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Author
Janowitz, Naomi

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Inventing the Scapegoat: Theories of Sacrifice and Ritual

No figure appears in studies of sacrifice more often than the scapegoat. Numerous societies, the argument goes, have a seemingly innate need to purge sins via an innocent victim. The killing of this victim constitutes the core of sacrifice traditions; explaining the efficacy of these rites outlines in turn the inner workings of all sacrifices, if not all rituals. I do not believe, however, that the enigmatic figure of the scapegoat can support a universal theory of sacrifice, especially if the general term "scapegoat" turns out refer to a variety of rituals with very different goals.

Rene Girard's extremely influential theory of the scapegoat includes a biological basis for the importance of the figure (Girard, 1977). According to Girard, humans are naturally aggressive, a la Konrad Lorenz. This innate aggression was channeled into an unending series of attacks and counterattacks during the earliest periods of history. A better outlet for aggression was to find a scapegoat whose death would stop the cycle of retribution (p. 2). For Girard, Oedipus was a human scapegoat, placing this model

at the center of Greek culture in addition to Biblical religious traditions (p. 72).

Jonathan Smith's observations on Girard's model in "The Domestication of Sacrifice" are both simple and devastating (1987). He critiques Girard's "scapegoat" theory by arguing that the goat sent into the wilderness (Lev. 16) carried off pollution and not sin, and thus was not a scapegoat at all (Burkert, Girard, Smith, & Hamerton-Kelly, 1987, p. 100). In addition, for Smith, sacrifice rituals are an elaboration of the cultural trope of the selective kill in contrast to the fortuitous kill of the hunt.[1] Animal sacrifice occurs in agriculturally-based societies but not hunt-based ones and employs animals, that are themselves the result of the "selective kill" of animal breeding. Sacrifice is a deeply cultural act using animals, which as Aristotle said, "exist for the good of man (Detienne, 1989, p. 9)."

Every theory of sacrifice correlates with a general theory of ritual. To construct a matching theory of ritual for his theory of sacrifice, Smith draws on Freud and Lévi-Strauss to deflate ritual activity into close, selective attention to a small subset of details from daily life. It

[1] Hunt animals are considered clean in the Hebrew Scriptures, but are nevertheless not offered as sacrifice (Douglas, 1999, p. 140).

is possible to focus more sharply in ritual settings because chance occurrences are factored out. Rituals unfold according to plan, not accident—-or the accident itself will become part of the plan. The "focusing lens" of ritual leads to elaboration, as in the "exaggeration of domestication" of sacrifice where animals created through the selective kill of breeding are then selectively killed for a symbolic reason (as opposed to simply for food) (J. Z. Smith, 2004, p. 152).

Smith's theory of sacrifice and ritual is constructed to avoid anything that smacks of James George Frazer's Victorian era theory of magic. Frazer's "primitives" employed rituals doomed to failure, their actions based on mistaken uses of analogical thinking (sympathy, contagion).[2] Smith counter-argued that natives are aware of the limitations of human action and meditate about these limitations via their rituals. Any attempt to posit a simple connection between, for example, a perfectly controlled hunt ritual and an actual chaotic hunt would be a mistake since the operating principles are so very different (J. Z. Smith, 1982, p. 53ff).

[2] For Frazer's two basic laws of magic (like produces like and once connected, always connected) see (Frazer, 1947 [1897], p. 11ff).

The severed connection between ritual and daily life delineated by Smith assigns to rituals a powerful but strictly delineated role. For Smith, rituals demonstrate to participants what the world would be like if everyone could act like a god instead of having to observe the limitations of being human. Smith's claim that religious ritual, like obsessional behavior, is symbolic and does not change or affect anything. In Burton Mack's elucidation, "Religion does not change anything at all; rather, it is a way of coping, creatively, with the contingent (1987, p. 48)."

It seems difficult, however, to believe that the modes of thought represented in rituals possess this complete differentiation from issues of cause and effect (Penner, 1989, pp. 70-71). Philosophical and participatory aspects of rituals do not constitute a sufficient theory of ritual. S. J. Tambiah notes that after the introduction of modern vaccines, the Indian festivals for the smallpox goddess died out despite their participatory and philosophical components (1990, p. 133). As Richard Parmentier reminds us, "ritual in many cultural traditions functions to change social relationships, convey divine powers, cure diseases, or coerce natural forces (1994, p. 128)."

Smith himself makes two remarks that point to possible adaptations of his theory of sacrifice. The first was made

in a verbal exchange with Rene Girard in their discussion of "The Domestication of Sacrifice" and addresses not the scapegoat but ritual in general. For Girard, some form of "imitative magic" stands at the core of every sacrificial act, no matter how exactly the act is carried out. Addressing the gap between the idealized rituals and actual behavior in the real world, Girard argued "imitative magic must still be imitative of some ideal way for the animal to die, even though the people know very well they are going to do something else in order to kill the animal" (Burkert, et al., 1987, p. 224).

Smith replied that he would "adore" this formulation but that it is not the classic formulation of sympathetic magic. This exchange suggests that it might be possible to reformulate a less pejorative notion of "imitative magic" that could bridge the gap between the use of words and objects in the idealized world of sacrifice rituals and the effects of the rituals in the world outside the focusing lens.

The second comment is a footnote that Smith added to his paper on sacrifice when it was republished in *Relating Religion*. In this note Smith refers to Valerio Valeri's work on Hawaiian sacrifice and comments that Valeri's emphasis on the role of vegetables in sacrifice cannot be

accounted for by Smith's own theory (J. Z. Smith, 2004, p. 159 n. 143). The use of vegetables, Smith admits, is not explained by either "selective kill" or issues of domestication, nor is it clear how their manipulation is thought to enact the social transformations of rituals.

Valeri shifts discussion of sacrifice from an abstract general level (sacrifice=gift) to the issue of how sacrifices can be seen to be efficacious, stating that sacrifice, "requires less a theory of gift than a theory of representation (p. 67)." His basic question is: Why is a representation (an animal or vegetable which stands for someone or something) in the sacrificial context considered efficacious (to effect some change in the context of use/"real world")? Why is it not simply considered fiction, or, we might add, purely symbolic. Animals or vegetables, the power of sacrifice seems inexplicable. For Valeri, the answer is in part the very complex manner in which objects, words and other signs represent the presence of the sacrificer, the sacrifice, the gods to whom the sacrifice is addressed and the goals of the sacrifice.

A vast amount of scholarship on sacrifice attempts to sort out these semiotic representations, searching for a clear manner of describing the wide variation in representational modes found even within a single ritual.

To pick one example, Jan Heesterman argues at length that whatever object is burned must have a "bond" that unites it with the person offering the sacrifice or the sacrifice does not work (Heestermann, 1987, p. 105). A useful theory of ritual, which moves beyond vague notions of "magical" analogical thinking, must include more detailed ways of differentiating these "bonds". Hence the increased interest in Peircean semiotic analysis which seems to offer a way of relating the ritual world to the real world without isolating religious behavior as anomalous in relationship to other modes of cultural activity (i.e., Frazer's laws of magic). Peircean terminology of token/type pinpoints how a specific ritual enactment (token) points back to an original template that is understood to undergird its efficacy (type). Rituals, however, do not only point back to a model that the participants are trying somehow to copy. As LiPuma and Lee explain, we must also explain how "ritual…creates the collectivities past and present to which they pertain, and sets out the criterion of identity which specifies the present event as an instance (an indexical icon) of a type (LiPuma & Lee, 2008, p. 99)." Following Smith, we would expect to find that the Levitical scapegoat rite enacts a different "criterion of identity" from the later Jewish and Christian surrogate sacrifices.

That is, a modified "imitative magic" theory of ritual would locate the transformational power for a range of sacrifice-like rituals and articulate what, if any, interpretative meanings, are shared. These would be preliminary steps towards formulating a unified theory of sacrifice or deciding to abandon the effort.

The Distinctive Efficacy of Disposal Rites

The locus classicus for the scapegoat ritual is Leviticus 16, as one of a series of complicated rituals carried out on the Atonement Day. The rite is presented in a condensed and enigmatic form described in one short, prescriptive unit (Leviticus 16:6-10, 20-22, 26). In basic outline, Aaron casts lots over two goats, designating one for the Israelite deity and one for "Azazel". The priest places his hands on the goat for Azazel, recites Israel's sins and then sends it out into the wilderness. The person who sends it away is unclean and cannot return to the camp until he has ritually bathed.[3]

[3]In a very short analysis of this rite, Mary Douglas emphasizes that the goats are reminiscent of many Biblical "grossly uneven pairs" where one is sent free and the other is killed by lot (Douglas, 1999, pp. 247-251). Douglas sharply contrasts this mode of analogical thought with

The meaning of this ritual has been the source of endless controversy and numerous interpretations. The ancient Aramaic translators of the Hebrew text interpreted Azazel as a place-name, that is, simply a way of referring to the wilderness where the goat was sent.[4] Modern scholars, based on parallel Ancient Near Eastern rituals, argue that Azazel is the name of a demon or god. In this interpretation some form of impurity, disease or evil is placed on an animal that is then sent off to the realm of a demon. One such rite is the Hittite "Ritual of Uhhamua" for ending a plague (Wright, 1987, p. 55ff). In this ritual, colored threads are placed on a ram, which is then driven away while a prayer is said asking the god to act peacefully with the land. According to Wright's analysis, a plague is transferred to an animal for disposal using the colored threads, the animal is decorated so as to appease the angry deity but not sacrificed (Wright, 1987, p. 77).

Jacob Milgrom rejects this comparison, since the Biblical rite lacks appeasement, i.e., the goat is not decorated. He opts in favor of comparison to the Ambazzi and Huwarli rites, which employ a mouse or dog to transfer an evil from an individual (1991, p. 1072). Neither of

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rational-instrumental thought, a distinction that downplays the instrumental aspects of analogical thought.

[4] For a review of the evidence, see (Tawil, 1980).

these two rites includes any actions that can be interpreted as appeasement, making them closer parallels to the Biblical rite (p. 1073).[5] No parallel is exact, however, and it is an open question whether the absence of a certain action means the absence of a certain theological stance (no decoration=no appeasement).

Parallel reading of the rites sidesteps the historical fact that the Biblical rites are adaptations of much older rites. A later adaptation often appears to both subsume and "modernize" an older rite, but does so in part by misreading it. Thus iconic/formal aspects of the antecedent ritual are reinterpreted and often the signs employed in the rite are understood by the later interpreters as working "by themselves" instead of being representations. The previous semiotic understanding has been misread, lost or deprecated on purpose or simply because the cultural context has changed.

The Priestly Torah editors *always* present modified forms of the Ancient Near Eastern rites. As they altered the rites, they preserved what they saw as the transformational core of the borrowed rite. In the case of the goat ritual, they preserved the action of bringing an animal into

[5] Milgrom's attempt to see the Priestly transfer rites as "Protestant" versions of the ANET rites is critiqued in (Janowitz, 2004).

physical contact with the unwanted burden and then mapping the movement of that burden away from the community. Other dimensions of the rite were expendable, but not these. They interpreted this basic form of the rite as being inseparable from its goal: moving an unwanted burden outside the bounds of the community. In none of these transfer rites is the animal killed, cooked or eaten, for obvious reasons.

For scholars such as Gary Anderson, who defines Biblical sacrifice as specifically "oblations which are burnt at the altar," none of these expulsion rites are sacrifices (1991, p. 873). His judgment echoes Smith's but based on a different argument. The goat rite would be excluded from the category sacrifice along with many other rites, even some which involve the dedication of food to the deity (tithes and heave-offerings). For Anderson, sacrifice operates via the divine-human channel marked out by the smoke rising from the fire.

Katherine McClymond casts a much wider net, arguing that killing is not central nor even important for a rite to be a sacrifice (McClymond, 2008). Instead, sacrifice includes a "matrix" of the activities of selection, association, identification, killing, and heating. Vedic sacrificial texts, for example, refer to "killing" plants.

These references, she argues, defuse the focus on violence in sacrifice in general since killing a plant is neither bloody nor extremely violent. References to "killing" even at the level of plants is, on the contrary, evidence that the killing/violence in the sacrificial system tropes even down to the level of plants. To the extent that plants function within the sacrificial framework, even they must be "beheaded". This association fits in well with some clearly articulated claims about ritual substitution, as in this Hindu text.

> The gods offered man as sacrificial victim. Then the sacrificial quality passed out of the offered man. It entered the horse. Then the horse became fit for sacrifice and they dismissed him whose sacrificial quality had passed out of him. He became a defective man. They offered the horse and the sacrificial quality passed out of the offered horse…The sacrificial quality lingers in the goat, making it a particularly good sacrificial animal, but also travels all the way into the ground. Rice and barley both contain as much sacrificial quality as do the higher animals (Aitareya Brahaman cited from (B. K. Smith, p. 77 n.24)

Such claims are not found in every sacrifice tradition, again emphasizing the need to distinguish between the many ways in which different ritual systems understand the "standing for" relationships employed in rites. The Biblical texts do not make any similar claims;

substitution is much more narrowly focused on less expensive animals for more expensive.[6]

If we look in more detail at the Priestly presentation of the scapegoat rite, even in its modified form, the rite remains anomalous in terms of its appearance in the Priestly Torah. The rite is one of the few to include the use of a verbal formula: the priest recites the sins of the Israelites over the goat.[7] Priestly cult activity, including animal sacrifices, usually has no verbal component at all (non-verbal actions only).

This striking aspect of most Israelite ritual remains somewhat of an enigma. Israel Knohl argues that the Priestly Torah's silent cult emphasizes the deity's loftiness, and the "spirit of the divine elements abstracted from its practical functions in the world (1995, p. 148)."[8] Knohl's theory repeats an aesthetic judgment found in some ancient texts that cultic silence is more imposing and austere then spoken forms of worship. *The Letter of Aristeas* 95, for example, claims, as part of an idealizing and apologetic stance, that seven hundred

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[6] McClymond is aware of this difference but argues that similar strands appear elsewhere in Israelite thought.
[7] The ANET versions have, instead, a prayer to the deity to accept the burden.
[8] His study is titled *The Sanctuary of Silence* to emphasize the lack of spoken formulas in the cultic system.

priests could carry out the sacrifices without making any noise. This interpretation of the meaning of the silence is not directly supported in the sacrificial text and it is worthwhile to pause and consider if the texts do seem to present any theory of spoken language.

The only other Israelite rites that combine verbal formulas and non-verbal actions are first, the rite of the suspected adulteress (Num 5:11-31) and second, the offering of first fruits (Deut 26:3). The first rite, the suspected adulteress, appears to be an ancient oath with a reference to the deity (verse 21) awkwardly added as if its efficacy was already obscure when it was edited into the Biblical context. Milgrom argues that "It was therefore essential to add v. 21 to the adjuration in order to emphasize that the imprecation derives its force not from the water but from the word" (Milgrom, p. 478). But it is unlikely that in any prior setting the ritual's power was thought to come directly from the water; the semiotic meaning of the water is lost now, and perhaps was already to the Biblical editors. The second rite, the first fruits ceremony, appears to be the result of editing an ancient creed into a new context. In this case a somewhat superfluous reference

to a priest is added, again showing that the first fruits are not understood to be a sacrifice.[9]

The Priestly editors included formulas in rites where the formulas seemed indispensable to clarifying the very specific goals of a rite (words plus non-verbal actions). That is, whatever their reason for generally eschewing formulas, the editors interpreted the efficacy of these particular rites as inseparable from the recitation of the verbal formula. They do not appear to have had any theory of effective speech that could be used to anchor sacrificial rites, as for example, later rabbinic traditions will employ "Blessed are" formulas for numerous settings. Verbal formulas tend to be easily portable into new ritual contexts so the exclusion of formulas may also have been part of a strategy to place certain rituals in the specific locus of the altar. The "deeds-only" presentation of sacrifice may have also served to make the rites even more enigmatic and secretive.

Returning to the scapegoat, the perceived-efficacy of the transfer rituals seems transparent; if something needs to be gotten rid of, have someone or something first come into direct contact with it and then carry it away. The rest of the ritual extends that formal dimension. The

[9] See Ex 23:16-19 and Lev 23:9.

placing on of hands and the recitation of the formula formally represents the placing of the burden on the animal that will carry it away. Analyzed in terms of Peircean semiotics, the recitation of the sins creates a "golden indexical," an animal charged with the power of the pollution.[10] The situation is made even more complex when the Priestly Torah parallels the goat with a second goat designated for the Lord (Lev 16:15).[11] This second goat is slaughtered and the blood then sprinkled inside the sanctum as a purgation. The goat is killed but not cooked and eaten; it is killed for the purpose of getting the blood. The second goat is in this structure also not a sacrifice; its agency is to supply the blood that will further the disposal process of the first goat. Smith insists that the goat carried off pollution and not sin. "Sin" is the marked term in relation to the unmarked term "pollution," that is, the concept of sin is used to fix a more specific notion of pollution. Interpretations of pollution vary; so in turn do scholarly argument which attempt to define the pollution as best troped by the demonic, by death, etc.

The Hebrew Scriptures present surprisingly few explicit interpretations of semiotic meaning of blood; no

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[10] See (Parmentier, 1997, p. 77).

[11] See (Milgrom, p. 1018 n.1015).

single Priestly text explicitly interprets its ritual use (Gilders, 2004, p. 77). Leviticus 17:11 presents the only direct equation of blood and life. Other texts posit less direct equations (e.g. Deut 12:23).

The claim that blood is equated with "life" attempts to anchor the semiotic meaning of blood but does not settle the issue for all the uses of blood in the various rituals. The blood obtained by killing the Lord's goat appears to be interpreted as an iconic qualisign, being the most formally motivated divine representation.[12] Using this divine sign to purify cultic places is not based on an equation of blood with "life" but instead blood with divine presence/power. Use of a bull carcass in parallel Ancient Near Eastern purgation rites points to iconic interpretations based on the formal identification of the deity with the form of a bull. Formal representation of Yahweh was part of Israelite religion as well (Golden Calf traditions), and the conservative nature of religious ritual may have preserved a formal linkage long after representation via the animal shape was abandoned.

The goat disposal and the cleansing of the altar are both meta-rituals that protect and preserve the cultic

[12] See Richard Parmentier's discussion of gold as the iconic qualisign in Incan religion (Parmentier, 1994, p. 61).

system itself so that regular sacrificial practices can be carried out. Once created, and properly maintained, the altar/heaven nexus was capable of withstanding the tremendous power of both divine and polluting forces established by the visible-invisible transformations of cooking.[13] Any misstep in the procedures and the forces would break uncontrollably. The sacrificial system is one dimension of a larger struggle between the forces of the deity and forces of the other, polluting, powers not directly under his control. The divine forces are not easily contained either, and their "automatic efficacy" is a threat which can turn against priest and layperson alike.

The efficacy of these rites is closely confined to the ritual system itself and thus seems more transparent than that of the more complex sacrificial system. That is, as meta-rituals they have no implications in the "real world". As we turn to sacrifices, the killing, cooking and eating of animals is open to many more competing interpretations and thus much more debate about what and how the ritual actions represent and affect the world beyond the rite itself.

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[13] The most concise discussion of this remains (Anderson, 1991).

Biblical animal sacrifices are presented as fulfilling a wide variety of functions, some articulated directly and others articulated only in modern scholarship.[14] Despite attempts by various ancient editors to create a unified picture, legal as well as narrative texts assume distinct concepts of sacrifice. In some texts, animals cooked on the altar are considered special food for the god and for humans. The altar is referred to as the table of the deity and the aroma as pleasing to the deity (Anderson, 1987, p. 14ff). Once the channel is working, it can be used via the transformation-through-cooking of the animal to repair a human lapse (pollution). Sacrifices re-align humans with the deity because the altar can withstand contact with these threatening items (the indexically-created bearers of pollution) and can change or destroy them. Killing and consuming (by fire, by mouth) the animal maps the achieved transformation of the negative forces, not their transfer. This interpretation of sacrifice does not see blood as an indexical qualisign of the deity, which may be why the explicit equation of blood with life is needed to anchor the meaning of sacrificial rites.

[14] Nancy Jay's scholarship is a classic example of the articulation of unconscious meanings of sacrifice (1992).

It is tempting to read both the transfer and the transformational rites as encoding some type of surrogacy (the animal dies in place of someone else). Historically this tendency emerges repeatedly. In rabbinic literature, The Mishnah (Yoma 6:6) imagines that the goat for Azazel was thrown into a ravine. This statement, the first explicit claim that the goat is killed, presents the goat's death as a surrogate death saving the Israelites from punishment for their sins. The disposal of the goat is, for Girard, "the mimesis of an initial collective murder," that is, it is the repetition of a specific instance of the killing of a person (1977, p. 97). Girard borrowed this idea from Sigmund Freud, adopting and simplifying Freud's ideas in the process.

The Scapegoat Emergent

Freud's theories presented in *Totem and Taboo* were roundly and consistently rejected from their first appearance in print. Ironically, Girard's widely cited theory presents a simplified Freudian analysis which appears to have been much more palatable to the scholarly community. In Freud's depiction, sacrifice is rooted in family conflict, specifically the desire of the young to displace the father and the hostility of the father towards

the youth who will replace him (SE 13:1-162). The horde kills the father, but then institutes the tradition of sacrifice to atone for the murder. The sacrifice offers some satisfaction to the father for the outrage that was inflicted on him by the primal horde and at the same time memorializes the event. The participants both weep and rejoice, expressing a basic ambivalence. The ambivalence stems from their attachment to the person sacrificed, who was both loved and hated by them. [15]

Freud's scenario of the ancient killing by the primal horde as an actual historical occurrence has long since been rejected. The theory has been explained most subtly by Robert Paul (1996) as a thinly disguised version of the Torah's story of Moses' rebellion against the Pharaoh. Moses (the junior male) rises up against and displaces the Pharaoh (the senior male), leading the horde with him and destroying the senior male. Freud, Paul posits, projected this story onto a non-existent primal horde, failing to notice where he got the story from in the first place. With this reading Paul frees Freud's reconstruction of the horde's rebellion from having to bear an historical weight it could not sustain. It is a story, Paul argues, about

[15] Among many who stress Freudian ambivalence see (Andresen, 1984).

what is *supposed* to have happened, a myth that "is capable of providing an authoritative foundation for the continual construction, maintenance, and reproduction of an ongoing social order (p. 10)."

As part of this argument, Paul must then carefully locate the model for the primal horde sacrifice in the Bible sacrifices. He presents an enticing and elaborate attempt to interpret the Passover sacrifice (Ex 13:11-15) as the killing of the senior male, but in the partially disguised form of the junior son representing the senior male (pp. 127-129).

The primal horde is depicted as eating the father raw. The Passover victim is similarly eaten in a specifically prescribed manner (roasted) which is a compromise "whereby the precivilized is represented from within the boundaries of the already civilized cosmos." It is no longer acceptable to eat it raw so it is eaten in the closest form to raw (roasted). The Passover sacrifice thus is a compromise formation, "for having killed a senior male, the Israelites, through the sacrifice of a junior male/son/animal, must pay the retributive price for the guilt they have incurred by turning the tables on their oppressor (p. 128)." For Paul, this complex of ideas is foundational to Israelite religion and also forms the

obsessional core of later Judaism. In contrast, early Christian texts, particularly the Pauline letters, present a completely distinct reading and resolve openly the conflict hidden in the Israelite text. That is, the hidden identification of the son with the father is finally made explicit in early Christian texts and a solution to the dilemma of the father-murder offered.

The Christian rites, Robert Paul explains, undo the disguise of all earlier versions of the story. They expose the usually hidden manner in which the son represents the father. The displacement is made explicit as "The Christian rite in effect confirms our suspicions that hidden beneath the image of a sacrificed son is the fantasy of the murdered and cannibalized primal father" (p. 10).

The Christian readings of the Passover story both clarify the original problem and offer a concrete solution which does not simply embalm the guilt of the father-murder in practice (as Jewish law does). Jesus sacrificed himself to undo the original sin of Moses' rebellion and killing of the Pharaoh, bringing an end to the need to feel guilty about the event. We are now confronted with the complex question: is this reading of the Israelite traditions, and the Freud/Paul vision of Judaism, a simple uncovering of an

original Biblical meaning or it is itself an interpretation?

Levenson's study *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son* is a mirror image of Freud's (and Paul's) study, coming to a very different conclusion (1993). He wants to draw attention to the oft-overlooked Biblical traditions of son sacrifice by parents and makes almost no reference to the son being a substitute for the father. The earliest Biblical sacrifices, Levenson argues, presume that the firstborn son belongs to Yahweh and is in some circumstances offered to the deity (Ex. 22:28-9).[16] The theme of the love of the deity for the first-born appears primarily in associated with kings and, somewhat ironically, the "beloved" son can easily be killed by his father.[17]

The Priestly editors, Levenson argues, then reinterpret the older sacrifice traditions via a series of associated rituals which focus more directly on the son (monetary redemption of the son) and in particular through an association of the paschal lamb offering with the son. The firstborn son then continues to claim center stage as

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[16] This sacrifice was only abandoned at a "late date" (Levenson, 1993, pp. 3-17).

[17] See for example Is 9:5 and Ps 2:7-9 for the king's adoption by the deity.

the “beloved son,” making appearances throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and then into early Christian texts.

The only place where Levenson raises the possibility that the son is a substitute for the father is in his brief discussion of child sacrifice as “imitation of the God” (pp. 25-31). Levenson cites several authors, all early Christians, who attribute to various ancient gods (Saturn, El) the killing of their own sons. He does not discuss the question of whether the Christian reporting was influenced by their understanding of the meaning of sacrifice. The related theme of killing sons in times of dire need introduces the only two Biblical examples of sons being clear substitutions for their fathers. The first example of a son substituting for a father, the only one of any import for our discussion, occurs during a national emergency. When a king was losing a battle or a war, offering a son was a way of making a spectacular gesture in hopes of regaining the deity’s favor (2Kings 3:27). The identification of the son with the father is made explicit when the son is dressed up in royal clothing, presumably his father’s. In these sacrifices the deity is understood to be angry with the king, and in order to save his own life he sacrifices his son (p. 27). This death does not ransom the father; ironically it is a form of more

permanent death of the father by cutting off his offspring. The father gives up the primary greatness of a king, the promise that his seed will continue to rule the nation. The sacrifice is the ultimate gift of the king's future "great name," i.e. his descendants, which is more than his individual life.[18] The motivation is a crisis, a moment when the usual system of connecting divine and human does not work. The king does not attempt to sacrifice himself, but instead is willing to destroy that part of him which would live on after his death.

Both Levenson and Paul see tremendous continuity between the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, based for Levenson on the beloved son, for Paul on the variously disguised father-substitutes. Both of them overlook the tremendous shift in the meaning of sacrifice from the biblical period to the first centuries C.E. Prophetic critiques of sacrifice had been repeated for centuries by

[18] Levenson's second Biblical example of son-for-father substitution is the story of the death of David's son by Bathsheba as punishment for David's adultery. This surrogate killing is not, however, related to sacrifice traditions but instead heightens the narrative drama surrounding the king's behavior.

then. The author of Daniel questioned the role of the traditional animal-centered cult, asking whether or not the deity is pleased by the sacrifice of rams (Daniel 3.27-31,37). The strong anti-institutional language of the text mirrors other claims by prophets about the ineffective status of animal sacrifices.[19] The Israelites deserve swift and just punishment, and their traditional means of overcoming their sins are no longer effective (Daniel 3.38b-40).[20]

The rise of belief in an individual afterlife also necessitated new ideas about sacrifice. The promise of a personal immortality negated the old meaning of the death of the beloved son as a cutting off of the "immortality" of the father.[21] By the first century B.C.E., once rare mentions of a personal afterlife become more widespread. [22] Afterlife redefines the meaning of the death of the firstborn in so far as immortality for the father is no longer limited to having the "great name" of his

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[19] See for example Micah 6:7 and Psalms 51:18.
[20] See the discussion by (van Henten, 1997, p. 111).
[21] Levenson argues that some notion of immortality is found throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, in the sense that an individual gains afterlife through the flourishing of his descendants. This idea is not the same a personal afterlife not even necessarily its origin.
[22] The single reference to any form of personal afterlife found in the Hebrew Scriptures is in Daniel 11:2. References are plentiful in post-Biblical Jewish texts from the 1st century B.C.E. on.

descendents. The son can be killed *and also returned* to the father. Death is given a new sense as a transformational moment not part of the older animal sacrifice system. Humans can participate in this new sacrifice system, since they can offer up their suffering and not so much their death per se.

Freud's theory of sacrifice is dependent upon these breaks with the Priestly animal sacrifice traditions, no matter how clever Paul's symbolic reading of the Passover sacrifice is. Offering a human as an actual sacrifice would have been seen as a perversion of animal sacrifice, as noted by Albert Henrichs in relation to the Greek stories of human sacrifice.[23] The break involves the turn away from animal sacrifice towards the martyrdom traditions developed as part of the emergence of early Judaism (and then early Christianity) and through which Jesus' death was interpreted. The ancient traditions of animal sacrifice were no longer seen as sufficiently efficacious as animal sacrifice became increasingly irrelevant. [24] A new type of sacrifice was needed, the self-sacrificing death of the human who would, through sacrifice, gain immortal life.

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[23] (Henrichs, 1980). The serving by Thyestes of Atreus' children to their father in a stew is a similar perversion of the meal prepared from an animal sacrifice.
[24] Among other texts see Sir 50:15.

The emergence of martyr traditions was not a simple re-emergence of ancient Biblical human sacrifice traditions. The new self-sacrificing human stories did resonate to an extent with earlier Greek stories that followed a careful pattern: in times of great crisis a high-ranked person might offer his own life as something of great value, in effect sacralizing himself, in a desperate attempt to persuade the gods to grant some reward such as protection of the person's homeland or military victory. This consecration results in a "homo sacer," who, as part of the divine world, must be dealt with under specific rules. The persuasive power of the "homo sacer" is his radical willingness to end his life forever, appearing to accept the aggression that the deity sends so unrelentingly.

The self-sacrificing death of the human martyr is a post-Biblical interpretation of sacrifice that is bound-up with the emergence of new notions of this Greek model of "homo sacer". In the earliest extant Jewish martyrdom text, Second Maccabees, probably written in the late 2nd century B.C.E., the sins of the Jews were too great for the familiar animal sacrifices to reconcile them, and their leadership, with the deity. The willing self-sacrifice of Eleazar, along with a mother and her seven sons, marks the

turning point after which the Jewish solders win their battles and rout the enemy. Unlike the earlier Greek model where the death of the hero was a tragedy, the self-sacrificing death of the Jewish martyr was linked with the promise of a rich personal afterlife. A human death can counteract the sins of the Jews and redeem their shortcomings in the eyes of the deity while the person who dies will gain a new eternal life from the deity. The dividing line between the ancient Israelite theories of animal sacrifice and the self-sacrificing martyr found in Judaism and Christianity was irrevocably crossed with the clear articulation of a promised personal afterlife gained through an atoning and redemptive death at the hands of an earthly king. With the rejection of animal sacrifice, blood no longer has the status of iconic qualisign as the most divine substance. Animal blood has lost its transformational force.

The model of the self-sacrificing death reinterprets many of the basic semiotics of animal sacrifice, shifting away from the altar setting and its “channeling” system. Evil forces are still at work throughout the world, but they must instead be dealt with one human body at a time. The martyr’s body becomes the substitute for the animal body, but since the martyr will live again, the issue is

the martyr's voluntary suffering. Long descriptions of an agonizing death replace the details of animal slaughter.

The re-interpreted sacrifice includes a new theory of semiotic representation; human blood is transformational and can be represented via the iconic "redness" of wine. Robertson Smith posited the drinking of the sacrifice's blood as the core of the most ancient sacrifice traditions, looking backwards, as he did, from the Eucharist to seek more "primitive" versions of communion (W. R. Smith, 1894, p. 313 and passim). Only with the replacement of animals with human martyrs can the eating of the sacrifice gain the cannibalistic overtones that Robertson Smith, Freud, and Robert Paul posited as the origin of sacrifice. Because no rite of this kind is found in any Israelite text related to animal sacrifice, their claim to have found the original meaning of Biblical animal sacrifice is unsubstantiated.

Is a Unified Theory of Sacrifice Possible?

A modified general theory of sacrifice would have to include all the various theories of representation found in the specific cultural settings. In the Hawaiian case, Valeri is able to give us some very specific theories about representation. A pig, he argues, stands for both the human who offers the sacrifice and something problematic which is

not human, or is a human lack.[25] The problematic element is connected with the person's transgression. This falsely human aspect is existentially linked with its representation, in this case, a pig. Although Valeri does not make this point, the pig, as a domesticated animal, is easily imaginable to link, following J.Z. Smith, with a human. The problematic aspect of a human is destroyed in the sacrifice as the pig is destroyed. The representational relationship does not collapse; the participants recognize that the pig is not identical with the human.

Since they can also represent decomposition, non-animal items are equivalent to animals in representing the "passage from the visible to the invisible." Valeri explains,

> "..This figurative element of death or destruction is common both to blood sacrifice and to the sacrifice of vegetable offerings…In fact, the vegetable offerings that are simply abandoned on the altar rot and disappear exactly like the animals that are put to death. Decomposition, which marks the separation from the human and visible world, seems thus a more general and perhaps more important element then the violent act of killing, which is present only in animal and human sacrifices" (p. 69).

In contrast to the Israelite sacrifices, ancient Greek sacrifice rituals enacted tremendously powerful constructions of social boundaries, delimiting the boundary

[25] For another discussion of the pig-human equation, see (Stewart & Strathern, 2002, pp. 28-33).

of the polis (Endsjø, 2003). Sacrifice was the opposite of raw food, and all civilization was connected with the act of sacrifice (Detienne, p. 2). Here J.Z. Smith's ideal model of the selective kill is better nuanced as voluntary death, carefully enacted to distinguish it from involuntary death. Sacrificial animals supposedly signaled assent to their deaths, distinguishing their mode of passing from murder. The only legal killing that can take place within the polis is the voluntary death of sacrifice, which in turn delineates the place of life itself.

Existence outside of the polis is existence in the realm of the dead. Voluntary death creates the basis of human identity, since humans are separated from the gods by the act of cooking and the eating of the sacrifice. To reject animal sacrifice, as the Orphics and Pythagoreans did, was not simply becoming a vegetarian but rejecting civilization entirely (Detienne, p. 6).

While issues of pollution were certainly present, the primary transformation of sacrifice was less about powers out of the control of humans and gods and more about the issue of what defines human existence. As such, issues of substitutability appear to be less important and are not discussed as much. The nodding of the head by the animal marks the transformation of that animal into a culturally-

defined willing being whose death can demarcate the limits of culture over and against the world of involuntary and random death.

Hawaiian sacrifice, in contrast, transforms the human world by incorporating it into and separating it from the divine world and not so much by controlling nearly out of control polluting forces. The Hawaiian first fruits sacrifice de-divinizes the majority of the harvest by transforming and thus incorporating part of it into the deity. At the same time, "…other sacrifices divinize men and his implements in order to make him able to effect the material appropriation of nature (Valeri, 1985, p. 77)." Human sacrifice, which can only be carried out by the king, incorporates either a vanquished enemy or a close rival to the throne into the realm of the victorious king via the incorporation of enemies and rivals into the divine world. This theory of human sacrifice has nothing to do with martyrdom or ancient Israelite notions of human sacrifice.

A pig representing a human is only a small part of the condensed semiotic meanings of any single rite. Other aspects of the sacrifice, including slaughtering, using the blood, cooking and eating the flesh, can all represent processes of ritual transformation. Killing, for example, is a dramatically transformative act. To eat, Valeri

writes, is to “encompass, possess, transform and also to destroy (p. 56).” Explanations of sacrifice do not easily travel from culture to culture exactly because of the incredibly diverse ways in which the “standing” for relationships of all these transformational processes have been understood. The cultural meaning of leaving a vegetable to rot or cooking a goat on the altar is not present in the act itself but in the unfolding attempts to interpret the act. These transformations have been employed towards a full range of human goals, as the rich history of theories of sacrifice attests. Any general theory of sacrifice would have to presumably demonstrate shared conscious articulations, such as, for example, offering as gifts, or unconscious meanings, such as Nancy Jay’s theory of animal sacrifice as attempting to accrue birthing power to men {Jay, 1992}. Otherwise killing, cooking and eating animals encode meanings as diverse as the human imagination is rich.

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