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Being as sacred: on Heidegger's ontological wanderings

Abstract: René Girard's Mimetic Theory has put forward a very compelling toolbox whose hermeneutical valour we are willing to test by reading Heidegger's ontological wandering in the semantic constellation of Being. Finding a lead in Heidegger's reading of Œdipus' peripetias as presented in Sophocles' *Œdipus Rex*, we will try to translate the fundamental notions of Heidegger's critique of metaphysics into Girard's jargon to see if any clarity is gained. It is time to go *after* Heidegger, both as in following him in his own wandering but also as in chasing him, out of his *Holzwege*, and eventually go further. Hopefully, some of the *obscurities* of Heidegger's text will find in this perspective a new light, without losing any of its *fascination*.

Keywords: being, *aletheia*, sacred, victim, *ens causa sui*, non-instinctual attention, metaphysics.

Introductory remarks

Heidegger famously said, in a well-known interview given to Rudolf Augstein and Georg Wolff for *Der Spiegel* magazine on September 23, 1966, that «only a God can save us». In a short and surprising sentence, he thus synthesized more than three decades of theological and ontological wandering. In this paper we will try and test a Girardian account of Heidegger's intuitions. The attitude we are intending to adopt is less respectful than Heideggerian studies might admit but fully in line with Girard's polemic style. The leading interpretative hypotheses are: a. to consider Heidegger's ontological and theological research as an adventurous yet uncompleted expedition in hitherto-unknown regions, that only thank to his exceptional

foresight he was able to shed light on and thus open for later inquiries; and b., to consider Girard's guide as the best suited and most promising to further on such exploratory enterprise, after but if necessary against Heidegger's own self-understanding. We find in Gianni Vattimo's approach to a similar initiative, the courage to endure such ambitious endeavour (Vattimo, 2010, p. 78). We will try and show what we might gain *to* both Heidegger and Girard from the implications of a close reading inspired by such hypothesis – namely that the semantic constellations by which Heidegger refers to *Being* should be reinterpreted, clarified and even completed, with the terminology by which Girard investigates the *Sacred*. We will work through Heidegger's wording to make such understanding as legitimate as possible and at the same time to verify whether the main tenets of Mimetic Theory might provide us with some useful insights, to move on past Heidegger's own mapping of the newly explored territories, going *after* him, so to say as to drive him out¹.

Entering the maze of Heidegger's wanders about Being, we shall bear in mind that «single question: whether the god is fleeing from us or not, and whether we ourselves are still experiencing this genuinely, i.e., creatively» (Heidegger, 2001b, p. 415): Heidegger's quest is, in fact, deeply influenced by such question, and such aim. How will this matter react with the essential feature of Mimetic Theory according to which, because the mimetic victimage mechanism is no longer working, there is no way we can ever experience any “god” in a genuine and *creative* way?

Philosophy, myth and the unconcealment

Ever since the academic courses of 1927/28, Heidegger started to envisage as necessary, for philosophy to regain its full essence, to go back to its origin, to its *Ursprung*, i.e., to myth. It has always been said, he recalls in the *Einleitung* (Heidegger, 2001a), even and already by the Greeks themselves, that philosophy had its origin in myth and thus every philosophizing, according to its own possibility, had and still has to make sure of such origin. Much of Heideggerian jargon has been crafted in and for this endeavour – namely the one he uses in texts that Girard labelled as «at once ‘obscure’ and fascinating» (Girard et al., 2003)². An obscurity, or difficulty and intricacy,

¹ Vattimo himself was very determined in finding this interpretative opening: “Everything depends on an effort to be faithful to the basic purpose of Heidegger's philosophy, even against Heidegger himself” (Vattimo, 2010, p. 81).

² Girard also confronted or made reference to Heidegger in other works, such as René Girard, “Peter's Denial and the Question of Mimesis” (1982).

which is of course not just a matter of Heidegger's inadequacy; according to our first hypothesis, we shall nonetheless consider it as a temporary result, as the unsatisfying way he found to deal with complex philosophical problems for which there was no adequate language, yet.

According to Girard, Heidegger was right to take this perilous path; he did actually «work back towards the sacred», rediscovering «certain elements relating to the many meanings of the sacred by examining the philosophical vocabulary» (Girard et al., 2003). He was nevertheless also convinced that the obscurity and often paradoxical formulations that Heidegger had been somehow forced to adopt as his distinctive style were the price he had to pay both to the relative novelty and thoroughness of the attempt, but also and at the same time a consequence of his resolute negation of every possible valour to Christian philosophy, or rather wisdom³. Should one attempt to re-read Heidegger from a mimetic perspective, Girard claimed, his texts would become crystal clear (Girard et al., 2003, p. 273)⁴. Inspired by such ambitious and somewhat arrogant foresight, we will proceed adopting an attitude informed by Girard's intuitions; still, I will try not to fall prey of Girard's radical enthusiasm and not to disregard altogether the intrinsic value of a philosophical approach. In other words, forty or so years later, we must re-read Heidegger, not so much within the radical 'anthropological' perspective enabled by the revelation of the victimage mechanism, yet taking it seriously. Girard, playfully for sure, might have been amused by the rhetorical jest of 'ending philosophy', going a step further Heidegger, which had notoriously been trapped himself in a similar mimetic rivalry with Nietzsche, the *Überwinder* of metaphysics⁵. Yet, instead of falling prey to such amusement, my aim is to push further the knowledge that Heidegger and then Girard have offered by translating the concepts they crafted into

³ For further enquiries into the related issue of Christian wisdom, see Emanuele Antonelli, "Mimesis and attention. On Christian sophrosyne" (2018).

⁴ Again, I dare say such thing because I find myself in the good company of my mentor Gianni Vattimo, who – as Italy's most prominent interpreter of Heidegger – made clear that such was the role Girard's Mimetic Theory played in his own philosophical endeavor. Ex multis, «I am now describing, although not in merely autobiographical terms, the way in which I came to recognize a "completion" of Heidegger in Girard, and also to reinterpret Girard through Heidegger», Id. "Heidegger and Girard", 8, emphasis added.

⁵ See Girard, *Things hidden*, 267: "Heidegger [...] is really helping to produce the decisive break he talks about. But his work also operates as a powerful obstacle to this break. He is under the impression that he himself can accomplish what will indeed be accomplished – but in a spirit entirely foreign to that of his philosophy".

one another, well aware that in the best scenario the result that I will be able to provide might raise some dust and shed some light on the fundamental issues at stake, but probably at the same time cover some meaningful and promising spot, with that very same dust: unconcealment as revelation might reveal but not without re-veiling, too.

Let us go back to the source and essential origin of philosophy, reading Heidegger reading myths, through a Girardian lens. The most promising excerpt to start from is a text where Heidegger comments on the myth of Œdipus and on Sophocles' *Œdipus Rex*, one if the not the most relevant case-study in Mimetic Theory⁶. Heidegger is expanding on one of the four fundamental oppositions through which Greek philosophy has thought Being, i.e. the struggle between Being and seeming (Heidegger, 2000)⁷, when he calls into question the figure and peripeties of Œdipus.

Œdipus, who at the beginning is the saviour and lord of the state, in the brilliance of glory and the grace of the gods, is hurled out of this seeming. This seeming is not just Œdipus' subjective view of himself, but that within which the appearing of his Dasein happens. In the end, he is unconcealed in his Being as the murderer of his father and the defiler of his mother. The path from this beginning in brilliance to this end in horror is a unique struggle between seeming (concealment and distortion) and unconcealment (Being). The city is besieged by what is concealed in the murder of the former king, Laius. With the passion of one who stands in the openness of brilliance and who is a Greek, Œdipus goes to unveil what is concealed. In doing so, he must, step by step, place himself into an unconcealment that in the end he can endure only by gouging out his own eyes – that is, by placing himself outside all light, letting the veil of night fall around him – and then

⁶ René Girard himself and several authors directly or indirectly related to Girard have applied mimetic theory to the myth of Œdipus bringing forward such clear and irrefutable results that should by now have become common sense. Besides René Girard's extended commentary in *Violence and the Sacred* (1977), see one of the most thorough of these attempts, by Sandor Goodhart, "Lestas Ephaske': Oedipus and Laius' Many Murderers" (Spring 1978), and the (re-)collection edited by Mark R. Anspach, René Girard, *Œdipus Unbound: Selected Writings on Rivalry and Desire* (2004).

⁷ In Chapter Four, Heidegger also expands on the oppositions between Being and Becoming, Being and Thinking and Being and the Ought. Heidegger is here working to deconstrue these oppositions, as he considers them a wrong way to make sense of Being; they count as a first step in the history of its oblivion. I am not willing to reinstate them, but trying to make sense of them from a different vantage point, and leveraging on that Christian wisdom that Heidegger refused.

by crying out, as a blind man, for all doors to be flung open so that such a man may become revealed to the people s the man who he is. But we should not see Œdipus only as the human being who meets his downfall; in Œdipus we must grasp that form of Greek Dasein in which this Dasein's fundamental assion ventures into what is wildest and most far-flung: the passion for the unveiling of Being – that is, the struggle over Being itself. (Heidegger, 2000, p. 122).

Nothing could be more revealing: according to Girard, one thing is for sure, Œdipus is not guilty. He is the victim of a scapegoating process, the spot on which the sacred, the victimage mechanism, performs its organizational closure; he is innocent – maybe not entirely innocent, but surely innocent of the accusations that have been repeated over and over again. None of this appears in Heidegger's words, not even the slightest doubt. On the contrary, he states that Œdipus is “unconcealed in his Being the murderer of his father and the defiler of his mother”. Most interestingly, such is the case that Heidegger chooses to exemplify a relevant phase in the *historial* struggle between Being and seeming, between unconcealment and appearance.

Let us recall what the historial struggle between Being and seeming is, according to the *Einführung*. Heidegger is here recollecting the evolution of the relationship between these two fundamental notions, by arguing that only through the very same evolution of Greek thought, the two concepts slowly slipped away one from another. In the beginning, Being is one and only with its appearance: that is the claim Heidegger put forward when struggling to find the best translation for *physis*. The pre-Socratic thinkers did not focus on nature, at least not in the sense that we give to this, Latin, word both nowadays and when Heidegger was writing. *Physis* is what «emerges from itself (for example, the emergence, the blossoming, of a rose), the unfolding that opens itself up, the coming-into-appearance in such unfolding, and holding itself and persisting in appearance – in short, the emerging-abiding sway» (Heidegger, 2000, p. 15)⁸. Being is *physis* and *physis* is what persists in appearance. Only later,

only with the sophists and Plato was seeming explained as, and thus reduced to, mere seeming. At the same time, Being as idea was elevated to a supersensory realm. The chasm, *chorismos*, was torn open between the merely apparent beings here below and the real Being somewhere up there. Christian doctrine then established itself in this chasm, while at the same time reinterpreting the Below as the

⁸ Emphasis added.

created and the Above as the Creator, and with weapons thus reforged, it set itself against antiquity [as paganism] and distorted it. And so, Nietzsche is right to say that Christianity is Platonism for the people (Heidegger, 2000, p. 111).

First and foremost, we might want to notice that, as imputed by Girard, Heidegger does not take into serious consideration⁹ that Christian wisdom which allowed Girard to unconceal the *things hidden since the foundation of the world*: those things hidden that are to be unconcealed, freed from the seeming¹⁰, even if in a rather different way than Heidegger might have envisaged. We are dealing with the same issue Heidegger was struggling with, except that he did so by overlooking, and even scorning Christianity. Girard did not. Following Girard on this might mean going against Heidegger, but only insofar as it is necessary to find the way out of this particular *Holzweg*.

By abiding to the traditional false accusation towards Œdipus, Heidegger is misunderstanding, in the good company of most of the history of Western thought, Œdipus vicissitudes, Sophocles' take on it, and the Christian wisdom that he disdains,¹¹ but also disproving part of his own argument about the very struggle between seeming and Being. Since Œdipus is (or taking seriously the hypothesis that, both in truth and according to Sophocles, he might be) innocent, his Being, his unconcealment surely cannot be that of «being the murderer of his father and the defiler of his mother». How much of Heidegger's argument should fall in order to make this right? What does this wrong tell us about the notions in question, i.e., Being, seeming, unconcealment, *aletheia*?

Heidegger tells us that Œdipus was «the saviour and lord of the state, in the brilliance of glory and the grace of the gods» and that he was then «hurled out of this seeming». Once we get out of the illusion of the mythic

⁹ A similar take is to be found in Anthony W. Bartlett, "A Flight of God: M. Heidegger and R. Girard" (2003), especially p. 1105: "Once this pattern [penetrating to an abyssal experience of the victim] is conceded, it becomes possible to read Heidegger progressively in Girardian terms, to deconstruct his own thought in the key of violence».

¹⁰ Such is Girard's well-known hypothesis, that Gianni Vattimo refined considering Heidegger to be an active and conscious participant in the history of revelation; « "I would suggest that Heidegger's philosophy is (interpretable as) a sort of philosophical, more or less conscious, transcription of the Judeo-Christian revelation" (2010, p. 80). Yet, it's also Vattimo's understanding that, at least at the level of the subjective and «explicit self-interpretation», Heidegger did not take notice of such involvement. He was not willing to take part into the business of revealing things hidden and yet he did, *volens nolens* (Vattimo, 2010, p. 80).

¹¹ «At more than one point one feels Heidegger's real hostility towards Christianity», notes Anthony W. Bartlett, undertaking an endeavor similar to ours, (2003, p. 1105).

telling on systemic events, we might want to take seriously the Girardian hypothesis that systemic effects work in both directions, raising up and then hurling down those who find themselves in the right/wrong place at the right/wrong time. Indeed, while wrestling with the struggle between Being and seeming, Heidegger says that «what appears, what is gives itself an aspect, *dokei*. *Doxa* means aspect – namely, the respect in which one stands. If the aspect, corresponding to what emerges in it, is an eminent one, then *doxa* means brilliance and glory» (Heidegger, 2000, p. 108). Heidegger is willing to free the notion of *doxa*, at least in its original meaning, from the bad reputation it eventually acquired. On the contrary, from a Girardian vantage point, it surely is clear that if *doxa* is the consideration and respect in which one stands, both the eminent one and the disgraceful one, both glory and ignominy might be the result of a mimetic systemic effect and thus should alarm the wise one, as something legitimately different from truth, and Being.

Still, following Heidegger's line of reasoning, we must infer that Œdipus' seeming was an eminent one, brilliant and glorious whilst his Being that of a murderer and defiler of his own mother. To clear out what this condition would have amounted to, in his reading of Greek thought or way of being, Heidegger adds that «to glorify, to bestow and demonstrate regard, is, in Greek, to *place into the light* and thereby to provide constancy, Being. Glory, for the Greeks, is not something additional that someone may or may not receive; it is the highest manner of Being» (Heidegger, 2000, p. 112)¹².

Here is the matter to carefully focus on. Heidegger is attributing glory and Being to the condition of being “placed into the light”, regardless of the quality of such light, intuiting that the organizational closure of mimetic events, the spotlight of the sacred, works anyway, regardless of any mundane perception¹³. To be is to emerge into the light and persist in the appearance – to be, is to be seen. Œdipus had attained the highest manner of Being, by being glorified, which is to say by standing in the light; being glorified as king, as *rex*, as he who stands, and holds, and bears, is secondary. Likewise, according to the Girardian reading, to be king is one and the same thing as preparing to being hurled out of the centre of attention – as *sacred king* (Simonse, 2018). To be seen is to set the condition to be hurled out of seeming.

Does this entail any ontological implications? Is there a difference between being hurled out of glory and being hurled out of seeming; between

¹² Emphasis added.

¹³ For further investigation into this “logic of collective phenomena”, see Emanuele Antonelli, “The Child of Fortune. Envy and the Constitution of Social space” (2013).

losing their glory, and losing their being? Besides, how can Being become nothing, by being hurled out of seeming? According to Heidegger, «the path from this beginning in brilliance to this end in horror is a unique struggle between seeming (concealment and distortion) and unconcealment (Being)» (Heidegger, 2000, p. 112), a struggle which would make the very idea of Being as constancy and persistency crumble. Instead, it is possible that this struggle is not apropos of Œdipus but, as Heidegger himself tells later, without noticing that he let the myth trap him, apropos that by which «the city is besieged», that which «is concealed in the murder of the former king, Laius». The difference, which slipped away from Heidegger's attention, is that it is not Œdipus who was besieging the city, because he is not the murderer of the former king, Laius. It is true that «with the passion of one who stands in the openness of brilliance and who is a Greek, Œdipus goes to unveil what is concealed», nevertheless Heidegger does not see that Œdipus does not gouge out his own eyes to place himself outside the light, letting the veil of night fall around him, to endure the unconcealment in which he had entered, nor is he thus revealed to the people as the man he is. On the contrary, he is taken down by the very concealment that he was trying to unveil – the misrecognized mimetic mechanism that took Laius down, too; he is not hurled *out* of this seeming but *by* this seeming. He, who dwelt in the brilliance of glory, is then swallowed by that very same glorifying event/process that had made him eminent in the first place. Mimesis had brought him forward, giving him the role he enjoyed, both in the city and in glory, and mimesis brought him down and out of being. The city still is besieged, not by Œdipus but by the sacred mechanism that makes beings be, in accordance with the ancient Logos of violence.

Missing this means missing it all. No wonder everything appears to be upside down; all the relations and struggles between being and seeming, between unconcealment and falsehood are blurred. Somehow it seems that Heidegger is caught in that very demonic destruction of all rank (Heidegger, 2000, p. 48-49), of all hierarchy (Girard, 2004, p. 164-165), that with some annoyance he was spotting around him.¹⁴ Not surprisingly, since he hurled

¹⁴ I am not referring to the destruction of all rank as in the *Abbau* of metaphysics envisaged and appreciated since Being and Time, but to what Heidegger labels as demonic: «By now in those countries the predominance of a cross-section of the indifferent is no longer something inconsequential and merely barren but is the onslaught of that which aggressively destroys all rank and all that is world-spiritual, and portrays these as a lie. This is the onslaught of what we call the demonic [in the sense of the destructively evil]. There are many omens of the arising of this demonism, in unison with the growing perplexity and uncertainty of

out the Christian wisdom from the very beginning, and thus hindered himself from gaining a different perspective on the relation between seeming and unconcealment.

According to Girard, the paradoxes of Heidegger's attempts should disappear as soon as we re-read him according to Mimetic Theory, so let us see give it a chance, at least on this particular issue.

We might consider the unconcealment in which Œdipus places himself both as the spot of the organizational closure of the mimetic mechanism and as the unveiling of its systemic glory. Yet, these would be two different kinds of unconcealment: one, which would be tantamount to Being as the emerging-abiding sway, as the appearance which is not yet to be reduced nor explained away to mere seeming, and one which would count as Being, in opposition to seeming.

Let us see if we can find in the Girardian conceptual toolbox a way to make a meaningful translation of these two concepts. There is a passage in *Things hidden* where Girard puts forward a fascinating idea about what would be like to be in the situation that he describes as *originary*, where he says:

I think that even the most elementary form of the victimage mechanism, prior to the emergence of the sign, should be seen as an exceptionally powerful means of creating a new degree of attention, the *first non-instinctual attention*. Once it has reached a certain degree of frenzy, the mimetic polarization becomes fixed on a single victim. After having been released against the victim, the violence necessarily abates, and silence follows the mayhem. This maximal contrast between the release of violence and its cessation, between agitation and tranquillity, creates the most favourable conditions possible for the emergence of this new attention. Since the victim is a common victim, it will be at that instant the focal point for all members of the community. Consequently, beyond the purely instinctual object, the alimentary or sexual object or the dominant individual, there is the cadaver of the collective victim, and this cadaver constitutes the first object for this new type of attention (Girard et al., 2003, p. 99).

Europe against it and within itself. One such omen is the disempowering of the spirit in the sense of its misinterpretation – a happening in the middle of which we still stand today», (Heidegger, 2000, p. 48-49).

Read in continuity with the *Introduction to metaphysics*, this excerpt brings a whole new perspective on Heidegger's text: *a-letheia*, which is unconcealment, is a character of Being, so close to its own essence to be more than a proxy and yet something distinguished. I claim that, should it be translated as non-instinctual attention¹⁵, it might give us a lead to follow.

Œdipus is placed into the unconcealment, he is unconcealed in Being. Heidegger's attempts to make sense of his "*coming-into-appearance*" might find in Girard's notion a perfectly clear translation, coherent to Heidegger's own phenomenological ascendance.¹⁶ What Girard is trying to describe by calling on a non-instinctual attention is the fact that from a certain point in history, the mimetic human being became able to pay attention to things in a totally unprecedented way, a way in which a thing might all of the sudden come up as *just* an object, as a *Gegenstand*, as a *Seiende*, a thing which is just there, a simply present thing, with the only one character *to be*. And such object as a simply present thing would thus require to be made sense of. We would have gained, *volens noles*, the possibility, and at the same time the need, to make sense of things that just were; to find their meaning. As amply argued in *Being and Time*, beings are not usually, nor first and mostly, perceived as things that are, just present, as *Vorhandenen* but as usable, as tools, as *Zuhandenen* already always inscribed in a grid of references. What Girard describes as non-instinctual attention might very well be described as the bracketing, as *epoché*, the suspension of the natural attitude towards the always already existing world: the main difference being that this was not just a choice nor only a technique to be mastered, but an event. *Aletheia* as unconcealment might then be a way to describe the condition according to which, instead of being immersed in nature, obscure, the object *as* object would come to the foreground, for us to stare at. According to Girard, it is because of the sacred, the self-organizing mechanism in which humanity has evolved and educated itself, suddenly, or through millenaries of analogous events, that we might have found ourselves staring at objects as objects, thus opening the realm of *aletheia*, the *Lichtung*. The object unconcealed, unveiled, the *alethes*, is the being (*Seiende*) forthcoming in the emerging-abiding sway, presenting itself to a non-instinctual, and in this sense transcendental, attention. Because

¹⁵ It might also be translated as transcendence, or the awareness of nothing that according to Heidegger makes human beings intrinsically metaphysical. See also Duane Armitage, *Philosophy's Violent Sacred. Heidegger and Nietzsche through Mimetic Theory* (2021).

¹⁶ «The primary scene of be[-ing] (ontology) is simultaneously a human event (anthropology)» (Bartlett, 2017, p. 125).

of the non-instinctual attention gained through and because of the Sacred, we would be confronted with things as objects, as beings, and by then find ourselves already in the approach that will lead to *metaphysics*.

Before getting ahead, of ourselves, we need to ask one more question: in the first place at least, could this being be *anything*? Not according to Girard¹⁷, to whom we need to go back, always paying attention to the myth.

According to Mimetic Theory, non-instinctual attention is the by-product of the victimage mechanism: it is the attention that persecutors paid to every victim-being-victimized and then to any and everything else. The event, or its endless repetition in the millenaries of our evolution, is what made humans become humans, it is so to say the essential origin of human beings. What does this entail? Well, it is nothing but a further confirmation that everything that Heidegger says about Being has something to do with the semantic constellation of the sacred. *A-letheia* is the unconcealment produced by the victim-being-victimized: it is the fact that all of a sudden, a culprit, a victim, emerges as the originary being. Being itself, on the other hand, is not the victim-being-victimized, but the process, the self-organizing mechanism that places the victim in the light and thus makes it be the victim.

The semantic constellation of being

Recollecting the originary scene of the victimization, we might find ourselves on the way to make room for more clarity. Should the sacred as a whole be what Heidegger is trying to refer to by the notion of Being, then we might reconsider the distinction between Being and being, between Being itself and the thing persisting in presence in a non-instinctual attention: Being (*Sein*) being what makes the single being (*Seiende*) be, i.e., appearing in the mode of presence. Being is the Sacred, the process that generates the spot, which in turn is the *aletheia*, the “there” of the being-there, which in the first place is the victim. Let us note, now, that according to Girard, just as to Heidegger, the difference between Being and beings, and likewise the difference between the Sacred mechanism and the victim, is obliterated, forgot – *méconnue*.

What does this entail in reading Heidegger's interpretation of the myth of Œdipus? In order to appreciate it, we need to clear out a missing theme: the myth of Œdipus only tells us of the swaying of Œdipus from two

¹⁷ For a more comprehensive theory of mimetic intentionality, or attention, see Emanuele Antonelli, *La mimesi e la traccia. Contributi per un'ontologia dell'attualità* (2012, p. 115-125).

different ways of dwelling in the spotlight, the first being glory, the second being disgrace – a “child of fortune” after all.¹⁸ Sophocles’ tragedy, to which Heidegger is mindlessly referring, already put into light this seemingly imperceptible distinction – at least according to Mimetic Theory. But it is only thanks to the Christian revelation that we can read Œdipus’ myth as the story of a being (the-victim-to-be) being hurled out of the previous seeming – the glorious one, the spot of the (sacred) king – to the second seeming – the mere appearance of the dead body of the victim-already-victimized; on the premises of false accusations.

Unconcealment is not something that is lost on the way, yet, in accordance with Heidegger’s extraordinarily sensitivity to the effects of this process, on the aftermath of unconcealment we can distinguish between the false accusations that lead to the fall of Œdipus and Being as the process that finds on Œdipus its organizational closure. Let us try to restate this passage. Both as king and as victim, Œdipus always dwells in the unconcealment, his relation to Being is constant, he is the object of a non-instinctual attention, that very special intentionality that interdividual mimetic events make possible. Yet, by Christian wisdom only, as innocent victim he is recognized as something different than what he seems: a culprit! Thus, in the history of Being, Being is at the same time and in the first place both unconcealment, *aletheia* and seeming. Later, when dealing with the nature of the accusations – which Platonism intuited without fully grasping, – *aletheia* will make place for *orthotes*, correctness and the distinction between Being and seeming will be sealed – *pace Heidegger*. Œdipus is at least innocent of the accusations of being responsible – which in Greek is said *aitios* – of the *miasma*. Is Heidegger deconstructing the distinction between Being and Seeming or is he failing to notice that Œdipus’ innocence makes his seeming legitimately questionable - and thus the very distinction between seeming and Being necessary?

We can make an even more originary observation because we can distinguish the mere appearance of the corpse, which is simply present, from Being, which never stops lighting up the scene and kindling the non-instinctual attention. Also, we might reinterpret absolute *presence* as an essential quality of Being qua *ousia* – as opposed to thinking, becoming, and *seeming* (Heidegger, 2000, p. 208-210)¹⁹ – as the mere being-there of the corpse, of the cadaver of the victim, of the trace of the victimage event, the corpse as the present-at-hand, lying-at-hand, *sub-stans*. Such *hupokeimenon* would easily

¹⁸ Sophocles, Œdipus Rex, line 1080.

¹⁹ See footnote 10.

be the forerunner of the later interpretation of being as object, as *Gegenstand*, that which stands against, in the light of the non-instinctual attention.

Focusing on the victim, on the object, on the trace substantivized, would entail entering metaphysics, which according to Heidegger is tantamount to an oblivion of Being itself and of the ontological difference between Being and beings. Should one want to be pedantic, we might find that the word 'sacred' is exposed to – or is exposing, by keeping trace of it – a related ambiguity: being normally used as a noun, a substantive, it is construed as the past tense of a verb, which does not exist. Sacred is thus both the residue of the action of the mechanism that Girard described in the first place as victimizing and the whole process itself, violence being its fundamental essence. The Sacred is what makes the victim sacred, just as Being is what makes the single being, *be*²⁰. Metaphysics is the approach that makes out of the victim the *fundamentum inconcussum* and thus construes God as the supreme being. To make the dead the very fundament of everything that appears is the original sin of metaphysics. To forget the difference between Being and being is just as to misrecognize the difference between the Sacred and what has been made *sacer* – sacrificed. With one difference: to distinguish Sacred and the sacrificed is more than to distinguish between Being and being.

Indeed, to recollect what has been gained so far: Being is the unconcealment, the coming (in the emerging-abiding sway) of the thing into the non-instinctual attention, and thus has intrinsically to do with *aletheia*, the 'there' where the being-there of the simply-present-thing occurs. Nonetheless, and only after Christian wisdom was made available, such thing can come to the fore in its rightful, orthotetic Being – as what it is (innocent for instance); or as seeming – thus as what it seems but is not (a culprit).

To overlook the difference between a guilty, seeming *aitios*, and an innocent victim is a misleading path to follow, even if the premises of Heidegger's analysis are correct.

We shall now look at this issue from a different perspective. Heidegger says that the process through which Œdipus is hurled out of the previous seeming reveals him as the man he is, to the people. According to the Girardian reading of the myth, this sentence is again as revealing as it could be: the people to which Œdipus would be revealing himself as the culprit are in

²⁰ "Are – but this says: use violence as violence-doers" (Heidegger, 2000, p. 163). In the original German, it reads "Sind, dies sagt jedoch: als Gewalt-tätige Gewalt brauchen", which might be translated more literally as "Are – but this says: as actively situated in violence, they use violence". See Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (1983, p. 162).

fact those very persecutors that by killing him (or gouging his eyes out and then expelling him out of the polis, which according to Heidegger is the very *Da* of the *Dasein*, thus that which makes the human being a human being (Heidegger, 2000, p. 162) made him appear as, seem the *aitios*, the responsible. From a post-Christ perspective, this is simply a false accusation. He might seemingly appear as the culprit – because of the rushed investigation of which Sophocles points out all the failings²¹ – but in truth, he is not. Here happens the definitive distinction between Being and seeming, but also between Athens and Jerusalem: after Sophocles, no one could ever believe, in truth, that *Œdipus* was responsible of the *miasma*, because in all evidence he was not aware of the effect that his deeds – even if unworthy of any blame to his eyes – were yet to cause. Thus, Athens converted the polysemic notion of *aitia* distinguishing its two meanings, cause and guilt; but without doubting of the process. Science, as the Greek endeavour par excellence, was to set its first step by repeating the accusation under the guise of the categorization – category meaning in Greek, to bring ‘down to the agora’, in order to accuse – and then slowly detaching one from another, but without really putting in doubt the henceforth underlying metaphysical approach of reducing Being (the Sacred) to one cause²², to one being (the culprit, victimized). Thus, we found ourselves in metaphysics, where being is just what can be categorized – *πολλαχῶς*, as Aristotle eventually has it. Jerusalem, on the other hand, would refuse to look for the *aitios* at all, undoing the very notion of guilt – then paradoxically so twistedly related to the Jewish culture. The Heraclitean *Logos* is this very reduction by way of violence of the opposites to the unity: a reduction of the many to the *Hen-Panta* (Heidegger, 1985, p. 71), the convergence of the non-instinctual attention of the many persecutors on the one seemingly culprit, the dead victim. The Johannine *Logos* is the victim being expelled, tortured, victimized and yet, as wholly other, persisting in its absence (Girard et al., 2003, p. 271).

Before getting to the conclusion, one last layer is to be added. According to Heidegger, «once beings are conceived as substances within a causal nexus, ipso facto, this nexus leads (in order to avoid [...] infinite regress) to a terminus, in an unconditioned cause that is simultaneously substantive in

²¹ See Goodhart, “‘Lestas Ephaske’: Oedipus and Laius’ Many Murderers” (1978), for a thorough recollection of all the clues that Sophocles points to those who have eyes to see and are awakened to spot the difference between the beam light of Being and truth as *orthotes*.

²² This might seem marginal to an English readership, but it is telling that in Italian, ‘thing’ is said ‘cosa’ which comes from ‘causa’, both Latin and Italian for ‘cause’.

the highest sense. God here is the *ens causa sui*» (Armitage, 2021, p. 58). If we read this synthesis through the emerging interpretative translation, we get that the accusative (as in accusation) nexus – the never ending, infinite regress of reciprocal accusations – leads to a terminus, the unconditioned cause that is the ultimate guilt, the only guilt that cannot be set upon someone else; the guilt that is simultaneously substantive in the highest sense, a substance, the corpse of the scapegoat. Thus, God is the *ens causa sui* in the sense that God is the one who accuses himself, the one who, just as in Heideggerian reading of Œdipus, gouges his own eyes out to punish himself. Metaphysics is a trial ending with a victim (portrayed as) self-accusing, self-victimizing. This is why, in the ultimate possible sense, as Derrida put it, «deconstruction is justice»²³ because deconstructing metaphysics is deconstructing the false narrative of the self-accusation, self-substantive, victim.

Heidegger said that in order to sublimate (*aufheben*) the old metaphysics and pass on to a non- or post- metaphysical thought, we would need a on-to-historical thinking with which thinking up (*er-denken*) and anticipating (*vor-denken*) another beginning by remembering (*an-denken*) the first one, in the mode of the polemic explication (*Auseinandersetzung*). A thinking that would operate starting from the old metaphysics, understood and limited in its *Grund*, the truth of Being (Heidegger, 2014, p. 243). Heidegger would probably have not subscribed it, but Girard has provided exactly this new thought (even if he considers it post-philosophical all together): a polemic, inasmuch as mimetic, confrontation that could remember the very beginning, the scapegoating event, thinking it up in new terms, anticipating a new way of making sense – being the ultimate translation of Being ‘condition of possibility of meaning’²⁴ – by *urbanizing* again not only the Heideggerian province (Habermas, 1983) but the Christian Logos itself.

²³ Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority,” in D. Cornell, M. Rosenfeld & D. G. Carlson (eds.), *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (New York & London: Routledge, 1992), 35. See also Andrew J. McKenna (2011).

²⁴ See also Armitage, *Philosophy's Violent Sacred*: “Beyng is the condition that enables things to be both intelligible and meaningful to us” (2021, p. 46). Beyng translates late Heidegger's *Seyn*, an attempt to focus on Being beyond its metaphysical reduction to whatness, or essence, in other words beyond the oblivion of the metaphysical difference between beings and Being.

Indeed, this is the last issue to be faced: the non-instinctual attention poses the fundamental problem of meaning²⁵ to those experiencing it. Suspending the natural attitude meant, in the first place, to lose the immediateness of *Zuhandenheit*, an event and an experience which thus called and have been calling ever since for an active meaning-making approach. The Sacred, which Heidegger is trying to tackle by rethinking the Greek, Heraclitean logos, was a way of *collecting* against the victim, a making-sense by reducing the many to a (portrayed as) *ens causa sui* granting unity: in Girardian terms, it might be defined as an *interdividual mimetic self-organizing meaning making process*. Such *Being* is receding²⁶ because it is in the process of being wholly *aufgehoben* by the Christian Logos, a collecting procedure aspiring to making sense by uniting in faith, and conscience, always *with* and never *against*²⁷. In other words, a collecting which is not self-organizing, nor violent. Thus, Girard has also cleared away those misunderstandings that lead Heidegger into thinking that a new beginning might have had the aspect of a new god, to experience genuinely and creatively, but that in the end seemed, not surprisingly from the vantage point we have conquered, a lot too *collective*, mindless and violent to be new at all. The *Weg* is eventually open.

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²⁵ As pointed out by John D. Caputo, ever since his Habilitation (1915), Heidegger had located the meaning of Being in Dasein itself. Here it is just about posing that the place of meaning is not in the Dasein but between Daseins. See John D. Caputo, Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics, (1982, p. 41).

²⁶ For the interpretation of Christianity as a sort of sacred receding, see Marcel Gauchet, Luc Ferry, *Le religieux après la religion* (2004) and also Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity* (2002).

²⁷ Thus, in continuity with Armitage (see footnote 41), we might conclude saying that the Being of Metaphysics is to the Sacred what Being is to Christianity.

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