

The Wei Tzu Document of the *Shu Ching*: A Sacrificial Crisis in Confucian Thought

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The classic Confucian literature of China explicitly acknowledges the central social function of the sacrificial rites or 禮. Quite apart from any written laws or legal system, such practices alone are said to unite society and establish order. Furthermore, for a king to neglect the observance of the rites is to invite discord and the outbreak of violence within the community leading to dynastic decay. In the *Shu Ching*, for instance, we can observe that the origin of the famous concept of 天命, which is the ideological cornerstone of traditional Confucian historiography, and which sanctions the power of a dynasty to rule, lies in sacrificial thought, for it is theorized that it is the neglect of the rites which convinces Heaven to withdraw its blessing.¹ It would seem that the practice of the rites coincides with the origin of a just Confucian society. Yet Confucius himself was reluctant to theorize about what we now know was a dramatic event inaugurating this social institution in Shang times: the sacrifice of a human victim. Did Confucius know about the violence at the origin of the rites? The purely textual evidence, taken at face value, seems inconclusive. Confucius complains about a lack of documents describing the Shang customs. But when asked about the meaning of the most important ancestral sacrifice of his own day, he responded in the following manner:

或問禘之說。子曰、不知也、知其說者、之於天下也、其如示諸斯乎。指其掌。

Someone asked about the theory of the *ti* sacrifice. The Master said, 'It is not something I understand, for whoever understands it will be able to manage the Empire as easily as if he had it here,' pointing to his palm.²

I would argue that Confucius employs a strange deception here when talking about the theory of ancestral sacrifice, for he recognizes its supreme power for generating beneficial social effects, yet he maintains there is

something in the exercise of this power which eludes a theoretical grasp of its inner workings. Is this reluctance due to simple modesty, as some have maintained? Perhaps, but if we examine some statements attributed to Confucius by the T'an-Kung B chapter of the *Li Chi* 禮記 where the merits of very specific ritual practices are discussed, we find not reluctance but genuine fear. I am referring in particular to his objection to the practice of burying wooden puppets, 俑, with the dead. How are we moderns to understand this fear, which seems to us almost quaint, as being real? How could such a seemingly harmless practice lead to the breakdown of society, for Confucius is concerned with nothing less than this in objecting to it? Now, according to the opinion of Chinese authors, these "dangerous" objects were a kind of automata with movable limbs, more closely resembling human beings than did another object often buried with the dead, the straw spirits or souls, 芻靈. These straw substitutes are on the other hand warmly commended by China's great philosopher. And the reason that Confucius gives for his anathema of wooden puppets is revealing when one considers that it is a fear of mimetic phenomena. Because of their resemblance to human beings, the wooden puppets represent to Confucian sacrificial thought the danger of a return to the use of real human victims:

孔子謂爲芻靈者善、謂爲俑者不仁、不殆於用人乎哉。

... "Confucius declared that those who made straw souls were virtuous, but those who made wooden puppets were inhumane, for was there not a danger of their leading to the use of living victims?"³

In order to further substantiate my claim that it is a mimetic *return* to human sacrifice that concerns Confucius here, allow me to cite another passage, this one from the *Mencius*, in which he is recorded as saying something about the unknown inventor of these puppets. In effect, Confucius denies him any ancestral rites:

仲尼曰、始作俑者、其無後乎。

Chung-ni said, "Was he not without posterity who first made wooden images to bury with the dead . . . ?"⁴

Because the man made semblances of men for that purpose he is to be cursed in the worst way Confucius thought possible: he will have no descendents to

practice his ancestral rites. So the rites are clearly mimetic in nature insofar as they repeat or copy an initial act of sacrifice about whose true nature we have seen Confucius equivocate. Legge's historical notes on the wooden puppets are revealing in this context also because they were written before the archeological discoveries of Shang human sacrifice:

6. 俑—in ancient times, bundles of straw were made, to represent men imperfectly, called 𤑔, and carried to the grave, and buried with the dead, as attendants upon them. In middle antiquity, i. e. after the rise of the Chau dynasty, for those bundles of straw, wooden figures of men were used, having springs in them, by which they could move. Hence they were called 俑, as if 俑 = 踊. By and by came the practice of burying living persons with the dead, which Confucius thought was an effect of this invention, and therefore he branded the inventor as in the text.⁵

If we reverse Legge's historical sequence we will come closer to the truth and to the nature of Confucian sacrificial thought. Human sacrifice lies at origin of the rites, and by a sort of displacement and disguise about which historically we can know very little, the human victims of these ancestral rites have been forgotten.

Actually, there are two important aspects of Confucian sacrificial thought that need to be emphasized here. I mentioned above a strange deception on the the part of Confucian discourse about sacrifice, namely, that it both recognizes the power of this institution for controlling violence and disorder within the community and at the same time it refuses to know anything about its origins. In the passage from the *Li Chi*, however, where the attention of Confucius is focused on the object of ritual, the victim, we find that first of all he openly recognizes that the mechanism of sacrifice depends on a principle of substitution. He recommends, in fact, that straw spirits be substituted for wooden puppets. Secondly, we should not fail to note that Confucius is deeply worried that this process of sacrificial displacement may reverse itself along the chain of substitutions from that which lies furthest outside the community (the straw spirits) to that which is directly inside it (a human victim). It would seem, then, that it is the function of the rites to expel violence from the community, but that this violence (and perhaps that directed at the inventor of the puppets himself by Confucius) is in itself denied or disguised by saying that it is the divinized ancestors who require the rite.

What we can now theorize from the comparison of these "humanizing" remarks on the nature of sacrifice by Confucius is a play of two sacrificial substitutions in Confucian thought itself. We can interpret sacrifice as an act of violence inflicted by the community on a surrogate victim, and ritual as a mimetic gesture towards this original event. But Confucian thought cannot speak directly about this event, for it divides ritual practices into two opposing aspects. Depending on its propensity for mimesis of a human victim, a ritual can be either harmful or beneficial for the community. One ritual practice serves to expel violence from the community and is therefore benevolent, 仁 . The other bears too close a resemblance to an original act of violence in which relatives of the dead were immolated and threatens a breakdown of differences and hierarchies within the community. This play of substitutions in Confucian sacrificial thought still implies, however, a degree of misunderstanding, for the role of the ancestors in the rite has not been clarified. We can only surmise that they also must have arisen somehow (and certain stories about them, their myths and legends) from an original act of violence on the part of the community against a human victim. In summary, these remarks by Confucius seem to tell us that the institution of sacrifice depends for its efficacy on its ability to conceal the displacement upon which the rite is based. Without some awareness, however, of the original act of violence, no mimetic substitution, protective, beneficial, or harmful, can take place and the sacrifice loses all efficacy also. Hence the strange deception in Confucian sacrificial thought, at once revealing and concealing about its object, the violence which it postulates at the origin of culture.

We might even go further than Confucius and say that without the institution of sacrifice, civilization and symbolic thought, which are based on differences, are impossible. Such in essence is the hypothesis of René Girard in his *La Violence et le sacré* (1972), and those familiar with this remarkable book of anthropological speculation will immediately recognize that my brief foray into the nature of Confucian sacrificial thought and its reluctance to talk openly about the sacred follows the spirit, if not the letter, of Girard's own deconstructions. Indeed, it was suggested by several remarks that Girard makes in passing in that work about the Confucian classics and the institution of sacrifice to ancestors.⁶ In keeping with the general thrust of post-structuralist methodology, it is Girard's strategy to argue that a text is constituted more by concealment than by revelation of its themes and that critical

activity is linked to this concealment:

Examiner un texte dans la perspective de la victime émissaire et de son mécanisme, considérer la "littérature" en termes de la violence collective, c'est interroger sur ce que ce texte *omet* autant et plus encore que sur ce que dont il fait état. Là, sans doute, et la démarche essentielle d'une entreprise radicalement critique.⁷

To examine a text from the perspective of the emissary victim and its mechanism, to consider "literature" in terms of collective violence, is to consider it in terms of what the text *omits* as much — if not more — as what it indicates. That is surely the essential first step in any radically critical venture. (My translation)

Girard defines the task of the critic in investigating myths and literature (if not religious discourse) as that of exposing the mechanism of unanimous victimage, an event disguised or hidden behind sacred myth; he charges the critic with becoming cognizant of the sacrificial displacements that constitute certain literary modes. Since by definition the only real scapegoats are those we are unable to acknowledge as such in religious discourses, the demystification of scapegoat effects — the divinization of founding ancestors, sacred kings, and indeed the origin of the sacred itself — is to be found in the revelations about these practices made by literature. In the Girardian textual economy, religious discourse can never speak directly about its true object, that is, the control of the outbreak of mimetic violence within the human community, for its power resides in its concealment of the social function of religion itself. Literary discourse, fictions, by contrast, can reveal the truth of religion.

Particularly instructive in this regard is Girard's highly original and provocative reading of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, from which he claims to derive interpretive principles that aid him in understanding what he terms the sacrificial crisis. *Oedipus Rex* does indeed open with a sense of the failure of the rites to purify the community and with a hunt, ironically initiated by Oedipus himself, for the guilty person responsible for the pollution. Sophocles could count on his audience knowing the myth of Oedipus, which says that he is different from everyone else, a monster, in fact, having married his mother and having murdered his father. But it is what Sophocles does with this myth of differences that is instructive to Girard. As the play progresses, a plague of conflictual violence rapidly breaks down differences.

between the principal antagonists. Oedipus, Creon and Tiresias are revealed as essentially the same by the nature of their accusations of each other (using almost the same language, they accuse each other of being the one responsible for the pollution), and as essentially the same in the object of their desire: the city of Thebes. Girard is led by the text of Sophocles to posit the existence of a primordial appropriative mimesis operating in primitive communities (those in which a legal system transcending blood revenge is absent) which, if not controlled, leads to the violent breakdown of differences. We are told that when any gesture of appropriation is imitated, rivalry and conflict cannot fail to appear for the simple reason that two hands are reaching for the same object. In violent symmetry and reciprocity of conflict, Oedipus, Creon and Tiresias become *doubles* of each other:

Si le mythe ne pose pas explicitement le problème de la différence, il le resout, et de façon aussi brutale que formelle. Cette solution, c'est le parricide et l'inceste. Dans le mythe proprement dit, entre Oedipe et les autres, il n'est pas question d'identité et de reciprocité. On peut affirmer d'Oedipe une chose au moins qui n'est vraie de personne d'autre. Il est seul coupable de parricide et de l'inceste. Il nous apparaît comme une exception monstrueuse; il ne ressemble à personne et personne ne lui ressemble.⁸

If the myth does not explicitly pose the problem of differences, it nonetheless resolves it in a manner both brutal and formal. This solution involves patricide and incest. In the myth properly speaking, it is not a question of identity and reciprocity between Oedipus and the others. One can affirm about Oedipus one thing at least which is not true of any other person. He alone is guilty of patricide and incest. He appears to us as a monstrous exception; he resembles nobody, and nobody resembles him. (My translation)

For Girard the tragic inspiration operates a partial deconstruction of the myth of Oedipus which is told from the point of view of cultural differences. Like the text of persecution, another Girardian category which we will take up in a moment in connection with the *Shu Ching*, the myth singles out a victim who is later deified. Although the murderer's expulsion is required by the oracle, and Sophocles' play ends by affirming the truth of Apollo, the play opens up for us for a brief moment a glimpse into the total destruction that threatens the primitive community if the disease of appro-

priative mimesis is not controlled. When the chorus, representing the divided fears and hopes of the community (now being for Oedipus, now for the oracle) finally polarizes and finds its unity in reviling Oedipus, we understand why. Sophocles ends his play by affirming the truth of religious discourse. The terrifying outbreak of reciprocal violence and vengeance is finally arrested by finding the guilty one. The cure is administered by a monster who becomes the bearer of differences, the scapegoat. What has really happened though, according to Girard, is that the community has arbitrarily ganged up on one of its members. Girard pushes this insight provided by Sophocles back to the origins of myth and ritual in the sacrificial crisis. Ritual is the attempt to control the outbreak of violence within the community by imitating the original act of expulsion. It is a re-enactment of mimetic escalation, like that between Creon and Oedipus, Oedipus and Tiresias. Myth is the retrospective transfiguration of these violent realities. Girard's understanding of the relationship between myth and ritual reverses most modern accounts, especially that of structuralism, for it depends on a historical narrative summed up in a recent interview as postulating

... a moment of violent crisis at the beginning — the plague of conflictual undifferentiation — which is then arrested by the sacrificial mechanism of the scapegoat, whose role is to institute hierarchies and to determine differences, to impose values, where before there was only conflict, through the dialectical play of the mimetic rivalry. The memory of the violence and of the expulsion is preserved yet concealed under the distorting veils of ritual sacrifice which both falsifies the nature of the crisis and moralizes the scapegoat mechanism. At later stages in culture the function of ritual is taken over by literature which reproduces the mystifications, but in certain instances — the great texts of Sophocles, Euripides, Shakespeare and the Bible — lifts the veil enough ... to glimpse the long hidden historical truth that lies at the origin.⁹

The implications of such a hypothesis and methodology as Girard's for the study of Chinese culture are manifold, but I can make only a few remarks here. The Chinese origin myths themselves vividly raise the issue of scapegoating as the genesis of the ritual system. For instance, the myth of Hou Chi (as narrated in the *Shih Ching*) manifests the transformations ascribed to the scapegoat according to Girard.¹⁰ At first Hou Chi is expelled and

debased, but later he becomes a source of divine power and fecundity, the ancestor of the Chou and the founder of their sacrificial rites, which we know were of primary importance in enabling the Chou to distinguish themselves culturally from the Shang while claiming a continuity of culture with them.¹¹ Chou culture defined itself on the basis of an abandonment of human sacrifice (Hou Chi is associated with agriculture and the offering of sacrifices not of people but of grain; his name means literally "Lord Millet"). Furthermore most modern scholars of Chinese myth accept rather uncritically the idea that "pristine" myth precedes historically the appearance of ritual and that because of the problem of euhemerization (i. e. the re-writing of Chinese myth into historical legends by Confucian historiography) the systematic study of this area of concern is next to impossible.¹² But Girard's hypothesis, by recasting radically the entire problematic of myth's relationship to ritual in terms of a violence at the origin that generates them both, allows us to see Confucian euhemerization in a different light. Might it not reveal, in fact, a partial "deconstruction" of Shang sacrificial thought? I will take up these issues again in the conclusion to this paper.

Even more important for the study of Chinese literature is the fact that Girard's hypothesis entails an analysis of literature in terms of cultural crises. Girard has studied two such periods in western civilization: what he calls the Crisis of Degree in Elizabethan England as revealed in the text of Shakespeare and that of Athens' Golden Age as revealed in tragic drama. Now, drama as we know it in the West was not part of the society that produced Confucian thought, but traditional Confucian historiography, which influenced all of later Chinese literature, is written using a model of periodic cycles of order and disorder in society. Disorder in particular is defined as a loss of ritual efficacy, as the opening arguments of this paper have demonstrated. Interpreted in terms of Girard's notion of a cycle of de-structuration or crisis plus restructuration through unanimous victimage, can Confucian historiography be rewritten in a "deconstructive" mode, its major terms (such as 仁) reinscribed in the context of the sacrificial crisis? That is what I will attempt to do in the remainder of this paper with the help of Girard and by broadening my horizon to take into account the cultural crisis that Confucius was trying to resolve by advocating the imitation and adoption of the rites of Chou. In this perspective, the whole thrust of Confucian sacrificial thought becomes clear.

The feudal world of ancient China during the Warring States period was troubled by a sacrificial crisis or breakdown of degree. The *Analects* of Confucius tell us that this was a time in which "throughout the world there is no Tao," 天下無道, indicating a withdrawal of the sacred.¹³ Mencius was certainly impressed by the number of cases of blood revenge in his time, and according to T'ung-Tsu Ch'u it seems not improbable that in this period no prohibitions operated to restrict the taking of revenge.¹⁴ Furthermore, during this period of social metamorphosis, not only did strife and disorder persist, making the livelihood of the people ever more precarious, but also all of the customs and institutions that had previously united people's minds and preserved social order were shaken to the point of collapse by the violent reciprocity of mimetic rivalry, their former effectiveness dissipated. This is made clear in Liu Hsiang's preface to the 戰國策, where the crisis is ascribed to the competition between rivals who took one another as models:

仲尼既沒之後、田氏取齊、六卿分晉、道德大廢、上下失序。至秦孝公捐禮讓而貴戰爭、棄仁義而用詐譏、苟以取強而已矣。夫篡盜之人列爲侯王、詐譏之國興立爲強。是以傳相放效、後生師之。遂相吞滅、并大兼小、暴師、經歲、流血滿野。父子不相親、兄弟不相安、夫婦離散、莫保其命、溘然道德絕矣。

After Chung-ni (i.e. Confucius) died, the T'ien family siezed the state of Ch'i, and the six chief ministers divided up the state of Chin. Morality largely fell into decline; superior and inferior lost their status. Duke Hsiao of Ch'in abandoned the rites and yieldingness and prized warfare, he discarded benevolence and righteousness and employed trickery and deceit — solely in the quest for power. Usurpers came to be ranked with princes and nobles, treacherous and deceitful states waxed to the status of great powers. Then this came to be imitated, and those who followed took Ch'in as their model. Thereafter (the States) all undertook to swallow and annihilate one another, annexing large and small, engaging in violent war year after year, shedding blood through all the countryside. Fathers and sons failed to observe family bonds, brother could not trust brother, husband and wives were separated, and no one could guarantee his own life. In chaos and confusion, morality was extinguished. (Translation by F. W. Mote, slightly adapted)¹⁵

Here we see the main features of late Chou society — its increasingly violent breakdown of differences — that moved such men as Confucius to

make critical inquiry into the causes and influences of these great changes, according to a Han dynasty Confucian scholar. Moreover, the situation seems to have gotten worse after the death of Confucius, as if his living presence alone were enough to restrain the crisis, which reaches its paroxysm when the usurpations within the state of Ch'in are taken as a model elsewhere (the key transitional phrase indicating mimesis is 相放效, 後生師之), spreading then rapidly to the rest of society until all is chaos. What is discarded by Duke Hsiao, who then becomes the new model, are the Confucian rites, 禮, and benevolence, 仁. Now, Confucian sacrificial thought and its concern for maintaining social degrees, as manifested in this preface of Liu Hsiang, was among other things an attempt to establish 仁 or benevolence in the human community. The reader may recall that certain ritual practices are said by Confucius to possess this quality of 仁. But for the most part it remains an almost transcendental concept in his philosophy. No human being is ever spoken of as possessing it entirely. There are, however, legendary figures mentioned in the classic texts who are said to possess it, and they function as models for Confucian thought in practice. I am referring in particular to three figures mentioned in the 微子第十八 of the *Analects*, a chapter whose object is to illustrate and vindicate the course of Confucius himself. Legge's historical note will serve as background on these three worthies of the end of the Shang dynasty:

The chief of Wei was an elder brother (by a concubine) of the tyrant Chau, the last sovereign of the Yin dynasty, B. C. 1154-1122. The chief of Chi, and Pi-kan, were both uncles of the tyrant. The first, seeing that remonstrances availed nothing, withdrew from the court, wishing to preserve the sacrifices of their family amid the ruin which he saw impending. The second was thrown into prison, and, to escape death, feigned madness. He was used by Chau as a buffoon. Pi-kan, persisting in his remonstrances, was put barbarously to death, the tyrant having his heart torn out that he might see, he said, a sage's heart.¹⁶

Although it certainly dates from a period much earlier than that in which Confucius lived, the Wei Tzu document of the *Shu Ching*, which tells their story and which must have been the source of the Confucian reading of 仁 (though the word 仁 is not mentioned in the text), is nonetheless important for the deconstruction of Confucian sacrificial thought for several reasons. First of all, my supposition is that Confucius wants *his* readers to

form an historical analogy between the crisis of his own time and that represented as happening to the Shang dynasty because of the depredations of the tyrant Chou. Deconstructive readings often trace the way a text is read through a process of triangulation, juxtaposing modern with historically contemporaneous readings, to measure degrees of misreading. Another reason then which makes this document deconstructively important is that it was already partially demystified at the time of Confucius, even before we get to modern readings which declare it a pure fiction:

子貢曰、紂之不善、不如是之甚也。

Chap. XX. Tzu-kung said, 'Chau's wickedness was not so great as that name implies.'¹⁷

That is, despite the fact that it depicts a sacrificial crisis in the Shang state, some of the accusations against the tyrant Chou were seen as so wildly improbable by one of Confucius's disciples as not to be believed. Most important, then, is the fact that the Wei Tzu document of the *Shu Ching* was seen as belonging to a class of texts — not quite true history, not quite myth — a class of texts which Girard sees as offering us the key to the correct historical interpretation of myth. These texts are marked by the presence of both believable and unbelievable features:

In the text of persecution — as in most etiological myths—we have two kinds of themes. First we have unbelievable themes, like the magical power of the Jews to harm the community, as a result of their unnatural acts, similar to those of Oedipus. Second we have themes that are more or less believable such as the conflictual undifferentiation (the plague), persecution, and re-differentiation (the restoration or establishment of order).

Unlike the mythologist, the historian does not feel that the unbelievable character of some themes invalidates the entire text as far as extra-textual information is concerned. Just the opposite. The more unbelievable the accusations against the likely victims, the more believable the persecution itself becomes, and the reality of the social disturbances that must have triggered it. Once the distortion introduced by the perspective of the persecutors is perceived, everything becomes clear; the genesis and structure of all textual features are too well matched to escape the perceptive reader.¹⁸

In the Confucian "reading" of the Wei Tzu document of the *Shu Ching*, we may be witness to the genesis of just such a "myth that failed," as Girard later defines the text of persecution, for Confucian sacrificial thought in this early period does possess the power to demystify scapegoat effects, at least partially. In order to more properly assess this ability, however, it will be helpful to consider first the reading of a modern historian, H. G. Creel, where violence and the sacred are kept in rigidly separate conceptual realms.¹⁹ In his reading of the document, Creel pronounces it a total forgery, arguing convincingly that it is not a piece of Shang literature as it claims to be. Creel notes the inconsistencies in the dramatized format, which appears in the form of a colloquy between three high officials of the Shang state (Wei, step-brother of the tyrant Chou, Chi and Pi Kan, his uncles) who debate the most appropriate course of action in the face of total cultural collapse. Among other things, Creel notes that the representational content of the document itself raises the problem of motivation, for it contains highly treasonable material and would have cost them their lives if the tyrant Chou had heard of their remarks. If such conversations had taken place in the exact wording of the direct discourse given us (and this is highly doubtful, in Creel's view), would anyone have taken the trouble to write them down? To be sure, it does not contain a detailing of the licentious pastimes of the monster Chou, but what makes the document unbelievable to Creel is mainly the fact that the condemnation of the Shang comes out of the mouth of Wei Tzu himself, and, in his opinion, it is too wholesale and too complete to be convincing. He says of the whole document that it "compares favorably with the wildest propaganda levelled against each other by the belligerents in the World War."²⁰

In short Creel believes that he has entirely demystified this document, partly because he is able to perceive the distortion introduced by the perspective of the persecutors, in his mind the Chou conquerors who were anxious to put the blame for the fall of the Shang dynasty on the loss of the mandate of Heaven. Is he right, however, in not granting any reality to the social disturbances in the text which are represented in terms of a sacrificial crisis? Creel argues that the document is most unbelievable on this point:

The author of the *Wei Tzu* is even less plausible when he tells us that "Now the people of Yin will even steal away the pure and perfect victims devoted to the spirits . . ." It is impossible to believe that this occurred

during what was, as the book itself tells us, a time of general calamity. The Shang oracle inscriptions make it abundantly evident that the Shangs were, if anything, even more profoundly religious, more completely assured of their dependence on the gods, than the Chous. And even in the sophisticated days of the present people who are normally indifferent frequently turn to religion in time of trouble. It is completely out of line with everything we know of early China to suppose that the Shangs would have tempted fate by insulting the gods when they were already in difficulties. On the other hand this is exactly the sort of story which their enemies would circulate about them.²¹

Now if the institution of sacrifice was as important to the Shang concept of cultural order as Creel maintains, then how could it fail to be affected by the Chou conquest, especially since, as Creel himself points out elsewhere, it was probably the Chous who, as war captives of the Shang, were the victims of these rites.²² Their entire ritual system must have undergone an inversion, with they themselves now the victims, and they may have represented themselves to each other as such. Creel's failure of insight here lies in his inability to link the time of general calamity, which he grants as real, together with the crisis of sacrificiality. For the Shang crisis, as will become clear in a moment, was not a crisis of belief, of doctrine (Creel says that the Shang were "profoundly religious" in precisely this modern sense), but rather of ritual, of practice. The sacrificial crisis is the disappearance of the sacrificial rites, coinciding with the disappearance of the difference between impure violence and sacred violence, and thereby the loss of any principle by which to deflect violence outside the group. Violent appropriation of victims is the next logical step in this process.

I do not dispute Creel's claim that this document because of its stylistic features must be of Chou origins. I am simply dealing with the level of representations, both in Creel's text and in the document itself. True, the text does represent the downfall of the Shang as due to their own sacrificial impieties before the Chou conquest, but what is to be gained by asserting, as Creel does, that the sacrificial crisis depicted in the text is only a fiction? Will it aid us in understanding how Confucius understood his own period? It certainly does not aid us in understanding the interplay of believable and unbelievable features in the text, which a Girardian reading could do. In order then to make those features more explicit and clearer to the reader, I will quote the entire document and add a Girardian commentary:

微子若曰、父師少師、殷其弗或亂正四方、我祖底遂陳于上、我用沈酗于酒、用亂敗厥德于下。殷罔不小人、奸草竊姦宄、卿士師師非度、凡有辜罪、乃罔恒獲、小民方興、相爲敵讐、今殷其淪喪、若涉大水、其無津涯、殷遂喪越至于今。曰、父師少師、我其發出狂、吾家老遜于荒、今爾無指、告于顛隲、若之何其。

父師若曰、王子、天毒降災荒殷邦、方興沈酗于酒。乃罔畏畏、弗其耆長、舊有位人。今殷民乃攘竊神祇之犧牲、用以容、將食無災。降監殷民、用又讐讐、召敵讐不怠、罪合于一、「多瘠罔詔。商今其有災、我與受其敗、商其淪喪、我罔爲臣僕、詔王子出迪、我舊云刻子、王子弗出、我乃顛隲。自靖、人自獻于先王、我不顧行遜。

I. The viscount of Wei spoke to the following effect: "Grand Tutor and Junior Tutor, the House of Yin, we may conclude, can no longer exercise rule over the four quarters of the empire. The great deeds of our founder were displayed in former ages, but by our being lost and maddened with wine, we have destroyed the effects of his virtue in these after times. The people of Yin, small and great are given to highway robberies, villainies and treachery. The nobles and officers imitate one another in violating the laws; and for criminals there is no certainty that they will be apprehended. The lesser people consequently rise up and make violent outrages on one another. The dynasty of Yin is now sinking in ruin; its condition is like that of one crossing a large stream, who can find neither ford nor bank. That Yin should be hurrying to ruin at the present pace!"

He added, "Grand Tutor and Junior Tutor, we are manifesting insanity. The venerable of our families have withdrawn to the wilds; and now you indicate nothing, but tell me of the impending ruin:—what is to be done?"

II. The Grand Tutor made about the following reply:—"King's son, Heaven in anger is sending down calamities and wasting the country of Yin. Thence has come about that lost and maddened condition through wine. He has no reverence for things he ought to reverence, but does despite to the aged elders, the old official fathers. Now the people of Yin will even steal away the pure and perfect victims devoted to the spirits of heaven and earth; and their conduct is connived at, and though they proceed to eat the victims, they suffer no punishment. On the other hand, when I look down and survey the people of Yin, the methods of government to them are hateful exactions, which call forth outrages and hatred; and this without ceasing. Such crime equally belongs to all in authority, and multitudes are starving with none to whom to appeal. Now is the time of Shang's calamity;—I will arise and share in its ruin. When ruin overtakes Shang, I will not be the servant of another dynasty. But I tell you, O king's son, to go away as being the best course for you. Formerly I injured you by what I said, but if you do not go forth now, our sacrifices will entirely perish. Let us rest entirely in our several parts, and present ourselves to the former kings. I do not think of making my escape. (Transla-

tion by Legge, slightly adapted)²³

In the catalogue of calamities (災) described here we can discern the main features of a sacrificial crisis according to Girard. The reader may recall that the sacrificial crisis is brought about by the disappearance of the rites. As the opening lines of Wei Tzu's speech make clear, it is the ritual practices of the ancestor of the Shang, T'ang, that have fallen into neglect. The result has been that the effect of these virtuous practices (i.e. beneficial social order based on the expulsion of violence from within the community) has been destroyed also. The distinction between pure and impure violence has therefore been effaced. This is expressed in the text as the state of drunkenness. Wine is no longer used in moderation for sacrifice, but spills wildly at the drunken orgies of the tyrant Chou, we may assume. Contagious reciprocal violence is spreading in the community also, for Wei Tzu says the people of Yin of every class are given to acts of violence, but the nobility especially are singled out as being caught up in conflictual mimesis (literally, as in 戰國策, 師師非度 they teach each other without degree or limit; again an indication of the breakdown of degree). Finally, Girard tells us, when the religious framework of a society starts to totter, the whole cultural foundation is put in jeopardy. Values are rapidly eroded and the cultural structure seems on the verge of collapse. This cultural condition is summed up admirably by the metaphor of one crossing a stream which Wei Tzu uses at the end of his speech: there is neither ford nor bank, only the threat of further undifferentiation. Despite what Creel has said, I find this account in the main believable, for Wei Tzu does not in fact blame everyone as it first appears. Among those not involved in spreading the violence within the community are the venerable ones of the royal families 耄 who have withdrawn into the wild. For me, the discount of Wei manifests a concern for his community rather than a scapegoating of it.

To the question what is to be done about this state of crisis, the Grand Tutor gives an interesting answer, but not before detailing some of the crimes of the tyrant Chou. We must see him, I think, as the real scapegoat of this text of persecution, for it is his death at the hands of the conquering Chou army that will put an end to this sacrificial crisis as if from the outside. The tyrant Chou is the monstrous brother-double of Wei Tzu, and that much of what is represented here is unbelievable. Indeed, even in the time of Confucius, as we have noted above, the sins of the tyrant Chou were not

to be believed. The Grand Tutor also details the problem of primordial appropriative mimesis infecting the community. The verb 攘 here means to appropriate for one's use, and it is the pure victims devoted to the spirits and ancestors that are being stolen. In other words, these are not ordinary robberies, but sacrilege, but the distinction between the two kinds of robbery is being rapidly eroded as are all other differences. There is a certain amount of mystification in the Grand Tutor's explanation for this, however, since he ascribes it to Heaven's sending down these calamities. Yet I find the sense of everyone trying to grasp a bit of divine violence and power to be strong in the text and the Grand Tutor does say that the crimes belong equally to all, thus implicitly recognizing that the violence is within the human community. As a matter of fact, the most interesting thing about his speech is the course of action he says he plans to take. He is going to sacrifice himself, 自獻 (Legge's translation is rather emasculated in rendering this phrase as "present oneself to an ancestor," but he did not have access to the oracle bones, and Creel did, so I follow his translation). Evidently, he recognizes that the situation is extreme enough to warrant human sacrifice.

In conclusion, then, it must be said first that we cannot accept Creel's reading of the document. The description of the sacrificial crisis given by Wei Tzu in particular seems accurate when compared to what we know of other cultural crises. Though certainly not equal to the *Oedipus Rex* in dramatic power, it nonetheless is a fiction which stages the various phases of the sacrificial crisis. It refers to the tyrant Chou's "using disorder," 用亂, in a time of general calamity, the withdrawal of the sacred virtue, 德, the rising cycles of revenge, 讐, the spreading of the epidemic or plague, 疢, resulting from conflictual mimesis (Legge refers to *laws* being broken, but there is no indication of this in the text, only imitation without degree or measure, 度) and a final return to ritual practices, i.e., the sacrifice to ancestors. On the other hand, we cannot accept the accusations against the tyrant Chou either. This makes of the Wei Tzu document for Confucian thought a text of persecution in the Girardian sense, and not the simple euhemerization of any myth surrounding the life of the tyrant Chou. We may assume that the power of Confucian thought to demystify certain scapegoat effects must have coincided, historically, with a decrease in their power to delude. And only a Girardian reading can account for the interplay of believable and unbelievable aspects that this text manifested in the context of Confucian sacrificial thought.

We must not forget, however, that Confucius sees in the behavior of the viscount of Wei and the others a transcendental or "deified" model of 仁, benevolence. But the original meaning of 仁 is "possessing the qualities of one's tribe."²⁴ And the members of a tribe show a forbearance towards one another that they do not show to outsiders. When we consider the fact that the category from which ritual victims are most often drawn is that of the outsider, we begin to unveil the origin of this supposedly transcendental concept of benevolence. For it can now be reinscribed into the context of the sacrificial crisis represented in the Wei Tzu document of the *Shu Ching*, and shown to be based on a displacement of meaning that still conceals for Confucius the violence at the origins of culture. And when we read in the *Analects* (XII, i) that the ruler who achieves 仁 will be the one who can show a complete submission to ritual, we come almost full circle to our opening quotation about the power of the man who understands the theory of sacrifice. He will hold the Empire in the palm of his hand because he has understood the nature of the sacrificial crisis.

ENDNOTES

1. James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. III (1895 rpt. Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 1960), pp. 420-33.
2. The translation used here is D. C. Lau, *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 69.
3. As quoted and translated in J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China* (Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1984), p. 807.
4. James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. II, p. 133.
5. Ibid.
6. René Girard, *La Violence et le sacré* (Paris: Grasset, 1972), pp. 22, 77.
7. Girard, p. 284.
8. Girard, p. 108.
9. "Interview with René Girard," *Diacritics*, 8, No. 1 (Spring 1978), p. 35.
10. James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. IV, pp. 465-72.
11. Joseph R. Levenson and Franz Schurman, *China: An Interpretive History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 14.
12. Derk Bodde, "Myths of Ancient China," in *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, ed. Samuel Noah Kramer (New York: Doubleday Books, 1961), pp. 369-408.
13. James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. I, p. 310.
14. T'ung-Tsu Ch'u, *Law and Society in Traditional China*, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Première Série, Etudes IV (Paris: Sorbonne, 1961), p. 80.

15. As quoted in Kung-Chuan Hsiao, *A History of Chinese Political Thought*, trans. F. W. Mote (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 6.
16. James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. I, p. 310.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 345.
18. "Interview with Rene Girard," *Diacritics*, p. 40.
19. Herlee Glessner Creel, *Studies in Early Chinese Culture*, American Council of Learned Societies, No. 3 (1938; rpt. Wakefield: Murry Printing Co., 1948), pp. 81-90.
20. Creel, p. 83.
21. Creel, p. 88-89.
22. H. G. Creel, *The Birth of China* (New York: Frederick Unger, 1937), p. 215.
23. James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. III, pp. 273-79.
24. Arthur Waley, *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), pp. 27-29.