

Apocalypse Deferred: Girard and Japan**Jeremiah L. Alberg****Publication Date**

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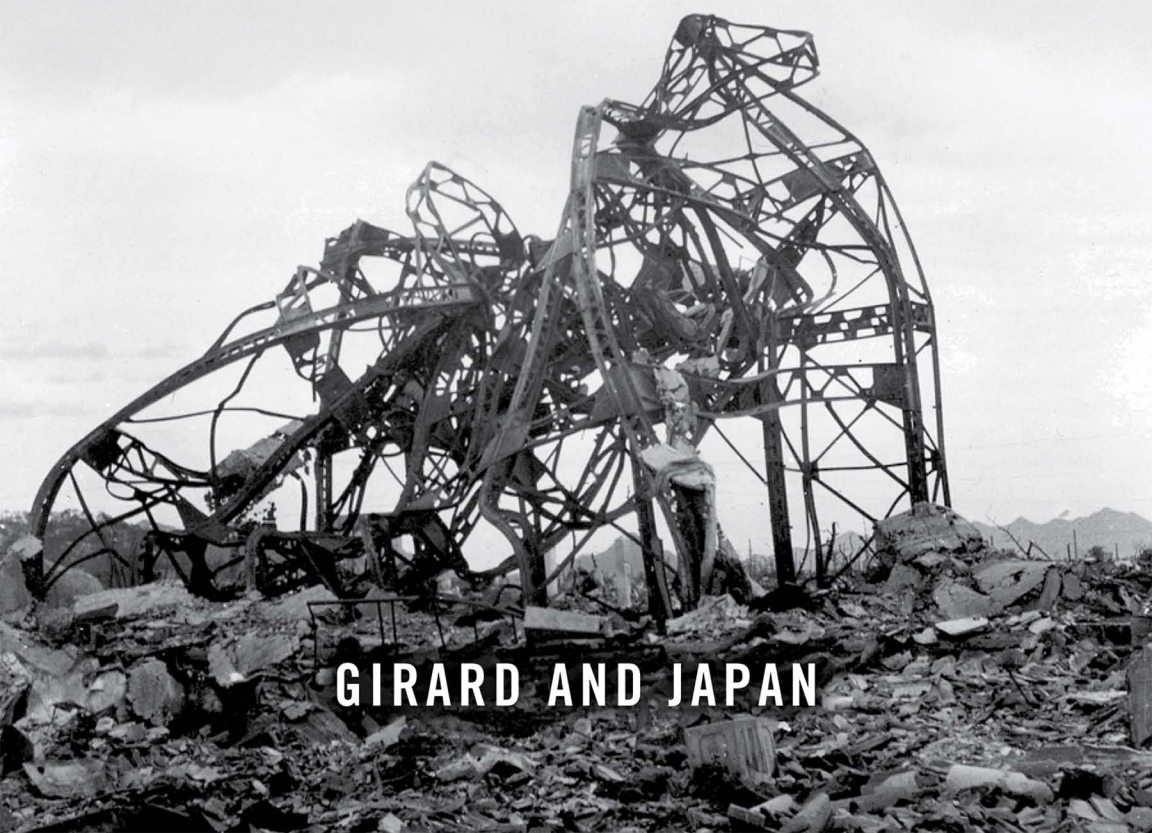
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EDITED BY
JEREMIAH L. ALBERG

APOCALYPSE DEFERRED



GIRARD AND JAPAN

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This book is dedicated to the memory of René Girard.

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All of the essays in this collection, save one, were originally offered as oral presentations at a conference titled, “Apocalypse Revisited: Japan, Hiroshima, and the Place of Mimesis.” While the introduction provides more background about this conference and the reason for the difference in the title of the conference and this volume, here is the place to acknowledge that without that event this particular book would never have come into being. Thus, our thanks must go, first of all, to those who made the conference possible.

International Christian University, through the office and the person of the vice president for academic affairs (at the time Professor Junko Hibiya, who is now president of the university), contributed much to the realization of this gathering of people interested in revisiting the theme of the apocalypse in a Japanese setting. Also, the staff of the Institute for the Study of Christianity and Culture contributed many hours of hard work both in preparing for and in ensuring the smooth running of the conference itself. Our thanks go out to these people.

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A LIGHT SHALL APPEAR IN THE EAST

An Introduction to This Volume

JEREMIAH L. ALBERG

When a book has multiple authors, and when these authors come from several different continents with diverse training and expertise, and when they are addressing such dramatically diverse topics as Japanese anime and typology in the Bible—all of which are true of this volume—then readers can have a difficult time finding their way. To aid readers in their quest, I offer two perspectives in this introduction. First, I will provide some background as to how this particular collection of essays came into existence, or the story of this collection. Second, I will give an account of my own rationale for the structure of the book, or the story this collection tells.

The Story of This Collection

Many of these essays, as can be seen in even a brief perusal, have been deeply affected not only by the place in which the meeting was held, Tokyo, Japan, but also the time at which it was held, the summer of 2012,

when memories of the devastating earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster of Eastern Japan which had occurred in March 2011, nearly a year and a half earlier, were still very fresh in everyone's mind. There was a period in preparing for the conference when we worried whether it could take place in the planned venue at all. It is not surprising, then, that several of the contributors, both Japanese and non-Japanese, touch upon this disaster in their reflections and use it as a touchstone for thinking about apocalyptic realities.

At the time that the conference was first being planned by the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R), we obviously had no idea of the disasters that Japan would go through. Instead, the desire was to break out of the tradition of always holding the conferences either in Europe or North America. There was a hope to hear new voices and to see things from a different perspective. The association of Japan with the apocalyptic through the events of World War II in general and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in particular were very much at the forefront of our minds. The events of March 2011 put it all in a much stronger light.

Some more remote background contributed to making Japan an appropriate place for holding a conference that treated such things as the thought of René Girard, mimetic theory, apocalyptic catastrophes, and possible salvation. Although Girard has never been to Japan, his thought has exerted a steady influence in that country through his writings, both in their original languages and in translation.

With a few exceptions, Girard's works were translated into Japanese here in the order of their publication. At first there was a ten-year lag between the appearance of a work in French and its translation into Japanese. *Mensonge romantique et vérité Romanesque* (published in English as *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*), published in 1961, came out (translated literally) as *A Phenomenology of Desire: Romantic Lie and Romanesque Truth* in 1971. *La violence et le sacré* originally appeared in 1972, with its Japanese translation coming out in 1982. Then things began to speed up a bit. There is a lag of only six years between the original publication of *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (1978) and its translation. A translation of *The Scapegoat* was published in 1985, only three years after the original. Girard's book on Job was published in Japanese in 1989, around four years after the original. Even his massive book

on Shakespeare, *A Theater of Envy*, was translated after only a space of four years. There are even two books translated into Japanese well before their English translation: *The One by Whom Scandal Comes* and *When These Things Begin: Conversations with Michel Treguer*. The translations of these works were carried out by Japanese scholars in French, British, and American literature, as well as by a sociologist.

In addition, several significant secondary works by such people as Jean-Pierre Dupuy, Paul Dumouchel, and Andrew McKenna have also appeared in Japanese. In 2015 Mark Ansprach's *À charge de Revance: Figures d'elementaire de la réciprocité* was also translated. There has been one book-length study of Girard's thought by Yoshinari Nishinaga, a professor of French literature, titled *The Direction of the "Individual": René Girard and Modern Society*. Finally, Girard's thought has also been employed not just in literary theory but by Japanese historians and ethnologists as well. Thus, scholars in Japan have shown a continual interest in Girard's thought since it first emerged in the early 1960s and have drawn on it in a variety of studies.

This widespread interest received a more concrete institutional form thanks, in part, to funding from a foundation, Imitatio, which supports efforts to expand the reach of mimetic theory. A small group of scholars living in Japan were thus able to meet in 2010 and 2011 to prepare for the conference. By happy coincidence, another scholarly association, the Generative Anthropology Society and Conference (GASC), was also planning to hold its conference in Japan, and so it was decided that the groups should join forces. Eric Gans, the founder of generative anthropology, had been an early student of Girard's, and their thought has much in common.

The actual conference took place from July 5 to July 8 on the campus of International Christian University (ICU) in Tokyo. The university is located on what was, up until the end of the war, the site of the Nakajima Aircraft Company. During the war, the company was developing and testing designs for advanced long-range bombers. Given its location, ICU identified a crucial part of its educational mission as the conscious effort to "beat spears into plowshares." Mimetic theory's focus on the causes of violence and violence's role in the constitution of culture aligns well with this mission.

The original conference bore the title *Apocalypse Revisited: Japan, Hiroshima, and the Place of Mimesis*. The title of this book, however, better reflects the content of the papers. The “deferral” of violence plays an important role in both mimetic theory and the generative anthropology of Eric Gans. In the former, greater violence is deferred through controlled violence, or “bad” violence is deferred through “good” violence. In the latter, the object that is both desired and unavailable gives birth to an originary love and resentment that will mark all further development. From a Christian perspective we might say, especially in reference to the *Apocalypse*, that deferral may be the best that we can hope for.

The Story the Collection Tells

Reviews of an edited collection often contain a moment in which the reviewer confesses to having failed to find the logical key that would grant access to the unity of the various papers collected between the covers of the book being reviewed. Thus, she is reduced to commenting on the few papers that strike her as particularly outstanding or criticizing those papers that fail to achieve what they set out to do. I hope that the *logos* of this collection will stand out on its own. Still, I would like to provide a few signposts to help the reader on his or her way.¹

Catastrophe, Apocalypse, and Japan

The essays of Part 1 are mostly, but not exclusively, rooted in the various events of World War II. The first paper, appropriately enough by Jean-Pierre Dupuy, sets the frame and the premise of this collection. Dupuy focuses on a struggle within Girard’s system. He sees that for Girard, human *méconnaissance* (the misrecognition of the victim as responsible for a given society’s problems) plays a central role in mimetic theory. The generative scapegoat mechanism works only so long as we don’t know what we are doing when we scapegoat the victim. Our increased knowledge of its working contributes to its inability to function. Dupuy points out how the Bomb is known and is, indeed, recognized by Girard as being known. He avers that “nuclear peace” is a new form of the sacred

informed by knowledge that the power of destruction that threatens us also protects us and that this power comes, not from God, but from ourselves. But this, Dupuy astutely points out, undermines the postulate of *méconnaissance*, which is necessary for the sacrificial mechanism to function. Accordingly, Dupuy wants to clarify the situation of the sacred Bomb and our recognition of it, a situation that Girard has termed “intermediary and complex.” At the same time that Dupuy points out our recognition of the reality of nuclear weapons and their destructive potential, he is astounded that “we do not see the moral horror” of the situation. It seems that *méconnaissance* is still operative. Dupuy detects a weakness in every person when his capacity for inventive destruction becomes disproportionate to the human condition. Thus, he recognizes the basis for the *méconnaissance*—the growing gap between the human capacity for making and the capacity for imagining what they have made.

Dupuy concretizes the problem by looking at the writings of Günther Anders and asking, with him, how it is that the Japanese can speak of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima by characterizing it as if it were a natural catastrophe, as if there were no malice involved. He equates this absence of hatred with an absence of scruple, which becomes the most inhuman form of all. Dupuy’s question gets a fuller context and an indirect response from the essays that follow. I will point this out below.

The next contributor, Eric Gans, much like the German novelist G. W. Sebald, lives in the shadow of the war and sees our present existence as the period of the deferral of World War III. Gans makes the case that the Holocaust establishes the basis for our condemnation of all other practices that affirm ontological differences among groups of human beings. Even those whose grievances predate the Holocaust, such as the victims of colonialism, must symbolically pass through it to conclude that such practices are dehumanizing.

Yet Gans is cognizant of the reality that the apocalyptic aspects of World War II were not limited to Europe and to the Jews. He helpfully summarizes and analyzes Girard’s scattered statements about the atomic bomb. He echoes what Dupuy in his essay has already pointed to: Girard’s conviction that the existence of the Bomb raises human awareness about its own power to destroy itself. Thus, we confront the mad paradox of guaranteeing nonviolence through the threat of absolute

destruction. In effect the Bomb has the capacity, as violence often does, of returning us to an original state: mutual destruction or deferral of violence, a kind of brutal equality in which each can destroy the whole. Up until the emergence of weapons of mass destruction, the originary dynamic was such that it diminished violence by channeling it toward the common good, but now, as Gans points out, the advantage goes to whichever group is willing to accept suicide.

Thus, Gans points out the West's vulnerability to any group that rejects forbearance and a concern for the victim and asserts its own unique religious validity. He also posits that the most successful anthropology is the one that serves as a foundation for the most successful society because this is the highest proof that it grasps the fundamental truth behind human social organization. This is the ultimate test of the struggle between the logos of violence and the logos of peace.

One possible answer to Dupuy's questioning comes to us in the form of a survivor's almost immediate response in faith to the suffering of Nagasaki. But in order to clearly perceive this response *as* an answer to Dupuy, I have placed Anthony D. Traylor's on "Undifferentiation" as a bridge between Dupuy's question and Yoko Irie Fayolle's answer. Traylor's essay is an exegetical offering on one of Girard's last works, *Achever Clausewitz* or, in English, *Battling to the End*. In this argumentative reconstruction of Girard's work, Taylor finds new considerations on the apocalyptic significance of undifferentiation. Girard's earlier view, of which Dupuy is cognizant, was that undifferentiation was the necessary condition for a new, sacrificially generated differentiation to emerge lest the society be destroyed. Girard saw ritual reenactments of the undifferentiated as attempts "to replicate the conditions proven by past experience to be effective in generating communal harmony and renewal." But with *Achever Clausewitz*, Traylor sees a new possibility developing out of an idea that is already present in *Things Hidden*, namely, that there are two forms of undifferentiation—"at once very close and radically opposed." One form is the mimetic crisis that we have already mentioned, in which mimetic doubles escalate their violence to an extreme, thus rendering themselves more and more identical, all the while continuing to assert their metaphysical autonomy from their rival. But there is also a benevolent reciprocity in the unilateral refusal to retaliate. In this state of affairs,

both the dangers of failure and the chances of success are maximal: either violent meltdown or conversion. Violence and love share in the abolition of differences, abolition of difference being a constitutive element of both love and violence.

In *Achever Clausewitz*, the question is how the claim of autonomy will be resolved. An undifferentiation that realizes that it is, in fact, the peaceful identity of the potential rivals is the “secret possibility” at the heart of violent identity. Thus, reconciliation becomes the flip side of violence.²

While the common ground of violent and peaceful identity is undifferentiation, their fundamental difference is in the self’s investment in autonomy. Paradoxically, the violent situation contains the possibility of allowing the protagonists to see “what violence does not want to see.” “What violence does not wish to see is precisely the nothingness which (strangely enough) under normal circumstances succeeds in dividing and distancing us from our fellow human beings.” With this recognition, the other becomes my other self. This involves the elimination of false differences and the giving up of any claims to metaphysical autonomy: “Thus, this divide separating violent from peaceful identity is marked by the presence or absence of autonomous self-assertion.” Girard’s thinking is now focused on the “*continuous . . . the mysterious kinship between violence and reconciliation*, negative and positive undifferentiation, the mimetic crisis and . . . the ‘mystical body.’” The only way from the one to the other is through an internal transformation of mimetism itself.

In her essay on Dr. Takashi Nagai’s funeral oration, Yoko Irie Fayolle gives us the opportunity to intuit the telos of violence that goes beyond a return to differentiation and is predicated on a certain self-effacement. Three months after the bombing, Dr. Nagai’s funeral address was given at the service for the 8,500 Christians of the Urakami Church in Nagasaki who died instantly in the blast. At first it does not seem very promising material for a Girardian reading unless that is meant in a critical sense. Dr. Nagai speaks of a Holocaust offered through the Providence of God. Fayolle’s aim is to understand “both the truth of Christianity and Girard’s theories in the secular context of Japan.”

The atomic bomb that killed so many of the Catholic community of Nagasaki did not inflict death on a random group of believers. This was an ancient community rooted in the Hidden Christians of Japan,

that incredible group of lay faithful who for two hundred and fifty years secretly kept the faith in Christ and his Church and in the prophecies they had heard only to emerge into a world that treated them exactly as it had treated their ancestors before they went into hiding—it persecuted them. This time, however, the persecution posed negative consequences for the world of trade and diplomacy, and so Japan adopted a “freedom of religion” clause to its Constitution in the Meiji period. Still, prejudice and hatred do not die out so quickly. The Christians of Urakami were considered “impure” and were judged by at least some of their Japanese co-citizens as having deserved their fate. The gods were angry because these Japanese did not love their country and worshipped a foreign God. Into this situation, Nagai’s funeral oration proclaims their innocence and our guilt. They were the ones that God found worthy to come into his presence. They were all *alter Christi*, standing in the place of Christ.

What Nagai saw in the flames of the fires caused by the Bomb is what Girard posited one might see: “the light of peace, . . . something beautiful, something pure, something sublime.” Nagai mourns their death while also rejoicing that they have entered eternal life.

There are voices who accuse Nagai of exempting both the Japanese and the United States from responsibility and thereby opening the way for future use of nuclear weapons. They see in Nagai’s speech the exact opposite of what it is. They see a logic of sacrifice when in fact it is a logic of mercy. Nagai, in good Christian tradition, is rehabilitating the victims, relieving them of their reputation for impurity, restoring to both those who perished and the Christians who survived their human worth and dignity. He frees the survivors of resentment.

It is here that the idea of *méconnaissance*, which Dupuy had questioned, returns: “Nagai reveals the *méconnaissance* of Japanese society by calling the victims of the atomic bomb ‘pure lambs’ and appealing to their innocence in public.” He puts the victims in Christ’s place and thus he becomes their Paraclete. As Fayolle astutely points out, in Japanese society there have been many martyrs, many witnesses, “but no one had ever come to their defense.” Nagai, by witnessing to their innocence and the truth of Christianity, became united to the victims in this witnessing. His witness has a power—the power “to persuade survivors to abandon all plans of mimetic retaliations.” This may help to explain the behavior

of the citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the war as noted above by Dupuy and Anders.

At this point, our essays branch off into two streams. The first stream explores Japanese culture using mimetic theory as well as tests mimetic theory using Japanese culture. The second stream develops some of the theological implications of mimetic theory.

Mimetic Theory and Japanese Culture

The essays in this part cover a wide range of topics within Japanese cultural history. The first essay, by Shoichiro Iwakiri, goes back to the source of Japanese literature in reading the *Tale of Genji* with an awareness of mimetic theory. At the same time, Iwakiri challenges Girard not so much on the grounds that mimetic theory does not apply to Japanese culture as on the grounds that Girard is too negative about the Dionysian elements of culture and that the Christian emphasis in his thought limits his appreciation of non-Christian values.

Mizuho Kawasaki's essay represents the kind of reading many Girardians engage in when they look to their own culture, guided by the insights of mimetic theory. Kawasaki analyzes a ritual dance that takes place annually in Hide city in Gifu prefecture. What is fascinating about this study is not so much the discovery of traces of the stereotypes of persecution such as scapegoating, accusations, and violence in the ritual, but how close to the surface the historical events that underlie the ritual are. Kawasaki's research has ramifications for our understanding of traditional Japanese mythical figures such as Tengu. If one digs a little deeper, beyond the mythical figures and the comparative analysis that mimetic theory makes possible, one also finds real victims. Although Japanese culture is quite old, many of its myths, even the oldest, only go back in their written form to the eighth century CE. Many of the stories and rituals are much more recent. This allows historical references to be much more easily traced and lends credence to Girard's somewhat controversial claim that behind our myths lie real victims, real violence.

Kawasaki is able to record the oral tradition in the community in which the ritual dance is practiced that preserves the name of the victim. The oral tradition that accompanies the ritual speaks of mimetic rivalry,

growing antagonism between two groups, and a murder. Further, the place of the murder became a shrine. Kawasaki suggests that the relationship between the murder of Gorube and the ritual dance, the *Sugoi-shishi*, “is identical to the relation between generative violence and ritual as sacrifice in Girard’s usage.”

Kunio Nakahata turns to the work of the Japanese novelist and essayist Ango Sakaguchi as a way of bringing mimetic theory and Japanese culture together. Nakahata sees that one of the difficulties with mimetic theory in terms of ethics is the following: if sacrificial structures are the matrix of the cultural world, then how is it ethically possible for someone to step out of that matrix? In *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, Girard makes clear that he thinks it is not possible without help from outside, without having someone who “owes nothing to violence.” In fact, this comes in the context of Girard’s “proof” that Jesus Christ is of divine origin. Conversion thus becomes a leaving or going out of the structure of sacred violence. Nakahata finds an analogous thought in Ango’s work on *karakuri*. This is a difficult term to translate, and so Nakahata leaves it in the original but explains that *karakuri* are systems in a broad sense which include not only visible but also invisible systems, or a sort of second nature realized in the mind of Japanese, for example, which they transform into the external realities surrounding them. It is similar to Hegel’s notion of “objective mind.” Ango’s point is that although *karakuri* are constructed and therefore are, in a sense, arbitrary, they are not experienced as such. For most people most of the time it is simply reality. For the Japanese, the Imperial system is one such *karakuri*.

This is not a form of conspiracy theory in which evil priests or politicians have consciously constructed a false reality to control the masses. However, Ango nevertheless sees these *karakuri* as historical realities.

It was the experience of the total violence of the war that broke through the *karakuri* for Ango. It freed him to glimpse the truth. Unfortunately, after the war ended, Ango experienced not a communal or national facing up to the truth but the quick and silent reconstruction of *karakuri* as another way of ignoring the moral horror, referred to above by Dupuy. The pressing question for Ango became how one avoids such self-deception. The path for Ango was not Christian conversion but “the possibility of finding a root of humanity,” which “means to fall outside of

the ‘*karakuri*’ at the same time.” Ango calls this consciousness “a radical intentionality toward life.”

Ango saw the falling away from “wholesome morals” of prewar and wartime Japan as being a hopeful sign. It was a fall into decadence he could support because it represented a recovery of true humanity.

Whether the recovery occurred is contested in the next essay. Andreas Oberprantacher turns first to an analysis of Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of the state of abandonment and then uses the dystopian Japanese anime *Vexille* as a vehicle for exploring the apocalyptic possibility awaiting us. *Vexille* presents the end not as an apocalyptic bang but as a slow-motion, violent contagion. In addition to the usual scenario of escalating mimetic rivalries resolved through a double sacrificial gesture that both restores order and veils the violence, *Vexille* also presents the nameless Tokyo slum dwellers as living in a state of abandonment. The slum dwellers’ lives are a representation of Agamben’s notion of “base-life”—life that is both unworthy of being saved and unworthy of being sacrificed.

Again in this essay we come to the point of undifferentiation. The sacrificial crisis is such that “purification is no longer possible and impure, contagious, reciprocal violence spreads throughout the community.” What Oberprantacher observes is that our latest art forms as well as our latest theoretical considerations represented in such figures as Nancy and Agamben both suggest that the sacrificial crisis may not resolve itself. It may, in fact, give way to a “lasting crisis.” Like Traylor, Oberprantacher calls for a reexamination of the focus in mimetic theory on typical scapegoat mechanisms. Oberprantacher raises the question of whether the preference for the scapegoat “may distort one’s critical attention and sensibility to the extent that one hardly notices all the excessive violence that is not bound and structured by mimetic rivalry.” Thus, a new strategy of concealment is revealed. Not only is the truth of the scapegoat mechanism being concealed, the bloodless, but nonsacrificial bio-political violence involved in slumification and desertification is equally blocked from view. Oberprantacher calls us to direct our attention to the margins to understand that when we move the scapegoat mechanism to the center of our attention, we have not done away with the phenomenon of *méconnaissance*, since the margin of our attention, where the surplus of violence may be playing out, still exists.

It is at the moment when these essays reach the point at furthest remove from “mainstream” culture, be it Japanese or Western, that we find ourselves paradoxically before the most revelatory—Matthew Taylor’s analysis of the cult film *Kamikaze Girls* (*Shimotsuma Monogatari*). This analysis of the film is revelatory in several ways, one being that it reveals what a supple instrument mimetic theory and generative anthropology are for analyzing contemporary Japanese culture. It also demonstrates that mimetic theory and generative anthropology call for no less attentive viewing, critical response, and background knowledge than any other method of cultural analysis. Taylor’s analysis shows the way in which such things as scapegoating, myth, and sacrifice are handled in contemporary Japanese film, and by extension in Japanese culture itself.

Perhaps uniquely in this volume, Taylor gives us real insight into Gans’s theory that not just sacrificial violence, but also symbolic representation in myth or as language itself can *defer* violence. If the original myth allows for and covers up violence, its reworking is more capacious, saving the intended victim while allowing everyone to feel purged of the need to sacrifice.

Taylor’s exploration is not a hazy mimetic analysis. He goes beyond Girard’s “brilliant interpretative concept” of pseudo-narcissism—that is, a narcissism that is de-established once the admiration is cut off, to explore in the film the relationship between the narcissism and the sacred. The reader learns from Taylor how the Lolita figure, the rococo style, and much else in the film and in the subculture go back to a popular manga series, *The Rose of Versailles*. As is often the case, the key to understanding this phenomenon is both present and absent from the film. Massively, if implicitly, present through the images and colors, *The Rose of Versailles* is never explicitly mentioned in the film. Taylor’s striking conclusion is that the subcultural Lolitas are modeling their identities on Marie Antoinette through the mediation of *The Rose of Versailles* while denying the influence of these mediators. The hidden mediation of Marie Antoinette is significant because it moves the Lolita’s identity from being pseudo-narcissistic to being pseudo-sacrificial. The sacred ultimate saves.

Taylor’s analysis not only shows that mimetic theory does not allow the interpreter to slight the hard work of becoming conversant in another culture and understanding the culture’s subcultures, but also has the added

advantage of showing precisely that mimetic theory allows one to put such knowledge to significant use. Who would have thought that knowledge of a 1970s manga could be used to show how a twenty-first-century Japanese cult continues to hide its own sacred and sacrificial tendencies?

Mimetic Theory and Theology

The following three essays, especially the second one, by Thomas Ryba, should be read as a kind of retrospective view of all that has gone before. In other words, these essays tell us something more about all the articles that precede them and cast the light of the Judeo-Christian tradition over the whole collection in a more intense form.

We turn, then, from Japan to a more familiar conceptual landscape for Western readers—the Judeo-Christian one. The first essay, by Sandor Goodhart, not only illuminates in a new way the relationship between the prophetic and the apocalyptic in their Jewish and Christian setting, but also allows a backward glance or even a hopeful glimpse at the Japanese writings that are examined.

Goodhart succeeds in a reading of the prophetic that combines a prospective viewpoint with an absolute and specific interpretation that frees the prophetic text to be fulfilled and yet not completed. I want to cash out this notion of “not completed” in a more robust manner.

Goodhart claims that Girard’s strong apocalyptic reading of Clausewitz’s understanding of reciprocity “conforms to the deepest prophetic insights of Christian scripture.” In an analogous way, I would propose that the analysis of Japanese culture in terms of mimetic theory shows that it too is open to both receiving and being received by this same prophetic insight. Goodhart concludes his essay by saying that Girard’s reading “opens new doors for us.” He specifies these doors as being not only a renewed appreciation for Judaism, Christianity, the prophetic, and the apocalyptic but also for their interaction throughout the history of Western Europe, because it is there that the dynamics of mimetic behavior, sacrificial violence, and their exposure in the religious texts of *our culture* play themselves out. Earlier essays have opened other doors in the same way, showing that in the history and culture of Japan, these same dynamics have been operative.

Goodhart suggests that “Girardian research of the future” orient itself to this Western European history of “the mimetic, the sacrificial, and their violent conflation in the context of biblical scripture and their prophetic and apocalyptic understanding,” but in our conference setting and in this volume we have opened a new door to a different culture, different religion, and possibly different scriptures. The next two essays show us ways in which this might be possible.

Ryba’s essay is a master class in how to read biblical “type” in general and the Antichrist in particular. He delineates the way in which a scriptural type is “in dialectical relation to the salvation history that contextualizes it.” The fulfillment of an apocalyptic announcement is the emergence of new meaning so that types predict vaguely and are fulfilled concretely. The apocalyptic is a call to anti-idolatry in the hope that we might defer its fulfillment. In this sense it becomes a perennial optic for social criticism, that is, for anti-idolatry.

Ryba sees the possibility of a correct reading of the type, Antichrist, in the recognition of what he calls the negative mimetic double of Christ. This consists in recognizing the kind of perverse imitation of Christ that does the opposite of what he does and so is completely reactive toward Christ. Not surprisingly, this kind of perverse mime is traditionally associated with Satan. A reading of this type implies that one is situated in a history in which these things have occurred in the past and are occurring now, with the ultimate fulfillment yet to happen.

Our reading of scripture equips us to read reality. Thus, it is not just a question of how to read the apocalyptic in scripture (Goodhart and Ryba) but how to understand this place, Japan, which for so many of us is so far away, and to be drawn near to it through its apocalyptic sufferings, that is, how to come near to Japan without rivalry—“a kind of nearness . . . prepared by preliminary distance,” as Richard Schenk so eloquently puts it. What Schenk is gesturing toward is a way to understand a world that has such diverse places but are still connected, even radically connected, via suffering, and to avoid nationalism and racism.

First, the real primordial distance is the path to true nearness, whether you live in Japan or not. This involves an opening to other, non-Christian, religions. Girard teaches a “path to a kind of closeness” that still allows for a limited rivalry of allies and friends because it presupposes

the initial distancing of lasting acknowledgment of the other as other. This reverence of the other requires self-restraint as a sacrifice, a sacrifice that is at once an affirmation of and an intercession for the other that can be fulfilled only by a coexistent.

This implies a conversion, a conversion that is a completion of Heidegger; it consists in finding “the real primordial distance that the human in his transcendence establishes for all beings,” which in turn is the path to the true nearness of things: a nearness without rivalry, a nearness of forgiveness. As Schenk sees it, it is Girard rather than Vattimo who acknowledges the greater distance that is needed for the path to genuine newness.

How do we draw close to the Apocalypse without bringing it on? How do we draw close to Japan without obliterating its uniqueness? The two questions seem unrelated but are not. Schenk gives us some reasons why mimetic theory might not so much provide a definitive answer to the questions but rather illuminate the path one must travel in answering them and in this way extend the illumination by faith from the standpoint of the ending. “By faith” because, as Schenk points out, it is faith that provides the “opportunities of productive non-contemporaneity” so necessary for this distance. Only this, “at first more distant faith could still today generate new rationality, the proximity of new experience, and the widespread renewal of social change.” This new rationality is not completely discontinuous with the old; rather, it allows for the morally troubling aspects of our society, the remnants of sacrificial structures to become visible and, as they become visible, to be done away with.

Thus, Schenk’s approach can leave one troubled. Sacrifice is not totally done away with, but rather is as limited as can be: limited both in practice and in imagery. Limited up to the point where its evasion leads to great harm or the forfeit of a greater good.

Conclusion

The collection ends with an essay that is intended to open up even more horizons, both geographically and conceptually. Mario Roberto Solarte Rodríguez and Mery Edith Rodríguez Arias reflect and theorize on the experience of conflict resolution in their native Colombia. The

developing world has in many ways been the missing element in the story being told so far. Very few voices from those places that suffer the “state of war,” not as an apocalyptic anime but as hard reality, are heard in this collection. This last essay is not meant to “make up” for that so much as to underscore it—whole regions of the world have been left out in this story and they too need to be heard. Many native cultures and peoples have been implicitly ignored in our focus on Japan and mimetic theory and that fact should be acknowledged.

It is in this spirit that the last essay comes to us as a kind of challenge to look at our neighbor who is suffering. Mario Solarte and Mery Rodríguez’s work is rooted in the particular but speaks a universal language and issues a universal call. Their work shows both a great respect for the culture of Colombia and a willingness to examine the violent roots not just of the dominating powers but also the indigenous cultures. The cumulative result is that Solarte and Rodríguez lead us to the desert and its silence. It seems to me an appropriate place, and state, with which to end this story.

René Girard died during the time that I was doing the final preparation of these pages for publication. Accordingly, the book is being dedicated to his memory. This book is just one example of the fruitful way his theories can be used to help us understand people, places, and events that are otherwise either too near and thus lead to rivalry, or too distant and thus lead to indifference. Girard’s thought provides the “*proximity that places us at a distance*.”³ The more closely we imitate him the less we will be in rivalry.

Notes

1. As will be seen, I use quotations from the essays in this collection (including the authors’ quotes of other sources) in explaining them. All quotations are taken from the essay that is being commented upon.

2. René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoit Chantre* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2010), 72.

3. *Ibid.*, 120.

PART I

CATASTROPHE, APOCALYPSE, AND JAPAN

THE NUCLEAR MENACE—A NEW SACRAMENT FOR HUMANITY

Catastrophes and Near Misses

JEAN-PIERRE DUPUY

Nuclear Peace as the Mock Version of the Gospel

René Girard's "hypothesis," as he calls it himself, asserts that the sacred is produced by a mechanism of self-externalization that, in transforming violence into ritual practices and systems of rules, prohibitions, and obligations, allows violence to contain itself. In this view, the sacred is identified with a "good" form of institutionalized violence that holds in check "bad" anarchic violence. The de-sacralization of the world that modernity has brought about is driven by a kind of knowledge, or suspicion perhaps, that has gradually insinuated itself into human thinking: could it be that good and bad violence are not opposites, but actually the same thing; that, at bottom, there is no difference between them?

There is no doubt that we now know that "Satan casts out Satan," as the Bible says; we know that evil is capable of self-transcendence, and by virtue of just this, is capable of containing itself within limits—and so, too, of averting total destruction. The most striking illustration is

to be found in the history of the decades that made up the Cold War. Throughout this period, it was as though the bomb protected us from the bomb—an astonishing paradox that some of the most brilliant minds have sought to explain, with only mixed success. The very existence of nuclear weapons, it would appear, has prevented the world from disappearing in a nuclear holocaust. That evil should have contained evil is therefore a possibility, but plainly it is not a necessity, as the nuclear situation today shows us with unimprovable clarity. The question is no longer: why has an atomic war not taken place since 1945? Now the question has become: when will it take place in the future?

It used to be said of the atomic bomb, especially during the years of the Cold War, that it was our new sacrament. Very few among those who were given to saying this sort of thing saw it as anything more than a vague metaphor. But in fact there is a very precise sense in which nuclear apocalypse can be said to bear the same relation to strategic thought that the sacrificial crisis, in René Girard's mimetic theory, bears to the human sciences: it is the absent—yet radiant—center from which all things emerge; or perhaps, to change the image, a black—and therefore invisible—hole whose existence may nonetheless be detected by the immense attraction that it exerts on all the objects around it.

In the section "Science and Apocalypse" of *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (book 2, chapter 3), Girard makes important observations on what has been called in an improbable oxymoron, "nuclear peace."¹ This, according to him, shows clearly that we are already living under the spell of the Book of Revelation. The Bomb has become like the "Queen of the world"; we live under Her protection, but we also know that Her destructive power is purely human. Girard writes, "Dans un monde toujours plus désacralisé, seule la menace permanente d'une destruction totale et immédiate empêche les hommes de s'entredétruire. C'est toujours la violence, en somme, qui empêche la violence de se déchaîner" (In a world more and more desacralized, only the permanent threat of total and immediate destruction stops human beings from destroying one another. As always, violence is that which prevents the unleashing of violence) (*Des choses cachées*, 279). What is remarkable at this stage of his analysis is that Girard feels the need to tell us that nuclear peace is not the sign that the Kingdom of God is

already with us (*Des choses cachées*, 281). He goes so far as to say that the “puissance de destruction [de la bombe], . . . sous certains rapports, . . . fonctionne de façon analogue au sacré” (the power of destruction of the bomb, . . . under certain aspects, . . . functions in a way similar to the logic of the sacred) (*Des choses cachées*, 278–79). Thus, according to Girard himself, nuclear peace is a new form of the sacred informed by the knowledge that the power of destruction which threatens us with complete annihilation and, at the same time, protects us against that tragic end, comes from us and not from God. That raises an important issue regarding the internal consistency of Girard’s anthropology of violence and the sacred. A central postulate of the theory is that the misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) of sacrificial mechanisms is a necessary condition for their functioning. The misrecognition issue is one of the major keystones in the edifice built up by Girard. Remove it and much of the theory of cultural evolution post Revelation—that is, the dynamics of modernity—is in serious danger of collapsing. *Ante apocalypsis* (before the Revelation), according to the theory, the participants in the collective victimage “know not what they do”—that may be the reason why they should be forgiven. They do not know their victim for what he is: a victim, the unlucky center of an arbitrary process of convergence. This misrecognition is not accidental, since it is an essential part of the mechanism. It is necessary to its proper functioning. The convergence of all against one rests on the common conviction that this one, the victim, carries an ultimate responsibility in the ongoing violence. The peace that follows the victim’s death confirms everyone in their previous belief.

If Christianity can be said to be “the religion of the end of religion,” it is because the Christian message slowly corrodes sacrificial institutions and progressively gives rise to a radically different type of society. The mechanism for manufacturing sacredness in the world has been irreparably disabled by the body of knowledge constituted by Christianity. Instead, it produces more and more violence—a violence that is losing the ability to self-externalize and contain itself. Thus, Jesus’s enigmatic words suddenly take on unsuspected meaning: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34). The Christian *revelation* appears to be a snare,

the knowledge it carries, a kind of trap, since it deprives humanity of the only means it had to keep its violence in check, namely the violence of the sacred. As Girard puts it,

Every advance in knowledge of the victimage mechanism, everything that flushes violence out of its lair, doubtless represents, at least potentially, a formidable advance for men in an intellectual and ethical respect but, in the short run, it is all going to translate as well into an appalling resurgence of this same violence in history, in its most odious and most atrocious forms, *because the sacrificial mechanisms become less and less effective and less and less capable of renewing themselves*. . . . Humanity in its entirety already finds itself confronted with an ineluctable dilemma: men must reconcile themselves for evermore without sacrificial intermediaries, or they must resign themselves to the coming extinction of humanity. (*Des choses cachées*, 150, 160, emphasis mine)

The fact that there has been neither any nuclear war nor, even more significantly, any direct conventional confrontation between nuclear powers since the advent of the atomic bomb, seems to give the lie to the assertion that *méconnaissance* is a necessary condition for the mechanisms of the sacred to function—if, indeed, the bomb is a new form of the sacred. What kind of sacred compatible with the end of misrecognition are we dealing with here? Girard sees the complexity of the issue but seems to be satisfied with the remark that “C’est donc à une situation intermédiaire et complexe qu’on a affaire” (We are dealing here with a situation that is intermediary and complex) (*Des choses cachées*, 281). Unfortunately, he does not try to go further in the clarification of the “intermediary” status of our situation. That is what I will endeavor to do now.

I will draw on three major interpretations of the status of the bomb: a post-Heideggerian approach to be found in the work of German philosopher Günther Anders; a strategic analysis that starts with a game-theoretical account and is soon obliged to transcend it towards an heterodox conception of rationality; and, last but not least, René Girard’s anthropology. The fact that those three interpretations converge toward similar conclusions is deeply striking and constitutes the major result of my own research.

Blindness in the Face of Apocalypse

On August 6, 1945, an atomic bomb reduced the Japanese city of Hiroshima to radioactive ashes. Three days later, Nagasaki was struck in its turn. In the meantime, on August 8, the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg provided itself with the authority to judge three types of crime: crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. In the space of three days, then, the victors of World War II inaugurated an era in which unthinkable powerful arms of mass destruction made it inevitable that wars would come to be judged criminal by the very norms that these victors were laying down at the same moment. This “monstrous irony” was forever to mark the thought of the most neglected German philosopher of the twentieth century, Günther Anders.

Anders was born on July 12, 1902, as Günther Stern, to German Jewish parents in Breslau (now the Polish city of Wrocław). His father was the famous child psychologist Wilhelm Stern, remembered for his concept of Intelligence Quotient (or IQ). Günther worked in the 1930s as an art critic in Berlin. His editor, Bertolt Brecht, suggested that he call himself something different, and from then on he wrote under the name Anders (“Different” in German). This was not the only thing that distinguished him from others. There was also his manner of doing philosophy, which he had studied at Freiburg with Husserl and Heidegger. Anders once said that to write moral philosophy in a jargon-laden style accessible only to other philosophers is as absurd and as contemptible as a baker’s making bread meant only to be eaten by other bakers. He saw himself as practicing “occasional philosophy,” a kind of philosophy that “arises from concrete experiences and on concrete occasions.” Foremost among those “concrete occasions” was the conjunction of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, which is to say the moment when the destruction of humanity on an industrial scale entered the realm of possibility for the first time.

Anders seems not to have been very well liked, at least not by his first wife, Hannah Arendt, who had been introduced to him by their classmate at Freiburg, Hans Jonas—each of them a former student of Heidegger, as he was; each of them Jewish, as he was; each of them destined to become a more famous philosopher, and a far more influential one, than he would ever be. The memory of Günther Anders matters because

he is one of the very few thinkers who have had the courage and the lucidity to link Hiroshima with Auschwitz, without in any way depriving Auschwitz of the sad privilege it enjoys as the incarnation of bottomless moral horror. He was able to do this because he understood (as Arendt herself did, though probably somewhat later) that even if moral evil, beyond a certain threshold, becomes too much for human beings to bear, they nonetheless remain responsible for it, and that no ethics, no standard of rationality, no norm that human beings can establish for themselves has the least relevance in evaluating its consequences.

It takes courage and lucidity to link Auschwitz and Hiroshima, because still today in the minds of many people—including, it would appear, a very large majority of Americans—Hiroshima is the classic example of a necessary evil. Having invested itself with the power to determine, if not the best of all possible worlds, then at least the least bad among them, America placed on one of the scales of justice the bombing of civilians and their murder in the hundreds of thousands and, on the other, an invasion of the Japanese archipelago that, it was said, would have cost the lives of a half-million American soldiers. Moral necessity, it was argued, required that America choose to put an end to the war as quickly as possible, even if this meant shattering once and for all everything that until then had constituted the most elementary rules of just war. Moral philosophers call this a consequentialist argument: when the issue is one of surpassingly great importance, deontological norms—so called because they express a duty to respect absolute imperatives, no matter what the cost or effects of doing this may be—must yield to the calculus of consequences. But what ethical and rational calculation could justify sending a million Jewish children from every part of Europe to be gassed? There lies the difference, the chasm, the moral abyss that separates Auschwitz from Hiroshima.

In the decades since, however, persons of great integrity and intellect have insisted on the intrinsic immorality of atomic weapons, in general, and the ignominy of bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in particular. In 1956 the Oxford philosopher and Catholic thinker Elizabeth Anscombe made an enlightening comparison that threw into stark relief the horrors to which consequentialist reasoning leads when it is taken to its logical conclusion. Let us suppose, she said, that the Allies had thought at

the beginning of 1945 that, in order to break the Germans' will to resist and to compel them to surrender rapidly and unconditionally, thus sparing the lives of a great many Allied soldiers, it was necessary to carry out the massacre of hundreds of thousands of civilians, women and children included, in two cities in the Ruhr. Two questions arise. First, what difference would there have been, morally speaking, between this and what the Nazis did in Czechoslovakia and Poland? Second, what difference would there have been, morally speaking, between this and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?²

In the face of horror, moral philosophy is forced to resort to analogies of this sort, for it has nothing other than logical consistency on which to base the validity of its arguments. In the event, this minimal requirement of consistency did not suffice to rule out the nuclear option nor to condemn it afterwards. Why? One reply is that because the Americans won the war against Japan, their victory seemed in retrospect to justify the course of action they followed. This argument must not be mistaken for cynicism. It involves what philosophers call the problem of moral luck. The moral judgment that is passed on a decision made under conditions of radical uncertainty depends on what occurs *after* the relevant action has been taken—something that may have been completely unforeseeable, even as a probabilistic matter.

Robert McNamara memorably describes this predicament in the extraordinary set of interviews conducted by the documentarian Errol Morris and released as a film under a most Clausewitzian title, *The Fog of War* (2003). Before serving as secretary of defense under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, McNamara had been an advisor during the war in the Pacific to General Curtis LeMay, who was responsible for the firebombing of sixty-seven cities of Imperial Japan, a campaign that culminated in the dropping of the two atomic bombs. On the night of March 9–10, 1945, alone, one hundred thousand civilians perished in Tokyo, burned to death. McNamara approvingly reports LeMay's stunningly lucid verdict: "If we'd lost the war, we'd all have been prosecuted as war criminals."

Another possible reply is that consequentialist morality served in this instance only as a convenient pretext. A revisionist school of American historians led by Gar Alperovitz has pleaded this case with great conviction, arguing that in July 1945, Japan was on the point of capitulation.³

Two conditions would have had to be satisfied in order to obtain immediate surrender: first, that President Truman agree to an immediate declaration of war on Japan by the Soviet Union, and second, that Japanese surrender be accompanied by an American promise that the emperor would be allowed to continue to sit on his throne. Truman refused both conditions at the conference at Potsdam, a few days after July 16, 1945. On that day, the president received “good news.” The bomb was ready—as the successful test at Alamogordo had brilliantly demonstrated.

Alperovitz concludes that Truman sought to steal a march on the Soviets before they were prepared to intervene militarily in the Japanese archipelago. The Americans played the nuclear card, in other words, not to force Japan to surrender but to impress the Russians. In that case, the Cold War had been launched on the strength of an ethical abomination and the Japanese reduced to the level of guinea pigs, since the bomb was not in fact necessary to obtain the surrender. Other historians reckon that whether or not necessary, it was not a sufficient condition of obtaining a surrender.

The historian Barton J. Bernstein has proposed a “new synthesis” that departs from both the official and the revisionist accounts.⁴ The day after Nagasaki, the war minister, General Korechika Anami, and the vice chief of the Naval General Staff, Admiral Takijiro Ōnishi, urged the emperor to authorize a “special attack [*kamikaze*] effort,” even though this would mean putting as many as twenty million Japanese lives at risk, by their own estimate, in the cause of ultimate victory. In that case, two bombs would not suffice. So convinced were the Americans of the need to detonate a third device, Bernstein says, that the announcement of surrender on August 14—apparently the result of chance and of reversals of alliance at the highest level of the Japanese government, still poorly understood by historians—came as an utter surprise. But Bernstein takes the argument a step further. Of the six options available to the Americans to force the Japanese to surrender without an invasion of the archipelago, five had been rather cursorily analyzed, singly and in combination, and then rejected by Truman and his advisors: continuation of the conventional bombing campaign, supplemented by a naval blockade; unofficial negotiations with the enemy; modification of the terms of surrender, including a guarantee that the emperor system would be

preserved; awaiting Russian entry into the war; and a noncombat demonstration of the atomic bomb. As for the sixth option, the military use of the bomb, it was never discussed—not even for a moment: it was simply taken for granted. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki followed from the bomb's very existence. From the ethical point of view, Bernstein's findings are still more terrible than those of Alperovitz: dropping the atomic bomb, perhaps the gravest decision ever taken in modern history, was not something that had actually been decided.

These revisionist interpretations do not exhaust the questions that need to be asked. There are at least two more. First, how are we to make sense of the bombing of Hiroshima—and, more troubling still, of Nagasaki, which is to say the monstrously absurd determination to persist in infamy? Second, how could the consequentialist veneer of the official justification for these acts—that they were extremely regrettable, but a moral necessity just the same—have been accepted as a lawful pretext when it should have been seen instead as the most execrable and appalling excuse imaginable?

Not only does the work of Günther Anders furnish an answer to these questions, but it does so by relocating them in another context. Anders, a German Jew who had emigrated to France and then to America and then come back to Europe in 1950—everywhere an exile, the wandering Jew—recognized that on August 6, 1945, human history had entered into a new phase, its last. Or rather that the sixth day of August was only a *rehearsal* for the ninth—what he called the “Nagasaki syndrome.” The dropping of the first atomic bomb over civilian populations, once it had occurred, thereby introduced the impossible into reality and opened the door to more atrocities, in the same way that an earthquake is followed by a series of aftershocks. History became obsolete that day, as Anders put it. Now that humanity was capable of destroying itself, nothing would ever cause it to lose this “negative all-powerfulness,” not even a general disarmament, not even a total denuclearization of the world's arsenals. *Now that apocalypse has been inscribed in our future as fate, the best we can do is to indefinitely postpone the final moment.* We are living under a suspended sentence, as it were, a stay of execution. In August 1945, Anders says, humanity entered into the era of the “reprieve” (*die Frist*) and the “second death” of all that had existed: since the meaning

of the past depends on future actions, the obsolescence of the future, its programmed end, signifies not that the past no longer has any meaning, but that it never had one.⁵

To ascertain the rationality and the morality of the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki amounts to treating nuclear weapons as a means in the service of an end. A means loses itself in its end as a river loses itself in the sea and ends up being completely absorbed by it. But the bomb exceeds all the ends that can be given to it, or found for it. The question whether the end justifies the means suddenly became obsolete, like everything else. Why was the bomb used? Because it *existed*. The simple fact of its existence is a threat, or rather a promise that it will be used. Why has the moral horror of its use not been perceived? What accounts for this “blindness in the face of apocalypse”? Because beyond certain thresholds, our power of doing infinitely exceeds our capacity for feeling and imagining. It is this irreducible gap that Anders called the “Promethean discrepancy.” Thus, Hannah Arendt, for example, was to diagnose Eichmann’s psychological disability as a “lack of imagination.” Anders showed that this is not the weakness of one person in particular; it is the weakness of every person when his capacity for invention, and for destruction, becomes disproportionately enlarged in relation to the human condition.

“Between our capacity for making and our capacity for imagining,” Anders says, “a gap is opened up that grows larger by the day.” The “too great” leaves us cold, he adds. “No human being is capable of imagining something of such horrifying magnitude: the elimination of millions of people.

The Paradox of Nuclear Deterrence: Away from Strategic Thinking, Back to the Sacred

A pacifist would say that surely the best way for humanity to avoid a nuclear war is not to have any nuclear weapons. This argument, which borders on the tautological, was irrefutable before the scientists of the Manhattan Project developed the atomic bomb. Alas, it is no longer valid today. Such weapons exist, and even supposing that they were to cease

to exist as a result of universal disarmament, they could be recreated in a few months. Errol Morris, in *The Fog of War*, asks McNamara what he thinks protected humanity from extinction during the Cold War, when the United States and the Soviet Union permanently threatened each other with mutual annihilation. Deterrence? Not at all, McNamara replies: “We lucked out.” Twenty-five or thirty times during this period, he notes, humankind came within an inch of apocalypse.

I have tried in my own work to enlarge the scope of Günther Anders’s analysis by extending it to the question of nuclear deterrence. For more than four decades during the Cold War, the discussion of “mutual assured destruction” (MAD) assigned a major role to the notion of *deterrent intention*, on both the strategic and the moral level. And yet the language of intention can be shown to constitute the principal obstacle to understanding the logic of deterrence.

In June 2000 Bill Clinton, meeting with Vladimir Putin in Moscow, made an amazing statement that was echoed almost seven years later by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, speaking once again to the Russians. The antiballistic shield that we are going to build in Europe, they explained in substance, is only meant to defend us against attacks from rogue states and terrorist groups. *Therefore be assured*: even if we were to take the initiative of attacking you in a first nuclear strike, you could easily get through the shield and annihilate our country, the United States of America.

Plainly, the new world order created by the collapse of Soviet power in no way made the logic of deterrence any less insane. This logic requires that each nation expose its own population to certain destruction by the other’s reprisals. Security becomes the daughter of terror. For if either nation were to take steps to protect itself, the other might believe that its adversary considers itself to be invulnerable, and so, in order to prevent a first strike, hastens to launch this strike itself. It is not for nothing that the doctrine of mutually assured destruction came to be known by its acronym, MAD. In a nuclear regime, nations are at once vulnerable and invulnerable: vulnerable because they can die from attack by another nation; invulnerable because they will not die before having killed their attacker—something they will always be capable of doing, no matter how powerful the strike that will have brought them to their knees.

There is another doctrine, known as NUTS (Nuclear Utilization Target Selection), which calls for a nation to use nuclear weapons in a surgical fashion for the purpose of eliminating the nuclear capabilities of an adversary while protecting itself by means of an antimissile shield. It will be obvious that MAD and NUTS are perfectly contradictory, for what makes a type of weapon or vector valuable in one case robs it of much utility in the other. Consider submarine-launched missiles, which have imprecise trajectories and whose mobile hosts are hard to locate. Whereas nuclear-equipped submarines hold little or no theoretical interest from the perspective of NUTS, they are very useful—indeed, almost ideal—from the perspective of MAD since they have a good chance of surviving a first strike and because the very imprecision of their guidance systems makes them effective instruments of terror. The problem is the Americans say that they would like to go on playing MAD with the Russians and perhaps the Chinese, while practicing NUTS with the North Koreans, the Iranians, and, until a few years ago, the Iraqis. This obliged them to show that the missile defense system they had been hoping to build in Poland and the Czech Republic would be penetrable by a Russian strike while at the same time capable of stopping missiles launched by a “rogue state.”

That the lunacy of MAD, whether or not it was coupled with the craziness of NUTS, should have been considered the height of wisdom, and that it should have been credited with having kept world peace during a period whose return some people wish for today, passes all understanding. Few persons were at all troubled by this state of affairs, however, apart from American bishops—and President Reagan. Once again, we cannot avoid asking the obvious question: why?

For many years, the usual reply was that what is at issue here is an intention, not the carrying out of an intention. What is more, it is an intention of an exceedingly special kind, so that the very fact of its being formed has the consequence that the conditions that would lead to its being acted on are not realized. Since, by hypothesis, one's enemy is dissuaded from attacking first, one does not have to preempt his attack by attacking first, which means that no one makes a move. One forms a deterrent intention, in other words, precisely in order not to put it into effect. Specialists speak of such intentions as being inherently

“self-stultifying.”⁶ But this plainly does no more than give a name to an enigma. It does nothing to resolve it.

No one who inquires into the strategic and moral status of deterrent intention can fail to be overwhelmed by paradox. What seems to shield deterrent intention from ethical rebuke is the very thing that renders it useless from a strategic point of view, since deterrent intention cannot be efficient without the meta-intention to act on it if the circumstances require doing so. Deterrent intention, like primitive divinities, appears to unite absolute goodness, since it is thanks to this intention that nuclear war has not taken place, with absolute evil, since the act of which it is the intention is an unutterable abomination.

Throughout the Cold War, two arguments were made that seemed to show that nuclear deterrence in the form of MAD could not be effective.⁷ The first argument has to do with the noncredible character of the deterrent threat under such circumstances: if the party threatening a simultaneously lethal and suicidal response to aggression that endangers its “vital interests” is assumed to be at least minimally rational, calling its bluff—say, by means of a first strike that destroys a part of its territory—ensures that it will not carry out its threat. The very purpose of this regime, after all, is to issue a guarantee of mutual destruction in the event that either party upsets the balance of terror. What chief of state having in the aftermath of a first strike only a devastated nation to defend would run the risk, by launching a retaliatory strike out of a desire for vengeance, of putting an end to the human race? In a world of sovereign states endowed with this minimal degree of rationality, the nuclear threat has no credibility whatever. Jonathan Schell summarizes this argument beautifully: “Since in nuclear deterrence theory, the whole purpose of having a retaliatory capacity is to deter a first strike, one must ask what reason would remain to launch the retaliation once the first strike had actually arrived. It seems that the logic of the deterrence strategy is dissolved by the very event—the first strike—that it is meant to prevent. Once the action begins, the whole doctrine is self-canceling. It would seem that the doctrine is based on a monumental logical mistake: one cannot credibly deter a first strike with a second strike whose *raison d’être* dissolves the moment the first strike arrives.”⁸

Another, quite different argument was put forward that likewise pointed to the incoherence of the prevailing strategic doctrine. To be effective, nuclear deterrence must be absolutely effective. Not even a single failure can be allowed, since the first bomb to be dropped would already be one too many. But if nuclear deterrence is absolutely effective, it cannot be effective. As a practical matter, deterrence works only if it is not 100 percent effective. One thinks, for example, of the criminal justice system: violations of the law must occur and be punished if citizens are to be convinced that crime does not pay. But in the case of nuclear deterrence, the first transgression is fatal.

The most telling sign that nuclear deterrence did not work is that it did nothing to prevent an unrestrained and potentially catastrophic arms buildup. If indeed it did work, nuclear deterrence ought to have been the great equalizer. As in Hobbes's state of nature, the weakest nation—measured by the number of nuclear warheads it possesses—is on exactly the same level as the strongest, since it can always inflict “unacceptable” losses, for example by deliberately targeting the enemy's cities. France enunciated a doctrine (“deterrence of the strong by the weak”) to this effect. Deterrence is therefore a game that can be played—indeed, that must be able to be played—with very few armaments on each side.

Belatedly, it came to be understood that in order for deterrence to have a chance of succeeding, it was absolutely necessary to abandon the notion of deterrent *intention*. The idea that human beings, by their conscience and their will, could control the outcome of a game as terrifying as deterrence was manifestly an idle and abhorrent fantasy. In principle, the mere existence of two deadly arsenals pointed at each other, without the least threat of their use being made or even implied, is enough to keep the warheads locked away in their silos.

This solution came with a name: *existential* deterrence. The intention or threat to retaliate and launch a counterattack that will lead to the Apocalypse is said to be the problem. Well, let us get rid of the intention. A major philosopher, Gregory Kavka, has said, “The existence of a nuclear retaliatory capability suffices for deterrence, regardless of a nation's will, intentions, or pronouncements about nuclear weapons use.” A second major philosopher, David K. Lewis, similarly puts it, “It is our military capacities that matter, not our intentions or incentives

or declarations.” If deterrence is existential, it is because the existence of the weapons alone deters. Deterrence is inherent in the weapons because “the danger of unlimited escalation is inescapable.” As Bernard Brodie put it in 1973, “It is a curious paradox of our time that one of the foremost factors making deterrence really work and work well is the lurking fear that in some massive confrontation crisis it may fail. Under these circumstances *one does not tempt fate*.”⁹ The kind of rationality at work here is not a calculating rationality, but rather the kind of rationality in which the agent contemplates the abyss and simply decides never to get too close to the edge. As Lewis says, “*You don’t tangle with tigers—it’s that simple*.” The probability of error is what makes deterrence effective. But error, failure, or mistake is not strategic here. It has nothing to do with the notion that a nation, by irrationally running unacceptable risks, can limit a war and achieve advantage by inducing restraint in the opponent. Thomas Schelling popularized this idea—known as the “rationality of irrationality” theory—in his landmark *Strategy of Conflict*, published in 1960. Here, by contrast, the key notion is “*Fate*” The error is inscribed in the future. In other terms, the game is no longer played between two adversaries. It takes on an altogether different form. Neither is in a position to deter the other in a credible way. However, both want and need to be deterred. The way out of this impasse is brilliant. It is a matter of creating jointly a fictitious entity that will deter both at the same time. The game is now played between one actor, humankind, whose survival is at stake, and its double, namely its own violence exteriorized in the form of fate. The fictitious and fictional “tiger” we’d better not tangle with is nothing other than the violence that is in us but that we project outside of us: it is as if we were threatened by an exceedingly dangerous entity, external to us, whose intentions toward us are not evil, but whose power of destruction is infinitely superior to all the earthquakes or tsunamis that Nature has in store for us. Günther Anders and Hannah Arendt were right: we are living under a new regime of evil—an evil without harmful intent.

Heidegger famously said, “Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten” (Only a God can still save us). In the nuclear age, this (false) God is the self-externalization of human violence into a nuclear holocaust inscribed in the future as destiny. This is what the fictitious tiger stands for.

In this light, to say that deterrence works means simply this: so long as one does not recklessly tempt the fateful tiger, there is a chance that it will forget us—for a time, perhaps a long, indeed a very long time; but not forever. From now on, as Günther Anders had already understood and announced from a philosophical perspective at the antipodes of rational choice theory, we are living on borrowed time.

In his *Memoirs*, Robert McNamara asserts that several dozen times during the Cold War humanity came ever so close to disappearing in a radioactive cloud. Was this a failure of deterrence? Quite the opposite: it is precisely these unscheduled expeditions to the edge of the black hole that gave the threat of nuclear annihilation its dissuasive force. “We lucked out,” McNamara says. Quite true—but in a very profound sense it was this repeated flirting with apocalypse that saved humanity. Those “near-misses” were the condition of possibility of the efficiency of nuclear deterrence. Accidents are needed to precipitate an apocalyptic destiny. Yet unlike fate, an accident is not inevitable: it *can* not occur.

The key to the paradox of existential deterrence is found in this dialectic of fate and accident: nuclear apocalypse must be construed as something that is at once necessary and improbable. But is there anything really new about this idea? Its kinship with tragedy, classical or modern, is readily seen. Consider Oedipus, who kills his father at the fatal crossroads, or Camus’s “stranger,” Meursault, who kills the Arab under the blazing sun in Algiers—these events appear to the Mediterranean mind both as accidents and as acts of fate, in which chance and destiny are merged and become one.

Accident, which points to chance, is the opposite of fate, which points to necessity; but without this opposite, fate cannot be realized. A follower of Derrida would say that accident is the *supplement* of fate, in the sense that it is both its contrary and the condition of its occurring.

If we reject the Kingdom—that is, if violence is not universally and categorically renounced—all that is left to us is a game of immense hazard and jeopardy that amounts to constantly playing with fire: we cannot risk coming too close, lest we perish in a nuclear holocaust; nor can we risk standing too far away, lest we forget the danger of nuclear weapons. In principle, the dialectic of fate and chance permits us to keep just the *right distance* from the black hole of catastrophe: since apocalypse is our

fate, we are bound to remain tied to it; but since an accident has to take place in order for our destiny to be fulfilled, we are kept separate from it.

Notice that the logical structure of this dialectic is exactly the same as that of the sacred in its primitive form, as elucidated by Girard. I am not speaking of an analogy here. It is the very same thing. One must not come too near to the sacred, for fear of causing violence to be unleashed; nor, however, should one stand too far away from it, for it protects us from violence. I repeat, once again: the sacred *contains* violence, in the two senses of the word.

There is a fundamental difference, though, between the sacred embodied in nuclear deterrence and the old sacred. We the Moderns know that the wild cat is a ruse, an artifice, an artful stratagem. We pretend to believe that it is real in the same way that we pretend to believe that the story we are being told or shown is true. This “suspension of disbelief” is essential for fiction to bring about real effects in us and the world.¹⁰

Nuclear deterrence in its existential interpretation appears to be a self-reflexive, self-organized, self-externalized social system—neither blind, spontaneous collective phenomenon nor formal, carefully crafted set of procedures as in a ritual. It is indeed, as Girard wrote, an “intermediary case.” At the very least, it shows that the mechanisms of the sacred are perfectly compatible with a good measure of *connaissance*—that is, of self-knowledge.

The Good News in Reverse: The End of Hatred and Resentment

It is probably owing to the influence of Christianity that evil has come to be most commonly associated with the intentions of those who commit it. And yet the evil of nuclear deterrence in its existential form is an evil disconnected from any human intention, just as the sacrament of the bomb is a sacrament without a god. In this context, worse news than the imminent end of hatred and resentment cannot be imagined.

In 1958, Günther Anders went to Hiroshima and Nagasaki to take part in the Fourth World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs. After many exchanges with survivors of the catastrophe, he noted in his diary, “Their steadfast resolve not to speak of those who were

to blame, not to say that the event had been caused by human beings; *not to harbor the least resentment, even though they were the victims of the greatest of crimes*—this really is too much for me, it passes all understanding.” And he adds, “They constantly speak of the catastrophe as if it were an earthquake or a tidal wave. They use the Japanese word, *tsunami*.”¹¹

The evil that inhabits the nuclear peace is not the product of any malign intention. It is the inspiration for passages of terrifying insight in Anders’s book, *Hiroshima Is Everywhere*, words that send a chill down the spine: “The fantastic character of the situation quite simply takes one’s breath away. At the very moment when the world becomes apocalyptic, and this owing to our own fault, it presents the image . . . of a paradise inhabited by murderers without malice and victims without hatred. Nowhere is there any trace of malice, there is only rubble.”¹² And Anders prophesies that “no war in history will have been more devoid of hatred than the war by tele-murder that is to come. . . . This absence of hatred will be the most inhuman absence of hatred that has ever existed; absence of hatred and absence of scruples will henceforth be one and the same.”¹³

Violence without hatred is so inhuman that it amounts to a transcendence of sorts—perhaps the only transcendence yet left to us.

Appendix: From Hiroshima to Fukushima via Chernobyl

As we saw, both Günther Anders and Hannah Arendt probed the scandalous reality that immense harm may be caused by a complete absence of malignity; that a monstrous responsibility may go hand in hand with an utter absence of malice.¹⁴ Our moral categories, they discovered, are powerless to describe and judge evil when it exceeds the inconceivable. “A great crime offends nature,” Arendt observed, quoting the legal scholar Yosel Rogat, “so that the very earth cries out for vengeance; that evil violates a natural harmony that only retribution can restore.” The fact that European Jews have substituted for “holocaust” the Hebrew word “*shoah*,” which signifies a natural catastrophe—specifically, a tidal wave, or tsunami—attests to the urge to naturalize evil when human beings become incapable of imagining the very thing of which they are the victims and the cause.

The tragedy that has struck Japan seems suddenly to have stood this image on its head: an actual tidal wave, the most tangible and unmetaphorical wave imaginable, now awakens the nuclear tiger. In this case, of course, the tiger is caged. An electronuclear reactor is not an atomic bomb; indeed, it is in a sense the opposite of one, since it is meant to control a chain reaction that it itself has triggered. In the realm of the imagination, however, a negation affirms what it denies. In reality, the other realm that we inhabit, the tiger escapes from its cage from time to time. And in Japan, more than elsewhere, the military and peaceful uses of nuclear energy cannot help but be linked in the public mind. "The earthquake, tsunami, and the nuclear incident have been the biggest crisis Japan has encountered in the sixty-five years since the end of World War II," the prime minister, Naoto Kan, told the nation. Sixty-five years ago, there were no nuclear reactors. But two atomic bombs had already been used against civilian populations. In uttering the word "nuclear," this, no doubt, is what the prime minister meant his listeners to recall.

It is as though nature rose up before mankind and said to it, from the terrible height of its forty-five-foot surge, "You sought to conceal the evil that lives inside you by likening it to my violence. But my violence is pure, impervious to your conceptions of good and evil. How should I punish you? By taking you at your word when you dare to compare your instruments of death with my immaculate force. By tsunami, then, you shall perish!"

The human and physical destruction in Japan has not come to an end. To a large extent, the tragedy is being played out on the stage of symbols and images. Among the places first to be evacuated in the Pacific were the Mariana Islands. The name of one of these, Tinian, should remind us that it was from there, in the early hours of August 6, 1945, that the B-29s took off on their mission to reduce Hiroshima to radioactive ashes, followed three days later by another wave of bombers that was to visit the same devastation on Nagasaki—as if the gigantic tide unleashed by the earthquake last month was sent to wreak vengeance on this speck of land for having given sanctuary to the sacred fire.

The special fascination of the tragedy that continues to unfold in Japan today derives from the fact that it joins together three types of catastrophe that we have long been accustomed to keep separate: natural

disaster, industrial and technological disaster, and moral disaster—Tsunami, Chernobyl, and Hiroshima, as one might say. This blurring of traditional distinctions, which can now be seen as the outstanding characteristic of our age, is a consequence of two countervailing tendencies that have collided in the Japanese archipelago. One of them, the naturalization of extreme evil that I mentioned in connection with Arendt and Anders, grew up with the horrors of the previous century. The other arose in the wake of the first great tsunami to leave its mark on the history of Western philosophy, the deluge following the earthquake that struck Lisbon on All Saints Day in 1755. Of the various attempts to make sense of an event that astounded the world, Rousseau's reply to Voltaire ultimately prevailed. No, Rousseau said, it is not God who punishes men for their sins; and yes, he insisted, a human, quasi-scientific explanation can be given in the form of a connected series of causes and effects. In *Émile* (1762), Rousseau stated the lesson of the disaster: "Man, look no further for the author of evil: you are he. There is no evil but the evil that you do and that you suffer, and both come from you."

Proof of Rousseau's triumph is to be found in the world's reaction to two of the greatest natural disasters in recent memory: the Asian tsunami of Christmas 2004 and Hurricane Katrina in August of the following year. For it is precisely their status as natural catastrophes that was immediately challenged. The *New York Times* reported news of the hurricane under the headline "A Man-Made Disaster." The same thing had already been said about the tsunami, and with good reason: had Thailand's coral reefs and coastal mangroves not been ruthlessly destroyed by urbanization, tourism, aquaculture, and climate change, they would have slowed the advance of the deadly tidal wave and significantly reduced the scope of the disaster. In the case of New Orleans, it turned out that the levees constructed to protect the city had not been properly maintained for many years and that troops of the Louisiana National Guard who might have helped after the storm were unavailable because they had been called up for duty in Iraq. The same people who later questioned the wisdom of building a city on marshland next to the sea now wonder why the Japanese should have thought they could safely develop civilian nuclear power, since geography condemned them to do this in seismic zones vulnerable to massive flooding. The lesson is plain: humanity, and

only humanity, is responsible, if not also to blame, for the misfortunes that beset it.

In addition to moral catastrophes and natural catastrophes, there are industrial and technological catastrophes. Here human beings are quite obviously responsible, unlike in the case of natural disaster; but in contrast to the case of moral calamity, it is because they wish to do good that they bring about evil. Ivan Illich gave the name “counterproductivity” to this ironic reversal. Illich foresaw that the greatest threats are now likely to come, not from the wicked, but from those who make it their business to protect the general welfare. Evil intentions are less to be dreaded than the good works of organizations like the International Atomic Energy Agency, whose mission is to promote “peace, health, and prosperity throughout the world.” Antinuclear activists who believe they must accuse their adversaries of malevolence and perfidy fail to grasp the true situation facing the world. It is a matter of far graver concern that the managers of the immensely powerful systems and machines that threaten humankind are able and honest people. They cannot understand why anyone would think of attacking them or blame them for doing anything wrong.

I have reserved for last the most grotesque of these catastrophes, which is economic and financial. The vast global market that dominates nations today is a dumb and craven beast that takes fright at the slightest noise and in this way brings about the very thing that it shrinks from in terror. The monster has already seized Japan in its grip. It knows Japan well. In the late 1980s, Japan’s market capitalization accounted for half of the market capitalization of the world’s economies. Some feared at the time that the land of the rising sun would soon rule over the entire planet. Yet the monster would not allow it, and two decades passed before its victim could lift its head again. Today it senses that the nuclear industry, perhaps the only industry on earth incapable of recovering from a major catastrophe, has been thrown back on its heels. The monster will not let go.

Notes

1. René Girard, *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1978). All English translations are mine.

2. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Mr. Truman's Degree," in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, vol. 3, *Ethics, Religion, and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 62–71.

3. Gar Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb and the Architecture of an American Myth* (New York: Knopf, 1995).

4. Barton J. Bernstein, "Understanding the Atomic Bomb and the Japanese Surrender: Missed Opportunities, Little-Known Near Disasters, and Modern Memory," *Diplomatic History* 19, no. 2 (March 1995): 227–73.

5. Günther Anders, *Die Atomare Drohung* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1981).

6. Gregory Kavka, *Moral Paradoxes of Nuclear Deterrence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

7. See the excellent synthesis of the debate by Steven P. Lee, *Morality, Prudence, and Nuclear Weapons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

8. Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth* (New York: Knopf, 1982), 307.

9. Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 370–71.

10. "Fiction" comes from the Latin *fingere* , to make up, to make believe, to invent, to feign (and not from *facere* , to make, which gave "fact").

11. Günther Anders, *Hiroshima ist überall* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1982), 84–85.

12. *Ibid.*, 87.

13. *Ibid.*, 114.

14. This appendix was first published as an editorial comment in French by *Le Monde*, March 20, 2011, and was translated by M. B. DeBevoise.