TRANSCRIPTS

Transcript of Girard Lecture IV | The Scapego Mechanism

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0. Introduction

David Perell: One of my favorite stories growing up was the *Iliad* – the famous Gree poem about the Trojan War. It explores timeless themes that Girard covers so close such as the way that envy and vengeance can strip us of considered reason, and how even small and localized acts of violence can escalate into all-out war.

Reading the *Iliad*, I've always wondered: When violence erupts and emotions are stirred, how do we establish peace? And then, in those moments of peace, where do social cohesion come from? Enlightenment philosophers would lead us to believe th in the middle of such a war of all-against-all that we can establish some rational soc contract, but Girard's answer is… scapegoating.

This is not as foreign an idea as it may initially sound. And though we no longer sacrifice goats, the logic of scapegoating is alive in the modern world. And though w like to tell ourselves that we've reached a post-Enlightenment world driven by logic and reason, we're still looking for people to blame and ostracize.

In this lecture, we're going to examine what really lies at the foundations of worldly peace and order.

Johnathan Bi: In the next four lectures, we will cover the entirety of Girard's philosophy of history, and we will see how the psychological and inter-dividual mechanisms – mimesis, metaphysical desire, and mimetic rivalry – that we have uncovered in the last two lectures, how they will interplay and manifest in different historical conditions. Girard's history, if you can believe it, is even more ambitious a encompassing than his psychology. Girard believes that he has uncovered the key lo of human social and even biological evolution that begins from the first human cult and that will eventually lead us towards apocalypse, the literal end of the world. Girard's history can be broken down into four large movements. The past: Pagan society. The rupture: Christian revelation. The present: Modernity. And the near future: Apocalypse.

And so in this lecture, we will begin where history begins and where Girard also begins, pagan society, our past. By pagan, what I'm referring to are societies that ar not Christian, but more specifically pre-Christian. When I say pagan, think the Gre and their gods, or the Romans and their pantheon, shamanistic societies, or Hindui

The defining feature of all of these pagan societies, and all the ones of course that I haven't mentioned, is their religion. And we will spend the entirety of the lecture today covering the form and origin of pagan religion. We are going to learn how pa gods are made, and even stronger, what lies at the very foundation of all pagan societies.

But before we can even begin to inquire what form religion takes, we need to understand the problem which religion is the solution to. Girard takes a Darwinian stance on the evolution of human societies, arguing that if religions exist across the spectrum, everywhere, it must serve like the lizard's tail that breaks off in an emergency, some adaptive purpose. Girard's claim is going to be that human groups are prone to escalating conflict which tends towards self-destruction – what he call reciprocal violence. Reciprocal violence threatened all hominoid groups… to the poi where the only ones that survived were the ones that stumbled upon a cultural proc

as a solution: pagan religion. Religion is to humanity then what the tail is to lizards necessary survival mechanism. So let us begin there, and start with the problem wh religion is the solution for… reciprocal violence.

1. The Trojan War and Reciprocal Violence

Johnathan Bi: To understand what Girard has in mind with reciprocal violence, let look at the Trojan War, which is a fitting place, I think, to begin Girard's history, fo is the genesis of Western culture.

The Trojan War begins when the Spartan king's wife, Helen, is seduced by his gues Paris, the Prince of Troy, and Paris takes Helen back to Troy. Immediately, I must highlight that the conflict which ignites the Trojan War is none other than mimetic desire. After all, Paris, as a prince, could have had almost anyone that he wanted, ye what he wanted most was an object designated by a model. Out of all the women th Paris could have had, he wanted what the Spartan king had. Indeed, the mimetic nature of desire is why Girard thinks conflict is so likely among human societies – i makes us naturally desire a similar set of objects, even when we have plentiful othe options available to us.

But let's continue to observe how this one local act of conflict, or more abstractly, violence, spirals into an uncontrollable contagion. First, we have the events of the *I* as told by Homer. Furious by the actions of the Trojan prince, the Greeks siege Tro for vengeance and to win back their wounded honor. To do so, the Greeks assemble an armageddon of heroes, the most notable being Agamemnon, Odysseus, Ajax, an course, Achilles.

The whole story of the *Iliad* is about Achilles' decision – a will he/won't he fight in t Trojan War. Because, you see, the *Iliad* begins with the Greeks on Trojan shores having made little progress. And Achilles is pissed off and doesn't really want to joi his fellow Greeks. He leans towards abandoning them and going home. But recipro

violence has a way, like a disease, like a plague, of enveloping everyone too close, contagiously spreading to all who are too proximate. Just observe how more and mo people get caught up in the violence of the events of the *Iliad*. First, the Greeks sieg the walls of Troy. In response, the Trojans burn the Greek ships. Then the Greeks k Trojan heroes. And importantly, Hector, the other prince of Troy, the brother of Pa who stole Helen, he kills Patroclus, Achilles' best friend. Achilles, then, fueled with burning rage, eventually enters the war and kills Hector. Of course, the story we all know too well is that eventually Achilles himself meets his demise, shot by an arrov the heel. Reciprocal violence then, is like a disease that gets to all who are too close even if they never wanted to participate.

But this violence, spawned by Paris' act of stealing Helen, is not only between the Trojans and the Greeks. There is an interesting story told by Sophocles about the aftermath of Achilles' death, where there is infighting and internal mimetic rivalrie going on within the ranks of the Greeks and not just between the Greeks and the Trojans. The story goes like this. Odysseus and Ajax are arguing over who gets to k the armor of Achilles – the armor of Achilles is made by Hephaestus, the armor-sm god, and as a result is very desirable. Odysseus, being the cunning man he is, wins t armor and out of a fit of rage and hallucination induced by Athena, Ajax, the other competitor, ends up ending his own life and cursing the rest of the Greeks with wh he had fought side by side for, for almost an entire decade. The idea here is that wh societies are enveloped in reciprocal violence, tensions are so inflamed that they ca be easily redirected to anyone, even one's own teammates. Not only is violence contagious, but violence is also blind. It's simply looking for trouble for something someone to sink its teeth into.

David Perell: Yeah, I don't know if you've ever gone out and come across a group o single individual who are just looking for trouble that night. And at times I've even met people who go out with the sole intention of starting a fight. And usually what they'll do is they'll find external people to fight because just like the stories that yo were mentioning of Ajax and Odysseus, fundamentally they're pissed off and lookin

for a place to channel their anger. So whoever is nearby, whoever is around them wi become a target and sometimes they'll even start fights with a friend.

Johnathan Bi: Yeah, I think that's a perhaps relevant contemporary example where sounds like you're saying that there are some people who just have a constant basis energy, of violence, and they need to channel it somewhere no matter who it is. And sometimes they can even fight their friends. And I think that's exactly the logic of reciprocal violence.

The logic of reciprocal violence is like what you said, but for societies. I mean, thin French Revolution where it's first the aristocrats who get taken to the guillotine and then it's Robespierre's political opponents and then it's Robespierre's allies and eventually it's Robespierre himself. And it just kind of descends into this arbitrary contagion that chooses its victims and the next targets of violence somewhat arbitrarily. What do they say about the revolution? That the French Revolution eats own children? Well, it eats its own children because violence is blind. Violence is ju trying to find an outlet. It just grabs on to whatever is near.

Let's go back to the Trojan War because we're still not done yet on the violent consequences of a single localized act of disrespect and violence – the violence keep on spreading. The victorious Greek generals Agamemnon and Odysseus go home to find violence plaguing their own homes in their absence. But more impactfully, the Trojan refugees who seek to establish a new Troy after the old Troy had been destroyed by the Greeks carry their violence into Italy where they continue to fight and conquer. One single localized act of violence spreading exponentially to envelo an entire continent in flames – This is the story of the Trojan War and also the logi reciprocal violence.

While the examples I have just provided come from literature so that it's a bit easie and relevant for us to understand, this is not, so Girard claims, just the material of fiction. We can see reciprocal violence operating in history. On, I believe, June 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife were assassinated. Ferdinand's

assassination led to what is called now as the July Crisis and precipitated Austria-Hungary's declaration of war against Serbia, which in turn triggered a series of ever that eventually led to Austria-Hungary's allies and Serbia's allies declaring war on e other, which of course started World War I.

A similar logic, I think, happened in World War II. Recall, Achilles didn't want to fi in the Trojan War to begin with – he wanted to go home until the Trojans killed his best friend. Well, I think in the same manner, America in the beginning of World W II didn't want to fight either. It didn't want to get involved in another world war in Europe that was not on its own soil. But due to the sheer size and resources, Japan couldn't leave America alone, any more than the Trojans could have left Patroclus alone, slaughtering countless Trojan soldiers. Pearl Harbor was America's Patroclu and its bombing forced America's hand into the war. Reciprocal violence, then, is li a contagion. It slowly starts to spread and envelops everybody nearby.

This is what Girard has to say:

> Vengeance, then, is an interminable, infinitely repetitive process. Every time it turns up in some part of the community, it threatens to involve the whole social body. There is the risk that the act of vengeance will initiate a chain reaction wh consequences will quickly prove fatal to any society of modest size.

David Perell: You know that quote reminds me of a Greek Life feud. I find that thes feuds always started in such small ways with these little things that happened. And remember one time, it was like freshman year or something, and there was a party a a recruit came to the party of fraternity A, and then fraternity B came to come pick that recruit. And what happened was it was this little small gesture, but the fraterni stole that recruit, the kid went to the other fraternity, and what came from that was this multi-year rivalry between the two houses that lasted the entirety of our colleg years. And what's crazy to me about that incident is that it all began with one small gesture.

Johnathan Bi: Precisely. And I think that's exactly the logic Girard is worried about. There can be these small, seemingly innocuous gestures, stealing a recruit, taking someone's wife (although that's not as innocuous) but nonetheless, these can envelo entire communities or even continents into war. But I suppose you had a different "Greek" feud than the Trojans. Girard's claim here is that almost with the certainty Newtonian laws, groups will be engaged in this form of contagion. And the only cultures that survived are ones that uncovered a certain cultural technology to bring peace, which we will turn to now.

2. Oedipus and the Scapegoat Mechanism

Johnathan Bi: We now have an understanding of what the problem is. The problem plaguing all hominoid societies was reciprocal violence – this combustible cycle of vengeance that sees one localized act of violence envelop an entire society in chaos.

The solution to this reciprocal violence is what Girard called the scapegoat mechanism – a cultural mechanism that would kick into place when early human societies were on the brink of destruction. We're going to dive into this throughout course of the next hour, but as a brief overview, the scapegoat mechanism has four sequences, four movements. First, mimetic contagion – societies would descend int chaos. Second, scapegoating – communities start to blame a single victim with caus all of the chaos and in a violent act of catharsis, expel this victim. Third, deification paradoxically, this expelled victim is deified into a God. And fourth, institutionalization – myth and institutions start forming around this victim turned God that becomes the cultural backbone of an entire pagan society.

In the same way that we uncovered the logic of reciprocal violence through our reading of the Trojan War and its aftermath, the best way for us to make sense of th scapegoat mechanism is to turn to Sophocles' Theban Trilogy – this is the story of Oedipus, for it will reveal the secrets of the scapegoat mechanism under interrogati

2.1 Step One: Mimetic Contagion

Johnathan Bi: We start with the first step – mimetic contagion, where groups start descending into chaos and violence. And for that, we need look no further than the first act of the story of Oedipus.

We begin Sophocles' story of Oedipus with a plague ravishing Thebes, where Oedip is king. Oedipus is the king of Thebes, he's a new king, and he sends his brother-in- Creon to the Oracle of Delphi, asking how we can resolve this plague. Creon comes back after consulting the Oracle of Delphi, and he says that the entire plague is cau by the killer of Laius. Laius is the old king before Oedipus was there. The killer of Laius lurks within the wall of Thebes, and that's who they need to expel to end the plague.

The first thing to note here in this first scene of Oedipus is the close proximity between social contagion, the murder of Laius, and biological contagion, the plague ravishing Thebes. The plague is a metaphor of contagion, mimetic contagion, becau what the plague symbolizes is this all-encompassing, powerful wave that removes people's free will, gradually expanding. No one is safe from its totalizing grip.

But beyond just a symbol, there is a close, real connection between biological contagion and mimetic contagion. Just remember that plague in antiquity had two meanings: It meant both social as well as mental malaise. That may seem quite silly us. The French Revolution clearly is social contagion, and the Black Plague was clea biological contagion, but without science, it is hard to distinguish for the pagan mi Even today, I would argue that the line between social and biological contagion is quite blurry – is the mass depression we are experiencing in society, is that social? Well, it seems like it, and many would say it is – yet we are trying to solve it as if it were a biological contagion with our mass prescription of SSRIs. This is how social and biological contagion even today are related.

But even if biological and social contagion can be neatly delineated in concept, they can't be in reality, because biological contagion often is a cause for social contagion. Think back to the Black Death of 1348, which brewed the foundations for the peasant revolt of 1381. But we don't have to go as far back as the Black Death, as our past two years with COVID-19 has shown – biological contagion can readily cause social unrest from the macro to the micro: whether it's that the pandemic has inflamed geopolitical tensions. It has inflamed domestic tensions at least within America, where social unrest has been channeled in different social movements, but it also causes strife and trouble within families and communities. Because of this symbolic, real, and causal connection – it is not just in Sophocles – but many, many cultures, all who associate plague, natural calamity, and contagion, social calamity. Think about the plague cast by Moses in response to slavery. Think about the flood of Noah in response to impiety. Think about the Chinese statecraft of antiquity, which sees a bad harvest or earthquake as signs of political incompetence. There's actually a Chinese saying, "天人祸":

> Natural catastrophes and human atrocities.

In the pagan mind, these two concepts are intimately linked, symbolically and causally.

Let's go back to the Oedipus story because there's a lot more to unravel. We eventually learn that Oedipus himself is the killer of Laius. Remember, the killer of Laius is the cause of the plague, so Oedipus is the cause of the plague. Furthermore, Laius, unbeknownst to Oedipus, was Oedipus' father, and his current wife, Oedipus' current wife, whom he had inherited from Laius, turned out to be his mother.

Oedipus committed both patricide and incest, and how this came to be goes something like this. I'll give you a very reduced summary. Laius and his wife abandoned Oedipus at a very, very young age, thinking that they killed him, that he was no more. However, Oedipus survived, and he grew up in a foreign land, not knowing his Theban heritage. One day, Oedipus and Laius meet at a crossroads, and not knowing who the other person was, both of them got into bickering over right of

way, and out of anger, Oedipus kills Laius. Around the same time, there was an earl plague that was plaguing Thebes and was caused by a sphinx. By defeating the sphi Oedipus saved Thebes from this first plague, and as a result, since Thebes no longe had a king because he was killed at the crossroads, Oedipus was crowned king and given Laius' old wife. That's the story of how he, unbeknownst to Oedipus of course committed both patricide and incest.

Just like the plague, the imagery of patricide and incest is also a crucial symbol representing mimetic contagion. It symbolizes the important quality of differences breaking down during mimetic contagion. Listen to this. Oedipus is introduced as brother and father of his children, as husband and son of his wife. Wow, how more unnatural can you get? Both represent a breaking down of the natural social differences.

Recall, by social differences, Girard means the social expectations and as a consequence, the different desires of different social roles. In antiquity, men and women had very different spheres of the world, while even today, while those differences between men and women have broken down, there are still meaningful differences, for example, between parent and child. Girard sees these prohibitions, these differences in essence between different classes of people as preventing mime contagion because it limits the sphere of competition. And he also sees, inversely, t breaking down of these differences as both a cause and consequence of mimetic contagion.

The breaking down of social differences is a cause of contagion because it leads to more and more rivalry, more people competing over the same things, which makes contagion and the chaos even worse. Patricide here is the cause of the whole traged If Oedipus had properly observed his place on the crossroads as a son, then this wo have never happened. It's because he transgressed the social role of a son to respect the father, it's because that difference had broken down that this whole contagion v caused in the first place.

The breaking down of difference, however, is also the outcome or a consequence of contagion because in times of social unrest, opportunities pop up and the social fab is thrown completely into disarray. Incest, then, the fact that Oedipus had sex with mother, is the outcome of contagion. Think about it like this, if the royal family was missing its patriarch, or if the Sphinx hadn't thrown Thebes into disarray, Oedipus, who is an outsider, would have never had the opportunity to marry the queen, who course turned out to be his own mother. Incest, then, the breaking down of the relationship between son and mother was a consequence of this contagion because Thebes was thrown into disarray.

Mimetic contagion, to summarize, is the first state of the scapegoat mechanism wh society is descending into chaos. It is marked by two qualities. The fact that it start slowly and slowly entangle larger and larger parts of society and remove people's fr will as symbolized by the plague. And the fact that differences start to break down a mimetic desire runs rampant as symbolized by patricide and incest.

Indeed, we should draw a strong connection to what we discuss here and what we discuss in Girard's psychology. Mimetic contagion is the societal condition where t number and intensity of mimetic rivalries accelerate because of the breaking down differences. It is the state in which large systematic issues creates the conditions fo many localized tensions.

David Perell: I want to pop in here because you're talking about patricide and inces but I want to bring that into practical reality, things that we're experiencing. And y see this in startups where there's this saying that growth solves all problems. But th is the opposite of that, where what happens in a company when things are going we is that there's a lot of goodwill. But once there isn't as much growth, there becomes lot of rivalry, a lot of competition in the company. And that's when people start fighting for scraps. That's what mimetic contagion is.

Johnathan Bi: Precisely, a fledging startup or any struggling organization is exactly what you should have in mind here – Girard's point is that for troubled social group

and organizations, there are systemic problems that create a breaking down of differences, which then lead to micro tensions, which leads to rivalry and, of course even more systemic problems. Again, think back to COVID here and the local, micr familial tensions, workplace disputes and relationship struggles that the macro problem of disease has caused. This is what it means to be in a state of mimetic contagion.

2.2 Step Two: Founding Murder

Johnathan Bi: Clearly, we haven't gotten to the solution yet. We've simply restated problem.

The solution to reciprocal violence is going to be this. The group will choose one victim or a small set of victims that is marked in some special way to inherit all of t blame and frustrations of the group. This scapegoat will be expelled and reconcile t group in a cathartic act of symbolic release.

Let's go back to Oedipus and see how this plays out. As the play progresses, it beco increasingly obvious to everyone that Oedipus is in fact the killer of Laius, that he i both patricidal and incestual. His mother-wife confirms it, the slaves confirm it, he himself confirms it. His mother-wife kills herself and he blinds himself, gouging hi own eyes out, after which he sends himself into exile, guided only by his daughter Antigone. This fulfills the prophecy and brings back peace to the city of Thebes.

This is Girard's interpretation of Oedipus' conviction and it is really peculiar. Let m read this to you:

> The attribution of guilt that henceforth passes for 'true' differs in no way from these attributions that will henceforth be regarded as 'false', except that in the ca of the 'true' guilt no voice is raised to protest any aspect of the charge.

What Girard is saying here is that Oedipus' conviction was arbitrary and groundles But this seems to go against the myth. Oedipus was not chosen arbitrarily, everyone

including himself, confirmed his crimes – it seems that there is a lot of objective evidence to distinguish truth from falsehood – so what does Girard mean here?

Girard's point here is that while it seems objectively "true", and in fact, it is objectiv true that Oedipus killed Laius, the following statement is the arbitrary one which Oedipus' conviction is deceitfully grounded on – the killer of Laius is responsible fo the whole plague of Thebes. Think about it, what a ridiculous statement that one murder can be responsible for an entire plague. Yes, Oedipus had a bad character tr but it well could have been some other trait that people believe caused the plague… could have been Creon, Oedipus' brother-in-law, who was trying to usurp the thron Maybe that's what caused the plague. Or there might have been three other guys ov there who had sex with their sisters. Maybe that's a better cause of the plague. This Girard's point about scapegoating. It's always grounded on a lie. The lie in the case Oedipus wasn't that he actually killed Laius, but that the killer of Laius is responsib for the plague. As you can see, the lie which grounds the founding murder is often a in only degree and not kind. Often, the victim is somewhat guilty, but this lie will b exaggerated, blaming the one small set of scapegoats or one single scapegoat for th entirety of the problem. That is how scapegoating is deceitful.

David Perell: Yeah, you see this in the way that Mark Zuckerberg is blamed for a lo the problems in the contemporary world. We like to blame Facebook for a lot of the problems that are actually problems with the internet itself. Don't get me wrong, Facebook does have a lot of problems. There's a lot of issues with the company, but issues aren't as great as the extent to which we blame that company for. And so we' have things that happen in society, riots, Donald Trump's election, all kinds of socia unrest, and we will pinpoint that blame on one scapegoat, Mark Zuckerberg.

Johnathan Bi: That's precisely right. In the same way that Oedipus isn't fully innoc I bet Mark Zuckerberg has done some questionable deeds. I haven't looked into the Facebook case as much, but the problem with scapegoating is that it's a lie in the extent of the blame. Just as all of Thebes' tragedies was blamed on one person,

Oedipus, your point is, if I understand you correctly, that all of society's, at least internet-related problems, is blamed on Facebook, when in many instances, it's actually not Facebook's fault.

2.3 Consensus, Deceit, and Catharsis

Johnathan Bi: The next logical question then is, well, if the scapegoat process, whic Girard seems to think all societies need to do, is grounded on a lie, then how do pec believe it?

This is Girard's answer. Let me quote Girard:

> The slightest hint, the most groundless accusation, can circulate with vertiginou speed and is transformed into irrefutable proof. The corporate sense of convictic snowballs, each member taking confidence from his neighbor by a rapid process mimesis. The firm conviction of the group is based on no other evidence than th unshakable unanimity of its own illogic.

Girard's answer here is that the lie is sustained by unanimity. Think back to two lectures ago, our lecture on mimesis as a key normative authority. We are creatures who can believe in lies in so far as others around us do as well. It is our mimetic capacity that overpowers our ability to reason, so much so that Oedipus himself believes that he is guilty, that his patricide and incest could bring about the entire collapse of society. The source of deceit lies in mimesis, mimetic unanimity.

David Perell: Yeah, I think there's a paradox of consensus here that shows up in ancient Jewish law of all places. So what happened was if a suspect was found guilty 100% guilty by every judge on the jury, that suspect was deemed innocent because t ancient Jewish people thought, well, if every single person is thinking the same way something must have gone wrong in the decision-making process. And there's anot investor, a venture capitalist, who tells me that all of their worst investments were made when every single partner on the investment team agreed and said, yes, let's d

that. And then finally, Peter Thiel talks about how in the Bible, every single time where there's unanimous consent, every time, it is actually a sign that something ha gone wrong, that the group is not thinking well. And you see this in the Tower of Babel story. Everybody thinks alike. Everybody is speaking the same language. And what does God do? When they're trying to build a tower that reaches to heaven, wh God does is he confounds their speech. He scatters all the people. And through tha he's warning us about the dangers of unanimous thinking.

Johnathan Bi: I think behind all of those examples, most notably the venture capita one as well as this Jewish law one, I have to think a bit more about this Tower of Ba example. The core intuition here is something like this: that if 90% of people believ and 10% don't, it's in some ways more indicative of truth than 100% of people believing. And I think that's quite interesting because it's so unintuitive. And I thin there's something deeply Girardian here. Maybe the logic goes something like this. everyone believes, the social force and pressure to believe is so strong that we shou wonder and inquire into whether there's anything real backing that belief. Does tha make sense? That there's so much social force, social legitimacy backing a statemer in the case where everyone agrees. We should really be skeptical whether that statement is actually pointing to anything objective.

David Perell: I think it was Ben Franklin who said, if everybody is thinking alike, th nobody is thinking at all.

Johnathan Bi: Right, precisely. And I think that conveys the same sentiment we've been trying to discuss here.

A consequence of Girard's views is that in times of large social unrest, we never rea have the right solution, at least not fully in view. More often than not in the mimeti contagion, in times of great chaos, French Revolution, COVID, there's a real system issue like natural disaster or plague, but people tend to vent their anger at somethir other than that systemic issue. I mean, look at COVID and see how the anger from

pandemic has been channeled to say, the social justice movements, right? The caus and the proposed resolution are completely on a different systemic level.

But why does Girard think that we need to have an untrue, deceitful, mob-like act o expulsion? Why in the middle of a mimetic contagion can't we just talk our way through it? Why can't we just form some kind of social contract? Well, I think the reason is that if you've ever been in any frenzied state where you were wronged and you wanted revenge, or you were extremely angry, you know that what you don't ca about is your actual immediate interests. If your rival who pissed you off gave you a hundred bucks, would that resolve the anger? No, we don't want anything material, want something symbolic – we want something cathartic. Reason has little authorit over us in such a state. So it's precisely at the height of war of all against all – mime contagion – that we can't just sit down like Hobbes and make a social contract. Wh we are concerned about aren't our material interests and reason is impotent. It is ou pride, our being, our ego, our self-conception that has been wounded in mimetic contagion. And so we need an equally symbolic solution. We need catharsis.

Think back to the idea that violence is blind, that it can be easily diverted – Ajax's anger towards the Trojans easily latched on to his anger towards Odysseus. The sar thing can be said for societies, that there's a constant degree of violence and this violence needs to be directed somewhere and unleashed. And, therefore, to satisfy t greatest possible symbolic release, the greatest form of catharsis, we need to chann at one tiny, tiny victim that has to inherit the entirety of the blame. We get a heightened degree of catharsis because we face the most radical evil, almost a mora black hole, the smallest space of surface area inheriting the widest possible mass of moral blame.

To summarize then, what is key about this second move in the scapegoat mechanis the actual scapegoating itself and the founding murder, is first, the level of catharsi that is required, and two, the magnitude of the lie that is required, and three, the unanimity that is required to sustain it. The frustration is so high that we need the

highest possible catharsis and that can only come if a single victim is given all the blame. And this degree of a lie requires total unanimity.

2.4 Three Marks of the Victim

Johnathan Bi: While the process of choosing victims is grounded on unanimity and therefore is somewhat arbitrary, there's still a set of criterion that tends naturally to highlight victims if not fully choose them.

The first such criterion is having a special mark. Many well-known victims and victimized groups have some kind of infirmity, think about Moses and his speech disorder or people with an extra or deformed limb. The reason a special mark is oft a sign of the victim is that it naturally captures our gaze and so our gaze naturally converges to the victim when we're looking for someone to blame. What is Oedipus special mark? Well, it's the fact that he's a king, that everyone's gaze naturally converges to the one ruler of Thebes.

The second criterion or the quality of a likely victim is that they need to be far from the social order. The victim needs to be detached and in some sense distant from th social order. The first reason that they need to be so distant is that we can't implica ourselves when we're blaming people, when we're scapegoating. And if it's that exa person over there who looks like me, talks like me, wants what I like and shares a ve similar moral character to me, then if I blame all of evil on him, I, in some sense implicate myself. But the second and perhaps more important reason that a distant victim has to be chosen for this process to work correctly is that anyone with substantial ties in the social order will not lead to peace. Their scapegoating, their unjust blaming can only lead to a new cycle of vengeance as their friends and family come to avenge them. Being far from the social order doesn't always necessarily me the lower dispossessed classes. There's a horseshoe going on here where it can ofte mean the high class as well because often the elite are estranged from society due t their position. Again, Oedipus is a foreign king, that's why he is far from the social order and a suitable victim.

This also happens in society and historical examples as well. Marie Antoinette's foreign Austrian status was repeatedly brought up in the public accusations. The th and last mark of the victim or quality of the victim then is that, paradoxically, they need to be near the social order. They need to be involved and embedded within the community. The problem with blaming someone not embedded in the community i that it's completely unbelievable even though mimetic contagion which leads to the founding murder is grounded on a lie, that lie needs to have some grounding, it nee to seem somewhat plausible. And if I point to someone 3000 miles over there who's never interacted with us as the sole cause of all the blame, well, that's not going to l believable even with unanimity supporting it. And so the victim also needs to be ne the social order. Well how is Oedipus near the social order? He is the king, he is in very veins of Theban power.

These three qualities, the three marks of the victim, being near to the social order, being far from the social order, and having a special mark is why Girard thinks the Jewish people, your people, have unfortunately been the canonical scapegoats in human history. The Jewish people are near to the social order because they have lor been in exile and as a result need to immigrate to other cultures. But they're far because unlike other immigratory cultures like the Anglos or the French who've moved to America and after three generations they don't even bring up their Anglo French heritage, the Jews still keep a separate sphere of existence. There's a separat religion, there's separate religious practices, there's separate holidays and it is this separation that also marks the Jews.

David Perell: Yeah, growing up Jewish, one of the things that we heard a lot about v how much Jews have been persecuted throughout history. And there's an assumptic amongst older Jews that it's going to happen again in the future even though the Holocaust happened more than 70 years ago. And even now whenever I call my grandmother, she's in her 90s, she always ends the phone call by saying, make sure y marry a Jewish woman. She says that every time. And I think that it's a way of stick together and protecting ourselves from something boiling up in the future.

Johnathan Bi: So if I understand you correctly in that example, you're saying that there's a public or maybe semi-private consciousness within the Jewish community from all these millennia of persecution that have embedded deeply into the psyche fears further prosecution. Is that roughly right?

David Perell: Mm-hmm.

Johnathan Bi: And I think Girard would describe this unfortunate historical sequer of events of continued Jewish persecution as being a result of the Jewish people bearing the three marks of the victim, of being far from the social order, being near the social order, and being marked in some special way.

With the logic of the second step of the scapegoat mechanism, the actual scapegoat and founding murder in view, let's move on to the third part of the scapegoat mechanism, which is divinization.

2.5 Step Three: Divinization

Johnathan Bi: The question we have to understand in this step of the scapegoat mechanism is this: how does this entire process we've talked about, about contagio and killing victims, bring us anywhere closer to what I promised you in the beginni of this lecture: gods? Girard's answer is that communities will divinize and worship none other than the evil and now expelled (and likely dead) victim, turning the previous evil victim into a god to be worshiped. Let's unpack this by following Sophocles and the Theban trilogy.

In the beginning of the second part of the trilogy, which is called Oedipus at Colon we find an aged and still blind Oedipus, guided by his daughter Antigone, wanderir in Greece and specifically in Athens. Low and behold, the plague had already diminished in Thebes. It's been resolved by Oedipus' expulsion. The Athenians, aft learning who Oedipus is, initially wants to chase him out of their lands for understandable reasons. You don't want a patricidal, incestual man who's caused th

plague to be here. But Oedipus has a trick up his sleeve. There's another prophecy t has been taking the spotlight, that has been gaining momentum in Greece, that wherever his remains shall be buried shall enjoy lasting peace. And so we notice something drastic but quite subtle changing here. He is someone, or at least he's starting to become someone, who people now want in their lands instead of only wanting to push away. People want Oedipus' remains and they want them in his lar The ruler of Athens comes and asks Oedipus to stay. Creon, the now king of Thebe also wants Oedipus' remains and wants him back in Thebes. Oedipus' son, who is i state of chaos, he's warring with his brother, also comes to Oedipus for his blessing

So what has happened here? What accounts for this big switch? In the beginning, when we discussed the first act of Oedipus, he was this guy who no one wanted to touch with a 10-foot pole, and suddenly now everyone wants a piece of Oedipus.

Girard has this to say, I quote:

> Because human thought has never succeeded in grasping the mechanisms of vio unanimity, it naturally turns toward the victim and seeks to determine whether h is not somehow responsible for the miraculous consequences of his own death o exile… Because the violence directed against the victim was intended to restore order and tranquility, it seems only logical to attribute the happy result to the victim himself.

Girard's point is that the scapegoat mechanism is such an unanimous process beca people feel so justified in their expulsion that they don't feel their own agency. And they, here meaning the crowds, the people who do the victim killing, they don't see themselves as the ones bringing peace. All they have in view is the victim, and reas that it must be the victim that has brought us that peace. And so, just as arbitrarily this group assigns all of the hate onto the scapegoat in the act of expulsion, Girard' claim is that they will now latch on to the victim and attribute to him all of the prai for ending the chaos. This is simply but the reverse of the founding murder, but it i equally grounded on a lie, and a lie, of course, that must be bolstered by unanimity.

But how can Oedipus go through such a radical transformation? Do people view hi as good or evil in this case? Girard's answer is that Oedipus is seen as both good an as evil. The very fact that Oedipus' expulsion brought about real peace meant for th persecutors that he was truly guilty and evil. I mean, think about it like this: you we told by some prestigious oracle that there's a guy who killed Laius, if you get him ou the plague would end. You get Oedipus out who killed Laius and the plague ends. F you, that's simply a proof that Oedipus is indeed guilty. However, that does not mea Oedipus can't also use his powers for good. It doesn't mean that Oedipus doesn't ha the power to end plagues as well as to cause them.

Let me put this a different way. Good and evil are the wrong poles altogether to thi about Oedipus, and all sacred objects in pagan religion cannot be judged on this dichotomy. The right polarity is between powerful and powerless, not good and evil What is consistent between the two Oedipuses (the two Oedipuses meaning both th one who caused the plague and the one who ended the plague) what's consistent is his morality – it's the power for Oedipus to give life and take life. What's consistent between two Oedipuses is his power. In the pagan system, it's not like one has to be good or evil. No, people are either powerful or powerless, and if they are powerful, they can be both good and evil. The distinction is not one of morality but of force.

2.6 A Revaluation of Values

David Perell: I don't know, maybe it's just me, but there's nobody that comes to mi today who's both radically good and radically evil.

Johnathan Bi: Yeah, that's a great question, and the answer is going to be Christian But the first thing I'll say is that there are traces of this ambivalence even in post-Christian history. Take, for example, the Jewish doctors who were blamed for the plague, the Black Death, and the witches who were burned alive due to witchcraft. Those were the same people you'd actually go to for help in desperate times of need And so even in a post-Christian world, there's an idea that within power lies both th ability to help and hurt people. But if what you're really looking for is a modern

equivalent, maybe the best example is I think the public's attitude towards tech billionaires, perhaps – I think a lot of people see them as both capable of doing a lo good but also a lot of harm. And sometimes they're painted as radically evil, and otl times they're painted as genuinely changing the world, and often by the same peopl And there's no contradiction here. What underlies these billionaires today is their power. So I think even in today's world, there exists a hint of this. But I think you're ultimately right that in today's examples that I've just given, it's a much more mute effect. We still tend to predominantly think of one person as good or evil, right? An so the answer to your question, the direct answer, is Christianity.

Christianity will engage fundamentally in a revaluation of values, and it will turn th polarity from powerless and powerful, into good and evil. And so, with this polarity the dominant view with which we judge moral characters, in today's society, someo has to be either predominantly good or predominantly evil. And that's why perhaps we're struggling to come up with real examples of people like Oedipus in today's society.

David Perell: You know , I once had lunch with a Hollywood screenwriter, and she said something really interesting. She said that one of her biggest complaints about Hollywood was that many of the characters were either good or they were bad, but they lacked this complexity, this nuance of being both of them. I think it was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn who said: "The line between good and evil cuts between ev human heart." But Hollywood has lost a lot of that complexity. You think of Marvel movies. There's the good guys and the bad guys. But we've lost a lot of these more subtle and contradictory webs of characters here.

Johnathan Bi: Yes, and I think that Girard would explain what you just described a being a consequence of this Christian reevaluation of values, moving away from the powerless to powerful, which in that worldview, someone who is powerful can be g and evil because that's not the primary pole. Once the dominant polarity is flipped

good and evil, you get the consequence of Hollywood that you say today. You get th one-dimensional characters.

However, let's go back to pagan society. In pagan society, where power is the domir axis, it was consistent for a powerful being to be both good and evil. That's the conclusion we went to. In fact, Girard's claim is that power is nothing but the fundamental building block of pagan sacredity. The sacred, at least the pagan sacre for Girard, is nothing but power, either the power to do ultimate evil or the power t do ultimate good. It doesn't really matter. Power is the real object of analysis here.

Listen to how Oedipus introduces himself. I quote:

> I come as someone sacred, someone filled with piety and power, bearing a great for all your people.

What defines pagan gods are not their morality, but their forcefulness. In fact, they often morally ambivalent. Girard gives us a whole host of examples.

I quote again:

> Dionysus is at one and the same time the 'most terrible' and the 'most gentle' of gods. There is a Zeus who hurls thunderbolts and a Zeus 'as sweet as honey'. In f there is no ancient divinity who does not have a double face. If the Roman Janus turns to his worshippers a countenance alternately warlike and peaceful, that is because he too reflects the same alternation.

Of course, this power that pagan gods have is not real. Oedipus did not really have power to cause the plague, nor did he really have the power to end the plague. Both exaggerated projections onto him by the crowd. In the final analysis then, all pagan gods and religions are grounded on violence, deceit, and fundamentally the unanim of the crowd, which believes in the victim's guilt as well as the God's power.

2.7 Step Four: Institutionalization

Johnathan Bi: We've covered three movements of the scapegoat mechanism already First, a society descending into chaos. Second, the society attributing blame onto a singular victim in a founding murder. Third, the divinization of the now murdered victim.

Girard believes that these are actually real events, that this is the real logic behind r historical events that have actually happened throughout history. These events are s impactful, so cataclysmic, that they spawned a series of myths around them that became the bedrock texts of religions. And given the close proximity between chur and state in pagan society, it shaped the core practices and institutions of such societies as well.

Sophocles' Theban Trilogy is one in a long line of myths that try to capture the stor Oedipus. Girard's claim is that this story, or, at the very least, stories like these poin some real events that happened. He might not have been named Oedipus. The city might not have been Thebes. And certainly, he did not have the power to cause plagues and end plagues. Pagan myths are always told from the perspective of the persecutor, the perspective of the crowd, and this is always deceitful. However, the Oedipus myth might have been pointed to some real event, where patricide and inc was the cause of the problem and exile was its solution. It was probably an event th was so tumultuous for all those who experienced it that it grounded the moral unive of people in that society. And even in Sophocles' time, if it couldn't establish an ent moral universe on its own, the Oedipus myth could certainly lend prestige to a few institutions of the day.

Even if these myths are pure fiction, do not underestimate fiction's ability to groun and align our real moral intuitions through mimetic unanimity, even in our age. Th example that I always like to go to is when China began to allow Western media in late 20th century, there was a really, really funny story. See, a villager in rural China was arrested and clearly had been watching a lot of American crime shows, Law an Order, stuff like that, because he said when he was arrested that, "I know my Fifth

Amendment rights." Of course, the legal system is very different in China and he didn't have the exact same American rights, but you see how fiction injected specif legal ideas, but also more larger moral intuitions like individualism into his psyche. Even when we know something is fiction, it still has a massive gravitational pull an effect to ground our moral intuitions.

But Girard's point is that most religious myths weren't mere fiction. His view of religion is one of psychologization, that we project sacredity onto a real event, and think I find that somewhat plausible. I mean, think back to the religions we do hav historical records of. Even the staunchest atheists must admit that they were pointi at real events and real people. There was a Jesus of Nazareth, whether he was the o true God, that's up to debate, but there's no debate whether he really existed. In lik manner, there was a historical Siddhartha and there was a historical Mohammad. A we've just discovered that the Trojan War did in fact happen as well. We discovered this in the 20th century when we unearthed the site of Troy. Girard then simply ask us to extend the same intuitions to the myths of yore which we don't have real historical records of, the Baldrs, the Zeus, the Purushas, and the Oedipuses of the world.

What is just as real as the events that these myths are pointing to are the institutio that these myths spawn and legitimize. This is the fourth and final step of the scapegoat mechanism: institutionalization. The point of these institutions is to use lessons we learned in a myth to stop future societal collapse. And there are largely t types of institutions.

The first type is prohibitions. Prohibitions are institutions that introduce differenc amongst people. If the problem with contagion is that differences, social difference ceases to exist, prohibitions and institutions that are prohibitory will seek to reinfo those differences, to make sure those differences stick. They try to push people apa so that their mimetic natures do not make them converge upon a similar set of obje And so what are some real examples of prohibitions grounded on religion? Well,

there's entire time periods in different cultures where society kind of just closes do and society tries to limit as much interaction with different people as possible. Len one example. The Sabbath is another example. And perhaps less familiar to our audience, the rites of the Swazi Incwala peoples: throughout their period of observance, all sexual activity, including the most legitimate, is completely forbidde Even sleeping late in the morning is regarded as a crime, and physical contact betw individuals is to be avoided at all costs, even scratching oneself is heavily frowned upon. Of course, all singing, all loud noise, all types of play by children are prohibit But furthermore, let me give you another set of examples. In pagan societies, there' often prohibitions against objects and people that call to mind the breaking down c differences, which lead to reciprocal violence. For example, twins amongst many different pagan societies had this very negative connotation, to the extent that ofte when twins are born, in some societies, the mother is asked to kill one of the twins. The reason that Girard thinks twins are often so prohibited against is because twin call to mind the breaking down of differences, the doubles that start to emerge in th height of mimetic contagion.

But that's just one set of institutions that can be derived from religion. Girard sees another seemingly completely different set of institutions, and he calls them rituals Rituals act as a release valve if prohibitions lose power, if contagion threatens socie again. The logic of rituals is this, if society is somewhat relatively peaceful right no let's use prohibitions. Let's make sure people don't get riled up too much. Let's mak sure that mimetic desire and metaphysical desire don't pass too readily among peop But if society gets riled up to a point where prohibitions start breaking down, then need to use a completely different strategy. What we're going to do is we're going to simulate the initial founding murder in an act of catharsis and try to bring about th peace in a different way. Instead of trying to contain it, we're going to simulate a release, simulate a catharsis. The examples of ritual in history are many as well. There's a whole set of festivities that are the exact opposite of time periods such as Lent and Sabbath, and that's the festival. Think about the Bacchanal of Rome celebrating the cult of Dionysus, where all forms of indulgence, usually unaccepted

society, is. Or think about perhaps the heir to Bacchanal, which is today the contemporary Carnival. What we can see in modern examples of carnival is that it's imitation of the frenzy of the state of contagion. There's the excessive consumption there's the grotesque bodysuits emphasizing exaggerated body parts, there's food fights, there's the mocking of authorities, there's abusive language and degrading a There's a complete reversal of norms. In previous iterations of the carnival, the slav actually have an opportunity to yell and berate the masters. It's a complete 180 from the usual social prohibitions that prohibitions try to enact. And it's a breaking dow difference in an attempt to simulate the state of mimetic contagion and the eventua cathartic release. Girard provides a whole host of historical examples that I encour you to explore, whether it's the proliferation of animal sacrifice, whether it's the Az human sacrifice, whether it's Tupinambá ritualistic cannibalism, or the ritual inces for African kings.

But we don't need to look too far to understand what a ritual institution is. Tocqueville's analysis of democratic elections conformed to this idea of a cathartic ritual, to have a controlled expulsion for people to vent their frustration. For Tocqueville, a key reason, I'm oversimplifying here of course, but a key reason that democratic process is so stable isn't because democracy chooses the wisest leaders the time, or because democracy allows people to feel recognition, but that there's a controlled expulsion of the leadership every eight, if not four years. The idea is that get to, in a national ritual, project all our anger and frustration on the leaving administration, to have our friends and allies bolster our certainty of the evil of the leaving administration through unanimity. And it's this psychological release valve that is so important for Tocqueville.

Of course, depending on the myth, different prohibitions and different rituals will b emphasized. But suddenly, with this idea in view, that the scapegoat mechanism eventually leads to both rituals and prohibitions, suddenly a whole host of moral events in a previously incomprehensible pagan universe now becomes readily intelligible.

Let's go back to the story of Oedipus then, to understand how it influenced the Gre institutions of the day. The story of Oedipus, by the time of Sophocles, is probably t weak to establish an entire culture on its own, but its prestige could nonetheless reinforce certain prohibitions and rituals of its own.

The prohibitions are quite obvious and quite uninteresting. Kids don't kill your dad and don't have sex with your mom. That's what got Thebes into this whole mess. A if you're going to try doing that, you're going to get yourself into a whole mess as w The ritual that the Oedipus myth reinforces is the *pharmakos*. This is a real ritual th Greek city-states constantly practiced. In times of plague, Greek city-states would choose someone, a *pharmakos*, on the fringe of society, usually a beggar or criminal, that would inherit and be blamed for the plague or the chaos, and taken outside of t city walls to be humiliated, to be tortured and expelled for good. Perhaps not unlike shooing away an administration then, the people in Greece felt cathartic release fro this ritual. And it clearly worked in that regard, because it was a very popular and often practiced rite. *Pharmakos* is where the English word pharmacy takes root, but Greek it meant both cure and poison. And not unlike Oedipus, the *pharmakos* had a ambivalent aura around him, ultimately evil because he had caused the plague, but ultimately good because he has the power to save people from it. So indeed, he was treated as an object of scorn, a butt of insults, but there's always a quasi-religious a of veneration around him. He also became, paradoxically perhaps to the modern intuition, a sort of cult-like object. And so do you see the proximity between *pharmakos* and Oedipus? How they're all blamed for plagues, how they're responsible for curing the plagues, and how they all have a dual era of being good a evil that unites in their power?

To summarize then, the scapegoat mechanism proceeds from a real cataclysmic eve – where society experiences contagion, cathartic release, and divinizes new gods. T real event is dramatized and captured in myth and then translated back into real institutions in the form of prohibitions and rituals. This arc, going from real event t

myth to real institutions, is not only how pagan gods and religions have been made, but also how all human societies and cultures are founded.

3. The Violent Foundations of Society

Johnathan Bi: Girard's unsettling conclusion is that not just human religions, but a human societies, along with their institutions, must be grounded on the myth of a founding murder.

To truly establish a peaceful society in a time of turmoil, this murder must be maximally cathartic and as a result, has to be maximally violent and deceitful – blaming a singular victim for the entirety of evil.

His surprising conclusion then is that worldly order, this worldly peace, human society, must be founded on violence and deceit. Cohesion is founded on finding a common enemy. As a contemporary example, or somewhat contemporary example, see the cohesive force of having a joined enemy, we only ought look at World War I because what could be a more unnatural pairing than capitalist America and communist Russia? Yet that was exactly what happened when both of them united against the Nazi threat. There's this image of this cooperation that I always find ver humorous. It's a photo of American supply lines sent to the Soviet front and on it, quite lovingly, on the supplies that were sent over, was written: "Hammer and Sickl them." Of course, the hammer and sickle stands for everything American capitalism against, but even mortal enemies soon become friends when they are united by a greater enemy.

To make sense of Girard's claim on the violent foundations of society, we must thin back to Girard's psychology, his elevation of spirit over reason: seeing us as symbol social creatures instead of rational agents. For every social philosophy, we must ask who the subject is: for Marx's philosophy, the subject is class. For fascism, it's the nation state. For Augustine, it's the Christian soul. For liberalism, it's the rational

agent. Girard's subject is the spirited animal – not one who thinks in terms of utilit and numbers, but vengeance and pride, honor and being, who experiences envy and resentment. For such a social creature, the primary social mechanisms that govern him, it's not consensus, it's not the mandate of heaven, it's not the common good, it not rational political discourse… The most important tools at society's disposal is prohibition, it's social difference, it's unanimity, it's ritual, it's catharsis, it's prestig These have nothing to do with truth, or more strongly, their proper functioning reli upon being grounded on a deceitful unanimity that can't be exposed to the light of truth.

This is how total Girard's claim is. Let me quote you so you don't think I'm making this stuff up:

> All religious rituals spring from the [founding] victim, and all the great institutio of mankind, both secular and religious, spring from ritual… they coincide with archetypal myths that tell, in apparently 'naive' fashion, how all man's religious, familial, economic, and social institutions grew out of the body of an original victim.

3.1 The Hymn of Purusha

Johnathan Bi: To give Girard's all-encompassing claim here just some semblance o plausibility, we must look beyond Oedipus to sacrificial myths that have grounded t entirety of a culture's institution.

For that, we must turn to the Hymn of Purusha – a section in the Vedas, the foundi text of Indian mythology and culture. This hymn tells about the founding murder o divine being whose name is Purusha, and how this founding murder is responsible the birth of Hindu society.

I'll let the hymn do the talking. It begins as such:

> The Man has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. He pervaded th earth on all sides and extended beyond it as far as ten fingers.

These are the opening lines of the hymn to Purusha, and the first thing we are mad aware of is not his morality, but his power, the defining feature of the pagan sacred

The hymn continues to describe how Purusha was sacrificed… Listen close.

> From that sacrifice in which everything was offered, the melted fat was collected and he made it into these beasts who live in the air, in the forest, and in villages. From that sacrifice… the verses and chants were born, the metres were born from and from it the liturgical formulas were born. Horses were born from it, and thos other animals that have two rows of teeth; cows were born from it, and from it g and sheep were born.

What we're hearing here is none other than the second and third step of the scapeg mechanism, a murder, a sacrifice, and the following divinization of the peace and li that is brought about by the founding murder. Do you see how what I just read you somewhat perhaps exaggerated form of the Oedipus myth? Where one man curing city, that's the logic of Oedipus, and it may seem extreme enough to us, but no, here all the laws, all the animals, the entire living world, nay, life itself is attributed to th sacrifice.

But of course, for Girard's theories to be true, it can't just be one peace-giving even Institutions must flow from it, and institutions do flow from it. Let me continue reading to you the hymn:

> His mouth became the Brahmin; his arms were made into the Warrior, his thigh the Artisan; and from his feet the Servants were born.

The most important prohibitions, the institution of the caste system, is justified on founding murder of Purusha.

And this is how the hymn ends:

> The gods sacrificed the sacrifice by the sacrifice. Such were the first institutions
> These powers had access to the firmament, where the Saints are, the original goo

Not only are prohibitions justified on the Hymn of Purusha, but so are the most important ritual institutions, the institution of sacrifice, which were the domains o the Brahmin and the moral, religious, political pillar of Hindu society. Even this is legitimized on this founding murder that's captured by this hymn. The Hymn of Purusha, then, is one of these all-encompassing myths that does ground, nourish, a legitimize almost the entirety of the culture. The living animals, the plants, the laws the music, the caste system, the sacrifices, all of these are attributed to the foundin murder of Purusha.

3.2 The Founding of Rome

Johnathan Bi: But it's not just Hindu culture. In many pagan cultures that we look, should expect to find, buried deep within them, a founding murder institutionalize myth that justifies and nourishes the most important institutions of a society. Let's look at Rome, the Roman Republic, first. Think Romulus and Remus. How the deat Remus marks, in some way, the founding of the Roman Republic. Remus was killed because he transgressed the lines that Romulus had drawn around the city. Well, th lines that Remus transgressed then became the *primarium* – the sacred boundary of city that took on a deep political and religious significance. This founding murder justified a deeply important Roman institution.

Let's look at the Roman Empire. Julius Caesar is another canonical example of a vic turned God founding a pagan society. Roman society is in a state of chaos and civil war. This is the contagion. Julius Caesar is then scapegoated, blamed, and collectiv murdered on the Senate floor. This is the founding murder, the scapegoating. Peace does not come immediately to Rome, but it does come at the hands of another Caes Caesar Augustus, Julius' nephew. And with Augustus' victory, Julius Caesar is litera

deified by the Roman Senate and spawned so many myths that were canonized in Roman practices and also captured in Virgil, Ovid, Shakespeare, and the like. This, course, is then the divinization as well as the institutionalization.

Listen to what Shakespeare has to say about Caesar. I quote:

> Your statue spouting blood in many pipes, in which so many smiling Romans bathed, signifies that from you great Rome shall suck reviving blood.

Caesar is the fountainhead. He's the prestigious symbol, the fundamental bedrock t grounds the legitimacy of the Roman Imperium to which all rulers will have to pay homage to, often explicitly by bearing his name Caesar. And there are so many othe cultures and religions and stories which Girard dissects deeply that we don't have t to explore. I'll simply point you to their direction, whether it's the death of Baldr in Nordic mythology or the birth of Zeus in Greek mythology, whether it's the Ojibwa myth of five gods expelling a sixth god from the group for taking off his eye patch a killing a human with his gaze among Native Americans, or whether it's the Tikopia myth of a trickster god who was expelled for stealing food, popular among Pacific Islanders.

Everywhere we look in pagan society, we see their core institutions as grounded an legitimized by myths that can all be traced back to some founding murder.

4. Moral Paradigm Shifts

Johnathan Bi: Of course, the prestige of certain myths will wane over time, whethe it's corruption internally or challenge externally. And when the rituals and prohibitions completely lose their grasp on a society, when they're incapable of fixi a society, then the process is repeated all over again. Mimetic contagion, founding murder, divinization, institutionalization. And so, pagan society, all the way from hominization, our evolution from ape, exists in this cyclical view where you have a founding murder, it becomes institutionalized, the institutions after a long time los

their prestige, and then a new founding murder with its own set of myths and institutions are needed again.

And we should understand each turn of the scapegoat mechanism, each foundation and institutionalization, as a singular moral paradigm shift. These are events that a so cataclysmic, so world historic, with the depth so low and the resolution so miraculous, that they can't help but through the associations in their stories alone, up the fundamental framework for a new moral paradigm. They set up associations good and evil that are grounded on nothing but unanimity itself.

David Perell: And adding on to what you're saying, I think this could be a good example of what it means to live inside of a paradigm, because right now we're livir in the Christian moral paradigm. And in this Christian paradigm, ideas like human rights, which are themselves downstream from the idea of imago Dei, which says th every human is made in the image of God. And from that idea, you get the contemporary values like equality, love, compassion, and those three values stand ir stark contrast to the Greek values, which they held so highly of honor and courage. And so you can clearly see that there's been a 180 in terms of the differences betwee the pagan paradigm that we used to be in and the Christian paradigm that we're in now.

Johnathan Bi: I think that is quite a good example of a moral paradigm, that we are given in each paradigm these fundamental core concepts grounded on unanimity about what good and evil is. And in this case, it's the Christian concepts, and from them flow a lot of conclusions like human rights, like you just mentioned. But we d even need to go that far to have an understanding of what living in a moral paradigı means. I mean, just look back to our last large world historic cataclysmic event whe the Axis powers were expelled and anything associated with the Axis powers, especially Nazism, is just completely defined as the root cause of evil. In the last lecture, you mentioned how the futurists, because of their association with the Naz is completely off the table. But I think this expands far beyond aesthetics and much

more than just aesthetic preferences were determined by this last moral paradigm shift. For example, all types of reactionary thinking is completely out of bounds tod It's outside the Overton window today. In the academy, there's only progressives wi a minority of conservatives. And to this day, I haven't met a reactionary professor y Or take another example, any semblance of racial discrimination, even if it is much more innocuous than, say, class discrimination, is completely unacceptable because racial discrimination calls to mind associations with the Nazis and their horrendou crimes. And even something such as science, there are entire practices like eugenic that once had incredible prestige around the world. I mean, in the beginning of the 20th century – UCL had a chair of eugenics. Theodore Roosevelt and Nobel laureat were supporters of eugenics. But that is now completely out of bounds because of t association with the Nazis.

David Perell: On the internet, there's something that I colloquially call the Hitler effect, where if you watch how arguments online unfold, they'll just end once somebody compares something to Hitler. Once you do that, the debate is over.

Johnathan Bi: Precisely, all of these examples that we've provided is what it means live in a moral paradigm, that we are just given these fundamental substratum obje of good and evil. And anything associated with the good is good. Anything associat with evil is completely off of bounds. And so just as growing up in a culture listenir to Sophocles' Oedipus will make patricide and incest completely out of bounds and will legitimize other practices like the *pharmakos*, so do our moral paradigms groun our key assumptions. They become the lens through which we interpret all phenomena.

If you think about it, this is quite an unsettling thought. Are our practices just as cr as the killing of twins in shamanistic societies? Are our rituals just as pointless as human sacrifice of the Aztecs? Are our desires just as arbitrary as the Romans' fetis for conquest? Are our judgments just as unreasonable as the *pharmakos* of Greece?

the fundamental building blocks of our society still grounded, like societies of yore, only on the prestige and unanimity of some deceitful and violent founding murder?

Fortunately, the answer is no. Or at least, not exactly. We are not part of this cyclica pagan story anymore with founding murders, failing institutions, followed by more founding murders and institutions *ad infinitum*. A single force in history has taken u away from this cyclical trajectory and projected us into a linear time. This force sav us from myth and the sacred, but with a religion of its own. It rescues us from viole and lies, but in doing so threatens the very foundations of worldly peace. That force Christianity, the topic of our next lecture.

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