, exposes
>
> the strategies of sacrificial alienation in its own functioning and enters the light of
>
> 'true fraternity'-- a society which lives without the need for scapegoats.

Girard sees the ideal Christian church as a community that does not expel but heals and

appreciates. Historical Christian groups fail to attain this ideal, most notably in their

treatment of Jewish people, who serve as the constant rival and scapegoat of Christian

civilization. Kearney describes the source of this community's unique character:

> Such a community would free itself from mimetic rivalries, based on conflicts of
>
> desire and condemnations of 'aliens', committing itself instead to principles of
>
> 'transcendence' beyond time and history. In short, peace requires nothing less
>
> than the decoupling of the alien and the other, acknowledging that the genuine
>
> 'other' is radically Other – an asymmetrical, vertical alterity irreducible to the
>
> envious ploys of mimetic desire. Girard […] calls this ethical alterity -- even if it
>
> addresses us through the face of the human other -- God.[38]

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[37] Girard, "Dionysus versus the Crucified," 825.

[38] Richard Kearney, "Aliens and others: Between Girard and Derrida", in *Journal for Cultural Research* 3:3 (1999): 253.

Following this description, and contra Nietzsche, the "transcendence" of Girard's Christian communities is not oriented towards a merely otherworldly heaven (though this is not altogether discounted). Instead, the orientation is towards a God who is "radically Other," who inspires a goal of transcendent love. Though the community may struggle to follow this God, in doing so it moves beyond labeling humans as alien, and seeks to recognize that humans are kin. Cultural differences are seen as minor and unable to bestow any truly superior power or worth to any one person or object.

That such a community requires great struggle to accomplish and to maintain is the problem Christianity has always dealt with, from the writings of St. Paul to St. Augustine's *City of God* and onward to today. The struggle to produce "true fraternity" in the church often leads to a hybrid of the old way, dedicated to earthly power and glory, along with the strange new way of the Gospel. The old model of kingship implies that the king creates general order by playing his role as well as giving his subjects specific commands. Yet the "king of kings," Christ, is the "servant of servants." From a Nietzschean point of view, Christ is a god who presents a strange "will to power" for the people. Caught between the old and the new ideal, a toxic hypocrisy takes hold which demands that one live life for power and natural goods yet secretly, "truly," wish to exit the world, to be in "the kingdom of God," after death.

In his introduction to James G. Williams' *The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred,* Girard makes the claim that Nietzsche is "too obsessed with the caricature of [the Jewish and Christian scriptures] to acknowledge the existence of the original."[39] Girard argues that Nietzsche sees clearly the same truth about Christianity that Girard does, but that Nietzsche perversely rejects it in favour of a god of violence, Dionysus. I contend that

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[39] René Girard, foreword to *The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred* by James G. Williams (London: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007), ix.

Nietzsche did think he knew "the original" Christianity, that it deemed wishing to escape the best choice,[40] and that it got its wish in the "death of God" which came to modern Europe.[41] Nietzsche's wish to escape the dull, stultifying, collapsing Christianity of his time leads him to long for a return to the worship of the Greek god Dionysus:

> I know no higher symbolism than this Greek symbolism of the Dionysian festivals. Here the most profound instinct of life, that directed toward the future of life, the eternity of life, is experienced religiously — and the way to life, procreation, as the holy way. It was Christianity, with its heartfelt resentment against life that first made something unclean of sexuality: it threw filth on the origin, on the essential fact of our life.[42]

The "essential fact of our life," sexuality, is connected by Nietzsche with *eros* (desire), and so with Nietzsche's conception of the will to power, the endless play of desire, creation, and destruction. Without an acknowledgement of this desire, clearly mimetic in nature, and a willingness to engage with it, one exists in a joyless world ruled by the "spirit of revenge," and this is just what Christendom appears to be to Nietzsche. Nietzsche knows that a full return to the festivals and rituals of the past is impossible, that Christianity marks a definitive break with the ancient world, that new festivals will have to be invented[43] -- so he dedicates his life to his project and finds a new version of

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[40] Nietzsche, "The Antichrist," 18: "God as the declaration of war against life, against nature, against the will to live!"

[41] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 125. Nietzsche's infamous "Parable of the Madman" where he announces that "God is dead."

[42] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols*"* in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1968), X: 4.

[43] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* 125.

Dionysus, a god who he sees as bringing hope to modern men, though admittedly only an elite few. In Nietzsche's view, we must escape the effects of nearly two thousand years of Christian rule which have culminated in the "death of God," along with an end to firm foundations for life.

Girard makes a similar assessment, and agrees that our problems are rooted in the instability, the perpetual mimetic crisis, that Christianity has unleashed -- but he asserts that there is no other way to deal with this than to continue to defend victims and shun the archaic order:

> Henceforth we can no longer pretend not to know that the social order is built upon the blood of innocent victims. Christianity deprives us of the mechanism that formed the basis of the archaic social and religious order, ushering in a new phase in the history of mankind that we may legitimately call 'modern.' All the conquests of modernity begin there, as far as I am concerned, from that acquisition of awareness within Christianity.[44]

Girard's particular view, that the kernel of Christianity is its regard for victims, differs from Nietzsche's view that Christianity seeks to demean victors, only by a few degrees. This difference is something that should be taken seriously by Girard when considering how to deal with desire in the world. Nietzsche's implicit portrayal of victors and masters as themselves *victims* of Christian thought shows an unconscious use of something like Girard's theory, a mimetic desire to gain the powerful place Christians occupy. Nietzsche does not, and cannot, return to the old way of the sacred, but instead draws attention to the part of life that Christianity, in its Girardian articulation, can seek to scapegoat: the joy that comes with victory and mastery. Nietzsche's account of religion, and of the

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[44] René Girard, "Christianity and Modernity" in *Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2010): 26.

Christianity he fights against, offers Girard an articulation of how mimetic theory can recreate the structures of the old scared if it seeks to scapegoat victory and self-assertion. The Nietzschean "spirit of revenge" can only be dealt with if all people are given a place and an acknowledgment of their fragility, victors included, and so new ideas of selfhood must be developed. To continue this line of thinking, we turn to the term that Nietzsche is most famous for, the "death of God."

Chapter 2

The Modern Murder of God

In the modern world mimetic disasters appear more and more, as, freed from authority by skeptical reason, possible models multiply endlessly, generating conflicts. With the Christian revelation's weakening of the scapegoat mechanism, the modern person is left adrift, with nothing to put a stop to each mimetic crisis. Wars and disasters become greater and stronger as no amount of blame or sacrifice can contain and order conflicts anymore. Girard and Nietzsche each respond to this situation: Nietzsche affirms a constant cycle of personal destruction and recreation, or "self-overcoming," without reference to a transcendent center or god, and Girard advocates a new, post-modern, return to the imitation of Christ. For Girard, Nietzsche's response is not only incorrect, but a path to ruin. What it lacks, as Girard correctly sees, is a view of community which would foster such free persons without falling back into the old patterns of sacred violence. Though Girard makes an effort to justify his harsh evaluation, he ends up using Nietzsche as a scapegoat, bearing the guilt for the failings of postmodern thought.[45] Against this rejection, I propose that Nietzsche's idea of selfhood is valuable to Girard's mimetic theory, as it provides a strong example of tactics that a person might utilize in the struggle for a modern, joyous selfhood without the sacred.[46] Rather than banishing Nietzsche into the desert, the Nietzschean self should be welcomed into the Girardian community.

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[45] That Girard uses Nietzsche as a scapegoat figure is suggested in Siebers, *The Ethics of Criticism,* 148.

[46] "Sacred" here is meant in Girard's specific sense. See *Violence and the Sacred.*

Girard sees this modern world, represented so accurately by those he considers the great novelists, as an outgrowth of Christianity. Girard's mimetic theory leads him to believe that humans will always imitate one another in what they desire:

In the universe structured by the Gospel revelation, individual existence remains basically imitative even, and above all, perhaps, when one rejects with horror any thought of imitation. The Church Fathers held as evident a truth which later became obscured and which the novelist regains step by step as he passes through the terrible consequences of this obscuration.[47]

In his study of Dostoevsky, *Resurrection from the Underground,* Girard gives us his version of this modern crisis, the Nietzschean "death of God." Just as Nietzsche's imagined prophet Zarathustra claims that if there is a god, he cannot stand not to be a god,[48] the jealous individuals Girard sees inhabiting Dostoevsky's novels are those who subconsciously feel the great weight of taking on God's responsibilities:

What is this omnipotence that is inherited, with the arrival of the modern world, not by human beings in general nor by the sum of all individuals, but by each one of us in particular? What is this God who is in the process of dying? It is the Jehovah of the Bible, the jealous God of the Hebrews, the one who tolerates no rivals. The question is far from being merely historical and academic. It has to do actually with determining the meaning of the enterprise that demands total payment of each of us, modern individuals. Every form of pluralism is here excluded. It is the one and unique God of the Jewish-Christian tradition who gives

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[47] René Girard, *Resurrection From the Underground: Feodor Dostoevsky*, Translated and edited by James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 57-58.

[48] Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Blessed Isles," in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* Translated by Walter Kaufmann *(*New York: Viking Penguin, 1966).

his particular stamp to Western individualism. Each mode of subjectivity must found and justify the being of the real in his totality and affirm *I am who I am.* [49] The struggle for this affirmation is a theme taken up most famously in Enlightenment philosophy by Descartes, with the claim *cogito ergo sum* offering a new foundation in place of the "*I am who I am*" spoken by God to Moses. Girard sees this, and notes the flaw of this response -- it "remains abstract,"[50] and so condemns the struggling individual to remain, as much as she can, in the world of abstraction. The actual, agonizing experience of founding oneself, along with the struggle against full imitation of or full dependence upon others, is something missing from the abstract accounts. For Girard this crisis of selfhood is a consequence of Judaism's and Christianity's destruction of idol worship, a rejection radicalized in the Enlightenment to include even the idolatrous residue of the sacred in Christianity. The role models of past tradition, given places of honour and hints of divinity, are now treated as hollow idols: nothing but the creations of flawed human beings, suitable for harsh criticism and even destruction. To exist as a modern individual, claiming "I am who I am," no mere imitation of that flawed, human past will do. Nothing can be grasped as a sure model to imitate as everything must be doubted, except the painful, lonely, undoubtable Cartesian self. Girard goes on to claim that:

> Nietzsche and Dostoevsky are the only ones to understand that the task is properly superhuman, even if it imposes itself upon all of us. The self-divinization, the crucifixion that it implies, constitutes immediate reality, the daily bread of all

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[49] Girard, *Resurrection,* 93 (italics in original).

[50] Ibid.

the little St. Petersburg bureaucrats who pass with no transition from the medieval universe to contemporary nihilism.[51]

In the wake of this modern crisis of the self, Girard responds by turning not only to novelists but to two of Paul Ricoeur's infamous "masters of suspicion,"[52] Nietzsche and Freud. Whereas most of his contemporaries pushed the radical critical emphasis of these "masters" to further destabilize structures of oppression and power, and in doing so seemed to get further and further from any sort of Christian orthodoxy, Girard took a different path. His readings of Freud[53] and Nietzsche, combined with his earlier work based in anthropology and literature, lead him back to Christianity, though in a new form, one which is consciously post-Enlightenment. Girard's technique, well-honed from his research, is to look for the "scapegoat mechanism," with its two marks of victims and gods. Once these themes are brought to light, Girard brings them into relation with his reading of the Gospel, which states that God is on the side of the scapegoat.

A prime example of this technique is Girard's essay on Nietzsche's "Parable of the Mad Man," the text where Nietzsche famously wrote that "god is dead." Girard's careful reading is, in comparison to the famous explications by Martin Heidegger and others, quite simple. Through close attention to the parable's text, Girard emphasizes

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[51] Ibid.

[52] Ricoeur names Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Friedrich Nietzsche as the "masters of suspicion."

[53] Girard's indebtedness to and respect for Sigmund Freud is more obvious than with Nietzsche, but it is another area worthy of study.

that though "Nietzsche is taken to be the great prophet of the *natural* death of God,"[54] the death is described by Nietzsche powerfully as a murder. Here Nietzsche, according to Girard, shows his intimate knowledge of the scapegoating process and the birth of the gods -- along with the recognition that the modern murder is one different from all those having come before. "Having written God is Dead, Nietzsche returns immediately and overpoweringly to his idea -- or maybe to mine, I no longer know which."[55] In Nietzsche's writing we see a challenge to the Enlightenment view of God withering away peacefully, forgotten and discarded as He becomes less relevant. Instead, God cannot just fade away; Europe does not just "wake up" from the dream of God. The investment in God's existence and goals is a massive weight for Europe. The new redeemer-god of humanity, Reason, was securely anchored by God,[56] and so Reason's redemptive power is also lost with God's death. As a consequence, and in line with the myths that Girard has surveyed, this crisis for the madman involves "the mixing of what should be distinguished," and the loss of order, as he asks "Aren't we perpetually falling? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Aren't we straying as through an infinite nothing?" When the madman arrives at the deed itself, his knowledge of the scapegoat process and its accompanying festivals seems striking:

> God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the
> murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves? That which was holiest and
> mightiest of all that the world has yet possessed has bled to death under our

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[54] René Girard, "The Founding Murder in the Work of Friedrich Nietzsche," in *Violence and Truth - - On the Work of René Girard,* edited and with introduction by Paul Dumouchel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 232 (italics in original).

[55] Ibid, 233.

[56] The most obvious example of this is Descartes' *Meditations.*

knives — who will wipe this blood off us? With what water could we purify

ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games will we need to

invent? Isn't the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we not ourselves

become gods simply to seem worthy of it?[57]

The madman speaks of the momentous event but is unsure what will happen

after it. Girard notes that in the madman's speech, "[e]verything is presented in the form

of questions, no affirmation is possible."[58] These questions surrounding God's murder

are what Nietzsche finds himself both proclaiming and responding to. Nietzsche's

answer to the madman's plea is to actively *affirm* the world, a world that Girard sees as a

potentially never-ending mimetic crisis, and to provide, tentatively, a model for this

affirmation in the form of his "Dionysian" prophet Zarathustra.

Nietzsche's World After God

[The] *Dionysian world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, this*

mystery world of the twofold voluptuous delight, my "beyond good and evil," without goal,

unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal; without will, unless a ring feels good will toward

itself-- do you want a name for this world? A solution for all its riddles? A light for you,

too, you best-concealed, strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly men?-- This world is

the will to power -- and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power --

and nothing besides! - Nietzsche[59]

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[57] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* 125.

[58] Girard, "Founding Murder," 236.

[59] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* 1067.

In this dramatic and abstract image Nietzsche outlines what he sees as the supreme problem for modern individuals -- the groundless, purposeless nature of reality -- and his strategy for dealing with that problem.[60] As was suggested above, Nietzsche's central philosophical idea is "the will to power," which Nietzsche here claims as the "name for this world," and it is this identification and its consequences that Nietzsche sees as a solution. That the world is "eternally self-destroying," "without goal," and "beyond good and evil" marks it as one where to be nihilistic is to be truthful, for there is no final state to attain, no true measure of value. To seek wealth or pleasure or even peace in the world has been presented in the past as ultimate goals, safeguarded by firm role models, but Nietzsche believes that an honest human being can no longer see things this way.

Some see that the world is "eternally self-destroying" and so they despair -- these are the "passive nihilists." Without an ultimate goal, they succumb to a "decline and recession of the power of spirit."[61] To put it another way, the passive nihilists cease to strive to become something, whether through competition with others or themselves. Nietzsche sees Christianity as bringing nihilism to its fullest expression in humanity through its commitment to truth, and the Christianity of his time as representing a full flowering of passive nihilism. Christianity's search for truth, and identification of truth with God, leads to a sense that truth is beyond life, in heaven, and so beyond humans. Most do not *know* that they believe life to be meaningless, but they live in such a fashion.

In contrast, others, a select few whom Nietzsche greatly admires (the "free spirits" he often addresses), see clearly that life has nothing grounding it, and act

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[60] This section is indebted to Tyler Roberts' interpretation of Nietzsche found in Tyler Roberts, *Contesting Spirit: Nietzsche, Affirmation, Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1998.

[61] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* 22.

creatively to pursue power over themselves and their environment. This is what Nietzsche calls "active nihilism," which he identifies with "increased power of spirit."[62] Nietzsche addresses these few active nihilists in his writing, and he names the world "will to power" for them. He hopes that by acknowledging the desire for power as the paradoxical, ever-shifting foundation of life, the active nihilists can affirm life, rather than giving way to despair or attributing meaning to a transcendent and unattainable end.

The obstacle to Nietzsche's affirmative quest is the great complex of fears which drag all people back to ultimate goals and simple answers, including those gilded with the complex language of philosophy. Uncertainty, insecurity, and, overwhelmingly, suffering are what create these fears, which Nietzsche names "the spirit of gravity." To succumb to gravity is inevitable, as all are involved in a web of power and influence (that is, all are involved in mimetic desire) -- but the free spirit seeks to always recognize the powers that compel and sustain her, and in doing so to find a way to both affirm the situation and create something new. This Nietzsche refers to as "self-overcoming," which, looking with a Girardian lens, I claim is an effort to escape the deadlock of mimetic desire, that ceaseless search for stability and safety.

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[62] Ibid.

On Self-Overcoming

"With Nietzsche, everything is mask. [...] Nietzsche didn't believe in the unity of a self and didn't experience it." - Gilles Deleuze[63]

Nietzsche's thought undermines the notion of a stable self, and attempts to find joy in the endless insecurity humans deal with throughout their lives. Self-overcoming is the name Nietzsche gives to the active affirmation of this insecurity and the endless opportunities for new creation it affords. From the point of view of self-overcoming, desires lead one to recreate one's self over and over, rather than confining one to a narrow, single role in life. This stands against notions of a "true self" or soul hidden beneath the flux of consciousness, opposing what Descartes saw as the possibility of a sure foothold in the *cogito.* Nietzsche posits the world as an endless flow of conflicting forces (the will to power), taking over one another and trying to gain new powers and possibilities. Deleuze follows this perspective when he proclaims that "everything is mask" for Nietzsche. This means that each thing identified as "I" is fabricated, changeable, and without a definite structure. The will to power is the "root" of the self, a "self" being a particular configuration of forces, struggling to both preserve and surmount their current form, and to draw in other forces (whether ideas, persons, or nations). The self is overcome continually by creating, destroying, and experimenting with forms and habits, especially those most powerful habits which construct identity. This is happening at all times, though most are passive about this constant death and rebirth of one's self, never acknowledging how the encounter with new people and ideas affects them. As Girard might put it, we do not understand that our desire is mimetic, that it is not ours in

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[63] Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life,* translated by Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 59.

any final sense. Acknowledging that we are constantly destroying and remaking ourselves, rather than believing we have a fixed essence, is Nietzsche's way of affirming the will to power, becoming its partner rather than its victim, a friend rather than a slave. This embodies Dionysian "faith" by admitting the "essential fact of our life," which is procreation, *eros,* or creativity in the broadest sense. Life itself confides to Nietzsche's Zarathustra, "I am *that which must always overcome itself."* [64]

The health or usefulness of a notion of self, of a given "mask," is determined by the particular forces at a given time and place. In the fullness of history, the self concept and role of "humanity" too will not be perfected or ended, but instead overcome. The self that replaces "humanity" is, for Nietzsche, the coming Übermensch, translated variously as "super-man," "over-man," or "beyond-man." The Nietzschean idea of creating, as Deleuze writes, "is to lighten, to unburden life, to invent new possibilities of life. The creator is legislator – dancer."[65] The Übermensch is contrasted to the "last man," a figure who no longer wishes to improve, as he believes he is experiencing the end point of all history, the aim of all human lives –- a figure who brings disaster (mimetic crisis) through modeling inactivity. This attitude is something Nietzsche feared was already present among the privileged classes of his time.

It is worthwhile to pause at the idea of the Übermensch and see in it the configuration of a positive desire, one which is not trapped in mimetic struggles, though it still exists with them. The Übermensch comes after humanity, as the figure who understands and takes on the meaning of the will to power. Nietzsche argues that there have been a few exemplary men who have approached the next stage, being masters of themselves and others (Goethe being his favourite), but he does not locate the

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[64] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* "On Self-Overcoming" (italics in original).

[65] Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, 61.

Übermensch anywhere in human history. The Übermensch is a creator -- of new values, new selves, new friends, new enemies, and most of all, new joy. Nietzsche imagined that the Übermensch would not struggle with or avoid self-overcoming, as his contemporaries seemed to, but will take it on as a joyful dance.

An extension of the Nietzschean ideas about both religion and selves that I have been examining is the key idea that forms of life create forms of thought, whatever they may be named. Nietzsche claims that "Every philosophy is the philosophy of some stage of life," [66] and it could be said further that each god also belongs to a stage of life. There is no grand cosmic plan to figure out, and so no absolute model, but instead many wills which seek to justify and affirm themselves and expand their powers. So the thinking, feeling creature calling itself "human" looks to find ways to continue thinking and feeling, and to honour those above other possibilities. And, among humans, different humans develop philosophies (and religions) which help to affirm and expand their particular form of life. So warriors find a way of war, fisherman a way of fishing, and so on, each with their own models to imitate. Due to this there is no "right way," despite the protests of many systems of imitation and order, but only multiple expressions of a "will to power" which characterizes all living things. So a way of life or a philosophy privileges and sustains a certain system of mimetic desire. When this is brought to bear upon the Christianity of Nietzsche's time, it can be seen why he eschews the Enlightenment ideal of a "rational" critique, instead moving to a frowned upon mode of argumentation, *ad hominem:* he attacks persons rather than arguments. He asks "what sort of person worships this sort of God?" and finds his answers that way, rather than asking other questions about God's possibility or necessity. For Nietzsche, the figure which expresses the God's powerlessness is a negatively configured Christian believer, understood by

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[66] Nietzsche, "Mixed Opinions and Maxims," in *The Portable Nietzsche,* 271.

Nietzsche as an anti-Übermensch, a person who lives a life based around an unattainable central aim, the afterlife -- which seems to him to deny that life has any value here and now, and preclude any notions of creatively reconfiguring life. Though Nietzsche would not see it, this figure has, in the language of mimetic theory, misunderstood a defense of victims (the defenseless, weak, and defeated) as a command to remain static, wishing for a share of being without movement.

For Nietzsche, Christianity is a tool of control and denial which contains a secret will to power. Yet its existence, and its affirmation of the importance of a commitment to truthfulness and discipline are essential tools that lead Nietzsche to his conceptualization of the "will to power." Arguably, Christianity is Nietzsche's greatest ally in his growth and also his greatest enemy in his quest for self overcoming. Yet the vitriol that grows and grows towards Christianity over the course of his career leaves out one peculiar target -- the figure of Jesus. Nietzsche imagines Jesus as a worthy opponent and figure, and attributes to him a doctrine of liberation like Nietzsche's own, beyond morals and guilt: "Jesus said to his Jews: 'The law was for servants;--love God as I love him, as his Son! What have we Sons of God to do with morals!'"[67] It is in *The Antichrist* that Jesus is given full attention for the first time, alongside with Paul, who Nietzsche claims is truly to blame for the monstrous Christianity that Nietzsche opposes. In *The Antichrist,* Jesus is presented not quite as a hero, but one who is blameless for what others did with his example, and who was a spirit too free for his time (and so someone Nietzsche admires). Nietzsche not only sees Christians as not living up to Christ's example, but goes a step further, proclaiming with typical hyperbole that "There was only one Christian, and he

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[67] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966), IV: 164

died on the cross."[68] Nietzsche spares Jesus as an exemplary individual, one who did not truly found a religion, but told of a new way of life which broke with what had come before. As somebody who self-overcomes, and affects his society profoundly, Jesus is spared what so much of Christianity is subjected to by Nietzsche. This admiration overflows in his final days, when Nietzsche's sense of identity ends up slipping fluidly between that of his beloved Dionysus and The Crucified (Jesus) who is configured by Nietzsche as that god's structural cousin.[69] Nietzsche's treatment of Jesus is notable for several reasons. It serves as a reminder that Nietzsche's contempt for Christianity is mixed with deep respect. It shows that Nietzsche is not an advocate for one single way of life, but for a single type of person, the "free spirit" who finds his own way, and so affirms a plurality of models. Most importantly, Nietzsche's treatment of Jesus demonstrates that his configuration of Christianity is different from the one Girard attributes to him, in that Nietzsche does intuit another, "healthy" version of it.

In his quest to create new forms of life after the death of the Christian God, Nietzsche finds a new "faith" in a god he called Dionysus, who commands humankind to create and say "yes" to life, by embracing even destruction, and self-destruction (in the form of self-overcoming), a god who is prefigured by a Jesus imagined by Nietzsche as seeking no followers. This vision of human life, and of divinity, is a criticism of most forms of religion which emphasize the eternal stability of the law, the order given by the gods. Yet it is one which, surprisingly, has strong resemblance with Girard's own positive account of a liberating Christianity, which stands in contrast to other religions. In the next chapter, this resemblance will be brought into sharper focus, as Nietzschean self-overcoming is given a place in Girard's theory of sacrifice.

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[68] Nietzsche, "The Antichrist," 56.

[69] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* 1052.

Chapter 3

Better to Burn Out: Nietzsche's Self-Sacrifice

What is the New Testament? A handbook for those who are to be sacrificed. -
Kierkegaard[70]

[T]he happiness of the spirit is this: to be anointed and through tears to be consecrated
as a sacrificial animal. Did you know that? -Zarathustra[71]

The Gospel reveals "things hidden since the foundation of the world" and through the
intermediary of Nietzsche this revelation begins to become self-aware. -Girard[72]

      In order to give Nietzsche's work a fuller place as an ally to Girard's mimetic
theory, an examination of Nietzsche using a more rigorous version of that same theory is
necessary. In conjunction with the work of Tyler Roberts on Nietzsche's asceticism and
accounts of Zarathustra's "gift giving virtue", this chapter begins that examination. The
emphasis of this analysis will be on the dual insight that Girard claims Nietzsche shares
with him most strongly -- the importance of sacrificial victims (scapegoats) for religion,
and Christianity's rejection of sacrificial victims. In Girard's view, Nietzsche is brilliant to
see this but is also reprehensible for choosing to go back to a culture of victims. I
propose, however, that this reading is lacking in proper Girardian insight, and

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[70] Soren Kierkegaard, *Provocations: Spiritual Writings of Kierkegaard* Compiled and translated by
Charles E. Moore (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 220.

[71] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* "On the Famous Wise Men."

[72] Girard, "Founding Murder," 244.

Nietzsche's understanding of sacrifice can be a helpful supplement to Girard's, as Nietzsche sees that in the time after the death of the god (or, for Girard, the weakening of the sacred due to Christianity), a process unfolds where each human being becomes a new sort of sacrifice. It is this process that Nietzsche names "self overcoming" throughout his work, which I show here.

Each God is a Consuming Fire

Before turning to Nietzsche, Girard's viewpoint must be reviewed once more, this time focusing on the image of fire in relation to sacrifice. To begin, I examine two images drawn from Girard's work on sacrifice in *The Scapegoat.* Girard is speaking of the Aztec sun god Teotihuacan and his role as destroyer of plagues. The god, in the role of a sacrifice, is killed in order to end the plague. Girard explains the consequence of this act:

> If then the epidemic recedes, the victim becomes divine in that he is burned and becomes one with the fire that instead of destroying him mysteriously transforms him into a force for good. The victim is thus transformed into that inextinguishable flame which shines on humanity. Where can this flame be found thereafter? The answer is immediately apparent. It can only be found in the sun, or maybe in the moon and the stars.[73]

This image of fire, and of the sun and stars, is one which appears in many different myths, which Girard appeals to later in the chapter as well. The role of the fire in religious ritual, especially sacrifice, is too vast to review here, as is the role of the sun and stars as the abode (or identity) of the gods. What is important to highlight in this paragraph is Girard's understanding of the fire as both *transformative*, by shifting a being from a lower

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[73] Girard, *The Scapegoat,* 60.

status to one of divinity and goodness in the eyes of the community, and *centering*, by stabilizing and giving the community a symbol of unity.

Girard notes similar imagery when he analyzes Peter's betrayal of Jesus as recounted in the Gospels. Peter warms himself by a fire among other men and women, having followed at a distance after Jesus' arrest. Peter falls into a mimetic pattern, simply wanting to be one of the group. But his association with Jesus is known to one woman in the group, and she lets the others know it. It is then that Peter denies Jesus, for he realizes that his association with Jesus puts him outside the group. As much as Peter wishes to remain loyal, he is drawn to conform to the group, for, as Girard puts it, Peter "cannot warm himself without wanting obscurely the being that is shining there, in this fire, and the being that is indicated silently by all the eyes staring at him, by all the hands stretched toward the fire."[74] Girard explains that beyond the practical reasons of heat and light, the fire creates a community. The woman who addresses Peter acts to exclude him from the community. By noting that he was with Jesus she implies that he does not belong with them. Peter, being alone and confused after the loss of Jesus, or "the collapse of his universe,"[75] is eager to join a new group. "Hands and faces are turned toward the fire and in turn are lit by it; it is like a god's benevolent response to a prayer addressed to him. Because everyone is facing the fire, they cannot avoid seeing each other; they can exchange looks and words; a place for communion and communication is established."[76]

As the scene unfolds, Peter denies his former master in order to gain safety and community around the fire. Girard goes as far as to state that "Peter makes Jesus his

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[74] *The Scapegoat,* 150.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid, 151.

victim..."[77] But the others know by his accent that Peter is not from Jerusalem, and that he came there following Jesus. They reject him in order to maintain the order strengthened and founded by the scapegoat mechanism. They tell each other, "We are all of the same clan, we form one and the same group inasmuch as we have the same scapegoat."[78]

To return to Teotihuacan, let us consider the similarity between the fire and the god. The fire plays the role of illuminating and defining the boundaries of the community, and the great fire of the sun does this to an even greater degree, doing the same for the world. When the role of a sacrificed god like Teotihuacan is compared to a star or sun, the exaggeration shows how important the role is -- this god's sacrifice (that which makes sacred) has given order, and so a secure life, to the community, even to the world.

The sacrificed god, despite the myths that surround him, is for Girard definitely a victim, one who was rejected violently. When Peter seeks to join the community by rejecting Jesus, he wants to defer this role of scapegoat. Not only does Peter wish to avoid pain, insecurity, and possible death, but, as Girard astutely notes, shame. "Peter is ashamed of this Jesus whom all the world despises, ashamed of the model he chose, and therefore ashamed of himself."[79]

People often seek to avoid being rejected by their community in some way, and so betray certain commitments they have made. At the level of the grand, divine sacrifice of a Teotihuacan, those like Peter imagine that the god must have had some special power to be able to give his own life for the good of the community, something Peter

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[77] Ibid, 154.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid, 155.

cannot imagine having. For Girard this special power, this true being, is what we seek when we imitate others. The myths of those like Teotihuacan are a lie in that the victim did not choose to give himself for the cure of a plague, but instead was killed to found a new community (or to renew one). The Gospel account of Jesus is, in contrast to this, a "true myth" in that it takes the same tale and reveals that the victim-god, the scapegoat, is innocent of any collective guilt, and did not want to become sacrifice for the community. Jesus is the only scapegoat to show this truth to his followers -- the sacrifice to end sacrifices. In doing so he founds a community of rejects, of wanderers whose center is elsewhere and invisible.

But with such sacrifices ended, or at least encouraged to end, after this revelation, how is a community to be built? How is it to renew itself? For Girard this question remains unanswered in any concrete manner, and the great proliferation of answers put forward in the period after Christianity's ascent, and especially in the modern period, are a consequence of this revelation. The old ways fail not because they have no strength, but because:

> Henceforth we can no longer pretend not to know that the social order is built upon the blood of innocent victims. Christianity deprives us of the mechanism that formed the basis of the archaic social and religious order, ushering in a new phase in the history of mankind that we may legitimately call "modern." All the conquests of modernity begin there, as far as I am concerned, from that acquisition of awareness within Christianity.[80]

So the Gospels slowly remove the community's ability to build new "fires" from victims by removing the ability to *believe* in the absolute power of those fires, and we return again to the loss of a stable self, both for the community and for persons. When

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[80] Girard, *Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith,* 26.

Girard discusses Nietzsche's approach to such victimage, he notices, with some (perhaps smirking) contempt that, "[n]ot without coquetry he protests against his future canonization, but he prepares the way for it by setting out to become a living scandal. He behaves like a proper sacrificial beast."[81] Girard is quite correct here. Nietzsche does indeed behave like a sacrifice, one who knows he is a sacrifice and one who will be "canonized," in other words, added to a list of those to imitate, a fire worthy of a community's respect and devotion.

Giving Birth to a Dancing Star

One must still have chaos within oneself, to give birth to a dancing star! - Zarathustra[82]

Indeed, we philosophers" and "free spirits" feel, when we hear the news that "the old god is dead," as if a new dawn shone on us; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectations. At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, our sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an "open sea." - Nietzsche[83]

Both in the voice of Zarathustra and under his own name, Nietzsche speaks of the joyous and terrifying freedom created in the wake of God's death. With the idea of both god and sacrifice as a fire still in mind, consider that Nietzsche's admonitions to

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[81] Girard, "Founding Murder," 240.

[82] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* Prologue 5.

[83] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 343.

overcome humanity, as well as one's self, are in a sense a call to self-sacrifice. The great "open sea" of the world cries out for each person to act as a sacrifice, a making-sacred of human life, a fire to build around and to create new values. Where typically "self sacrifice" is understood as oriented towards some definite future goal or the preservation of the status quo, this self-overcoming wishes to continually find new joy along with new suffering. To Nietzsche each person should burn, voluntarily, rather than deferring the role of scapegoat to another individual.

As Girard often emphasizes,[84] Nietzsche does not use religious, and specifically Christian, terms and tropes by accident. Nietzsche's world is saturated by Christianity, and so the themes he uses are direct from the mythological playbook, including, as Tyler Roberts puts it "the discovery of a deep-seated sickness unto death; scales falling from eyes; brave and bleak periods of isolation; daily martyrdoms; the bite of hard-heartedness, of discipline and desire; the flaming spirit; and, finally, the grace of renewal where one finds one's life and one's world transformed."[85] It is of course the "flaming spirit" that is most interesting here, and especially its link to Christianity: "Like the desert ascetics of early Christianity, Nietzsche seeks the transfiguration of the body into flaming spirit."[86]

The sacrificial Christianity that Girard describes is the historical struggle wherein the old way of a sacred center, with which both desire and violence can be channeled, is slowly overtaken by the realization that the old way and its accompanying role models are contingent, that there is "no Greek or Jew" in Christ, which leads to a great freedom. But to live out freedom, one must still, even after this realization, choose and build order

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[84] See especially Girard, "Dionysus versus The Crucified."

[85] Roberts, *Contesting Spirit,* 3.

[86] Ibid, 92.

-- and so, as Girard shows us, one must sacrifice. If the revelation of Christianity begins to become self-aware in Nietzsche, as Girard claims, it is found most clearly in Nietzsche's efforts to sacrifice (that is, "make sacred") his self continually, rather than allowing an external object to be the site of violent expulsion.

In the process of this continual self-sacrifice, Nietzsche oscillates between a return to a purely competitive agon where the enemy is expelled, and one rooted in love, where each friend and enemy is both helped to grow and is helpful to growth. Roberts emphasizes the latter when he states: "Love, as Nietzsche understands it, is a rejoicing in the other, a directionality toward or desire for the other manifested in creative giving."[87] Girard is right to warn against the Nietzsche who wants to paradoxically reinstate the old order of rank and death, aided by reading in Darwinian ideas popular at the time. Yet he ought to apply his own theory of Christianity's dialogue with the violent sacred to Nietzsche, which would clarify Nietzsche's role for his thought. The struggle between a "bad" mimetic desire of the closed system and the "good" mimetic desire of Girard's non-sacrificial Christianity is embodied explosively in Nietzsche's life and writing.

At one level, Girard knows Nietzsche rejects a caricature of Christianity, not the "real thing." At the same time, Girard's most consistent statements attribute to Nietzsche a knowing rejection of the Judeo-Christian revelation in favour of violence. This rejection is present, yet it is not as informed as Girard suggests, as Nietzsche's disdain for victims comes from a vision of pity and victims rooted in a sacrificial Christianity, as Girard would put it. From Nietzsche's viewpoint, victims are praised for remaining victims, for waiting in devotion to a "sickly" reproduction of a Girardian "archaic religion," one which continues using the logic of the scapegoat, but does not allow for any movement or resolution to conflicts, as scapegoating is now shameful. Such a Christianity, which

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[87] Ibid, 195.

punishes the strong and aggressive while telling the poor and weak to remain in that state, is rightfully condemned.

Had Nietzsche been able to conceive of a Christianity which includes Jesus' "good news" and a Jesus whose message included a community rather than only individuals ("idiots," like Nietzsche's childlike Christ),[88] he might have arrived at views closer to Girard's. An emphasis on incarnation (the body) and divinity (as a creative joy), something more akin to a theosis, would match Nietzsche's longings. Roberts makes this point eloquently, sketching the sort of theology that approaches Nietzsche's Dionysus:

> ...a theology of the Cross can affirm a God who suffers with humanity, who is immersed, out of love, in the world-reality of the human. This God is closer to the repeated suffering and dying of Nietzsche's Dionysus than the impassible God who supports the dualism of the ascetic ideal. Contrary to Nietzsche's assertion, such a mystical theology would find in the imitation of Christ on the Cross not a means to another life, but an expression of love for this life -- a life in which the deepest suffering is intimately connected with the deepest affirmation.[89]

The dualism that Roberts refers to here maps onto Nietzsche's rejection of an otherworldly source of meaning and redemption for life. The incarnate god seeks not to condemn or give up on life, as Nietzsche fears, but instead to inspire recognition of the continual self-sacrifice each person must undergo in affirming life, which is both death and resurrection. To follow Christ becomes, in Nietzschean terms, a process of continual, affirmative self-overcoming.

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[88] "Idiot" understood as one who does not belong to a community. As Bruce Ellis Benson notes in *Pious Nietzsche,* the Jesus portrayed in *The Antichrist* seems to be similar to the protagonist of Doestoevsky's *The Idiot.*

[89] Roberts, *Contesting Spirit,* 183.

Further, Roberts identifies his analysis of Nietzsche with a "metaphoric postmodernity" which can easily be allied with Girard's work: "Whereas analytic postmodernity relegates all significations to the ultimately meaningless play of signifiers, metaphoric postmodernity reconnects the signifier to the signified through the body: signification is not purely linguistic; it is somatic, it speaks desire."[90] The emphasis on "the body" which "speaks desire," beyond the purely linguistic, is just what a Girardian account seeks to recover in its emphasis on "the truth of the victim." Missing from this insight, exemplified by the death of Jesus on the cross, is what could be called the "truth of the resurrected" -- that is, the truth of those who have overcome being a victim used for others' "salvation," and instead taken on an identity as living flame. The being who has followed a "holy desire" in a community she loves and desires to flourish is the rehabilitated victim who endures anguish and pain, never denying it in favour of some static "victory" or "other world." The victim's body, Nietzsche's body, and the body of the community, all speak and grow in desire, and all imitate each other in continuous, joyous creation by living, growing, and suffering without need of a transcendent guarantee, instead becoming flaming spirit.

Nietzsche misses this most difficult challenge of engaging with others due to his great nausea in the face of human laziness and contempt, and a refusal to follow a god of pity, along with his own deep loneliness.[91] He remains caught between his contempt for the Christian society of his day and his love of an idealized ancient Greece, neither of which he can truly affirm. In seeking to affirm life in an era which seems to idolize the weak and passive, he moves past his own teaching, the affirmation of everything, and

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[90] Ibid, 205.

[91] Christopher Hamilton, "Nietzsche and the murder of God" *Religious Studies* 43 (2007): 165–182.

decides to negate once more: "The weak and the failures shall perish: first principle of *our* love of man. And they shall even be given every possible assistance."[92] This statement from Nietzsche immediately brings to mind the charges of proto-Naziism often brought against him. As Tobin Siebers suggests, Nietzsche, if he is to be consistent, would need to affirm even Christianity[93] and "the weak and failures," along with all aspects of life. For him to create a world where those who are intent on self-overcoming could flourish would involve not a new set of masters, but a new ethic of partnership, one that we catch a glimpse of in Nietzsche's own insight about religious community. In such a community he sees that: "Love gives the greatest feeling of power. To grasp to what extent not man in general but a certain species of man speaks here....this means no morality, obedience or activity produces that feeling of power that love produces; one does nothing bad from love, one does much more than one would do from obedience and virtue... Being helpful and useful and caring for others continually arouses the feeling of power."[94]

Yet Nietzsche rejected this community, despite seeming to understand it, and came to embody the violent and ugly aspects of sacrifice in himself rather than its unitive and joyous ones. Christopher Hamilton writes that Nietzsche:

> believed that to have a sense of such a fellowship was to reject the world in all its
> morally suspect manner. And he believed that to do this would be
> to reject the standing conditions of life in the only way we humans can live it, that
> is, as a life involving much that is morally reprehensible. For Nietzsche, that
> thought was disgusting, unworthy of human beings. He was trapped between a

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[92] Nietzsche, "The Antichrist," 2 (italics in original).

[93] Siebers, *The Ethics of Criticsm,* 147.

[94] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* 176.

sense of common fellowship with other human beings, and a desire to affirm life

as it actually is. Unable to do either, he tyrannized over his own nature,

exercising, but seeking thereby to exorcise, the asceticism he abhorred, and

murdering God in the process.[95]

In Hamilton's assessment we find another confirmation of Nietzsche's ascetic nature,

cloaked though it may be in the rejection of the old God. Nietzsche acts as the sacrificer

and sacrifice, the "worshipper and worshipped" as Girard elsewhere claims, insofar as he

does constantly overcome (sacrifice) himself, or at least struggles to do so.[96] How this

consistent self-overcoming is to be maintained while still respecting and interacting with

others is unclear to Nietzsche -- he is trapped and alone because of his constant quest

for a purely individual freedom and power, the only way he sees to "affirm life as it

actually is."

The Lonely Sun

When this disgust for human fellowship comes out in Nietzsche's work, it stands

in contrast to the passages where Nietzsche, or at least his creation Zarathustra,

emphasizes the great value of friendship and gift giving. Two scholars have recently

examined this in relation to politics, Romand Coles[97] and Katrin Froese.[98] Both examine

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[95] Hamilton, "Murder of God," 179.

[96] This loneliness and rejection of community, and their connection with Nietzsche's sense of
reality, are also taken up in Giles Fraser's *Redeeming Nietzsche,* 97-99.

[97] Romand Coles, "Liberty, Equality, Receptive Generosity: Neo-Nietzschean Reflections on the
Ethics and Politics of a Coalition," *American Political Science Review* 90:2 (1996), 375-387.

[98] Katrin Froese, *Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Daoist Thought: Crossing Paths In-Between* (Albany:
SUNY), 2006.

the theme of gift and giving in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Zarathustra can be seen as a sort of proto-Übermensch who acts out Nietzsche's ideal life (which is notably one still built on tragedy, comedy, and an appreciation for Christian symbolism).

Coles focuses on the section of *Zarathustra* concerning "The Gift Giving Virtue," which Coles notes is the "highest virtue" according to Zarathustra. The attitude here is one who gives out of fullness, who is compassionate in a sense which is positive for Nietzsche, rather than the parasitic "pity" which he attributes to the popular morality of his time. Coles also focuses on an image of fire in Nietzsche's work, the sun, and connects it to this virtue.[99] The great star, which burns and freely gives to the world, is what Zarathustra strives to be like. In keeping with the theme of self overcoming as self sacrifice, the sun burns and gives. It is a star like so many other gods -- steady, brilliant, and without need of support. Yet it is obvious that Zarathustra does not see an end to strife in the gift-giving virtue, but rather a noble way of negotiating with it, as Coles notes. How can one become the "dancing star" Zarathustra wishes to be without a dancing partner, without others? To give and give without receiving would leave one "giving" without any notion of what is received, or of who is receiving. More than this, the self-overcoming which Nietzsche assumes is necessary for life would seem to have no place.

In Froese's work this is accounted for in her reading of Nietzsche's concept of eternal return as the great interconnectedness of all things.[100] This interconnection is held in tension with Nietzsche's own aristocratic politics which he builds upon the notion of will to power. As Nietzsche sees it, a will always seeks a stable sovereignty, or, to put it another way, to be a star. Froese points out that Zarathustra's comments on friendship indicate the best are those wherein "each stimulates the other's development and

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[99] Coles, "Neo-Nietzsche Reflections," 382.

[100] Froese, *Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Daoist Thought,* 162.

growth,"[101] rather than a self-sustaining god dictating to another mortal. The porous self that Nietzsche acknowledges is one which can never really become a "sun" or "star" -- or rather, it can only become such a celestial body for those who are kept far away and who do not examine it too closely. This is a recreation of the image of the "lords" on high in relation to the servants and slaves who take the gifts (and commands) of the god. Froese's emphasis on the fluid nature of the Nietzschean self, along with the interconnection of life as an eternal return, shows the weakness of Nietzsche's politics, which lack imagination.

Both Coles and Froese see in the gift giving virtue the potential for another path in Nietzsche, one which Nietzsche himself did not follow, likely out of his stubborn loneliness. In this vision Zarathustra does find the companions he seeks, and more than this, helps create a style of life and community which encourages the generosity and agon which is so difficult to maintain. Julian Young, in his effort to reconstruct a proposed folk religion from Nietzsche's writing, suggests that the community which Nietzsche did imagine was one which gave positive role models for many different classes of people, held together by the *pia fraus* of the philosophers.[102] That all people could embrace the radical fluidity of the self was not something Nietzsche could imagine. Yet, in reading Nietzsche with Girard's account of Christianity, it would seem that that is the proposed, though extremely difficult, project the church pursues.

Nietzsche's life was tragic for many reasons, his loneliness key among them, but the one I have uncovered here is his failure to imagine, if not a vehicle for his longings, an ally and fellow traveler in a non-sacrificial Christianity. Contrary to Girard's suggestions, this was not due to poor reasoning or to Dionysian mania, but for the lack of

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[101] Ibid.

[102] Julian Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Religion,* 171-173*.*

a role model, and a lack of courage. Nietzsche had to try to square the circle by imitating himself, "becoming who he is." The Christianity that surrounded Nietzsche did hold the insights that Girard points to, except unconsciously, while its outward signs and the majority of its members carried out the ancient duties of religion in the sacrificial style. That Christianity is not like other religions was clear to Nietzsche -- but that it held anything but a strange (and brilliant) cult of weakness, this was hidden from his conscious mind, sighted only briefly in his assessment of Jesus. As Christianity did not seem to allow for any models but the heavy weight of guilt and passive nihilism, he proposed to become a "flaming spirit" for the sake of those with eyes to see and so behaved as a sacrificial victim. Yet because of his inability to affirm the potential of other people to also become "dancing stars," as well as his need for them as partners, he closes off the possibility for community, and so for the Übermensch (the ideal friend) he longs for. This version of Nietzsche, brought into Girard's project, offers these insights of "becoming a star," which can be joined together with an idea of intersubjective community, striving together to be flaming spirit.

Chapter 4: **Saved from Salvation**

In the work of both Nietzsche and Girard, "religion" is seen as something both integral to all communities and as something that must be overcome if humans are to become free. In overcoming "religion," human beings can come to deal with the world as it is rather than seeking some final end to suffering and turmoil. As commentators on both thinkers have suggested, Nietzsche and Girard seek a way to be saved from salvation,[103] that is, to live without the promise or hope of transcending the world of desire and conflict.

Girard's account of Nietzsche is almost exclusively negative, except where Girard sees the seeds of his own insights. As the preceding chapters have indicated, there is much to be gained from reading Nietzsche through Girard and Girard through Nietzsche. That Girard is not more charitable towards Nietzsche's life, and to the inspirational quality of Nietzsche's corpus (both his writing and what we know of his life), is a great loss to Girard's project.

In this chapter the idea of a Girardian community is examined, in the light of Girardian scholars, followed by a look at Rebecca Adams' suggestion for a "reassessed Girardian point of view." Finally, in light of my earlier account, Nietzsche will be given a place in this "reassessed" view. I assert that, within a Girardian model of intersubjective, creative community, Nietzschean thought, and the figure of Nietzsche, can be given a role which avoids the darker aspects of a victimizing Nietzsche.

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[103] Giles Fraser emphasizes Nietzsche's project as soteriological, one which seeks to "redeem us from redemption" while Simon T. Taylor writes of Girard's project as one which seeks to "save us from salvation."

A Community of Free Spirits

The contrast of Girard's vision with Nietzsche's lies in Girard's championing of the orthodox Christian tradition,[104] and especially the imitation of Christ, as a way to overcome the maladies of the modern world. Nietzsche's Jesus is one who, though beautiful, admirable, and a "free spirit," is not, and perhaps *cannot,* be understood by his community. Nietzsche's "free spirits," as well as his Übermensch, may come together in community occasionally, or spar for growth and joy, but the communities they found are to be ones of rank, hierarchy and selective breeding. Girard's Jesus, in opposition to this, is the founder of another community of "free spirits" -- *ecclesia,* the church, the members of which are "free" in the sense that they know about the scapegoat mechanism.

Among the many theologians, psychologists, philosophers, clergymen, and clergywomen who make use of Girard's mimetic theory in their work, some of the most interesting thought happens within his own Catholic faith, and it is from such sources that we will briefly examine this community in light of Nietzsche. In his book on Catholic ascetic practice and Girardian thought, Andrew Marr brings together themes of community and selfhood, and links a parable of Jesus with his understanding of mimetic theory:

> Clinging to myself is a sure way to lose myself. That is to say, trying to save one's
> life is a sure way to lose it. A "true self" is a set of relationships, as mimetic theory
> would have it. What makes such a set of relationships constitute a true self is its
> grounding in God, from which the self reaches out to others with God's creative
> love. If we lose ourselves, we will find it. The true self is gift planted in us by God,
> like a mustard seed. […] And as the seed within us grows into a flourishing self,

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[104] Though of course there are many "sacrificial" elements in Christian theology's development which are at odds with Girard.

many other people will expand the self by resting in our branches. The more one

wills one's own true self, the more one will also will the true self of other people.[105]

Nietzsche's harsh tone and vitriol towards "the weak," as well as the Christian God,

would seem to preclude him from appreciating such an image. Yet Nietzsche did enjoy

seeing the self as essentially organic,[106] and his great love and respect for friendship, as

well as his overwhelming wish to have friends as equals around him, suggests that

Nietzsche, when he is able to see others as persons, rather than masters or slaves,

wishes for just such a mutual striving. In Nietzsche's published writing, as well as his

notebooks, the number of equals Nietzsche envisions seems to be quite limited.

Nietzsche's politics are typically taken to either be non-existent (which seems doubtful)[107]

or viciously aristocratic, with an aim to create the conditions necessary for great men,

and eventually the Übermensch, sacrificing as many of "the herd" as might be

necessary. Yet what if Nietzsche had a picture of an ascetic community as originating in

the affirmation of life he seeks, that is, willing one's "true self," rather than the negations

of rank and violence? Would this not appeal to the gift-giving virtue?

Another suggestion of this comes from Catholic theologian James Alison who

has, since the early 1990's, drawn extensively on Girard's insights in his writing, focusing

on key Catholic themes such as original sin, eschatology, and Christology. His vision of

Christianity is one which is both traditionally Catholic and "Girardian," and seeks a return

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[105] Andrew Marr, *Tools for Peace: The Spiritual Craft of St. Benedict and René Girard* (Detroit: iUniverse, 2007), 106.

[106] For example see Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, translated by Roger Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 382.

[107] Walter Kaufmann seems to paint Nietzsche as apolitical.

to the "good news" as actual news centred in this world, the earth. Speaking about the prophet Ezekiel, Alison gives us a glimpse of what he sees all believers hoping for:

> I am beginning to sense a creative project of love which is not really beyond resentment at all. It is so much prior to resentment that it has to hide a vast, playful laugh at bringing us into being, lest we misinterpret such playfulness and such joy from within our resentment and shrink back, refusing to believe that all that tenderly suppressed mirth is not "at" us but "for" us.[108]

Are there not echoes here of Nietzsche's project, to laugh and play again in the midst of life, without the "spirit of revenge?" Nietzsche was living within a world saturated by Christianity. As Girard suggests throughout his later writing, people come to absorb some of the gospel message unconsciously. Nietzsche does not intend to worship a god of violence in invoking Dionysus, as Girard charges, but his own god of *affirmation,* a god he imagines from the time "prior to resentment." Nietzsche wants a god who says "It is good!,"[109] the eternal "Yes!," at all times. This affirmation involves creation, dance, and risk, as opposed to stasis. In the Christianity of his time he saw a "No!" which was not constructive, but final. It was a disguised "wisdom of Silenus"[110] -- that a human would be better off to have never been born.

Nietzsche's philosophy, and so his Dionysus, do end up affirming slavery, exploitation, and a harsh hierarchy in opposition to this "no" of an inactive, absolutely passive Christianity. His ideal of dancing, creative men of equal rank in the world

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[108] James Alison, "Moving On: The Exilic Transformation of Anger into Love," in *Faith Beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 124.

[109] For Nietzsche such a claim of "good" would be made beyond the dualistic categories like good/evil or good/bad. The world is good insofar as the god affirms it – the affirmation is what makes it good.

[110] Nietzsche discusses this in *The Birth of Tragedy,* building on Arthur Schopenhauer.

requires an underclass -- he does not make the grand move to suggest that there could be an entire world of Yes-saying, a revolution which releases humanity from having to crush and enslave one another.[111] The world of self-overcoming persons who do not *need* to be above others, do not *need* to have an order of rank, the masters, is paradoxically supplemented by those who do need such things, the servants or slaves. Nietzsche's ideal of masters who have great friends and enemies who spur each other to greater things does not need to oppose a Christianity like the one Alison promotes, contrary to Nietzsche's other views.

A community composed of "equals" in the sense of a static equivalence is what Nietzsche saw modern Christianity (as well as socialism and most forms of liberal politics) as promoting. "We are equal, and that is that -- there is nothing to be done in this world, nothing to achieve," say those who are equal in this sense, echoing Nietzsche's fear of the "last man." In contrast to such an equality, those who struggle to be free of negative mimetic desire do not rest in a static, dead certainty, but instead recognize the process of self-overcoming happening in all beings. Nietzsche lazily claims that there are simply those who are incapable of self-overcoming (the recognition of the will to power), of bearing the weight of such knowledge. Elsewhere it is clear that he knows modern people cannot be used as the building material of such a project anymore, that the news of god's death is spreading.[112] Reinvigorating the blind, reactive will to power (a negative mimetic desire), in the form of empires of rank, is only a temporary measure. Surely Nietzsche would prefer a world of equal, playful rivals and friends than one in which the majority of people make him sick? By taking on Nietzschean "self-overcoming" as a

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[111] See Ruth Abbey and Fredrick Appel, "Nietzsche and The Will to Politics" in *The Review of Politics* 60:1, (1998): 83-114.

[112] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* 304.

powerful vision of Girardian asceticism, Girardian thought can give a place to Nietzsche while Nietzschean thought can try to articulate a social ideal other than lonely, distant masters lying to control their slaves.

At the end of his essay on the Parable of the Mad Man, Girard suggests that the death of god "opens up an abyss of meaninglessness closed by Zarathustra,"[113] who is a supporter of the old engine of pagan myth. While this is convenient for Girard, in that it fits into his theory at first sight, pushing the Girardian analysis further bears much sweeter fruit. Nietzsche's writing does oscillate between advocacy of violence, even if only an aesthetic violence, and a glorification of the strong, giving, almost merciful Übermensch, who wishes for friends and growth. If one puts the emphasis on the latter theme, it seems that at some level Nietzsche did absorb the (Girardian) Gospel message of non-violence and non-scapegoating. The Übermensch, along with Nietzsche's other dreams for himself, battles with life, and honours sacrifice, and in doing so grows. But he does not seek revenge, does not blame others. And most importantly, he knows that no victory, nor order, is meaningful or valuable in itself. In this way Zarathustra does not "support" the old engine, then, but produces a hybrid of the Girardian Gospel and a pagan ethic of self-cultivation. Self-overcoming does not require an order of slaves and masters in the old sense, and in fact the older order might impede true self-overcoming, as it encourages strong identification with one's social role, a clinging to one's current mastery. Nietzsche knows such a thing is not possible, that the times do not fit with that. Nietzsche feels he is alone in his insight into Christianity, and speaks from a lonely position -- one that leads him to downplay the importance of community, and even promote collective violence. Girard has an intuitive grasp of this through his theoretical apparatus. He says of the parable that "[t]he Madman is an image of himself which

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[113] Girard, "Founding Murder," 245.

Nietzsche only appears to control. Like all images of himself, it transforms irresistibly into an *imago Christi* of unusual reverence."[114] This is due to Nietzsche embodying the task of somehow moving the world beyond false redemptions, through a model which is Christ, though seen through a glass darkly. For Girard and those who utilize his mimetic theory to cast out Nietzsche based on his failings is a mistake which cuts off valuable resources for thinking about selfhood without the idea of a sacred centre.

From "Loving Mimesis" to Loving Nietzsche

Amor fati: May that be my love from now on! I want to wage no war against the ugly. I do not want to accuse -- I do not even want to accuse the accusers. May looking away be my only form of negation! And, all in all I want at all times to be only an affirmer! - Nietzsche[115]

As suggested above, Girard can gain a more positive account of mimetic desire through Nietzschean self-overcoming, and Nietzsche can be moved closer to being "only an affirmer" of life by being brought into Girardian community. Independent scholar Rebecca Adams has put forward a proposal for a fuller, more positive account of mimetic desire than the one typically put forward by Girard. She feels that her ideas are a consequence of the ideas present in Girard's theories when applied against themselves -- an account of mimetic theory which looks for and seeks to exonerate its scapegoats (or in other words, to rehabilitate its victims). Her proposal provides an additional framework for interpreting Nietzsche as an ally for Girardian thought. Adams seeks to move past the

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[114] Ibid.

[115] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* 276.

seemingly dead end of Girard's portrayal of desire, which seems to suggest desire is always negative, leading only to conflict, and that the solution is a renunciation of desire. The image of a community based around such renunciation seems to have no chance for growth, or for culture, and seems to fall easily into Nietzsche's charge of life-denial, and this is what she seeks to avoid.

Adams describes her "new paradigm of mimetic desire" as "genuine love," beyond "a split system of representation as mere nonviolence, a set of prescriptive ethics, or self-renunciation." This is a sort of desire which embraces all aspects of life, in fact loves life. It seeks "to be only an affirmer," to use Nietzsche's phrase. However, following Girard, Adams too suggests Nietzsche as a model to be avoided, saying that her account is "[u]nlike Nietzsche, who tried definitively to take [love and power] apart and who rejected Christianity in the process." Though it is true that Nietzsche rejects Christianity, and that he often emphasizes the violent, and even hateful qualities of his "will to power," I do not think Nietzsche's views are always so different than Adams' here, especially if one pushes certain Nietzschean ideas, as Adams does with Girard, beyond their initial conclusions.

The most important connection between Adams' account of mimetic desire and the Nietzschean will to power is that both are concerned with creativity, and further, construe creativity as intertwined with love. Adams gives an account of "real love" which shows its dynamic and even frightening character, explaining: "[R]eal love is not mere peace or harmony, and creativity is not merely positive or pretty. Real love is the powerful force which liberates victims and perpetrators as well, which will not allow us to remain small or static, a prospect which can indeed be frightening. Real love continually

brings new things into being."[116] Nietzsche's images of the philosopher as legislator, as dancer, as artist, and most importantly, of the constant quest for self-overcoming, all resonate with Adams' description. Desires fully pursued create new things, not merely a clinging to status, people, or objects, and a name for fully pursued desire is love. The imitation of another's desire, even another's love, which seeks only security (and so scorns risk), can never become love, can never add to love, as it is not a fully pursued desire.

In an oft-quoted aphorism, Nietzsche asserts that "What is done out of love always occurs beyond good and evil,"[117] and this seems to me to be the first step in bringing Nietzsche and his Zarathustra towards collaboration with Adams' interpretation of Girard. Adams, following her statement against Nietzsche, claims her version of mimetic desire allows for "a more adequate interpretation of true power as the will to intersubjective creative love of Self and Other." Though Nietzsche advocates for a will to power rooted only in individual organisms, "against the herd," there is no *necessity* for this path to be taken, and no necessity for a group to become a "herd," mindless, will-less, and dominated by outside forces. In his work he also admits the fractured nature of the "self," the multiple nature of bodies, and the many internal and external drives which come together to form a seemingly "single" will. Therefore an embrace of the will to power as the identity of life could easily take the form of an "intersubjective creative love

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[116] Rebecca Adams, "Loving Mimesis and Girard's 'Scapegoat of the Text:' A Creative Reassessment of Mimetic Desire." Retrieved at http://web.ustpaul.uottawa.ca/covr2006/Document/RebeccaGirard.pdf , 2006: 24.

[117] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* 153.

of Self and Other," a self-overcoming which spreads to others, rather than the bleak vision Nietzsche chooses.[118]

Nietzsche's efforts to free himself, and his readers, from resentment and the "spirit of revenge" can be seen as efforts to escape the "bad" mimetic desire which Girard opposes. Life is often very competitive, with the desires of different groups and individuals coming into conflict, but it is not this conflict that Nietzsche opposes, but a certain reaction to it. Rather than seeking to outdo others, or to prevent them from experiencing growth or joy, Nietzsche's model is the one who pursues one's own will and own expansion. Unfortunately Nietzsche includes in this the master who would enslave, the warlord who would sacrifice his minions rather than grow himself. This may be out of necessity, as Nietzsche sees no role model who is pure and so can avoid becoming a master of that sort. Nevertheless, as Girard charges, Nietzsche often advocates a return to the old engine of kings and lords, even as he punctures and dismantles the old framework which preserved such systems.

Yet Nietzsche claims that "the secret of the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment of existence is: *live dangerously!,*"[119] and it seems that the link between the

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[118] I am aware that, following scholars such as Deleuze and Heidegger, the Nietzschean will to power does not provide a clear demarcation between power-as-love or power-as-hate, but treats all power as ontologically equal. The emphasis here is placed upon the idea that there is no *necessity* to choose a purely individualistic strategy in the struggle for power. Though Nietzsche advocates for such strategies at times, I am suggesting another strategy, one more in line with Adams' suggestion of intersubjective creative love, is possible for Nietzsche. As elsewhere, I am influenced by Tyler Roberts' reading of Nietzsche in this regard. See for example, *Contesting Spirit,* 23,186-88, and 195.

[119] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* 283 (italics in original).

evils of mimetic desire in Girard's view, and the "reactive" strategies of the will to power (e.g. "slave morality") in Nietzsche is exactly in this failure to "live dangerously." One can see in Girard's account of mimetic desire a yearning for the very "being" the other person possesses -- a vague, powerful and static something which is, above all, *security*, safe from the world of change and pain. In Nietzsche's account of slave morality, especially of the Jewish and Christian varieties, it is another world, one which again promises *security* above all else. Nietzsche's positive appraisal of the Napoleons of the world, however, leads Nietzsche to search for security as well -- the master has his slaves, after all, who follow and obey, which provides a great deal of strength and security. But this security too is false as all the slaves are also potential "masters," capable of love "beyond good and evil." His advice to free spirits, "not to cleave to any person, be it even the dearest -- every person is a prison and also a recess"[120] holds well for all. Nietzsche chooses to advocate for the "safe" path in advocating for hierarchy and rank, where one can keep a safe distance from everyone, and so stay, in a sense, pure in one's goal. However if Nietzsche is to truly "live dangerously," and overcome himself as he is driven to, he will have to accelerate the process in those around him -- he will have to engage in an intersubjective creative love, a community, one fraught with constant rivalry with the potential both for growth (with others as healthy rivals and allies) and stagnation (those who become a "prison"). "Love has been falsified as surrender (and altruism), while it is an appropriation or a bestowal following from a super-abundance of personality. Only the most complete persons can love."[121] Without a community, Nietzsche has little opportunity to exercise such love.

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[120] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* II: 41.

[121] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 296.

That there could be other groups or schools of thought, both in Nietzsche's time and ours, that grasp the Girardian "intelligence of the victim," without explicitly being Christian, is a theme Rebecca Adams discusses in "Loving Mimesis." In her conclusion she emphasizes the importance of looking at other religious traditions, as well as philosophical or non-religious traditions, for signs that a similar "upbuilding creative love,"[122] to use James Alison's term, can be fostered. This is mentioned to emphasize again that the path we have wandered down suggests that Nietzsche's insights can point to such selfless love, without requiring a positive appraisal of the Gospels themselves. Girard's insights, combined with Nietzsche's, show Nietzsche as a powerful thinker, saturated by the Christianity and philosophy of his day, who struggled to work out his own exit from a deadlocked mimetic struggle through his notion of self-overcoming. Though he may have failed in this regard, his efforts give us a model for rigorous self-criticism and a willingness to engage with mimetic desire as a creative, transformative force. Nietzsche saw Girard's mimetic struggles clearly, and sought to stay with the world, despite this, attempting to renounce security to avoid mimetic crisis.

If a community, a culture, is merely a vehicle for producing a few "higher men" in Nietzsche's view, could a further step not be taken to create many such beings, free from resentment? If such beings can go "beyond good and evil," why can they not move beyond mastery and slavery?

Following Adams' suggestions for a this new understanding of mimetic desire, Nietzsche can be utilized within mimetic theory as the "revered guru of guru-renunciation," as Girard jokingly puts it, a contemporary figure who models the struggles which arise from both knowing one needs to become something ultimately independent

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[122] Alison, "Moving On: The Exilic Transformation of Anger into Love," in *Faith Beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay (London:* Dartman, Longman, and Todd, 2001), 117.

of a model yet can only arrive there once one has forsaken (and therefore, first successfully imitated) one's models. Embracing one's "will to power" becomes the duty to create new strategies, and the corresponding duty to endure suffering. That Nietzsche did not count many human relationships as worth enduring, as worth affirming, is his failing, his own refusal to live dangerously. To move his work beyond this failing, towards a true embrace of both desire and its partner, the gift-giving virtue,[123] would give mimetic theory new tools to make positive, constructive claims.

"No longer joy in certainty but uncertainty; no longer 'cause and effect' but the continually creative; no longer will to preservation but to power; no longer the humble expression, 'everything is merely subjective,' but 'it is also our work! -- Let us be proud of it!"[124] Where else but in a community of shared love, always trying to free itself of masters and slaves, can Nietzsche have hoped to live out such a vision? Where else could he live out his self sacrifice so as to become a dancing star, over and over again?

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[123] The gift-giving virtue is the aspect of Nietzsche's ideal figure which gives freely, out of abundance. See chapter 3.

[124] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* 1059.

Conclusion: A Girardian Nietzsche

A great value of antiquity lies in the fact that its *writings* are the only ones that modern men still *read with exactness*. - Nietzsche[125]

This quote from a young Nietzsche, at the time living as a young professor of philology, points to the bond that is present between his work and that of Girard. For Girard as well as Nietzsche, the best way to deal with the present age is to go back and work through the traditions that have constructed it, and so to make something new.

In reading Nietzsche together with Girard with some "exactness," and so using them both as models, I have shown that, contrary to Girard's suggestion, Nietzsche's notions of "will to power" and "self overcoming" offer more than merely the "ideology"[126] of

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[125] Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche,* 48 (italics in original).

[126] Girard, as quoted in Siebers, 147.

Girard's mimetic desire, but instead are precursors and powerful supplements to it. Girard opens important questions about Nietzsche, but does not pursue his own insights far enough. Nietzsche's suggestions for self-overcoming offer a path which is constantly being cleared of idols, and so from the negative, "metaphysical" version of mimetic desire, in favour of an imitative ethic which is dynamic and creative. The "guru of guru renunciation"[127] provides a model where one imitates, but is never fully identified with, a role, and so, ideally, is not trapped in a certain tradition, but instead is liberated from scapegoating, saved from the need for salvation.

As suggested by working through the different yet complementary analyses of Tyler Roberts, Tobin Siebers, Rebecca Adams, and others, instead of merely seeing the destructive, victim-hating Nietzsche, Girard and those dedicated to his theory ought to investigate the Nietzsche who seeks to "be only an affirmer" of life, and in doing so aims to embody a creative love, always striving to be free from resentment and the need for scapegoats. By identifying this shared aim, and engaging with the Nietzsche who seeks an affirmation of life's desires, mimetic theory can be furthered.

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[127] Girard, "Innovation and Repetition," 12-13.

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