

Research Article

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Dionysus versus the Crucified: Thinking the Death of God with Heidegger, Girard, and Bataille

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Abstract: Girard has argued that in the opposition between “Dionysus” and “the crucified,” Nietzsche contrasts Christian martyrdom that resolves violence through pacifism with pagan festivals that affirm violence by ritualizing it. In agreement with Girard, this article shows how Heidegger’s discussion of nihilism fails to ethically confront the violence of Nietzsche’s Dionysianism, a criticism that applies equally to Deleuze. However, I argue that Bataille’s reading of Nietzsche confronts the violence in a manner that Girard fails to appreciate. Bataille interprets ritual sacrifice as a drama communicating the loss of identity experienced by those who contemplate the spectacle. Bataille demonstrates the complicity between Dionysian and Judeo-Christian martyrdom insofar as both implicate human beings in the violence of evil that the death of God consummates.

Keywords: Heidegger; Girard; Bataille; Nietzsche; nihilism; death of God

Real vengeance is back among us in the shape of nuclear and other absolute weapons, reducing our planet to the size of a global primitive village, terrified once again by the possibility of unlimited bloodfeud. Real vengeance is so awesome that even the most vengeful men do not dare unleash it, knowing perfectly well that all the dreadful things they can do unto their enemies, their enemies can also do unto them.

– Girard, “Dionysus versus the Crucified”

René Girard (1984) has argued that in the opposition between “Dionysus” and “the crucified,” Friedrich Nietzsche contrasts Christian martyrdom that resolves violence through pacifism with pagan festivals that affirm violence by ritualizing it. This is why the death of God in §125 of Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science* is the outcome of a

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collective murder rather than a passive withering away of religious belief: “*We have killed him* – you and I. All of us are his murderers” (Nietzsche 2001, 119–20). Christian martyrdom exposes the scapegoat mechanism at work in pagan sacrifice rituals by revealing the innocence of its victims. These rituals channel the implosive forces of collective violence into the murder of a scapegoat whose death unites the community by purging its internal strife. The worshippers of Dionysus celebrate such human sacrifice, promoting a warrior culture that affirms all forms of suffering including “torment, destruction, [and] the will to annihilation [*den Willen zur Vernichtung*]” (Nietzsche 1968, 543; Nietzsche 1972b, 58). Nietzsche’s readers often fail to notice the violence that Dionysian intoxication springs from or feign enlightened disinterest in it. But Girard stresses that the threat of nuclear warfare dwarfs the twin pitfalls of nineteenth-century *ressentiment* and nihilism that Nietzsche’s Dionysianism combats. Girard targets Martin Heidegger in particular for systematizing Nietzsche’s dramatic, polemical rhetoric, instead presenting a mythless, areligious metaphysics. Given our current geopolitical climate, Girard’s provocation seems to have aged well. Linking the contingency of earthly existence with our species’ senseless self-destructive stupidity, I submit that the prospect of nuclear extinction captures the notion of nihilism far more starkly than, say, the hypothetical heat death of the universe. Nonetheless, Heidegger’s account of the will to power that mobilizes technology in the service of terrestrial mastery is one of the few interpretations to critically contextualize Nietzsche’s work in the nuclear age.

In agreement with Girard, my analysis shows how Heidegger’s discussion of nihilism fails to ethically confront the violence of Nietzsche’s Dionysianism, a criticism that applies equally to Gilles Deleuze. However, I argue that Bataille’s reading of Nietzsche confronts the violence in a manner that Girard fails to appreciate. Girard’s anthropological analysis of the scapegoat mechanism demonstrates how pagan cultures mythologize sacrificial violence in a way that justifies it, whereas the Gospels unveil a new form of justice that heals communal strife through the peaceful practise of compassion. By demystifying the power of myth that sanctifies violence and glorifies warfare, Christianity inaugurates a pacifism that revolutionizes human history. In contrast, Georges Bataille subverts any claim to religio-historical objectivity. He interprets ritual sacrifice as a drama communicating the loss of identity experienced by those who contemplate the spectacle. Bataille demonstrates the complicity between Dionysian and Judeo-Christian martyrdom insofar as both implicate human beings in the violence of evil that the death of God consummates. This is, I think, an important, underappreciated point that Nietzsche’s understanding of sacrificial violence conveys.

1 Heidegger on Nihilism

Heidegger equates the history of nihilism with that of European metaphysics. It begins with Plato and culminates in Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God. This latter event signifies the debasement of the antithesis between the suprasensory and sensory realms, a debasement of the essence of both that results in their meaninglessness. Humanity, in assigning Being a value – the highest value – simultaneously subjects Being to a severe devaluation. This devaluation is the theme of nihilism: Nothing, nullity, befalls Being, whose unthought essence withdraws from thought. As Heidegger sees it, Nietzsche fails to grasp the essence of nihilism, which can be understood only in relation to Being, the phenomenal horizon of the world that beings indwell. His ontological principle of the will to power posits Being as a value and thereby precludes the “coming to presence [*wesen*]” of Being “in its truth,” that is, the worldly unconcealment of beings in their finitude (Heidegger 1977b, 108; Heidegger 1977d, 263). Construed as the value-positing principle of life, the will to power is nihilistic, eclipsing a truth of Being that endures independently of human valuation and eludes the subject/object dichotomy endemic to representational thinking. Nietzsche overturns Western metaphysics by exposing its essence as the will to power, but since this is not the abode of Being, he remains mired in the nihilism that he aims to overcome (Heidegger 1977b, 61, 75, 97, 104, 109).

The modern crisis of nihilism is a crisis of humanity's creative responsibility in relation to nature, which for European modernity appears as an object of human valuation and domination, which makes the question posed by Zarathustra prominent: “who shall be the ruler of the earth?” (Nietzsche 2006, 260).¹ Heidegger's critique of industrial society in his essay “The Question Concerning Technology” dovetails with his interpretation of Nietzsche's will to power, which he thinks conceals the mystery of Being whose difference is lost in the challenging (*Herausfordern*) of nature through enframing (*Ge-stell*). As the essence of modern technology, this “enframing” makes nature appear as a stockpile of industrial resources, reducing Being to what Heidegger calls standing reserve (*Bestand*). That is how technology teaches people to view nature, as no more than just so much “standing reserve.” Note well the parallel between this so-called enframing and the will to power that forms a horizon for the Being of beings. “That encircling sphere bounds off the constant reserve [*Bestand*] of what presences (*ousia*, in the everyday meaning of this term for the Greeks) that is immediately at the disposal of the will” (Heidegger 1977b, 84). This clarifies Heidegger's statement that enframing, which he identifies as the essence of technology, “is itself nothing technological” (Heidegger 1977a, 20). It coincides with

¹ Lampert (1996) takes Zarathustra at his word: “What was Nietzsche's intent? To rule the world” (128).

the will to power that consummates Western metaphysics by subjecting all beings to human valuation, typically based on technological application (see Lovitt 1977, xxix–xxxi; Heidegger 1977b, 83ff, 84 n. 23, 96–97, 100). Hence for Heidegger, the rise of industrial society, dominated by modern technology, is the culminating event of the history of metaphysics. He subscribes to a grand narrative that only a philosopher would take seriously, whereby “the fundamental metaphysical positions are the ground and realm of what we know as world history, and especially Western history” (Heidegger 1991c, 53). The decisive turn in metaphysics comes with Descartes, whose rational subject represents nature as a mathematically calculable, inert, spatially extended substance. This mechanistic vision of matter marks the dawn of modernity, opening the way to what Heidegger (1991c) thinks is the final stage of nihilism, namely global mechanization, automation, and unrestricted resource extraction (116–17). These processes involve the leveling down of humanity itself to just one more industrial resource comparable to a homogenous mass of exploitable energy.

We have seen how nihilism, the danger that arises with metaphysics, conceals Being or its difference from beings. But by virtue of this concealment Being mystifies us, attracting our attention. Heidegger raises the question concerning the difference between Being and beings from which metaphysics arises. Plato thinks of the Being of beings as *idea*. Nietzsche thinks of it as value (Heidegger 1991c, 194). Neither thinks of it as abyssal finitude, which Heidegger thinks are the more appropriate terms, and by which he means time’s impenetrable passage. Humans indwell the enigma of transience that is nonhuman, which he thinks of as an abyss (*Abgrund*) that defies our comprehension despite sustaining the relation by which we comprehend beings. Being is the source or ground for the metaphysical determination of beings as objects of human knowledge and valuation, *the very relation to beings by which Being is made to withdraw from thought* (see Heidegger 1991c, 231). By recognizing this thoughtlessness of metaphysics, we open ourselves to the elusiveness of our existence (*Da-sein*), the abode (*Unterkunft*) of Being that reveals itself through our questions. We are thereby obliged to acknowledge this, “*that Being itself withdraws, but that as this withdrawal Being is precisely the relationship that claims the essence of man, as the abode of its (Being’s) advent*” (Heidegger 1991c, 224). Nihilism, Heidegger’s term for the withdrawal of Being, anticipates the advent of Being as an enigma (*Rätsel*) that calls us to a home outside of ourselves, for our essence “is nothing human” (Heidegger 1991c, 233). The promise of homecoming remains concealed during the reign of metaphysics that draws us, unknowingly, toward the mystery revealed in Being’s self-withdrawal (see Heidegger 1991c, 227, 244–45). In this light, the death of God understood as the culmination of metaphysics connotes a mystical undertone that summons the holy (*das Heilige*), namely a poetic attunement to nature that reveals its nonhuman grandeur. Rather than assigning Being a value, we “let it be what it is as Being itself” (Heidegger 1977b, 104).

Heidegger's essay "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God Is Dead'" ends with a question concerning the madman in *Gay Science* who cries out after God. "Has a thinking man perhaps here really cried out *de profundis*?" (Heidegger 1977b, 112). This "mad" cry for God is an earnest call for thinking in a marketplace that is thoughtless. Likewise, Heidegger's treatise "Nihilism as Determined by the History of Being" nears its conclusion using religious language. "The closure of the holy eclipses every illumination of the divine. The deepening dark entrenches and conceals the lack of God" (Heidegger 1991c, 248). It would seem that Heidegger refers to the death of the onto-theological God of Western metaphysics, the event that the madman announces to the public in the marketplace. Those whom he addresses ridicule him, failing to recognize the event's magnitude and their collective responsibility for it. They cannot begin to think through its consequences. Nihilism conceals this event's significance from modern Europeans, whose essence lies in the withdrawal of Being that unveils the enigma of finitude. "Seen from the standpoint of Being," as Gideon Baker (2024) says, "the death of God (recalling that this God was released by Being's withdrawal) is a giving rather than a taking away; and what it gives is finitude" (12). But in the above passage about the absence of God, the "openness of the holy" (*das Offene des Heiligen*) goes in hand with the "evanescence of the hale" (*das Heilsame*) that withdraws along with the divinity in question (Heidegger 1991c, 248; Heidegger 1961, 394). Heidegger associates Being with the holiness of the divine (*pace* Krell 1991, 278). Just as nihilism has two imbricated senses – both concealing and revealing the withdrawal of Being – so the death of God points to the absence of the holy whose openness Being at once needs and calls on us to enter into. The madman recognizes this need, which those who mock him in the marketplace remain blind to (cf. Heidegger 1991c, 247).

Where does the holy dwell for Heidegger? Perhaps it found expression in the mysticism of Eckhart, Heraclitus, or Laozi, rather than the hippiedom of Woodstock, which for Hubert Dreyfus (2002) indicates the possibility of a new 'cultural paradigm' (171–72). In point of fact, this ideal is symptomatic of the so-called "modern age" that Heidegger criticizes. Heidegger (1977c) derides our relativistic concern with "culture" and the emergence of a *Weltanschauung* composed of cherished values (116, 133–34, 142; Heidegger 1991c, 195–96). He instead seems seduced by the ancient Greek temple whose harmony with nature was a figment of the modern German imagination, speaking fondly of the god who once dwelled there (Porter 2019, 52; Heidegger 1971b, 41–44). He also poeticizes "the splendor of the simple" glimpsed in, say, a butterfly perched atop a meadow flower (Heidegger 1971a, 7, 9). This last sparse, inconspicuous vision of the holy has received the most damning overturning from the poet Paul Celan, whose poem "Todtnauberg" recounts his visit to Heidegger's *Hütte* in the summer of 1966. "Todtnauberg" refers to the location of the *Hütte*, but the poem calls attention to the *Todt* (death) that infects the *Berg* (mountain) from

below as its hidden underworld (Joris 1999, 156). Pierre Joris's commentary on the poem illuminates its deftly concealed allusions to the Holocaust and Heidegger's Nazism, allusions so subtle that the philosopher apparently missed them and prized the poem as an ode to his rustic abode (Jorris 1999, 161). But Celan implies that beneath the idyllic meadow footpaths he trod with Heidegger lies a mass grave (Jorris 1999, 163–64). The poet conveys how Heidegger fails to confront the horror that contaminates what is nearest – his life, his person, his home.

Heidegger (1991c) vaguely references a certain violence that attends modern nihilism, namely the violence of industrialization that threatens “the actual annihilation [*Ver-nichts-ung*] of all beings, [and which], encroaching from all sides, makes almost every act of resistance futile” (229). Rather than confronting fascism and the *actual annihilation* of six million European Jews, Heidegger dreads the leveling power of technology from whose metaphysical essence history flows.² His intellectual obsession with metaphysics prevents him from facing the horror of history and his own guilt in relation to it. Likewise, Girard (1984) argues that by turning the death of God into an event in the history of metaphysics, Heidegger effaces the violence Nietzsche's *Wort* conveys, that of collective murder: “What was holiest and mightiest . . . has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement . . . shall we have to invent?” (Nietzsche 2001, 120). Girard's critique includes the French readers of Nietzsche that followed in Heidegger's wake. For instance, Deleuze (1983) emphasizes a tragic conception of sovereign justice whereby “existence *justifies* all that it affirms, including suffering, instead of being justified by suffering, or in other words, sanctified and deified” (19). The bad conscience and *ressentiment* express what Deleuze calls reactive forces, which internalize suffering in such a way that sanctifies the one who suffers *from* life. Abraham and Job purportedly exemplify this instinctual disposition, which characterizes the entirety of “Semitic and Christian thought” (Deleuze 1983, 36, 21). The will to power is the “differential element” that distinguishes reactive forces from active ones, which affirm suffering unconditionally (Deleuze 1983, 7, and *passim*). Values originate from the hierarchical difference between the “noble” and the “base” that determines their character (Deleuze 1983, 2, 55, 75, 86, 104). The values of Greek polytheism, represented by “Dionysus,” are noble because they affirm the dynamic plurality of becoming whose cosmic innocence Heraclitus proclaims. The values of Semitic monotheism, represented by “the crucified,” are base because they ascribe guilt to becoming, making life something blameworthy. After two millennia of Christendom, the Dionysian will to power may finally overcome reactive forces

2 This is evidenced in the 1949 lecture “Das Gestell,” on which “The Question Concerning Technology” is based, where Heidegger writes that “farming is now a motorized food industry, in essence the same as the fabrication of corpses in gas chambers and extermination camps” (Vadén 2014, 111).

through the “‘eternal joy in becoming’ which is avowed in an instant, the ‘joy of annihilation,’ the ‘*affirmation* of annihilation and destruction’” (Deleuze 1983, 174–75). Deleuze reduces the violence of such destruction to an ontological abstraction: active forces triumph in the final “transmutation” of nihilism, where becoming expels all that fails to affirm it (see Deleuze 1983, xiii, 70–71, 171ff).³ Set against Girard’s account, Deleuze fails to acknowledge the Dionysian mob that projects evil onto the scapegoated other in its violent purgation of communal strife, fueled by mimetic rivalry. Girard sees in the martyrdom of Christ an anti-pagan, pacifistic resolution to collective violence, abolishing hierarchical difference through the practise of selfless love (e.g., Girard 1984, 823–24; Girard 1986, 101, 126; Girard 2004, 89).

2 Bataille on Sacrifice

In my view neither Deleuze’s paganistic, “anti-religious” reading of Nietzsche nor Girard’s anti-pagan critique of Nietzsche adequately address the ambivalence Nietzsche finds in martyrdom. On this point, Bataille (1994) makes an improvement in his study *Sur Nietzsche*, which dramatically represents the Dionysian intoxication that results from contemplating ritual human sacrifice, the “moral summit” that is “a summit of evil” (17–18). Bataille transposes “Dionysus” onto “the crucified” and thereby dissolves their apparent opposition (see Bataille 2014, 156; cf. Kendall 2015, xx, xxii; Klossowski 1997, 234ff). He finds in the crucifixion of Christ a tragic communication with God that implicitly mirrors the divine wound whose manifestation Nietzsche (1999) finds in Attic tragedy. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Dionysianism ritualizes taboo behaviour that annihilates personal identity, which one loses in communal rapture (*Rausch*). Such transgression inverts the relationship between good and evil distinguishing the serene Apollonian morality that sanctifies selfhood. Bataille implicitly applies this framework to the drama of Christ’s crucifixion, communicating the Dionysian unity experienced through the laceration of Apollonian integrity.

The killing of Christ injures [*porte atteinte à*] the being of God.

It looks as if creatures couldn’t communicate with their Creator except through a wound that lacerates integrity.

The wound is intended and desired by God.

³ Porter (1998) notes how “this moment of destruction is forgotten, so to speak, in a self-blinding and virtually Hegelian sublimation, in a negation of negation. . . [wherein] ‘destruction becomes active to the extent that the negative is transmuted and converted into affirmative power. . . . Negation has defeated itself’ and ‘is completed’ [Deleuze 1983, 174–75]. Something is clearly being evaded here; violence is being purified” (156 n. 8).

The humans who did this are not less guilty.

On the other hand – and this is not the least strange – the guilt is a wound lacerating the integrity of every guilty being.

In this way God (wounded by human guilt) and human beings (wounded by their own guilt with respect to God), find, if painfully, a unity that seems to be their purpose.

If human beings had kept their own integrity and hadn't sinned, God on the one hand and human beings on the other would have persevered in their respective isolation. A night of death wherein Creator and creatures bled together and lacerated each other on all sides, were challenged at the extreme limits of shame: that is what was required for their communion.

Thus “communication,” without which nothing exists for us, is guaranteed by crime. “Communication” is love, and love taints those whom it unites.

In the elevation upon a cross, humankind attains [*atteint*] a summit of evil. But it's exactly from having attained [*atteint*] it that humanity ceases being separate from God. So clearly the “communication” of human beings is guaranteed by evil. Without evil, human existence would turn in upon itself, would be enclosed as a zone of independence: and indeed an absence of “communication” – empty loneliness – would certainly be the greater evil (Bataille 1994, 18; Bataille 1973, 42–43).

I have highlighted the wordplay between *atteinte* (injures) and *atteint* (attains) to illuminate Bataille's notion of a paradoxical summit that humans “attain” through degradation. Lest one mistakenly interpret the above bit of theology literally in support of Bataille's purportedly religio-historical or anthropological claims about the significance of ritual sacrifice, Amy Hollywood dispels the notion that such passages describe anything other than a dramatic representation of suffering that the contemplative subject projects through inner experience.

[T]he object contemplated by the mystic is not a divine object of emulation but a projection of the self, a dramatization of the self's dissolution. . . . What is central about the cross, Bataille suggests, is neither who is on it, nor the salvific nature of his suffering, but suffering itself, which serves as the projected image through which the subject experiences his or her own dissolution. (Hollywood 2002, 70, 73–4; see Bataille 2014, 119ff).

Bataille (1994) meditates on a ritual killing whose inner dramatization leads to the experience of “horror transfigured” (58). It can be said, with Nietzsche (1999), that in his contemplative dream state the poet-mystic “resembles, miraculously, that uncanny image [*unheimlichen Bild*] of fairy-tale which can turn its eyes around and look at [*anschaun*] itself; now he is at one and the same time subject and object, simultaneously poet, actor [*Schauspieler*], and spectator [*Zuschauer*]” (33; Nietzsche 1972a, 44). In the crucifixion drama that Bataille describes, the poet projects this

dream vision, identifying simultaneously with the innocence of the sacrificial victim and the shameful horror of the mob, while beholding the scene as a spectator moved by an anguish that transmutes into joy. This Apollonian dream vision dissipates into the experience of “being suspended beyond oneself, at the limit of nothingness” that erupts from the self’s psychical laceration as one identifies with the hallucinated death of the sacrificial victim (Bataille 1994, 19). Here the projection of an imaginary Beyond empties into a void. For Bataille, the Beyond of divine transcendence collapses into nothingness, which the immanence of inner experience transmutes into mystical ecstasy, the shock of the real’s heterogeneous contingency. He calls this the “nonmeaning” of chance, referring to the precariousness of existence that defies our moral and rational comprehension (Bataille 1994, xxx, 141, 183).

Bataille’s dramatic representation of Nietzsche’s thought regards the unity of Judaic and Dionysian sacrifice, wherein “the victim’s surrender . . . coincides with the blow striking the god. The gift partly frees up a ‘humanity’ for us, and for a brief moment human beings are free to unite with the existence of their divinity, a divinity that at the same time death has brought into existence” (Bataille 1994, 21). Ego death is the gift that destroys our investment in the demand for moral meaning and rational purpose, which regulate society by taking on the status of transcendent values. The sacred lies beyond the profane world of social utility circumscribed by taboo. The anguished ecstasy Bataille finds in criminal transgression destroys the illusion of moral purity, exposing our complicity in the violence of evil. Implicated in the sacrifice that we behold, shame taints love, guilt taints innocence, pain taints joy. This affective ambivalence climaxes at the “moral summit,” where the transposition of “Dionysus” onto “the crucified” implicates the object of Christian mysticism in the violence of intoxication and the intoxication of hallucinatory violence. Conversely, the innocence of Dionysian self-abandonment is not freed from guilt; human beings unite and communicate with God through shame.

Bataille offers a novel response to the question Nietzsche (2005) poses at the end of *Ecce Homo* when he asks: “Have I been understood? – *Dionysus versus the crucified*” (151). Bataille reveals this antagonism as the moralism that it is, for to choose between Dionysus and the crucified is to absolve oneself of the guilt that sacrifice stains humans with. Bataille avoids the mimetic rivalry between Deleuze’s anti-religious appraisal of Greek affirmation and Girard’s anti-Nietzschean appraisal of Christian pacifism, both of which fall prey to competing passions for forms of justice that offer a return to innocence – *extrication* from the horror of the Dionysian mob. Such absolution fails to confront the crisis of communication endemic to Nietzsche’s thought, which implicates us in the violence of evil. The nature of the crisis is not obscure. It confronts and uncovers the hidden, disavowed manifestations of an inner violence that dominates modern Europeans in the form of *ressentiment*, which locates the causes of suffering and evil everywhere but in oneself, thereby

fuelling the “will to power” of political ideology. This denial feeds into and off of the cultural fantasy of innocence evident in the profane illusion of social and political salvation. Yet “all those things which we now call culture, education [*Bildung*], civilization must some day appear [*erscheinen*] before the judge Dionysus, whom no man can deceive” (Nietzsche 1999, 94; Nietzsche 1972a, 124).⁴ If Nietzsche puts the Western conscience on trial, Bataille passes sentence: we are found *guilty*. If Deleuze had not been seduced by the fantasy of pagan innocence, he would recognize with Girard how the scandal of the cross evokes the complicity between Jews and Romans in the crime of collective murder (Girard 1986, 112–15). Violence immanently dissolves the very oppositions that it erects. Bataille dramatizes this scandal in a way that Girard thinks fetishizes violence, an accusation that he levels at anyone who fails to praise the purity of the Gospels that for Girard mark the turning point of human history (Girard 1979, 222).⁵ Girard seems to ignore the tradition of satire that successfully demystified the scapegoat mechanism embedded in Greek mythology though from an atheistic standpoint.⁶ Despite his anthropological pretensions, Girard adheres to a theological interpretation that splits history between persecutors and victims. His theology has soteriological implications, since Jesus vindicates all the victims of history by virtue of “the transcendence of divine love that triumphs over all manifestations of violence and the sacred by revealing their nothingness” (Girard 1986, 194). Girard’s rhetoric falls back on myth, endorsing the Christian-Platonic antithesis between goodness as the plenitude of being and evil as a privation of goodness. Bataille subverts this antithesis in his experience of pure immanence, which restores the sacred quality of evil that Christianity abolishes in its condemnation of paganism. Christianity demonizes paganism for its threat to universal goodness, the myth of divine transcendence. This mythical Beyond collapses in the apprehension of human suffering devoid of soteriological meaning. The sacred experience of pure immanence refers to the collapse of meaning, shattering one’s identity. Bataille opposes Girard’s understanding of the sacred as a justification of violence. Hollywood notes that for Bataille the sacred “lies beyond salvation,” involving a “recognition of the essentially ‘nonsensical’ nature of misfortune [that] is

4 The German is more direct, deeming Dionysus the “infallible” (*untrüglichen*) judge. Franck (2012, 339) notes Nietzsche’s characterization of Dionysus as a judge in his notebook from 1885.

5 In another passage that implicitly targets Bataille, Girard (1986) writes that those who make “the Passion a unique event *because of its evil dimension*” are “making a fetish of violence and reverting to a variation of mythological paganism” (111). This contrasts with his critique of Heidegger, for whom “philosophical concepts serve to shield from sight the tragic conflict of human antagonisms” (Girard 1979, 204).

6 See e.g. “Prometheus on Caucasus” in Lucian of Samosata (1905). Nietzsche, who consistently serves as Girard’s scapegoat for all the ills of popular anti-Christian prejudice, was of course well versed in this satirical tradition and arguably champions it.

the necessary preliminary to any real historical or political change.” Hence, “for Bataille the desire for horror is not a desire to escape the demands of history but to face them” (Hollywood 2002, 85–86, 104). Paradoxically, only by recognizing our complicity in the senselessness of evil – avoiding the safety of siding with either Christians or pagans, Jews or gentiles – is surmounting it made possible. In Bataille’s illuminating reading of Nietzsche on martyrdom, an excruciating shame taints the puerile “innocence” of love, unlike the innocence that both Deleuze and Girard cling to in their competing visions of purified justice.

What Bataille calls “nothingness” is not any mode of nihilism. It refers to death, which like eroticism connects mortal human beings. This contradicts the nonrelational (*unbezügliche*) character of being-towards-death (Heidegger 1996, 241). For this reason, Heidegger will not speak of something like the “sweet, shared slime” that connects us as erotic beings, nor the blood, horror, and sacrifice that taint the sacred, instead choosing to conceal its violence (Bataille 1994, 98). Nevertheless, as Allan Stoekl (2007) points out, Heidegger’s critique of enframing, which determines beings in terms of instrumental value and results in the stockpiling of everything from fruits and vegetables to nuclear weapons, complements Bataille’s call for useless expenditure, an ethics of gift-giving that expresses one’s liberation from the exigency of utilitarian calculation (57–58, 141–42). But unlike Heidegger’s ethno-nationalistic expectation for cultural renewal (Heidegger 1991a, 104; Heidegger 1991b, 102), Bataille’s understanding of expenditure defies any profane assimilation by the nation-state, whose goals and values only provoke laughter. He surrenders to time without destiny, to the fleeting nonmeaning of chance whose ecstasy dissolves all expectations, obligations, commands, and guarantees. Such freedom is found in the nothingness that lacerates the integrity of beings, exposing their finitude through shared shame. Far from fetishizing violence, Bataille meditates on it. This ethical encounter confronts the senselessness of evil afflicting human societies and unveils the vulnerability that can potentially surmount it.

Declaration: This work is original and is not under consideration by any other journal.

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