

A Gaian Harmony of the Nonviolent Gods

Presentation of Work-in-Progress from
After Violence: Futuring Victim-Free Society

In this book I argue that deconstructing the phenomena of systemic violence and victimization is the decisive project of the postmodern era. Such phenomena pervade all our institutions and disciplines at the deep structural level. We therefore require a systematic and millennia-long process of exposé and reconstruction. In this section the deconstructive project focuses on specifically religious violence as a malpractice and distortion of the benign orientation of a religion's idealized traditions.¹

By hypothesis, every religious tradition conveys its own distinctive resources for nonviolence. Even if this were true, however, we are also discovering that each tradition needs other traditions in order to deconstruct (or simply recognize) its own intractable conflicts and chronic human rights violations. It appears that no single religious tradition or cultural institution has ever demonstrated sufficient competence or proficiency to insure the freedom of its own adherents from 'sacred violence' and human victimization. Collectively, nonetheless, these wisdom traditions may be able to provide invaluable and

¹ I attempt here to extrapolate to other religious traditions the "non-sacrificial reading" of scriptural texts (cf. "A Non-Sacrificial Reading of the Gospel Text" in René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987; pp. 180-223); or to generalize an "anthropology of the Cross" (cf. "Epilogue: The Anthropology of the Cross: A Conversation with René Girard," in James Williams, ed., *The Girard Reader*, New York: Crossroad, 1996; pp. 262-288.)

decisive supplements to each other's internal resources for fostering violence-free societies.

3.1 Pharmacy of the Counterfeit Sacred

A schematic framework for this section is available in this 'pharmacopeic' terminology derived from the related Greek words for scapegoat, potion, and sorcerer: *pharmakos*, *pharmakon*, and *pharmakeus*, respectively.

Pharmakos: scapegoat, sacrificial victim, ritual target

Pharmakon: potion; medicine/poison; ritual prescription

Pharmakeus: sorcerer, wizard, magician, ritual expert

I use the interrelationship of these terms to suggest how rivalry and mystification among religious traditions serve to conceal and perpetuate the demonic operation of the sacred. In these terms the typical scapegoat (Gk: *pharmakos*) in a given tradition functions as a healing/harming potion (Gk: *pharmakon* = medicine or poison) that is prescribed to resolve a sacrificial crisis by the ritual expert (Gk: *pharmakeus*) who presides at a certain time and place. These three figures or factors are configured by each tradition distinctively and characteristically in order to treat issues of rivalry, difference, and contagion within its own social-historical context. However, if a meta-comparison of these pharmacopeic structures and operations were ever displayed, *by hypothesis* each tradition would expose to view the fabricated, relative, arbitrary, and

implicitly malleable nature of its (otherwise hallowed and sacrosanct) ‘victimary’ and proto-violent constructions.²

Judaism for example would be exposed to the inescapably exclusionary, and hence anti-prophetic and anti-messianic nature of its prevailing ethnocentric and patriarchal constructions of Torah righteousness. Christianity for example would be exposed to the self-contradictory nature of its prevailing exclusionary claim, that only a literal profession of the divinity of Christ constitutes membership in the beloved community of an all-loving God. And Islam for example would be exposed to the internal contradictions proceeding from its prevailing rivalry with Judaism and Christianity, contradictions that result in its ongoing exclusion of women and varying ethnic and social classes from the far more egalitarian and inclusive provisions accorded them by the Prophet himself (PBUH).³

The common element in these examples, as I have articulated them, is exclusion or exclusivity. Such exclusion is a pharmacopeic trace, found in every religious tradition, cultural institution, and group process, of the scapegoat mechanism. For scapegoating consists precisely in the unifying of one group by means of (at the cost of) the exclusion, expulsion, or destruction of ‘the other’
Therein it provides the instrument by means of which group identity and unity is

² Cf. Vernon Ruland, *Sacred Lies and Silences: A Psychology of Religious Disguise*. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1994.

³ See Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, *The Second Message of Islam*. Trans. and Introduction by Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im. (Emory Law) Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1987.

achieved; by means of the schema, “unanimity-minus-one.”⁴ The complicity of all religions and cultural institutions in such identity formation and unity maintenance is explored in these chapters. I begin in section 3.2 with the Western comparative matrix that comprises the classical monotheisms or ‘Abrahamic’ traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. After turning to Hinduism, Buddhism, and then the more numerous traditions of indigenous peoples in section 3.3, I attempt a ‘Gaian harmony’ of all religious traditions. (I borrow my use of the ‘Gaia Hypothesis.’ See Appendix A below.) Such a harmony, however, is not intended to be a theological synthesis of different religious beliefs or practices.⁵ It is intended rather to demonstrate “how the counter-rivalry of each religion preferring / deferring-to other religions deconstructs sacred violence.”

To this end I show how each tradition conveys its own distinctive resources for countering scapegoating and deconstructing sacred violence. Moreover, *by hypothesis*, each tradition needs the other traditions in order to supplement its own deconstructive resources. For no single religious tradition or cultural institution has ever demonstrated sufficient competence or proficiency in forestalling the scapegoat process within its own domain, nor between itself and other traditions and institutions. In this proposed “Harmony of the Nonviolent

⁴ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 259. Cf. Chapter 4 above.

⁵ In this connection see the excellent work of N. Ross Reat and Edmund F. Perry, *A World Theology: The Central Spiritual Reality of Humankind* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) to appreciate the kind of project that I am *not* attempting here.

Gods” I posit a necessary and perhaps a ‘socio-genetic’ dependence of each religion on some critical combination of other religions—not only its familiar rivals but also traditions configured as its relatively unknown, ‘wholly other’.

‘We never see our own scapegoats,’ as René Girard reminds us.⁶ For that reason each tradition requires multiple voices within and without to disclose the requirements of its own internal and external projects of deconstructing victimization and violence. Ironically—and contrary to his own intentions, I insist—Girard himself is often regarded as scapegoating other religions on the basis of a christocentrism that devalues their anti-scapegoating capabilities. For his part Girard feels justified in privileging the Christian gospels for providing, decisively in its crucifixion-resurrection nexus but also elsewhere in the Christian scriptures, the indispensable revelation of the scapegoat mechanism, without which we would not recognize it definitively in other traditions and practices. My own attempt to mediate this debate follows Karl Jaspers’ more circumspect insight regarding the criteria for verifying the empirical reality of a so-called “Axial Age.” (On this term see Appendix B below.)

An axis of world history, if such a thing exists, would have to be discovered *empirically*, as a fact capable of being accepted as such by all men, Christians included. This axis would be situated at the point in history which gave birth to everything which, since then, man has been able to be, the point most overwhelmingly fruitful in fashioning humanity;

⁶ For this expression see René Girard, *The Girard Reader*, James G. Williams, ed., (New York: Crossroad, 1996), p. 000.

its character would have to be, if not empirically cogent and evident, yet so convincing to empirical insight as to give rise to a common frame of historical self-comprehension for all peoples—for the West, for Asia, and for all men on earth, without regard to particular articles of faith.⁷

In the following schema I attempt my own matrix of relations among diverse religious traditions [see next page].

⁷ Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 1.

Gaian Harmony of the Nonviolent Gods:

Renunciatory Transformations Each Tradition Offers to / Needs from the Others

[Cf. John Cobb, "Being a Transformationist in a Pluralistic World," *Christian Century*, Aug. 10-17, 1994, pp.748-751.]

Tikkun Olam "Repair the world": It is possible to heal from all histories of domination

Judaism: (true) *Torah* renounces a peoples' internalized pain as the voice of God

Pharmacosm "Ritual Cosmos" (Zeuss): World as storehouse of ritual transformations

Indigenous Religions: pharmacopeic renunciation of poison/medicine dualism

Aware Compassion "However innumerable all beings are, I vow to save them all."

Buddhism: Bodisattvas renounce self-enlightenment to secure liberation for all

Jihad "Struggle" against all injustice & oppression that follows total surrender to Allah

Islam: the greater vs. lesser *jihad* is the renunciation waged within oneself

Atman is Brahman Each of us is simultaneously oneself and 'coinherent' (C.Williams) with that ultimate reality that grounds us all.

Hinduism / Vedanta: "Thou art That"; e.g., your body the Vedic fire altar on which you, the sacrificer, offer yourself, the sacrifice (cf. *Samnyasa Upanishads'* renunciation of all rites) = non-dual sacrifice

Gospel / <i>kerygma</i>	"good news" / proclamation: no-new-victims!	We found it (eureka)! "beloved community"
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Christianity: renunciation of scapegoating is Jesus' 'way, truth, and life;' non-victimization neither 'scapegoats-in' at self nor 'scapegoats-out' at others

N.B. This schema lacks a necessary addition of the typical deceptions and distortions to which each tradition is susceptible given its own origins, provenance, and enthrallment to sacred violence. Cf. Ruland, *Sacred Lies and Silences*, cited above.

Appendix A

The Gaia Hypothesis

In this draft Excursus I simply borrow the term “Gaia” or “Gaian” from its earliest theoreticians, James E. Lovelock and Lynn Margulis. In the final draft of the book I plan to elaborate a harmony of the nonviolent sacred that is consistent with Lovelock’s concept of a benign planetary “homeostasis,” and with Margulis’s preference for cooperative over-against competitive or exploitative processes in that homeostatic system, and for symbiosis over-against chance mutation in evolutionary theories.

The Gaia hypothesis, when we introduced it in the 1970s [in *The Gaia Hypothesis* by James E. Lovelock and Lynn Margulis] supposed that the atmosphere, the oceans, the climate, and the crust of the Earth are regulated at a state comfortable for life because of the behavior of living organisms. Specifically, the Gaia hypothesis said that the temperature, oxidation state, acidity, and certain aspects of the rocks and waters are at any time kept constant, and that this homeostasis is maintained by active feedback processes operated automatically and unconsciously by the biota . . . The conditions are only constant in the short term and evolve in synchrony with the changing needs of the biota as it evolves. Life and its environment are so closely coupled that evolution concerns Gaia, not the organisms or the environment taken separately.⁸

In our first account of Gaia as a system neither Lynn Margulis nor I fully understood what it was we were describing. Our language tended to be anthropomorphic and, especially in my first book, *Gaia*, poetic. Not surprisingly, some scientists misunderstood our intentions and accused us of saying that organisms acted from some in-built purpose to regulate the

⁸ James Lovelock, *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of Our Living Earth* (Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 19.

planet's climate and chemical composition. The notion of purpose in natural systems is of course a scientific taboo, a sin of heresy. That heresy is avoided in the clearer modern version, which is Gaia theory. This theory sees the evolution of the material environment and the evolution of organisms as tightly coupled into a single and indivisible process or domain. Gaia, with its capacity for homeostasis, is an emergent property of this domain. There is no more need to invoke notions of purpose or foresight in the evolution of this domain than there is in the evolution of our own bodies within Gaia.⁹

Appendix B

Karl Jaspers' Hypothesis of an "Axial Age"

The era 600-400 BCE was called "axial" by German philosopher Karl Jaspers. Radiating out from 600-400 BCE and extending more gradually from 800 to 200 BCE, key religious traditions in multiple parts of the world developed more enlightened, benign, and pro-human versions of their originating beliefs and traditions.¹⁰ According to this hypothesis, two and a half millennia ago our

⁹ James E. Lovelock, "Foreword" to Elisabet Sahtouris, *Earthdance: Living Systems in Evolution* (Universe, 2000).

¹⁰ In his influential work, *Origin and Goal of History* (1953; *Vom Ursprung und Zeit der Geschichte*, 1949) Jaspers attempted a universal or global history that located at its center or "axis" the fundamental conceptual developments that undergird the world's formative religions and civilizations.

The most extraordinary events are concentrated in this period. Confucius and Lao-tse were living in China, all the schools of Chinese philosophy came into being, including those of Mo-ti, Chuang-tse, Lieh-tsu and a host of others; India produced the Upanishads and Buddha and, like China, ran the whole gamut of philosophical possibilities down to skepticism, to materialism, sophism and nihilism; in Iran Zarathustra taught a challenging view of the world as a struggle between good and evil; in Palestine the prophets made their appearance, from Elijah, by way of Isaiah and Jeremiah to Deutero-Isaiah; Greece witnessed the appearance of Homer, of the Philosophers—Parmenides, Heraclitus and Plato—of the tragedians, Thucydides and Archimedes. Everything implied by these names developed during these few centuries almost simultaneously in China, India, and the West, without any one of these regions knowing of the others.

species embarked on conceptually and incipiently nonviolent approaches to human relationships and interactions. In the terms relevant to this study the principal commonality of the Axial Age across diverse cultures and religious traditions was the ‘internalizing’ of ritual sacrifice, so that matters of law and ritual became matters of heart and soul. The most instructive instances of this ‘internalization’ occurred in India and Israel, with the “renunciation” of ancient Vedic fire sacrifice in India, and the privileging of just behavior and attitudes over ritual propriety and legal observances in Israel. In both instances we see the shift from external observances to sacrifices of the “heart.”¹¹

Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), p 2.

The synchronicity of the developments highlighted by Jaspers is evident in the following schema:

Axial Age Highlights 800-400 BCE

Israel: Isaiah (770-700), the "Age of the Prophets" (650-500)

Iran (Persia): Zoroaster / Zarathustra (ca. 600)

India: Buddha (563-483), Jainism (6th century), Upanishad texts ca. 550

China: Lao-tse (605-530), Confucius (551-479)

Greece: Thales (d. ca. 546), Pythagoras (d. ca. 507), Socrates (469-399), Plato (427-347), Aristotle (384-322)

¹¹ The theology of renunciation espoused in the renunciatory (*samnyasa*) Upanishads is a key locus for this internalization phenomenon.

Fire occupied the central place within the ritual religion of Brahmanism. All the Vedic sacrifices were offered in the sacred fire. . . . The abandonment of that ritual religion by the renouncer is symbolized by . . . the ‘depositing within himself,’ of the sacred fires . . . clearly the central and the most important element of the renunciatory rite.

The theology of renunciation that underlies this rite . . . considers the abandonment of the fire not as a rejection but as an internalization. The external fires are deposited within the renouncer, who continues to carry them internally and, therefore, in a more perfect and more permanent manner.

We have still, however, to apply these breakthroughs to the deep structure of cultures in ways that would transform history and society as we know them.

The abandonment of rites, paradoxically, can be accomplished only through the appropriate rite. Renunciation is not a mere refusal to perform rites . . . [but] a state . . . attained only through the proper ritual process.

The internalized ritual is more permanent and more sublime [because] . . . The renouncer's internal fires are . . . [kindled] with every breath. His eating becomes a sacrificial offering. His body and bodily functions are transformed into a long sacrificial session. The renouncer's body thus becomes a sacred object; it is equal to the fire altar where the Vedic rites are performed" (p. 68). Patrick Olivelle, *Samnyasa Upanisads: Hindu Scriptures on Asceticism and Renunciation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 86, 82, 68.

In this connection see below section 3.3, Gaian Harmony of the Nonviolent Gods [cross-reference here], where I further develop this renunciatory asceticism for the purpose of contemporary anti-scapegoating practices (cf. also "mesoteric" practices, section 2.0, A Theory of Toxic Force).

A different kind of interiority confronts us in the prophetic age of ancient Israel.

Consider this text from the prophet Jeremiah:

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah . . . [not] like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt . . . after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jeremiah 31.31-33)

And compare this related text from the prophet Amos:

I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals
I will not look upon.
Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5.21-24)

Finally Psalm 51.17-18 expresses not only a renunciation of mere sacrifice, but a shift to interiority as compelling as that of any prophetic text. (The collection of the Psalms derives from individual poems originating throughout Israel's history, but entered liturgical use in the period of the Second Temple after 520 BCE.)

Had you desired it, I would have offered sacrifice,
but you take no delight in burnt-offerings.
The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Instead we remain committed at deep-structural levels to formations of history and society that are intrinsically violent, victimizing, and anti-human. What accounts for our persistent blindness, our abysmal myopia regarding issues so crucial for the well-being and flourishing of human beings across millennia? The answer requires a theory of violence that is capable of explaining how our species' nonviolent destiny, and our available freedom from endemic victimization, can remain such an 'open secret' for so long. What theory can account for the fact that we continue to function in one civilization after another as if the Axial Age, alongside far more recent breakthroughs, have never occurred? Such a theory is also available and articulated in this study.

Appendix C

A Reformulation of the Mimetic Hypothesis

Central to my inquiries here is the theory of sacred violence, scapegoating, and mimetic (imitative) desire developed by René Girard, and currently under research and critique by members of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R) among other scholars and practitioners.

The Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R) is an international association of scholars founded in 1990. It is dedicated to the exploration, criticism, and development of René Girard's mimetic model of the relationship between violence and religion in the genesis and maintenance of culture. COV&R is concerned with questions of research and application. Scholars from diverse fields and theoretical orientations are invited to participate . . .¹²

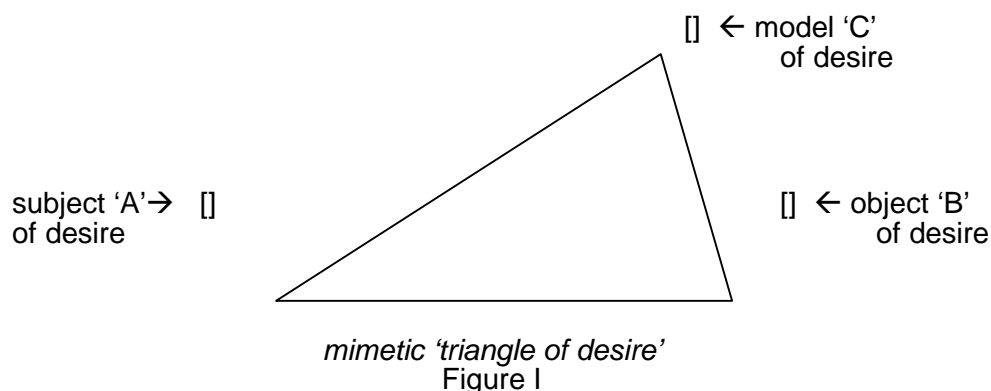
In concert with this "mimetic theory" I explore the prospect for a violence-free future in view of the following alternatives: in view of (1) our deformed humanity after violence has become pandemic on the one hand (our present situation), and in anticipation of (2) our full humanization *after violence* has been systemically arrested on the other (our destiny *by hypothesis*). But the most efficacious strategy for such

¹² The Bulletin of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion. The Bulletin is the internal organ of communication for COV&R, and is published by the Institut für Systematische Theologie, Innsbruck, Austria [CHK] and online at <http://theol.uibk.ac.at/cover/bulletin/x1.html> .

deconstruction is not to look backwards as if to retrieve the breakthroughs of past millennia (as with Karl Jasper's hypothesis of an Axial Age). Rather a 'futuring' strategy is required that conveys all the energy of progressive social movements in the present, while also retrieving already achieved conceptual transformations from the past. More succinctly stated: conceptual transformations of the past await futuring strategies in order to become concrete transformations in the present. Proposed here therefore is a futuring strategy for re-imagining ourselves within and between the diverse wisdom traditions of our species.

In this connection there has emerged in our time an insight that is unique in understanding desire: the insight that desire is not only cognitive and evaluative but also imitative or *mimetic* on the one hand, and acquisitive and conflictual on the other. The mimetic and acquisitive nature of desire constitutes a third dimension in addition to the two elements of desire treated by Aristotle.

That is the seminal insight and contribution of mimetic theory in the human sciences: the insight that desire is mimetic and acquisitive. More precisely, through desire the subject imitates a model who becomes focal for the subject's desire. As already indicated, the original sources for this insight were literary, namely novels of romantic desire in which the plot turns on the 'triangle of desire' between characters enmeshed in the familiar love triangle. In such triangles subject 'A' loves object 'B' because friend 'C' loves 'B'. Hence it is really friend 'C' on whom 'A's attention is fixated, while the beloved 'B' is merely the means actualizing that fixation. Thus the desire to acquire object 'B' by subject 'A' renders friend 'C' the "model" of desire in a triangular relationship, as illustrated below.



Mimetic theory describes this fixation on the model as 'desire *according to* the other.' It is desire that emulates and adapts itself to the other, rather than desire pure and simple *for* the other. Thus mimetic desire is not, strictly speaking, metaphysical or ontological desire for the *being* of the other (although, as we will affirm shortly, mimesis includes an ontic desire to experience the subjectivity of the other). Rather, mimetic desire is 'deontological' (derivative from the conditions of existence)¹³ that is, desire according to the figure, the icon, or the model of the other.

How does this fixation on someone(s) who is the model for our desires lead to violence? The transition from rivalry to violence is a key feature of mimetic theory, and the question of 'how?' is addressed by a phenomenology of resentment. When our models readily accede to our imitation of them, by granting our desires and facilitating our acquisition of their objects, they become for us model-mediators. That is the case most obviously with our teachers and mentors, who generously invite us to become like them by mediating for us their gifts of knowledge and wisdom, rights and roles, privileges and prospects. 'Imitate me!' they say without qualification. 'Become like me; have what I have, and do what I do.' However, when our models resist our imitation of them by

¹³ CHK this definition.

denying us the acquisition of their objects, they become for us model-obstacles and evoke our resentment.

That is the case most obviously with our oppressors, who by virtue of their status beckon us, yet at the same time (in the classic double-bind) forbid us to become like them by denying us their knowledge and wisdom, rights and roles, privileges and prospects. 'Imitate me!' they beckon by way of their role or status, yet at the same time warn, 'Don't imitate me! You can not have what I have; do not dare do what I do.' In the development of critical theory the definitive instance of the model-obstacle is the father figure in the 'primal scene' ascribed to our earliest ancestors, most notably by Freud. The father prohibits the maturation of his sons who would become like him by 'acquiring' females in the community. The sons therefore conspire to destroy him in order to fulfill their desire to be like him. That banal passion, by means of which they overcome fear of the father (and their own fraternal discord) with sufficient unanimity to conspire in his demise, is resentment.

Mimetic desire is the larger framework, more inclusive than romantic desire, within which rivalry with our model-obstacles leads to resentment. The term 'mimetic rivalry' is used to describe the grounding of resentment in thwarted desire: desire that is thwarted or hindered when our models present obstacles to our becoming like them. Violence is certainly not the *necessary* outcome of such resentment. However, under the conditions of existence it is the *inevitable* outcome in contexts where destruction of the model becomes the most compelling route to successful imitation. Violence is compelling, that is, when circumstances render it the most available means by which subjects can become like their models. Most often, however, that model is not the actual victim of our resentment or acts of violence. Most often our models possess and wield so much power and authority over us that they are effectively inaccessible to us for victimization. Typically our victims are others, essentially arbitrary, who become targets for our resentment simply because they are accessible or safe. They can not, will not, or are less likely to retaliate. Hence they are by definition scapegoats. In Girard's more precise terminology they are "surrogate victims;"¹⁴ substitutes for those model-obstacles whom we are less able to target or attack.

Two related clarifications are imperative here. First, mimetic desire is not only acquisitive in ways that result in rivalry or conflict. In addition there occur consensual forms of mimetic desire that lead to conciliation with our models and model-obstacles, and thus the renunciation of resentment and conflict. Through consensual mimetic desire we pursue becoming like our models not by acquisition but by consent, consent even in the face of the model's conflictual behaviors. That is, we seek co-subjectivity: shared identity without reducing either of us to an object existing at the disposal of the other. Mimetic theorist Rebecca Adams articulates this dimension of co-subjectivity with clarity:

In this new scenario . . . by definition, in desiring your subjectivity I get or acquire an intersubjective relationship with you . . . but I do so without acquiring you as an *object*. . . . The essence of the scapegoating process is that someone or something is turned into an *object*. This temptation to turn things into objects instead of subjects, even ourselves or God, might be called Idolatry. In a violent or mythical system of representation, something or someone must play the role of object so something or someone else can be a subject.¹⁵

¹⁴ For this term see René Girard, *The Girard Reader*, James G. Williams, ed., (New York: Crossroad, 1996), p. 000.

¹⁵ Rebecca Adams, "Loving Mimesis and Girard's 'Scapegoat of the Text': A Creative Reassessment of Mimetic Desire," in Willard M. Swartley, ed., *Violence Renounced: René Girard, Biblical Studies, and Peacemaking* (Telford, PA: Pandora Press U.S., copublished with Herald Press, Scottdale, PA, 2000), pp. 294-95.

Co-subjectivity, by contrast, fulfills the most intimate yearning that motivates us when we seek to be like someone else. Expressed in poetic terms: it satisfies our 'heart's desire.' At this most intimate level we seek neither to become an object nor to possess any object (not even our model as object). Rather we seek to experience in ourselves the unfettered being of the other as an element of our own unfettered being. Consider an adventurous youth for example, stalking wildlife in the forest. This novice hunter really wants to experience the free vitality and the sheer otherness of the animal within oneself and even—if only momentarily—to become the animal. One so young must then be taught to achieve that end by capturing, trapping, or destroying the animal for food (ingestion) or sport (conquest). This example has a sexual or romantic analogue that provides an apt, related example. In gendered relationships we naively desire a joyous and free co-habitation within the other person (consensual desire). However, like our young explorer we are socialized to pursue that desire in patterned forms of consumption or conquest (conflictual desire). More generally, therefore, consuming or conquering the other constitutes our most familiar forms of conflictual desire. In such patterned ways we forfeit alternative impulses of consensual desire, according to which we seek non-objectified co-subjectivity with the other.

This deontological reformulation of mimetic theory calls for a related reconstruction. If consensuality is comparable to conflictuality as a form of mimetic desire, then we must reconstruct our view of the role of victimization and violence as generative in religion and culture. Again, Rebecca Adams clearly apprehends what is at stake here.

A reconstructed view of the Girardian theory . . . maintains that the victimage mechanism, though a social and political reality, is not the foundation of culture; rather mimetic desire is. . . . In the revised view these institutions have an ambivalent and not simply negative relationship to love and freedom. . . . [Thus] human institutions serve both to regulate violent mimesis *and* to express and propogate our highest ideals . . . they are founded on mimetic impulses which originate both in scapegoating and in creative love.¹⁶

“Creative love” in this formulation expresses what I have elsewhere described more generally as “mimetic intimacy.”¹⁷ Through such intimacy we seek a kind of ‘beatific union’ with our models, even in the face of their own entrapment in mimetic conflict. Again, we seek a co-subjectivity that renders neither of us objects at the disposal of the other. But if such beneficent union (cf. unanimity) is also a possible and practical goal of mimetic desire, then desire that issues into rivalry and conflict is a miscarriage of this; a missing-the-mark. More precisely it is entrapped desire: desire that has lost its way in its effort to emulate its model and has, tragically, become captive to resentment of that for which it truly yearns. Here again we must insist: the failure of a model-obstacle to consent to our imitation and to share subjectivity with us need not *necessarily* lead to our rivalry and conflictual antagonism with that model, albeit too often it does so *inevitably*. Instead there is always the possibility, however remote and unlikely the actualization, that we experience rejection by our models *consensually*. It is always possible that,

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 300. “The general political implications of this theory have seemed reactionary to some. The pessimistic view of human nature and institutions it proposes might be interpreted as reinforcing the political status quo. Some have seen it as advocating the largely passive awaiting of a historical evolutionary process of revelation, with an implied need for law and order—or even scapegoats—until this new order comes into being. Although Girard may not intend for his theory to be interpreted in a politically conservative way, it contains elements making such an interpretation possible, even likely” (p. 300).

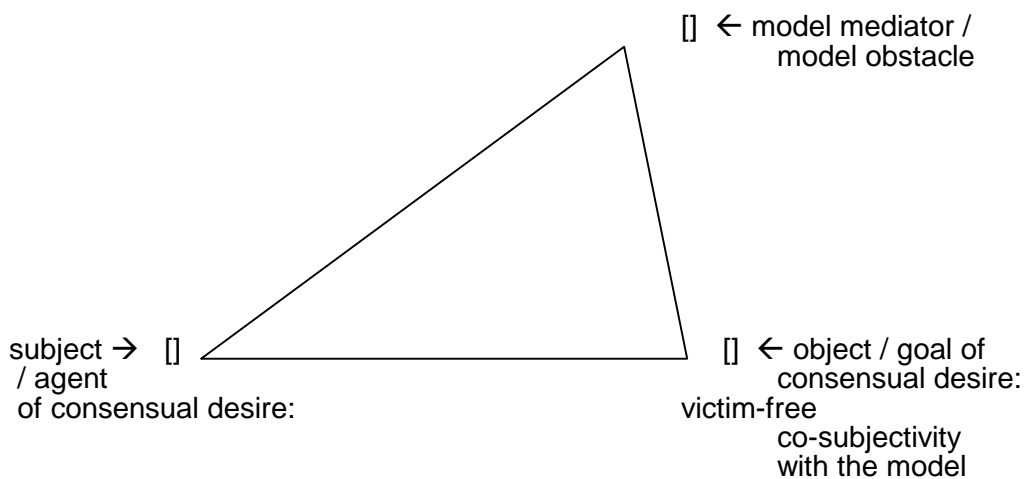
¹⁷ Theophus H. Smith, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 188,189,201,202,213,215.

through beneficent sensibilities and practices, we might consent to our failed project of co-subjectivity as a failure for which neither ourselves nor the model is wholly culpable. On this view ‘culpability’, ‘fault’ or ‘blame’ is as much a quality of conditions as of persons. In more value-free (morally neutral) terms, rather, failure is also attributable to the conditions of existence to which we are both subjected.¹⁸

Well-force is the kind of power or force which would enable us to exercise such sensibilities and practices, as defined in section 1.3 (Definition 1) above:

Well-force is willing the well-being of oneself and all beings with the fullest possible knowledge of the conditions of existence; specifically the conditions that induce antagonism and destruction on the one hand, and the conditions that foster coexistence and flourishing on the other.

The *inability* of a subject to acquire and practice this kind of force renders the subject’s originating desire an entrapped desire, enmeshed in a net of resentment, rivalry, and conflict that holds it captive¹⁹. It is evident nonetheless that its captivity is contrary to its alternative capacity. Captivity does not contravene the benign capacity of mimetic desire at the level of dual impulses. For the distortion of a phenomenon under negating conditions of existence does not completely negate its nature, but negatively confirms that nature. In this case the entrapment of desire, as a distortion of its benign capabilities, confirms those capabilities. Moreover in this regard mimetic theory requires a benign reality axiom: a minimal acknowledgment that the ontological trajectory of “all our real desires”²⁰ is toward the good, whether or not we are able existentially to achieve that good. In any case it is axiomatic in the following sections, as illustrated in the figure below, that a comparable goal of our desire to imitate our models is consensual rather than conflictual. It is the desire to experience victim-free co-subjectivity with the ones we emulate, whether or not they reciprocate or mediate that desire. Consider in this regard the amplified illustration of consensual desire in Figure II below.



mimetic 'triangle of desire'
Figure II

¹⁸ See section 4.1 below: “Reinventing Fault.”

¹⁹ Hence my neologism, *victim-hold*; definition to-be-developed.

²⁰ René Girard, *Job: The Victim of His People* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 168.