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Girard and Nietzsche's phenomenology of victims

Abstract: In this paper I argue that Nietzsche and Girard provide, for the first time, a phenomenology and genealogical account of the victim as both an ontological and moral category. First, I lay out Girard's mimetic theory and show how it culminates in a phenomenology of victims and victimization. I then turn to Nietzsche, in particular Girard's consideration of Nietzsche as the most important theologian of recent past, to show that Girard's phenomenology – of victims, violence, and scapegoating – already exists within Nietzsche's philosophical framework, albeit with a significantly different interpretation. It is my hope to problematize the seemingly self-evident and axiomatic character of the category of the "victim" by highlighting its specific genealogy within the Judeo-Christian tradition in order to further a much broader discussion on the hermeneutics of violence in general.

Keywords: Mimetic Theory, Girard, Nietzsche, Violence, Phenomenology.

According to Rene Girard, despite all appearances that contemporary Western society is post-Christian and postmodern, there nevertheless remains one indissoluble moral absolute: the *concern for victims*. For Girard, this concern reigns supreme despite all theoretical reflections that would case the cultural landscape as relativistic. This absolute value, the concern for victims, is so self-evident, so axiomatic, and so intuitive that one is rarely even aware that such a value exists. It is precisely this value, this religious, Judeo-Christian value for Girard (and for Nietzsche), that binds together and regulates the contemporary moral and political culture of the West. In this paper, I want to discuss precisely why according to Girard and Nietzsche (Girard's reading of Nietzsche) that this is the case by offering

a phenomenology[1] of the victim[2]. My argument will be simply to show how Girard and Nietzsche provide, for the first time, a genealogical account of the victim as both an ontological and moral category. I first will briefly lay out Girard's mimetic theory and show how it culminates in a phenomenology of victims and victimization, in what Girard calls the scapegoat mechanism of the mythic sacred. Next, I will turn to Nietzsche, in particular Girard's consideration of Nietzsche as the most important theologian of recent past, in order to show that Girard's phenomenology – of victims, violence, and scapegoating – already exists within Nietzsche's philosophical framework, albeit with a significantly different interpretation. It is my hope to problematize the seemingly self-evident and axiomatic character of the category of the "victim" by highlighting its specific genealogy within the Judeo-Christian tradition in order to further a much broader discussion on the hermeneutics of violence in general[3].

Where ought a phenomenology of victims and of victimization to begin? Indeed, what is a victim exactly? For Girard, the phenomenon of the victim must be traced historically, genealogically, through the process of victimization, which Girard thinks remains, in the end, synonymous with religious scapegoating. That is, for Girard, victimization is itself a fundamentally religious phenomenon, or perhaps even more strongly put: victimization is a *sacred* act. Thus, any phenomenology of victims must begin with an historical understanding of religion. As we shall see, the category of victim is revealed in and through a religious process that Girard calls sacred violence or mythic scapegoating.

Now Girard's thesis concerning victimization and sacred violence remains fairly straightforward: violence, victimization, remains the very essence of religion and the very meaning of the sacred itself. For Girard, the sacred is always (or was always) tethered to violence, in particular sacrifice and sacrificial scapegoating. Whether it be human sacrifice (which Girard

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[1]   I use the term "phenomenology" in the Heideggerian, as opposed to the Husserlian, sense and understand it to mean simply the process by which a thing is made to disclose itself. In this sense then, phenomenology is synonymous, as it is for Heidegger, with the process of *aletheia*, or truth as a disclosure.

[2]   Portions of this paper appear in Duane Armitage (2021). Printed with Permission.

[3]   The thesis that mercy and compassion were uniquely an innovation of Christianity has already been put forth by Rodney Stark, as well as E. A. Judge. However, the precise philosophical foundations of this innovation, I believe, were first unearthed by Girard and Girard's reading of Nietzsche. See Rodney Stark, 2011, pp. 105-120. See also, E. A. Judge, 1986, pp. 107-121.

thinks was original) or animal sacrifice, the blood of the sacrificial victim is essential to the sacred and its sacrificial acts, as the word sacri-ficare suggests: to make sacred. Yet this sacred victimization is wholly concealed to those who practice it, i.e. to those who victimize, and for this reason such victimization is ipso facto scapegoating. Yet given the initial self-concealed nature of scapegoating, the process of victimization, for Girard, is conditioned by a certain anthropology, namely one that understands violence and victimization as necessary for the formation of human communities.

Human violence is inevitable for Girard precisely because of human beings' mimetic (imitative) nature, which tends to eventuate in rivalry and conflict. That is, as human beings learn their desires from each other, mimetically, such mimetic desires lead to violence, in part, due to the scarcity of physical objects, but even more so because, in the end, desire is not, for Girard about the object(s) desired, but about those who desire them; that is, I seek ultimately to possess the other who models my desire (Girard, 2014, p. 12). Regardless, human communities always and inevitably become violent. The question becomes then, for Girard, how have human beings evolved in order to cope with their inevitable violence? That is, how have human communities survived this long without destroying themselves? The answer lies in religious victimization.

For Girard, religion functions as a cathartic mechanism through which the human community can, so to speak, "let off steam" and channel its pent-up frustrations and hatred (born of mimetic rivalry) toward a single individual – a victim – who is then collectively persecuted – effectively lynched – by the community qua the collective mob. It is essential that the community sees this victim as the cause of all of prior strife; that is, the victim must be considered guilty, and even evil, and must therefore be purged from the community in order, so the community thinks, to rid itself of this violent contagion. The guilty victim allows for communal unification in the name of justice and the banishment the evil, and from such unification a cathartic peace is achieved. The community is bonded together over and against the single victim such that harmony is restored to the once rivalrous and strife-laden community.

For Girard, this tells us something striking about human beings, namely that the main foundation of inter-subjective, communal experience lies in persecuting, in victimizing. Humans feel united collectively in their victimizing, which explains the human propensity to gravitate toward the mob phenomena.

But how exactly do victims originate? How are such victims selected? Girard's insight regarding the selection process of victims is not only edifying in itself, but it also allows for further penetration into the nature of the victim itself. Girard argues that the same process that enables mimetic desire and rivalry also conditions the selection of victims, namely *undifferentiation* (Girard, 1986, pp. 17-18). That is, as humans begin to mimic each other, and, in turn, become more rivalrous, they also become more similar. Differences between people dissolve. Strangely, Girard thinks that violence is ultimately caused not by difference but by sameness. As differences between people dissolve, groups inevitably form, and such groups form around the escalation of the conflict wrought by *mimesis*. In short, mimetic rivalry leads to a communal crisis that is at the same time coterminous with group selection and formation – undifferentiation. Such undifferentiation, however, further differentiates itself from that which is other than the group, and it is within this newfound space – of differentiation amongst undifferentiation – that victims arise. Victims arise, are differentiated, then through the process of undifferentiation, which means quite simply that as groups form, so too do victims.

Victims are an eventuality of group formation and thus of human community. Victims, for Girard, often represent the weakest members of a community, such as those who are disabled, those who suffer from some physical malady, ethnic or religious minorities, etc. However, since victim selection ultimately hangs on difference, often the scapegoated victim can even be a king or someone in the upper tier of a communal hierarchy. Regardless, victims are selected based on their inability to assimilate into an undifferentiated group. Victims thus are those differentiated by the undifferentiated community, climaxing in the scapegoating process of the mob versus the single victim, wherein this violence scapegoating enables even further social cohesion. The foundation, again, for intersubjectivity, for Girard, lies in such collective victimization. In short, victims are inevitable wherever human communities form.

Yet, the victim for Girard is a kind of *pharmakon* – a poison and a remedy. The very thing that makes human community possible must also be violently purged; in fact, the purging itself ultimately contributes to a community's stability. Moreover, the scapegoated victim, originally perceived to be the very cause of all of the community's evil, is later, due to the collective peace that ensues, deified. Thus, Girard can write "[t]he peoples of the world do not invent their gods. They deify their victims." (Girard, 2001, pp. 70). These deified victims are those around whom mythology and ritual

sacrifice revolve, insofar as such myths and rituals reenact victims' original persecutions via the mob. Every ritual, every sacrifice, and every mythic tragedy, recollects (unconsciously, of course) a founding persecution and victimization of one who was deemed guilty, but later revealed to be divine. Thus, for Girard violence is, in a very real sense, the "sacred." That is, the sacred necessitates fear and awe precisely because of its confluence with violence. Ritual sacrifice then keeps human violence "in check." This sacrificial mechanism, for Girard, is essential to not only the formation, but also the continuation of any and every culture. Ritual sacrifices in effect prevent further violence from extreme escalation. According to Girard, this logic of sacrifice makes little sense outside of a proper understanding of a founding murder, a founding victimization. And yet, for Girard, the real logic to sacrifice remained *concealed* to those who offered it.

The recollection of the violent sacred that is reenacted in ritual is called myth. However, the most crucial element of myth is not simply that it is the recounting of victimization, but that it is a recounting *from the mob's perspective*. That is, myth is the recollection of the death of a victim from the perspective of the persecutors. What if, however, a "myth" were to be told, not from the persecutors' perspective, but rather the victims'? What would an inverted mythical account of sacrifice look like? For Girard, the Judeo-Christian tradition, beginning with the Hebrew Bible and culminating in the Passion of Jesus exemplifies this inversion, and even deconstruction, of myth. The victim's perspective *deconstructs* myth precisely due to the revelation that the victims of sacrifices were never guilty, but rather always *innocent*. This innocence remained wholly *concealed* from mythical accounts of the sacred, and the Biblical tradition begins to reveal such concealment and thus reveals what Girard refers to simply as the *scapegoat mechanism*.

For Girard, victims, all victims, are *always* innocent scapegoats. This much is revealed by Judeo-Christianity. Indeed, in the Bible, both the scapegoating of the innocent, as well as the mimetic rivalry due to envy, are precisely made explicit. For example, the story of Joseph, who is victimized by his brothers due to their envy, or Cain's murder of Abel, who was murdered because "his own deeds were evil, and his brother's righteous" (1 John 3:12). The Jewish people themselves, through their continual persecution, represent a constant reminder of the scapegoating of the innocent. The Gospels present Jesus as the scapegoat par excellence, the innocent victim of a collective mob lynching. Indeed, for Girard, since the Gospels speak consciously about scapegoating, they therefore ipso facto deconstruct it, for scapegoating is contingent upon its own concealment. Girard even reads the budding

friendship between Pilate and Herod, who are said "to have become friends on that very day" (Luke 23:12) as indicative of the scapegoat mechanism's ability to unify otherwise opposed parties (Girard, 1014, p. 32). Moreover, we see also the power of the mimetic mob, so powerful that it overtakes Peter to deny Christ.

In sum, for Girard then the Bible represents the beginning of the end of mythology, as it is the absolute antithesis of mythology. Furthermore, the Bible exposes the singular lie of mythology: the victim as guilty. Rather, in reality, the victim is always innocent. There are no guilty victims, only innocent ones; it is rather the mob that is guilty. This truth remains concealed from mythology, as does the essential scapegoat mechanism inherent in religion and to the very notion of the sacred. In other words, within Judaism and later Christianity then, the *victim qua victim* comes to fore and is permitted to appear for the very first time in cultural history. For Girard, prior to Judaism, victims were not seen *as victims*, that is, as those who are unjustly scapegoated. The idea of a victim itself then arises by way of the Judeo-Christian deconstruction. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, a new ethic emerges, namely one of concern for victims (Girard, 2001, pp. 160-169). Compassion and mercy begin to eclipse pagan virtues that often exhibit the strength and power of the hero[4]. This original Judaic ethic of *concern for victims* is universalized and spreads to the entire Western world by way of Christianity. For Girard this universalization and spreading of the Jewish ethic is the single greatest event in shaping Western culture.

We see then Girard's original insights with regard to the beginning of a phenomenology of the victim, insofar as Girard offers us, in a sense, a historical genealogy of how victimization, and in turn, the victim qua victim arose not only as an ontological category, but, more importantly as the fundamental ethical force of Western culture. In sum, victimization is inevitable in the formation of any social group, and, in fact, group formation is predicated upon unconscious victimization, or the scapegoat mechanism of primitive, mythic religion. Yet it is not until Judeo-Christianity's deconstruction of such mythic religion that the victim itself can arise thematically as a metaphysical and, more importantly, a moral category.

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[4]   Consider the Aristotelian or Platonic virtues – temperance, courage, magnanimity, etc., all which indicate strength over that of weakness; even Latin the word *virtus* itself, means essentially "power," and the Greek *arête* comes from the same root as "aristocratic" or "noble," which indicate superlative superiority (*aristos*).

Strangely, Girard noticed that his insights into not only the mythic sacred's victimization, but Judeo-Christianity's overturning of such victimization already appear a century earlier in the work of Nietzsche. In fact, Girard praises Nietzsche as *the* thinker who discovered this "anthropological key" to religion and to Judeo-Christianity, namely the defining of the meaning of the victim, and, in turn, the vocation of concern for victims (Girard, 2001, pg. 171). That is, Nietzsche knew the *facts* of the collective persecution of mythical traditions and Judeo-Christianity to be the same; however, the essential difference that Nietzsche noticed was the difference in interpretation of the facts, namely the moral interpretation of the meaning of collective violence with regard to the victim. The key passage of Nietzsche for Girard comes from Nietzsche's *Will to Power* 1052:

> Dionysus versus the "Crucified: there you have the antithesis. It is *not* a difference in regard to their martyrdom – it is a difference in the meaning of it. Life itself, its eternal fruitfulness and recurrence, creates torment, destruction, the will to annihilation. In the other case, suffering – the "Crucified *as the innocent one*" – counts as an objection to life, as a formula for condemnation (emphasis mine; Nietzsche, 1968a, para. 493).

In other words, Dionysus approves of the mob violence and lynching of the victim, in the name of life, vitality, and recurrent cycles of necessary violence as a part of "life" itself; Christianity however condemns violence of any kind in the name of the "innocent" one, Jesus. The difference lies not in fact, but in interpretation. For Nietzsche, it is a matter of the affirmation versus the denial of life vis-à-vis suffering and violence. Dionysus dismembered is the promise of life, of continual rebirth from destruction and violence. Nietzsche therefore affirms Dionysus *over and against* Jesus, the "Crucified." Nietzsche further writes,

> Through Christianity, the individual was made so important, so absolute, that he could no longer be sacrificed: but the species endures only through human sacrifice…Christianity is the counter-principle to the principle of *selection*. If the degenerate and the sick ("the Christian") is to be accorded the same value as the healthy ("the pagan")…then unnaturalness becomes law…Genuine charity demands sacrifice for the good of the species – it is hard, it is full of self-overcoming, because it needs *human sacrifice*. And this pseudo-humaneness called Christianity wants it established that *no one should be sacrificed* (Nietzsche, 1968a, para. 246).

Nietzsche here, for Girard, sees the uniqueness of Christianity: it is an obsession and concern for victims, for the weak, the sick, and the ill constituted. Nietzsche simply despises it. "Unnaturalness," in the Darwinian sense, "becomes law" in Christianity. Moreover, Nietzsche sees the primary necessity of human sacrifice in the foundation of human culture and society. Thus, Nietzsche sees the same insight as Girard – scapegoating is foundational. Nietzsche however affirms it, where Girard, following Christianity, overturns and abhors it.

It is a matter then of perspective. From Dionysus' perspective (here understood as the mythic writ large) the "persecuted" are weak, full of resentment and hate toward the healthy and the powerful; from the perspective of the "Crucified," the persecuted victims are innocent, the scapegoats of the collective mimetic contagion of the angry mob. It is indeed a matter of which perspective one chooses: the mobs' or the victims'. Girard believes Nietzsche sides with the former and thus despises the latter. For example, in *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche writes,

> The weak and the ill-constituted should die off [sollen zu Grunde gehn]: first principle of our philanthropy. And one shall help them to do so. What is more harmful than any vice? –Active sympathy for the ill-constituted and weak –Christianity….(Nietzsche, 1968b, para. 2)

Aside from the obvious inflammatory rhetoric, Nietzsche nevertheless shows his cards in his hatred for Christianity's ethic of victims. It is not just victims, but the *concern* Christianity has for them that Nietzsche criticizes. That is, Christianity, for Nietzsche, remains most obsessed with the virtue of compassion or pity (*Mitleid*). Later, in *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche's critique of compassion takes a more Darwinian – even Social Darwinian – turn. That is, Nietzsche comes to despise compassion not simply because it "denies life," but because it is also lauds weakness. Nietzsche writes: "Christianity has taken the side of everything weak, base, ill-constituted, it has made an ideal out of *opposition* to the preservative instincts of strong life" (Nietzsche, 1968b, para 4). As opposed to this, for Nietzsche, Dionysian festival gives the benefits of ecstasy and intoxication, primordial unity, by celebrating all aspects of life, especially strength and vigor, without affirming weakness *qua* weakness. In one of the most outrageous passages in Nietzsche's entire corpus, Nietzsche equates Christian compassion with the preserving of that which *ought* to be destroyed:

> Christianity is called the religion of *compassion* [*Mitleid*]… Suffering itself becomes contagious through compassion…its morally dangerous character here appears in a much clearer light: compassion on the whole thwarts the law of evolution, which is the law of *selection*. It preserves what is ripe for destruction, it defends life's disinherited and condemned. (Nietzsche, 1968b, para. 7).

Nietzsche links compassion to the defense of the condemned, i.e. the victims. Compassion affirms what is weakest and most ill fit for life and is therefore *hostile to life*, to Dionysus as the celebration of life in all its circles of birth and decay and violence.

Finally, in the *Genealogy* Nietzsche notes the positive, *cathartic* effect of inflicting punishment, not because it corrects some abstract, metaphysical injustice, but rather because punishing enables the release of primitive, violent emotions. Indeed, watching the sufferings of others is in fact *good* for human beings. Nietzsche writes,

> To see others suffer does one good, to make others suffer even more: this is a hard saying but an ancient, mighty, human, all-too-human principle … Without cruelty there is no festival: thus the longest and most ancient part of human history teaches – and in punishment there is so much that is *festive!* (Nietzsche, 1989, 2:6).

Nietzsche here seems to come close to Girard's point about ancient mythology's scapegoat mechanism and its use of sacrifice and violence in order to abate humanity's primitive emotional constitutions. There is indeed, for Nietzsche, something purgative about violence. Cruelty is the *essential* aspect to "festival," or we could say, to religion. This passage amounts to Nietzsche's almost unequivocally saying that "violence is the sacred."

Nevertheless, for Girard, Nietzsche's insights penetrate not only then into the essence of religion and mythology, but into the very essence of Judeo-Christianity and its distinctiveness vis-à-vis all mythology. Nietzsche understands quite well that original religion is about victimization and persecution, and that with Judaism and Christianity this victimization is inverted, deconstructed, and transmuted into a new ethic of concern or compassion for victims. In other words, Nietzsche's philosophy corroborates Girard's. Both agree that Judeo-Christianity launches an ethic of victims that overtakes Western culture effectively establishing the victim as an ontological and moral category. The only disagreement concerns whether this is positive or negative.

That Nietzsche saw so clearly into Christianity's essence, while also rejecting it, is for Girard simultaneously Nietzsche's genius and madness. Thus, Girard writes that, "Nietzsche's only error, a properly *Luciferian* error (in the sense of "bringer of light"), was to have chosen violence against the innocent truth of the victim, a truth that Nietzsche himself was the only one to glimpse…"(Girard, 2014, p. 135). For Girard, Nietzsche's descent into madness results from his choice of perspective, his siding with Dionysian mania against the weakness of victims, whom he regarded as inferior. For Girard, Nietzsche paid for this choice with his life (Girard, 1988, p. 76).

Nevertheless, Nietzsche calls into question our simple and axiomatic acceptance of the virtue of mercy toward victims and the moral status of the victim itself. That is, Nietzsche highlights that mercy is not in any way a self-evident or obvious ethical truth, but rather one that has a very particular and contingent history inherited from Judeo-Christianity. According to Nietzsche and Nietzsche's "ontology," if reality is simply about power, will to power, inequality in such power, in strength and weakness, will be an inevitability. Why then assume it is best or virtuous to side with the weak, with the victim? Why assume their perspective? Why not rather the strong perspective? What we consider to be a seemingly obvious and even innate moral tendency, namely to feel pity and compassion for the persecuted, is, for Nietzsche, nothing more than the result of 2000 years of cultural catechesis in Christianity.

Returning then to our initial aim, namely the genealogical account of the victim through Girard and Nietzsche, we see then that both thinkers disclose, in different fashions, the necessity of scapegoating and victimization in order to form social cohesion. Moreover, both thinkers recognize a fundamental shift with Judeo-Christianity, namely the recognition of the victim qua victim, and the ethic of mercy, over and against the lynching mob.

What then is a victim? We can say now that a victim is one who is differentiated in and through the process of undifferentiation. Victims arise when groups are formed. Initially, victims are not recognized as victims, but rather as the other, the weak, the disabled, the deformed, the evil – as that which must be expelled from the community. It is this very act of expulsion itself, with its cathartic effect, that cleanses the community and allows for social order and further group formation. It is not until Judeo-Christianity, for Girard as well as for Nietzsche, that we see a culture growing in its awareness of this cathartic, victimizing mechanism. Indeed, the fact that this mechanism becomes thematic leads to a radical new ethic of mercy, one which condemns the act of victimization in favor of the vindication of

the victim, thus leading to the phenomenological disclosure of the victim as, again, an ontological and moral category. While Nietzsche saw such disclosure as ultimately nihilistic and decadent in its vindication of weakness, Girard marks such a disclosure as the essential foundation of Western culture. The victim, as martyr, for Girard is essentially a witness, a *martyros*, that is, one who testifies against victimization, and, in and through such testimony, discloses and thus deconstructs the victimizing process itself (Girard, 1986, pp. 198-201). The witness that began with Judaism culminates for Girard with Christ, as, in a sense, the ultimate martyr, the final witness, who in turn simultaneously inaugurates the universalizing of the victim ethic, while also establishing the martyrdom tradition.

The insights we can draw from here are several: our postmodern culture is not as secular or as relativist as it thinks itself to be. It axiomatically accepts the ethic of concern for victims, and thus remains still deeply rooted in a specific genealogical history, namely Judeo-Christianity. Indeed, the only moral absolute in postmodern culture appears to be the defense of victims. Western culture remains obsessed with victims. One needs only to glance at contemporary American culture and its politics to see its victim obsession. It is in many ways the fundamental element that structures political discourse. The "Right" and the "Left" are perpetually engaged in a "battle over victims," a battle over *who* the victim *really* is: is it minorities, members of the LGBTQ community, women, etc. (as the Left argues), or is it the white, blue-collar worker, the "forgotten man" (as the Right argues)?

Yet, in America at least, this ethic exists as strange caricatural, hyper-Christianity where the ethic of victims has become unhinged from any metaphysical grounding, and fused, in a way, with the Dionysian affirmation of violence, insofar as this ethic is now not only an ethic of concern for victims, but also at the same time, an ethic of the necessity of persecuting (even violently) victimizers *in the name of victims*. Moreover, there appears to be a kind of collective *catharsis* felt in publicly shaming and condemning the guilty, those perceived to be *victimizing*. The media consistently parades before us guilty victimizers that are to be judged by the "court of public opinion." There exists a certain satisfaction and even pleasure we take in watching these guilty people be judged, condemned, and publicly shamed. Indeed, it is *cathartic*. It even remains culturally permissible to judge, condemn, and shame, *so long as* it is done "in the name" of defending victims.

Thus, in postmodernity, we witness two rather mystifying phenomena: (1.) the uprising of persecution (often violent) *in the name of victims*, and (2.) simultaneously, in response, the *repudiation* of the concern for victims

altogether, where "victims" and "the victim mentality" are pejoratives. The latter repudiation of victims, it seems to me, amounts to a neo-Nietzscheanism, a resurrection of fascism and its need to eradicate the weak in the name of power, in the name of making America "great." And yet the former – persecution in the name of victims – confirms Nietzsche's worry about slave *ressentiment*, namely when violence or persecution is excused in the name of "defending the persecuted."

In other words, due to the death of God, this victim ethic is now detached from its metaphysical foundation, and in turn, has taken on a life of its own. One specific concern, for Girard, as well as for Nietzsche, remains the re-wedding of this victim ethic to the mythic sacred, that is, to the process of victimization, in its victimizing of perceived victimizers. In this religious parody, the violence of the mob remains, except now it is directed at the perceived "lynchers" of the innocent, thereby still achieving catharsis through victimization and violence, and thus forming social cohesion. Violence is used to control violence. The insight of Judeo-Christianity only works, for Girard, if it is non-violent, lest it slide back into the mythical-Dionysian – and fall prey to Nietzsche's critique of Judeo-Christianity as laced with *ressentiment*. This genealogical phenomenology of victims thus serves an important regulatory function, namely the illumination of the origin of the victim ethic as one distinct from the ethic of violent scapegoating, which can, in turn, guard against further violence and victimization, even if done *in the name of victims*.

For both Girard and Nietzsche, human beings are unable to transcend their religious history. Our concern for victims is contingent upon the ontological status of the victim itself, a truth revealed by Judeo-Christianity. Therefore, it would seem that, according to Girard and Nietzsche, furthering any discussion concerning the hermeneutic of victimization and violence would require first acknowledging its Judeo-Christian heritage.

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