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Transcript of Girard Lecture VII | The One Wh Withholds

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0. Introduction

David Perell: The logic of violence is changing. Once upon a time, our most powerf weapons were sticks and stones. But everything changed during the world wars of t 20th century – where the very technological advances that we once naively believed would liberate man started acting against him. Machine guns, bombers, tanks – Th scale, the efficiency, and the brutality of killing were unprecedented.

And yet, we've only become more technologically advanced since then. And today, v have nuclear weapons which could destroy the world many times over. And they almost did in close calls such as the Cuban Missile Crisis. In this final lecture, we're going to focus on Apocalypse. And this may seem old-fashioned – after all, the spec of apocalypse has faded from the public consciousness ever since the fall of the Sov Union.

But Girard has good reasons to believe that it's going to make a quick, unsuspected and devastating return. Let us explore these reasons now.

Johnathan Bi: We are at the end of our journey, which proves not comedic, but trag In this lecture, we will articulate all of the reasons that Girard thinks we're marchir

towards inevitable apocalypse. And all these reasons will center around violence – c increased capacity for it, and the increasing inability to contain it.

Three lectures ago, I began by detailing our past – pagan society. After that, we talk about the rupture – Christianity, and the four forces it let loose on history, love, tru innovation, and violence. In the previous lecture, we examined modernity, contemporary society, under the light of the three good forces, judging it by the standards of the Kingdom of God, and seeing how it did and did not live up to Christian ideals. In this lecture, then, we are going to talk about the near future. We going to examine contemporary society under the light of violence, as if it were still pagan society – still requiring violence and deceit for peace. And this examination w lead us to a terrifying conclusion. We are headed for apocalypse.

This lecture will proceed in three large steps. First, we will understand the fourth a final force that Christianity injects into modernity: violence. Next, we will examine institutions we have to deal with violence, namely law, capitalism and global trade, eventually war. Lastly, we will briefly, briefly discuss the solutions that Girard outli to our apocalyptic moment, how ought one live for inevitable apocalypse – it will be brief, only because Girard does not give us much.

Let us begin with violence.

1. Violence in Modernity

Johnathan Bi: For millennia, human society operated on a cyclical time, whose cycl were demarcated by founding murders. Societies would descend into chaos. Scapegoats would be unconsciously chosen to inherit all the blame and killed. This founding murder would bring back a peace so miraculous that people attributed the saving force to the victim, deifying it. Myths would be created out of this event, and out of these myths spawned the core institutions of pagan societies. Prohibitions prevented violence, and rituals acted as release valves for violence. Of course, both

scapegoating and the deification are equally deceitful. The victim neither had the power to cause nor end the chaos – it's all a psychological projection by the crowd, grounded on nothing but deceitful unanimity.

This fourfold process is called "The Scapegoat Mechanism" – it's the foundations o worldly cultures and society. Everywhere Girard looks, he seems to find murdered victims at the origins of worldly power and peace: whether it's Cain and Abel, Romulus and Remus, Julius Caesar, Hymn to Purusha. For Girard, this scapegoat mechanism was deeply ambivalent, a combination of ultimate evil and worldly gooc sacrifice one for all; limit freedom of the parts for the stability of the whole; it used violence and lies to establish worldly order.

What is required for its functioning was that its mechanisms remain hidden. Becau sacredity and pagan power are based on a deceitful unanimity, the victim's innocen must remain hidden, lest the whole arbitrariness be exposed and the entire enterpri start crumbling down. For religions to work then, cultures must not know that the source of power of their God actually comes from the psychological projections of t group. This is where Christ comes in. Christ, through the crucifixion, showed precisely the innocence of the victim, the guilt and projection of the crowd, and gav us a moral paradigm through which we can expose, decode, and free ourselves from religion altogether.

The Christian revelation for Girard becomes the rupture of human history. Slowly b surely, humanity is going to lose its ability to create myths out of the deified scapegoat, and with it, the legitimacy of prohibitions – now considered oppressive and the efficacy of sacrifice – now considered cruel – also begin to deteriorate.

You may be surprised that Girard conceived of violence as one of the forces coming out of Christ's defeating of the scapegoat mechanism. But given Girard's understanding of how worldly peace is brought about, this conclusion really should flow naturally. Because, if worldly order, if peaceful society, is founded on a deceitfu

violent act of catharsis, then the truth and love that Christianity has unleashed mus be harmful for this foundation.

Girard constantly reminds us that Christ himself says as much. Matthew 10:34:

> Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

Whereas orthodoxy often interprets this as Christ causing local inconveniences, du the conflict between believers and non-believers, Girard takes Christ literally here, be saying that he is here to cut down the very pillars of worldly order.

While the consequences of the Christian revelation for Girard are violent and destructive, Christ's intentions surely are not. He did not cut down the worldly orde for the sake of cutting down worldly order, but only so that we may be freed from violence and lies, such that we can love each other. Christ asks us to imitate him in developing unwavering love and an unconditional renunciation of violence in order that we may bring about the kingdom of God in this world – which is only possible all of us surrender this scapegoat mechanism, if none of us agree to use it and unilaterally we all renounce violence. The problem, however, is that expelling the scapegoat mechanism is only a necessary but not a sufficient condition to engender the kingdom of God in this world. The kingdom of God will only be engendered if a unilaterally renounce violence and develop love. Otherwise, those who have renoun violence will simply be silenced by those who have not – and this is what happened Christ. While this unilateral renunciation is a logical possibility, it is a statistical impossibility – as likely as if a randomly typing monkey will directly produce the Bi

Christ only sought to cut down the pillars of worldly order, such that we may have t possibility of realizing the kingdom of God. Christ took off our training wheels so t we may be freed, yet we've simply fallen and stumbled. We were given a choice between the kingdom of God and violent apocalypse, and we veered away from the kingdom. For Girard, it is solely our failure in not being able to choose love over

violence that now leaves us stranded without the scapegoat mechanism to deal with violence at all.

David Perell: But scapegoating is unfortunately alive and well in contemporary society. Have we been freed from it?

Johnathan Bi: That's a great question and one I think we should address immediate To be clear, the scapegoat mechanism hasn't been fully expelled. Only parts of it ha been weakened from exposure to truth through the crucifixion. So let's do this. Let' examine each step of the scapegoat mechanism and see how it has been changed.

1.1 Mimetic Contagion in Modernity

Johnathan Bi: The first step of the scapegoat mechanism is mimetic contagion. It s groups descend into frenzy as metaphysical desires run rampant and mimetic rivalr multiply. Modern society is much more susceptible to mimetic contagion because c proximity.

The first type of proximity is spatial/temporal proximity. Whereas it was hard to en into competition or even know of – much less be envious of – people beyond your to or village in the old days, modern technology and transportation has greatly accelerated the breaking down of physical distance between peoples. The slogan of social media companies like Facebook of "connecting the world" is not a celebrator declaration for Girard, but a terrifying damnation because it renders all of us as capable of competing with each other. I can compare myself so easily these days an be competitive with my friend all across the world, whether it's Milan or Beijing, through Instagram.

The second type of proximity that has also been reduced is social proximity – most substantive forms of social difference have broken down. The whole host of prohibitions which used to create social differences among people – whether it's gender norms or caste systems or aristocratic hierarchies or guild systems, have bee

obliterated by our ideal of equality. Whereas before we told our kids that they have follow in specific professions according to their lineage, we now tell them, you can whatever you want to be. Whereas before certain goods were reserved for certain castes, we now demand access for all. We no longer believe that there is any essenti difference between anyone, between people, and that what one person deserves so does everyone else.

While Girard believes that breaking down of social differences is an ultimately goo thing, it's an extension of Christian love, he's also incredibly worried because we ar much more envious and competitive. These prohibitions, however oppressive for Girard, acted as barriers to prevent metaphysical desire from spreading too rampan Without these barriers, desires just travel much more feverishly in the population, leading to mimetic contagion much, much more easily.

1.2 Scapegoating in Modernity

Johnathan Bi: Of course, as we discussed, mimetic contagion leads to strife, it lead suffering, it leads to anger, it leads to a spirited malaise that requires an equally spirited and irrational solution: catharsis. Before Christ, groups used to attribute al the blame to a single, relatively innocent scapegoat and in an act of violent expulsio achieve catharsis and peace. Blame the entire plague on Oedipus, cast him out of th city and found a new order – that was the pagan logic.

Surely, this must be exposed by Christ, right? Surely we can no longer commit as egregious acts of scapegoating as blaming the entire plague on one man. Surely, yo must give us this much, right Girard? Yes, but that is not a good worldly thing.

Girard reminds us that what is constant is the level of catharsis we need to feel pea And thus, the degree of blame remains the same – we still need to find someone to blame for all of society's problems. What's changed is how many people we need to blame to be convinced. Christ has made us less gullible. Indeed, we can no longer believe one single person is to blame for everything. If blaming the plague on one

man's patricide and incest engendered peace in Thebes, I'm afraid it can engender nothing but laughter today.

Because we are less gullible, for the same magnitude of blame, we need many more victims. We need to up the dose because we are more aware of the effects. We can n longer believe that one single man can single-handedly cause all the problems, but t Soviet Union could still believe that an entire class of people were the cause of humanity suffering, and Nazi Germany could still believe that an entire race of peo were responsible for their national collapse.

This is Girard's terrifying conclusion. I read to you

> Entire categories of humans are distinguished — the Jews, the aristocrats, the bourgeois, the unfaithful, the faithful — and we are told that utopia depends on necessary condition of the elimination of the guilty categories. As the power of t mechanism breaks down, sacrifices at a larger and larger scale must persist to achieve the same calming effect. Before we could bring peace by sacrificing a go or a few men, but now we must kill an entire race, religion, class — the eradicati needs to be total.

Truth did not make scapegoating any better. It made it much worse. Whereas the pagan mystical mind could have been satisfied with a single man being responsible calamity, the modern rational mind is not as gullible: it needs entire classes of men be expelled.

1.3 Divinization and Institutionalization in Modernity

Johnathan Bi: In pagan society, the peace which the victim's expulsion brought abc was attributed to the dead victim. He is deified and made ultimately good and evil f bringing about but also ending the chaos. Since Christ, this no longer happens at al for two important reasons.

First, the pagan victim can be both good and evil because in the pagan moral paradigm, the dominant pole was power. The primary distinction we draw between people and beings is powerful and powerless. The victim-now-God in pagan society powerful and can use that to both good and evil. In the Christian moral paradigm, t dominant pole is morality. It's not power, it's been switched to morality – people ar either good or evil. And so, no victim can be divinized because in order to do so, to make them "good", to turn them into a god, we have to admit that they are essential good. But doing so incriminates the persecutors – if they are essentially good, why we kill them in the first place? The pagan answer to this was, well, the victim was a powerful being. It is evil and caused the plague, so our killing was justified. But it is also good and ended the plague, and so that's why we now worship them. This ambivalence is no longer available in our Christian moral framework.

But even if we were still in the pagan moral framework that permitted ambivalence would not be able to create any more deities because Christ showed us the deceitfulness of the scapegoat mechanism. At the height of scapegoating, when we caught in the mimetic frenzy, bolstered by the unanimity of all, we might still be ab to believe in the guilt of modern victims. But as soon as the dust settles, and we are a less frenzied and spirited state, the Christian moral framework – and its suspicion the mob and concern for the victim – allows us to quickly decode the injustice of wh had just happened. Just as we did do for the victims of Soviet and Nazi terror. Put another way, the Christian revelation unleashed a truth that is powerful enough to help us see persecution after the fact, but not powerful enough to make us see our projection during the violent, frenzied, spirited state of persecution itself.

David Perell: I want to hop in and clarify for our listeners who think that Christian no longer dominates the world that you don't need to be Christian to have a life tha fully shaped by Christian values. Atheist or Christian, religious or secular, if you liv the West, your life has been shaped by Christian ideas through and through becaus how influential they've become. And if these Christian ideas seem so trivial, it is on

because they're so influential. So we don't explicitly need to be Christians to be suspicious of the scapegoat mechanism in the way that you've just described.

Johnathan Bi: That's precisely right. Girard would say that the Christian moral paradigm we're all in, even when it does not manifest explicitly as Christian, seeps i our everyday secular notions, such as the ideal of equality or human rights. And so t scapegoat mechanism really has been purged from all Western societies or exposed all Western societies and not just explicitly Christian people in those societies.

To summarize then, the Christian revelation has stripped us naked of all of our old tools to bring peace. Not only is mimetic contagion more likely and worsened becau of the closing down of physical and social difference, not only do we have to scapeg larger and larger amounts of people for the same effect, but we've also lost our abili to create lasting peace through myth. We can have no more prohibitions grounded the words of a God, and we certainly cannot perform cathartic rituals as wholeheartedly. Both the breaks on and solutions for violence of old have crumbled

So that begs the question, why haven't we gone bust yet? Girard's answer is that we developed new institutions, not identical to the ritualistic and prohibitory institutic of pagan society, but not completely different either. To repeat… There are three key institutions that channel, contain, and direct violence in modernity – law, capitalism and global trade, and war. Let's examine each of them in succession to see how they deal with violence.

2. The Katechon of Law

Johnathan Bi: In the absence of ritual, law is going to be the key modern institution contain and limit violence. Girard has this to say, I quote:

> Sacrifice has languished in societies with a firmly established judicial system — ancient Greece and Rome, for example. In such societies the essential purpose of sacrifice has disappeared. It may still be practiced for a while, but in diminished

> and debilitated form … Ritual in general, and sacrificial rites in particular, assum essential roles [only] in societies that lack a firm judicial system.

As a descendent of ritual, law takes its place and serves the same function as a ritua to prevent reciprocal violence from destroying a society. Recall in Girard that a like outcome of society is reciprocal violence, where strands of localized violence balloc up to engulf an entire society or continent in the case of the Trojan War. In early human societies, even if people had a well-developed social conscience, that is, a system of moral notions as this is right, that's wrong, there was no such thing as punishment of a crime by the society. If one person injured another, it was left to th injured party to seek vengeance. Obviously this repeats *ad infinitum*.

Ritual and law then both try to resolve this escalating reciprocal violence by first, prolonging the time of response, making sure that rivals don't exchange punches to frequently, leading to escalation. Second, they also try to contain this vengeance an violence by clearly demarcating what violence is justified and what isn't. In law, for example, the violence that is justified is the violence of the state to sentence or kill criminal. In ritual, violence is redirected but also contained to a particular space or time. In sacrificial rituals, like Aztec human sacrifice, violence and resentment wer channeled to the victim. Only the blow that kills the victim is justified, is sanctified festivals such as the Bacchanal or the Carnival, violent energies were contained to t single day. The only acceptable form of violent expression was on the day of the festival.

Let me give you another example. In another type of ritual, trials by combat, as dictated in Germanic law, where two opposing parties with irresolvable claims wou fight to the death with the victor having gained the "right", this is also an attempt a containing that vengeance and that violence by saying: hey, let's don't go about tryi to kill each other every day, but let's focus and narrow down our violence in this on date, time, and place. Let's just battle it out to the death and see who wins.

2.1 The Monopoly Over Violence

Johnathan Bi: Despite the similarities between rituals and legal systems that they b prolong reciprocation as well as clearly demarcate what violence is justified and wh isn't, legal systems and rituals are also very different – throwing a child in a volcanc every full moon is radically different than sentencing a criminal according to an agreed upon law. So what is the difference then?

To answer this, let's look at the most law-like ritual and see what is still missing. Th most law-like ritual that Girard brings up is a ritual enacted by the Chukchi – an indigenous people of the Arctic who roamed in these separate different tribes. The ritual goes something like this, if one person in my tribe kills a person in your tribe then I as the tribal leader will choose someone in my tribe to kill to hopefully settle score. Importantly, I never choose the person who actually did the killing. I must choose someone else who is completely unrelated to the initial incident.

Do you see how this, more than sacrifice or carnival, is more like a legal institution' It's done explicitly in response to an explicit wrongdoing instead of carnival that occurs on a set schedule, and it has the same tit-for-tat punishment that we are use with modern law following an explicit series of rules. But it's also radically differen the biggest point of difference being that it's not the guilty party who is punished, b someone innocent, an innocent bystander on your own tribe, on your own team, wh isn't related, that's who gets killed. That is what shocks our modern intuitions abou this example – why isn't the original instigator punished? While we're at it, why do none of the rituals that we talked about seek to punish the original instigator but instead punish a bystander, like in sacrifice, or no concrete person at all, like a festi

Girard's answer is that the guilty party can't be punished, because they are the ones who are socially charged, who have people rallying both against and for them. They are in the very center of the mimetic contagion. If you kill them, you might spawn a whole new line of reciprocal vengeance. Recall our discussion a few lectures ago ab how the victim needs to be far from the social order, and that's why foreign rulers li

Oedipus or Marie Antoinette make such great scapegoats – because you kill them a it just ends there. They don't have that many family or friends in the social order to avenge them. A bad scapegoat would be like Agamemnon sacrificing his daughter, because the daughter is at the very heart of the Spartan power system – she's too cl to the social order, and as a result, that did spawn a whole new path of vengeance.

This is why the Chukchi can't punish the person who is guilty, whom entire tribes have rallied around, because he is at the very center of the social nexus. Everyone's is on him. This is also why in sacrificial rites like the *pharmakós*, a criminal or outca is used, and why in Carnival, the violent actions and intentions aren't directed at anyone in particular.

So why can our judicial system punish the guilty person? This is Girard's answer an the entire punchline – because we have an entity with a monopoly over violence, th state. I quote:

> There can be no true 'administering of justice', no judicial system without a superior tribunal capable of arbitrating between even the most powerful groups. Only that superior tribunal can remove the possibility of blood feud or perpetual vendetta.

We can punish the guilty party because we are not like the Chukchi with separate roaming tribes. We are one big tribe with an entity that has a monopoly over violen which is the state. If someone harms you and you don't like the sentence they were eventually given and try to take justice into your own hands, then you will be threatened with the state's vengeance and violence in turn. Girard's surprising conclusion is that for law to work the way it does now and so effectively, where the guilty party is punished, there must be a totalizing force handing out the punishme

Let me give you an analogy. I played a lot of basketball growing up, and when you're playing a friendly game of casual pickup there are often disagreements of whether y went out of bounds or traveled, but there's no referee to arbitrate between who's rig

or wrong. And so one of the only ways you can decide peacefully and efficiently wh right is essentially a ritual, what we called "Ball Don't Lie". You have your claim tha you didn't travel or you did travel or he didn't travel or he did travel, and you shoot three pointer. If it goes in, you are right, and if it doesn't, the opponent gets the call This is not unlike a ritual like trial by combat: to agree not on a solution, but a solu for a solution. It's only in serious matches with a referee who has a monopoly over violence – in this case, the ability just to kick you out of the game – do we actually g judicial judgments. Of course, the funny thing is that everyone who does ball don't and practices that ritual knows that the ball do lie – whether your three pointer goe or not has nothing to do whether your claim is just, whether he actually traveled or not. Just like whether you win your duel or not has nothing to do with your innocen in a trial of combat. But before there's a monopolistic force, the best one can do are rites like "ball don't lie."

Just as referees are much more effective than "ball don't lie" – our judicial system is much more effective than ritual institutions of old in making judgments and limitir reciprocal violence because we actually take the guilty party out of commission. Aft all, the killer is still on the loose in the Chukchi tribes, even after the ritual. And if t other tribe, the one who's wronged, does not feel cathartic enough, then the killing might still continue. Under this light, the judicial system conforms much closer to t logic of vengeance than even ritual does – because it's intent on punishing the guilt party.

2.2 The Price of Equality

David Perell: Building on what you're saying, I'm astonished at how effective law ca be at ending the escalation of violence. There was a situation recently where Jeff Be sued Elon Musk for like $3 billion or something. And what's amazing about this is i the past, before we have these systems of law, if there was a feud between two of th wealthiest and the most powerful men in the world, it could escalate into somethin really bad. But what happened was Musk won the lawsuit and Bezos put out a press

release and simply said, “Congratulations, I lost fair and square,” and they moved o
And it didn’t end up becoming an issue because the feud was settled in a court of la
which everybody respects.

Johnathan Bi: I think Girard, like you, is also a bit astonished and finds it laudable
how well law works. But he warns us that we give up a lot for this efficacy. Girard
thinks that not only do we have a monopolistic force on violence, but that the state
must assert itself everywhere to establish law. It must govern every type of action to
snub out even the beginnings of violence, because violence can begin anywhere.
Speeding tickets, prenups, business deals, employment contracts, inheritance, divo
settlements, defamation penalties – compared to pagan society, where rituals were
quite localized, law has to assert itself in all aspects of our lives and in all these area
is always backed by total violence.

Law then becomes a quick way to end a large amount of relationships so that they
don’t get out of hand. What had been functions governed primarily by relationships
inheritance by parent and child, family by husband and wife, business ventures by c
partners – is now less so governed by those relationships and more so by the
intermediary of the state through law. This idea of law as a way to end relationship
perhaps why societies with a strong rule of law can feel so cold and atomized.

I think you can get a taste of a society being predominantly governed by relationshi
and one primarily governed by law by looking at the transition from secured
employment relationships to the gig economy that we’re seeing today. Whereas say
working long hours is often out of social forces – you want to motivate the employe
you don’t want to let your teammates down – in a regular company like let’s say a
startup where there’s a lot governed by relationships. The amount of hours you wor
a gig economy like driving for Uber or getting food for DoorDash is solely determir
by cold hard compensation. And whereas say taking care of your employees is a
responsibility for an employer, the gig economy leaves a lot of that burden onto the
worker. And even in this subtle transition from employment relations governing jo

relations to the gig economy governing job relations, we can already see a microcos of the larger shift towards law – there's more freedom, but less social congeniality; there's more things that are governed by contracts and not relationships.

Law, then, is not only a descendent of ritual but it's also a descendent and continuation of prohibition. We've given away the big prohibitions like caste syster but only to find ourselves surrounded by a million small prohibitions no matter wh we look.

David Perell: What you're saying is making me think of an example that drives me insane and it's one of the things that has surprised me the most about the professio world. I've noticed that when we're hiring people for write of passage or doing som interviews, there are so many things that I'm not allowed to say. And they're all so specific. And what bothers me about this is that there isn't like this big code of morality that's intuitive, that's natural, that's embedded in the society that has roon for bending and all these sorts of things. But what happens is that with modern employment law, you need to know about this little thing, this little thing, this littl thing. And I have to keep them at the top of my head the entire time. And I feel like can't even treat somebody like a human being when I'm interviewing them. It's this atomization of virtue that drives me insane where instead of talking to somebody li a friend, somebody like you know them, you need to treat them like a potential laws And it's terrifying, but also there's so many laws that it's impossible to keep up.

Johnathan Bi: That's exactly the total restraint that Girard thinks we have to give u for efficacy. Not only do we need a monopolistic force of the state governing our relationships, but now we also need the state to be in the middle of all of our relationships, all of these different employment questions and employee-employer relationships. Every little detail has to be managed by the state. And the only way th state can do that is through these cold objective laws that surround you in every ang This is what we've given up for the efficacy of law.

However, Girard also observes that this total restraint also paradoxically allows us t behave more freely towards each other.

Girard has this to say:

> Primitive societies do not have built into their structure an automatic brake agai violence; but we do, in the form of powerful institutions whose grip grows progressively tighter as their role grows progressively less apparent. The constar presence of a restraining force allows modern man safely to transgress the limits imposed on primitive peoples without even being aware of the fact. In "policed" societies with law, the relationships between individuals, including total strange is characterized by an extraordinary air of informality, flexibility, and even audac

Girard's point in this quote is that, yes, David, you are right, our relationships are much colder and less intimate, but this paradoxically also frees us in some sense, th we have an aura of informality and flexibility in our relationships with other people that these two things, the coldness, the atomization, and the freedom, are joined to hip, so to speak. For Girard, then, what makes it possible to live peacefully with eac other as equals, what enables us to not have the large pagan prohibitions like caste systems, is a totalizing violence that legislates and erects prohibitions in every aspe of our lives.

2.3 Kinetic and Potential Violence

Johnathan Bi: Law, by atomizing us, decreases the actuality of violence by allowing to freely interact with each other, however cold that interaction may be, but always looming threat of state violence is in the background in those interactions. With lav then, now we can conceive of each other as equals, now we can desire what the president of the United States desires – this creates more conflict, which rarely resu in actual violence because of law, but does lead to a greater buildup of violent energ Law increases the potential buildup of violence while decreasing the actuality of da

to-day violence by allowing us to interact much more frequently – law increases internal mediation, but stops it before the stage of violence.

David Perell: There's a popular critique of Steven Pinker who writes that never has world been safer than it is right now. But the critique goes as such, and I think it's a good point, where in the world of physics, there's an idea of potential energy and there's kinetic energy. And likewise, in the world of social relations, there's potentia violence and kinetic violence. And Pinker is only looking at kinetic violence, how much violence is actually happening in the world. But what you're talking about he is the buildup of violence, the potential violence, and with nuclear weapons and the way that society is structured under this legalistic framework, it's the potential violence that is being underestimated in his ideas.

Johnathan Bi: Precisely, and you bringing up Pinker, it makes me think of what I th colloquially people call the turkey problem – that a turkey who's statistically incline that lives each day closer to Thanksgiving, will conclude that it is actually safer tha the day before – because there is no kinetic violence, right? The turkey is safe, there an extra day that's gone by without there being violence. But precisely to your point the potential violence is building up. And paradoxically, the turkey will conclude th he is safest on Thanksgiving, which is of course is the most dangerous day of the ye So this delineation between potential and kinetic violence is important when we're trying to understand the violent potential of modernity. The absence of violence is the absence of the potential for violence.

2.4 Prestige, Catharsis, and Violence

Johnathan Bi: Let's take this back to the transition from ritual to law. I suggest tha we should understand this transition from ritual to law as a shift of what actually brings about peace. In rituals, peace is primarily brought about by catharsis and prestige, and only partially by the threat of violence, whereas in law, peace is prima brought about by the threat of violence, and only partially by catharsis and prestige

Let's say you were the wronged party and were not satisfied with the outcome of a sacrificial right or a ritual – say you weren't happy with the outcome of the trial by combat, or the sacrifice didn't give you enough catharsis – what is the cost of taking vengeance into your own hands? Well, because there's no central authority, the cost somewhat low, right? It's simply the resistance of the guilty party that you're trying take vengeance on and any future reciprocal violence. Because there is such low cos for you to continue killing, it's basically one guy and his friends that you have to wo about, rituals really need to make sure that you are satisfied with the outcome of th rite. And the way rituals do this is twofold. First, rituals aim to give you – the wrong party and the angry party – catharsis. This is why ritual sacrifices often seem so unnecessarily cruel, like the *pharmakós*' ritual, where the entire community participates in harming and humiliating the victim before killing the victim. Its cruelty is not tangential, but central to why rituals work – so that you get your cathartic release and have no more desire to seek vengeance.

The second way that rituals make you satisfied with the outcome of the ritual is tha rituals are grounded on immense prestige such that even if you don't feel catharsis, you feel social pressure against exacting vengeance. Let's say you're a wronged part and challenges the guilty party to a trial by combat. Even if you lose and you don't f catharsis – the outcome of the trial by combat may be seen as the will of some god, so there is immense prestige given to the outcome of the rite, even if it goes against your favor. You feel compelled to respect it, even if you aren't satisfied with the outcome of it.

To summarize then, rituals bring about peace primarily by making wronged parties feel catharsis, and by grounding the outcome of the ritual on prestige – whereas the threat of violence for exacting revenge is actually quite minimal. Law flips this on it head, primarily stopping violence with more violence and only partially using prest and catharsis.

Think about it this way. Our judicial system does indeed generate some level of catharsis. Girard thinks that the state is acting in our stead and exacting vengeance us, which may give the wronged party some release. I think this idea has some bear because after the guilty party has been sentenced, you often hear the wronged party state that "justice has been done." And furthermore, the way we do our sentencing a build our jails is also reminiscent of the type of expulsion of ritual sacrifices, where cast people away from society. And I think the legal system does serve a primarily cathartic function in very public cases. Look at how social media reacted to the sentencing of the cop who killed George Floyd – there were celebrations all around the cop's conviction – it was a hugely emotional, cathartic, national event. But I thi for less public cases, catharsis is not the primary reason that the legal system works And I don't think it's prestige either. Girard thinks that the legal system does indee enjoy some amount of prestige and respect, but certainly not enough to prevent violence on its own.

What really ends violence for our judicial system and makes it so effective is the thr of more violence. Let's ask the same question. In today's society, if the wronged par were not happy with the sentence given by law to the guilty party and decided to ta vengeance into their own hands, what is the cost? Well, the cost is almost infinite, because it's not just the guilty party and the guilty party's friends who will come aft you, but the entire state that will cast you as a criminal for taking justice into your hands. For Girard, this is what grounds the efficacy of law, that there's nothing we do about the conclusions of law.

2.5 The Logic of Retribution and the Logic of Guilt

Johnathan Bi: This transition from catharsis and prestige to the threat of violence spawns both a change in who the focus of punishment is, and also changes the very philosophy of punishment itself. In rites, the focus of punishment is the wronged p so that he can get his cathartic release, and the philosophy of punishment is retribution – that the wronged person deserves to get even in some way.

This is also Nietzsche's conclusion as well. I quote Nietzsche here:

> To what extent can suffering balance debts or guilt? To the extent that to make suffer was in the highest degree pleasurable. To the extent that the wronged part exchanged for the loss he had sustained, including the displeasure caused by the loss, an extraordinary counterbalancing pleasure, that of making suffering a genuine festival.

In rituals then, it's about the wronged party experiencing pleasure and catharsis, because without the threat of state violence that is what will end reciprocal violenc

In the legal system, the focus of punishment is the guilty party – to take him out of commission and break the chain of reciprocity. The philosophy of punishment is gu – he, in some ways, deserves to be punished, not for the pleasure of the wronged pa but in and for itself.

Girard naturally draws a somewhat relativistic conclusion on modern conceptions o justice as punishing the guilty party. Girard's point is that we didn't start punishing the guilty party because it was more just. We started doing it because it was more effective, and then we backed our way into this notion of justice as punishing the guilty party. He has this to say:

> Our penal system operates according to principles of justice that are in no real conflict with the concept of revenge. The same principle is at work in all systems violent retribution. Either the principle is just, and justice is therefore inherent i the idea of vengeance, or there is no justice to be found anywhere.

His point here is that either justice is revenge, in which case our system is the most just because we conform closest to vengeance or justice is just some relativistically made up term – Contra Plato, Girard isn't particularly concerned with justice, beca some abstract ideal of justice isn't the concern for rituals or law, it's about containi reciprocal violence, it's about making sure the group survives. In the absence of a

monopolizing force, the most effective way is to create cathartic rites that does not punish the guilty party but gives the wrong party release – if you want to call that justice, fine by Girard, justice really isn't the concern here, the existence of the soci group is at stake.

Law then, for Girard, is an institution descended from rituals that occupy the funct of both ritual and prohibition in modernity. There are three large differences betwe rituals and law. First, law requires an all-pervading, all-powerful, monopolistic forc function. Second, whereas rituals prevent further violence from prestige and cathar law prevents violence with the threat of more violence. Third, rituals are primarily done with the wronged party as its focus. The logic of punishment is retribution. La are designed with the guilty party as its focus, the logic of punishment is guilt.

The key thing to take away is that law is the katechon, that which contains violence and apocalypse, but it is only effective at stopping violence with the threat of more violence – this will be pivotal for Girard's arguments on apocalypse, because at cert points the dike is going to break, the dike of law is going to give way. Law will brea precisely where there is no central monopolistic power, namely in international affa and global trade. With that, let's move on to our second institution of modernity – capitalism and trade.

3. The Katechon of Capitalism

Johnathan Bi: In the same way we understood our legal system by tracing a genealc to ritual, let us understand the institution of capitalism and global trade by tracing genealogy back to gift-giving.

Contra our popular conceptions, before currencies were invented, societies didn't operate under barter – I'll take three sheep for your cow – but under gift-giving – I s that you, my neighbor, are hungry and I offer to give you a few eggs. And I think thi makes intuitive sense. Bartering and exchange is rather cold and impersonal and nc

suitable in early societies that had a small and tight-knit social fabric. Even today, i environments with a strong social fabric, the exchange of goods and services operat less on the logic of barter and more on the logic of gift-giving. We don't go to our cl friends or coworkers and say, I will work on your spreadsheet for three hours if you promise to walk my dog for two days. We offer to walk dogs, we offer to help with spreadsheets based on the strength of the relationship. But we do keep some kind o tally, right? You can't just keep asking me for favors the whole time. But it's not the immediate bartering system that we may have in mind. It doesn't need immediate reconciliation.

Girard makes two interesting observations about gift-giving that will help us better understand capitalism.

The first is that while there is a substantive portion of gift-giving that was about material aid, the dominant logic of gift-giving was often about spirit and not appeti It was about what gift-giving said about the gift-giver instead of how it helped the receiver. Girard has this to say:

> Among the Kwakiutl and other Northwestern Indian tribes, great chiefs used to demonstrate their superiority by giving away their most precious possessions to their competitors, the other great chiefs. They all tried to outdo one another in t contempt for wealth. The winner was the one who gave up the most and received the least. This strange game was institutionalized, and it resulted in the destruct of the goods which the two groups, in principle, were trying to give to each othe just as most human groups do in all kinds of ritual exchange.

As this example shows, gift-giving, which may have originated from neighborly hel transformed into a social competition. And there are so many examples of this, including how gift-giving started wars and how some, after receiving a gift so good that they had nothing to reciprocate with, committed suicide or killed the gift-giver because they were so humiliated.

David Perell: These points about gift-giving remind me of modern day philanthrop where often at universities, for example, people will put their names on the buildin And outwardly, they'll be all about the good. They'll be about, "Oh, I believe in wha happening at this institution. I really believe in education and so I'm going to give a building." But really what ends up happening is once they see their name on the building, they get to put their shoulders back and feel the sense of tremendous prid And what they get from that is so often them not giving to the university, but them giving to themselves.

Johnathan Bi: I think that's a funny modern equivalent, whereas the tribal chiefs w giving, but not for the gift-giver's sake, but for their own sake by showing how muc they had to spare. It seems like you're suggesting that the same logic happens in modern-day gift-giving in philanthropy. But I think it's not just about the habits of giving in modern society, but any form of material exchange – as we discuss extensively in celebrity advertisement, material exchange is often not about materia goods at all, but about what they say about us.

Going back to gift-giving in early societies, the second interesting point and what w be different from modern capitalism and trade is that gift-giving rituals always had temporal gap between gift and counter-gift. And furthermore, the value of the gift couldn't be wildly different, but also couldn't be exactly the same. It's obvious why t value of the gifts can't be wildly different, you can't have one person taking advanta of the other, but the values can't be the same either, because that implied that you wanted to break a relationship off with someone. If I have a friend who, say, asks m fix his car, I may be offended if he constantly asks me for favors like that without reciprocating. But I may also be offended if he offered to pay me immediately and insistently, because it implies that our relationship isn't strong enough to have that trust of future reciprocation. A zeroing of the balance sheet implied a breaking of th relationship.

What about the other point, about the temporal gap? Well, there had to be a tempo gap between gift and counter-gift for the same reason – to show that there was trus that relationship instead of a clearing of the balances immediately. In my life, at lea the closer the relationship, the less urgent I am in settling accounts after, say, a din If it's someone I'll never see again, it's imperative that we pay for both our own dinners, but if it's a good friend, I might just get the whole bill without thinking too much about it, because he'll likely do the same for me in the future.

David Perell: I've experienced this too. I was once on a trip with a friend, and for th first 24, 48 hours, we were Venmoing back and forth, $12 here, $17 there, and I was one initiating it. He was like, "Dude, stop doing this." He's like, "We're not Venmoi each other anymore." And at the time, I thought it was weird. I thought it was really jarring. But looking back, I understand why. The need to settle the accounts, as you were saying, to always bring that balance back to zero, it implied this implicit break the contractual nature of a friend, like two people who just care for each other. And the second that you start accounting for debts, the relationship just devolves into a transaction.

Johnathan Bi: That's exactly right. The need to immediately zero the accounts impl that the relationship itself is not strong enough. But there's another reason to wide the temporal gap between gift and counter-gift, and that is to prevent violent escalation. As the example of the Kwakiutl chiefs showed, gift-giving can be extrem passionate and spirited – and it is best to have some gap in between to cool off the spirited energies.

Let's summarize. What's important for gift-giving for Girard is that, first, material exchange is often not about material at all and is about a social display that could le to violence, because there are so many prideful energies involved. And second, gift- giving had to be done with temporal gaps in between with objects of differing value

The transition to modern-day capitalism then, can be understood as the introductio of money, which takes away this second quality of gift-giving. When we buy things

with money, it is both instantaneous as well as the exact same value. This breaks th relationship and prevents an escalation of violence. Money then is to exchange wha law is to human relationships. Just as law atomized us, which allowed us to interact much more frequently with a much more diverse set of people, money also atomize us. It takes this ledger of gift-giving, which used to be governed and intimately entwined with relationships, and ends it with each transaction bringing the balance zero. The same story for law here applies to money as well. Whereas before, so muc of our functions in life were governed by relationships, now they've been substitute by some more mechanical and immediate process.

But make no mistake, capitalism, like gift-giving, is still mostly about social display and less about actual material goods for Girard. It's still about spirit and competitiv energies that could lead to violence. The relationship between capitalism and gift-giving then, is the same as the relationship between law and ritual – in that, by atomizing individuals, it allows us to interact much more frequently, trade has accelerated. So while the actuality of violence has diminished, the potential for violence has increased. Girard probably has something like this in mind. In tribal societies, only a very limited set of goods were traded or gifted, and at very infreque intervals. But in modernity, almost everything can be bought by money, and the pac of exchange is much, much faster. This increases the surface area of competition.

You may say then, that with capitalism and law, we never have any true peace whicl only violent catharsis can bring about. What we have is superficial peace covering a ocean of violent energies. We are in a state of suspended polarity that could burst a any moment.

Capitalism and capitalistic competition then, is a guard against violence because it atomizes us, but it's also a generator of violence because it increases the frequency surface of trade.

3.1 Capitalism and Violence

Johnathan Bi: The next point that Girard is going to make is that capitalism also channels, is an outlet for violence that acts as a stabilizing force. Before I go on and elaborate on this last and third point, let me be clear that when Girard says that capitalism is a channel for violence, he doesn't have in mind whipping slaves to bui the pyramids, but that the same energies of violence, of pride, of desire for conques are the dominant ones driving capitalism today.

Girard reminds us, I quote:

> It is not by chance that the European aristocracy went into business once heroes and warriors went out of style.

Girard's reading of capitalism here is nothing new – private vice leads to public virt When we peek behind the motivational curtains of actors in capitalism, we shouldn expect to find a desire to help others. Hell, we shouldn't even expect to find materialistic, selfish greed. Instead, Girard thinks that it's the exact same motivatio force as the tribal chief's giving away goods – it's honor, it's prestige, it's glory, it's conquest. The princes and heroes of yore who would have amassed armies now find themselves competing to make products and services. Girard warns us, don't be foo by what the actors in capitalism tell you, it's the same drive that drove Achilles to k Hector, Germany to invade France, and Caesar to capture Vercingetorix that under our world economy today.

David Perell: Hearing you talk about the armies and products makes me think of h many entrepreneurs, a shocking number of entrepreneurs I know, were criminals in high school. I've been trying to back into what's going on there because they clearly have this either violent or destructive or rebellious energy inside of them. But it's through capitalism that they channel their pursuits into the pursuit of profit, which better for society than the illicit activities that they used to engage in.

Johnathan Bi: I think this is both a critique of capitalism, that it's fundamentally st driven off these same-spirited forces and by these malicious actors, but also a deep,

deep praise of capitalism for the point you just made, that it channels these malicio energies to such a productive use.

This is what Girard has to say:

> The United States never relapsed into totalitarian contractions because of – amo other reasons – its social fluidity, its extensive mobility both in geographical and social terms. The modern Western economy is the first civilization that has learr to use mimetic rivalry positively. It is known as economic competition.

Girard's point is that what a miracle it is that people today who seek revenge, who seek glory, who seek to conquer, who seek to channel their conquering drives, who would have had to raise armies and engage in zero-sum wars just a few hundred yea ago, today they primarily satisfy these malicious drives by creating better products services for others.

Think about how ambivalent this makes Girard. Just as we discussed in the last lecture, the good forces of Christianity – truth, love, and innovation – power, the m terrible currents of modernity, the most terrifying and apocalyptic force – violence responsible for fueling the best living standards of any human society ever to exist.

3.2 Incendiary Global Trade

Johnathan Bi: Girard's reading of capitalism as driven by spirit instead of reason ar appetite explains a whole host of behavior puzzling to classical economics with its *homo economicus* reading of human nature. For example, in the 2000s and '90s, th dominant view of China's relationship with the West was of greater harmony throu economic liberalization. The belief was that China's rise would lift the boats of the world economy and that economic similarity would lead to political harmony. At th peak of Chinese optimism however, in 2007, Girard says, nay, the reason nations compete is the same reason individuals compete – similarity instead of difference. Being more similar, having the similar ends between US and China, will cause mor

rivalry and make both sides erect false differences. And even if China's rise will mal most in the US have absolutely more material goods, spirit is what drives capitalism And so it's more the relative rather than absolute standing that Americans will care about and will feel threatened by the rise of China.

Girard has this to say:

> The looming conflict between the United States and China has nothing to do wi 'clash of civilizations.' We always try to see differences where in fact there are nc In fact, the dispute is between two forms of capitalism that are becoming more a more similar.

But conflict is fine, right? After all, doesn't capitalism thrive from rivalry and chan it productively? It does. But only when law is there to constrain it. Capitalism is dependent on law. But as we discussed earlier on, law is dependent on an entity wit monopoly on violence. Capitalism and law work fine within a nation, as your examp of Jeff Bezos peacefully suing Elon Musk goes to show. But between nations, where there is no monopolistic power, that is where the breaking point is, global trade wil the arena where violence erupts.

And so, at the height of Sino-American optimism in 2007, Girard not only predicts falling out of these two nations, but also correctly observes that the very mechanism others thought would bring together these two nations – global trade – would be th exact point of conflict, anticipating the trade wars of the 2020s.

Girard:

> A conflict between the United States and China will follow: everything is in plac though it will not necessarily occur on the military level at first… Trade can transform very quickly into war… From this point of view, we can reasonably fea major clash between China and the United States in the coming decades.

Let us now examine what such a war in modernity between two colossal nation-stat would entail.

4. The Katechon of War

Johnathan Bi: We've discussed the mass collapse of all forms of institutions – ritual sacrifice, prohibitions, the breaking of laws and capitalism – but the most frighteni collapse of institution is the institution of war. You may be surprised that I would e call war an institution. After all, when we think about institutions, we think about l and codes, rules and regulations. This in our minds has nothing to do with war, because we conceive of war as about winning at all costs, disregarding any codes an rules and laws, regardless of the means and the form which victory takes – biochem weapons, terrorism, torturing prisoners, weapons of mass destruction, this is what think about when we think about war.

Girard's point is that war was not always like this. Think of how the Iliad ends, witl 12-day truce for the burial of Hector. Think about how Greek city-states fought eac other over land with phalanxes in a very ritualized manner. And at least before the Peloponnesian War, most of the battles between these phalanxes were very contain and ritualized. It's like a rugby match almost, where rival leaders agreed where and when to fight. And the fight ended not when one side was totally exterminated, but when one side started to lose ground – there are always these implicit rules governi every aspect of the fight. Even in modern day, I think we still have hints of this institution of war. For example, the impromptu Christmas truces in World War I, where rival soldiers came out of their trenches to play soccer with people that they were just trying to kill days ago in no man's land.

Girard understands warfare as being composed of two elements: the abstract conce of war, which is what we are used to now, and the frictions of war that turn it into a institution. To understand this abstract concept of war, Girard asks us to turn to th military theorist and general, Carl von Clausewitz's famous *On War*. I quote:

> War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale… War is an act of force, and there is n logical limit to the application of that force. Each side, therefore, compels its opponent to follow suit; a reciprocal action is started which must lead, in theory, extremes.

This metaphor of a duel is very alarming, because a duel is defined by instant escalation. Whether by sword or by pistol, the duel is often over in a matter of minu if not seconds, with one or both parties dead. Both of you deploy all your abilities a forces to immediately exterminate the opponent. That's the logic of the duel. For Girard, as for Clausewitz, the abstract concept of war – the governing logic of war - none other than this instant escalation to extremes, the Hegelian duel – which only ends in death or complete domination.

But of course, in reality, wars do not happen like this – there are stalemates, there a withdrawals, there is de-escalation, there are peace treaties. What prevents actual w from conforming to its abstract concept of unending escalation to the extremes are frictions – frictions that prevent both parties from fully deploying all their forces at once. The idea is this. If violent reciprocation is simultaneous, then spirit dominate and you are completely caught up in that logic of vengeance. Yet if there are friction that prevent rival factions from deploying their forces, then they can have time to d escalate and cool off. It's very much like personal rivalries, where taking time away from your rival is very important for spirit to cool off and being able to use reason. like manner, rival nations need frictions to help them gain lucidity to de-escalate. A I think there are two types of frictions that prevent rival armies from deploying the forces at once.

First are technological frictions – the terrain you have to traverse to get your troops onto the battlefield, the long gap of communication that plagued armies of old, etc.

4.1 The Gentleman's War

Johnathan Bi: The second are cultural frictions – the rituals and prohibitions in wa what made war into an institution. You see, up until modern times, there were ofte things you must or could not under no circumstance do to your enemy, even in the context of war, even if it meant giving up an easy victory or facing certain defeat. These frictions often delayed violence and gave both parties space to de-escalate.

And we don't have to go back to the Greek phalanxes to see war as an institution governed by these rules. We can look at something much closer, the gentleman's wa of the 17th and 18th century. These wars were called gentleman's wars because ther were so many implicit agreements that everyone respected. Let me just give you a f examples. During the wars of the 18th century in Europe, it was usual for armies to campaign in set seasons – usually from March to September. And so with the onset autumn, armies would go into winter quarters and many officers would head home. This notion of war, that it's like some kind of NBA season, is ludicrous enough, but what is more is that for many officers to go home on this off-season, some would ha to travel through enemy territory, and usually their enemies granted them safe passage.

Let me give you a more specific and incredible example. In gentleman's wars, to kil officers via assassination was considered scandalous and not honorable. The famou rifle corps commander, Colonel Patrick Ferguson, had this to recount in 1777 when was deployed to America from the British Empire to quell the rebellion.

I'm reading from his journal here, I quote:

> We had not lain long when a rebel officer, remarkable by a Hussar dress, passed towards our army, within 100 yards of my right flank, not perceiving us… I ordere three good shots to steal near to them and fire at them; but the idea disgusted m recalled the order… I could have lodged half-a-dozen of balls in or about him bef he was out of my reach. I had only to determine; but it was not pleasant to fire at the back of an unoffending individual, who was acquitting himself very coolly of duty; so I let him alone. That day… one of our surgeons… came in and told us they

> had been informing him that General Washington was all the morning with the light troops, and only attended by a French officer in a Hussar dress, he himself dressed and mounted in every point as above described. I am not sorry that I did know at the time who it was.

Ferguson let the rival chief commander, George Washington, go because it was, "N pleasant to assassinate." And after learning who it was, he wasn't sorry for letting h go. That's like if the US had bin Laden at its crosshairs but decided to call off the drone strike because it was a Sunday and it's not good to kill on the Lord's day. Tha how strong these cultural frictions were in the 18th century. War was much more li competitive team sport – filled with passions and emotions but with clear boundari that few transgressed.

4.2 Napoleon and Total War

Johnathan Bi: These all sound so bizarre to us after World War I and World War II. We do have a code of law now that governs war, but this doesn't carry much cultura weight – we've simply resorted to the most efficient forms of killing. There are no r rules anymore. To us, it seems so odd to tell your opponents where you will go, to le them pass by on a vacation, and not to shoot someone because it was unpleasant – today warfare is all about domination. How to use every method, every arrow in our quiver to inflict greatest damage with the most minimal loss. So what has changed between our era and the era of gentleman's wars?

Girard sees the inflection point between modern war and the gentleman's war in Napoleon. Napoleon came to power towards the end of the French Revolution, and throughout the revolution what fundamentally shifted was the philosophy of war. Before the French Revolution, Europe generally was at ease with war in some sense War was thought of as a normal state of affairs waged by professionals – usually aristocratic officers for whom military service was just another phase in a varied career, not unlike how you'd go start a company now, but later on you'd be a venture capitalist, just another phase in your career. The Napoleonic era saw three radical

changes from this European ideal. First, the prestige and power of the old nobility along with its attitude towards and involvement in war diminished. Second, the enlightenment assumption of war as an extraordinary aberration took hold. War wa no longer a common state of affairs, but a barbaric interlude which gave people gre normative justification to commit atrocities in the name of ending wars. And third, apocalyptic view of war as either total victory or total defeat started gaining momentum. Whereas there was a form of dignity given even to the losers of war, if were defeated you often could just go home and sometimes were even honored by t victors – now people believed that the enemy was out for total extermination.

This change in the philosophy of war can be summarized as the stakes of war being heightened – and these extraordinary ends started justifying extraordinary means. was no longer a profession, a team sport, an institution among others in society – it became total and enveloped all aspects of society. For the first time in modern histo the Jourdan Law of 1798 introduced total mandatory conscription – before that, arn were usually filled by mercenaries, aristocrats, and maybe localized conscription. B even for non-combatants – those who weren't conscribed in this new paradigm of t conscription, war started taking on a total form. Married men made munitions, wor created clothes, the old told tales of glory.

And this blending of civil society and the military resulted in increased civilian casualties and further oppression of conquered peoples. After all, it's not just the military that is the enemy now. It also resulted in more grotesque tactics like scorch earth policies, and this intensified cruelty, engendered coordinated attacks by alrea conquered civilian peoples, most notably in Spanish guerrilla warfare, which Girar sees as giving birth to modern terrorism.

With Napoleon then, we are already far away from the gentleman's wars. As the sta of war increased, warfare became more about exterminating the enemy at all costs instead of respecting rituals and prohibitions that gave one honor. Today, these

cultural frictions have all but fallen to the wayside. War is no longer an institution with checks and balances, but conforms to its abstract concept of domination.

4.3 The Bomb

Johnathan Bi: Of course, cultural frictions aren't the only ones that have disappear In the age of instant telecommunications and paratroopers, we can deploy our force in much more rapid succession. But nothing beats the nuclear bomb and its ability instantaneously deploy all of one's violence at once. What is unique about the nuke isn't its singular destructive force – the firebombing of Tokyo, the Mongol mass murderers are all comparable to the devastation of a singular nuclear strike. What i unique about the nuke is that it forces rivals to utterly destroy each other at the firs glimpse of provocation. Unlike firebombing or a Mongol Horde that takes time to maneuver through terrain, there are no frictions to unleashing your entire nuclear arsenal. You just gotta press the button. Before the nuke, nations fought wars like a boxing match, taking time to maneuver, resting in between, with fatal blows rare ar often taking a long time. The nuke allows nation-states to fight wars like a duel – instant fatal escalation. It's worse than a duel because it allows the dead party to sh the person who is alive – because even if you nuke my entire landmass to oblivion, r nuclear submarines can still avenge me post-mortem.

Framed in this light, Girard's worries of apocalypse is less theological speculation t déjà vu. On October 27, 1962, a Soviet submarine armed with a nuclear-tipped torpe was located and targeted by an American carrier group, dropping signaling depth charges intended to destroy the submarine. At the height of the Cuban Missile Cris the crew had lost contact with Moscow for days and thought that a new war had broken out. The crew was considering whether to fire the nuke, believing they were under attack. This submarine required all three senior officials to agree to launch th nuke – two of them decided to fire – only one officer's stubborn refusal prevented a almost certain nuclear attack and likely world-scaled Armageddon. This is how clos we were. The will of one man was all that stood in the way.

This is why Girard felt with the bomb, we truly do live in an apocalyptic time where a war were to begin, it could quickly conform to its abstract concept, escalating instantaneously to the extremes.

5. The Case Against Political Action

Johnathan Bi: Girard isn't exaggerating when he says we are living in the end times. Prohibition and ritual have broken down and we are without our old tools to limit violence. The best we can do is law and capitalism, which are insufficient katechon decreasing the actuality of violence while increasing its potentiality. Unlike sacrific of old, there is no real peace. This potential energy, if it hasn't already, will engende war at the point where law is impotent, and capitalism has channeled our rivalrous instincts – global trade. And such a war, without cultural nor technological friction would see a rapid nuclear escalation that brings about literal apocalypse.

So what ought we to do in such an apocalyptic age? How should one live in the end days?

Let's begin with what Girard thinks we shouldn't be doing. We shouldn't try to fix t world through collective political action. Indeed, Girard has an inherent suspicion all collective actions, because we necessarily lose a part of our authenticity by being immersed in a group. Forceful political action is almost always deceitful to justify violence or at least expulsion. But Girard does not categorically reject political acti despite these downsides, because there are certain movements that are still worthy engagement despite of them – perhaps freeing the slaves.

Girard's heed, therefore, against political action isn't categorical, but contingent on our social-historical moment. He believes that nothing is left to be done on the political level. Girard, like Hegel, believes we are in the end times. We have realized a large degree, equality, freedom, and truth, which are the ultimate ideals humanity can strive for. But contra Hegel, Girard also believes that it's these exact forces of

equality, freedom, and truth that are also the forces causing this monstrous buildup violence. It's because we've gotten rid of caste systems that competition is building It's because we've given up an unjust sacrifice that we have no resources to resolve violence. It's because we've given up silly prohibitions that wars have taken a total character. And it's because of our desire for truth that we can no longer believe in a noble lies that can bring lasting peace. This is the eschatological paradox. The conditions that make possible the kingdom of God on earth undifferentiation, the state of equality that we're all in now, is also the conditions for mass violence. Polit action is impotent because we are already at the most ideal state. If we can't love ea other now, we can't love each other ever.

Girard declares, I quote:

> All men are [already] equal, not just under law, but in fact.

We are already in the perfect social-historical conditions. There's nothing left for political activity to do. What is required of us in such perfect social-historical conditions is a radical transformation of spirit, where we give up our metaphysical desire and in doing so, renounce violence and learn to love others. This deeply personal individual transformation, Girard calls conversion.

6. Conversion

Johnathan Bi: If collective political action won't save us, let's see whether conversi is an adequate strategy to live in an apocalyptic era. Despite its Christian connotations, conversion is not an experience reserved for the religious, but simply process of becoming disillusioned with the promise of metaphysical desire. Girard uses the term conversion much more broadly to describe "a liberation from desire." fact, Girard's canonical examples of conversion are literary writers that have nothin to do with Christianity.

Through conversion, one sees through the vanity of metaphysical desire, naturally renounces the futile violence within mimetic rivalries, develops an identification ar love for the other as false differences diminish, and is even imbued with a newfoun "creative energy." Post conversion or so Girard makes it seem, we can continue to engage deeply with society without being trapped in the pernicious games of metaphysical desire. Conversion is a fundamental transformation of spirit, where w are no longer prideful. Our energies are channeled into wildly creative pursuits, an we develop a genuine identification and concern for others. While this may seem to spiritual, I think we can all recognize instances of conversion (even if it does not go the heights that Girard is suggesting here) in our own lives. Think about stories of letting go of a competitive career to spend time with family. Think about realizing t vanity of status games and stepping away. These are all steps in the direction of conversion.

Conversion is precisely what we need. But for Girard, it is not reproducible for thre key reasons, and thus is not a reliable solution we can just recommend to anyone.

First, the requirements for conversion are extremely specific and intimate. Girard h this to say:

> In reality, no purely intellectual process and no experience of a purely philosoph nature can secure the individual the slightest victory over mimetic desire… For th to be even the slightest degree of progress, the victimage delusion must be vanquished on the most intimate level of experience; and this triumph, if it is no remain a dead letter, must succeed in collapsing, or at the very least shaking to th foundations [our core conception of self] everything that we can call our "ego," o "personality," our "temperament," and so on.

That is to say, conversion relies on a rare experience that fundamentally changes wh we conceive the self is or could be. And, yes, if this dissolving of the ego sounds a lo like what you see in Eastern spirituality, Girard himself makes the comparison to Nirvana. Prima facie, such an intimate and Copernican event, should make us

suspicious of its reproducibility. We can't just tell people to go out there and get enlightened.

The second reason for why conversion is not a reliable, reproducible solution is tha the conditions for conversion cannot be pursued directly. What is necessary to prod such a strong, life-changing experience is a "fall". Failing a company, having your h broken, losing a loved one, you need to suffer through the pains of desire to shake y ego down. Since the fall is defined by, above all, failure, it cannot be pursued directl It is not as if one can work towards a fall in hopes that it will lead towards conversi for then it would cease to have the necessary destabilizing shock. Instead, the fall m result from a genuine and intense metaphysical desire that is inevitably thwarted.

The third and last reason that conversion is not reproducible and reliable is that eve when both of these conditions for conversion are met, it is still, to some degree, not to us whether we do convert. We are still faced with the choice to deepen our pride to renounce it, to enact violence on the rival, or to seek reconciliation. Unfortunate this choice is not completely up to us and will be determined, at least in large part, the models we have been exposed to at a young age. Old habits die hard and old models haunt us for our entire lives.

It should now be clear why conversion cannot be prescribed any more than winning the lottery can be prescribed. Not only do you need to fail monstrously to the point collapse, that failure has to expose the lies of mimesis and shake your ego to the cor And only if you have been mediated by the right models – then and only then – do y have even the possibility, the chance of escape. Conversion then is an act of grace, given to the fortunate, but not something we can make meaningful strides towards ourselves.

7. Hölderlin and the Case for Withdrawal

Johnathan Bi: But there is one last solution Girard offers us as individuals living in end times that can be reproduced. This does not require grace and can be willed by Recall, conversion is a way to exist within the community, to live, to love, and creat it. It is the ideal state, a state that if everyone obtained would bring forth the kingdo of God on earth. But for those of us, most of us, not lucky enough to be given such a treasured gift, Girard's suggestion is simple – withdraw. Withdraw from the world. Leave the world behind. Tend to your own garden. Proximity is the problem of modernity. There's nothing we can do about social proximity – we're all equals now but we can create physical proximity by leaving society altogether.

Girard's example par excellence of withdrawal is going to be found in Friedrich Hölderlin, the 19th century poet, a contemporary of Hegel, Schelling, and Fichte. Hölderlin is someone that Girard brings up because and not despite of his strong metaphysical desires and pride. Girard diagnoses Hölderlin with an extreme pride t he wanted to be a Goethe or nothing – Hölderlin was not lucky enough to be blesse with conversion. But that is precisely what makes him attractive for Girard – if withdrawal works for even such a mimetic person, then it must work for all. And withdraw Hölderlin did. For the last 40 years of his life, Hölderlin retreated into a tower where only few of his friends visited him, cutting himself completely off from society. Girard attributes to the withdrawn Hölderlin a quiet mysticism, tranquility and even holiness.

This withdrawal is so central to Girard's prescriptions that he takes it to be a defini characteristic of Christ. The command, "*Imitatio Christi*", to imitate Christ for Girar is a heed to leave society. Like Christ, who does not imitate any man, so must we refuse to imitate. What's equally important is to refuse to be imitated.

Girard comments that Christ, I quote:

> Withdraws at the very moment he could dominate.

Girard's point is this, at the resurrection, when his divinity, when Christ's divinity, apparent to all, when Christ could have founded an empire on earth, he left. So too must we then humble ourselves in front of others and refuse to be a model by refusi to be too close to society. And it's only at this distant and withdrawn place – refusir to imitate and refusing to be imitated – can we see truth and practice love. The first commandment to direct one's gaze towards God is incomplete without the 10th commandment to divert one's gaze away from others.

8. The End

Johnathan Bi: We may find Girard's only actionable prescription of withdrawal dee unsatisfying. First, Hölderlin's contemporaries found him far from the ideal of holiness that Girard attributed to him. He was devoid of companionship. He was characterized by anxiety rather than peace. It's not clear that withdrawal does prote us. Second, Girard ironically succumbs to the escapist flaws the younger Girard fou unsatisfying in Eastern religions.

Girard says this as a critique:

> The nonviolence of Eastern religions is the search for a position outside of violer nirvana, etc. But this comes at the price of all action. But this search abandons th world in a way to itself.

But these are the exact problems that Girard himself runs into by prescribing the Hölderlinian option. Lastly, we may ask, what good is whatever love we manage to develop withdrawn if this love is so far from being able to help others?

I don't think Girard found this final solution that satisfying either. But at the end of the day, Girard has no choice and if he is right, neither do we. Apocalypse is immin If we don't withdraw, we're going to get sucked right up into the mimetic frenzy.

This is how certain Girard was of the end of the world. I quote:

> Christ will have tried to bring humanity into adulthood, but humanity will have refused. I am using the future perfect on purpose because there is a deep failure all this.

The kingdom of God, while a logical possibility, is a statistical impossibility. Apocalypse is coming. There is no hope for collective salvation. The only thing we c do is to preserve our own integrity by withdrawing in order to make ourselves wort of salvation by God in the next life. In the '80s, after describing our predicament, someone asked Girard, what is to be done? And all that he said was, "We might beg with personal sanctity." During a lecture in Paris, he was asked the same question a he simply just answered, "pray". Girard does not give us any worldly solutions becau there are none. The kingdom of God will not be established here on earth, but perh we can preserve ourselves to be worthy of it in heaven.

Perhaps, the only worth asking question then is how do we know when the end is near? I can't help, but call to mind these Marxists of the Frankfurt School who have set date where capitalism is going to end, exact eschatological predictions are, I thi are not good for much beyond humor in retrospect.

Girard is not engaged in this Mayan type of business of having a specific date. Inste he points us gently back to Matthew 24:

> For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there sha be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kil you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many fal prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, t love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shal saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

Girard looks at our world: what is the earthquakes and pestilences that Matthew re to, but the ecological challenges we're facing. What are these geopolitical fault lines and trade conflicts, but the rise of nation against nation. What are the ones who persecute in the name of victims, but the false prophets who shall deceive many. Ar what is our increasingly toxic cultural landscape, but the iniquity that causes the lo of many to grow cold.

And to that we may add, what is Girard's work, but the last preaching of the gospel an unreceptive world. The end is not near. The end is here.

I will leave our listeners stewing in the same unbearable silence that Girard left me stranded in. The final sentence in his final book reads:

> In 1815, the Congress of Vienna was still able to put an end to the War of the Six Coalition. That era is over. Violence can no longer be checked. From this point o view, we can say that the apocalypse has already begun.

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