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Believing Anew:

Gianni Vattimo and A Form of Faith in Contemporary Culture

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Love is holy because it is like
grace – the worthiness of its object
is never really what matters

Marilynn Robinson
Gilead

Introduction

Today's religious landscape is one that invites reflection on the place of faith, its cultural connections, and its future. This is, in part, due to the various religious sensibilities at play in the present time. On the one hand, there is an attraction to a structured, doctrinal-based form of religion that asks one to recognise a particular authority and to surrender to it. On the other hand, there is a decline in the explicit practice of religion. Our places of worship reflect these dwindling numbers, rows of once full pews now standing empty as attendance falls. There are, of course, several reasons for this decline. Many simply cease practicing, while still professing themselves to be believers; others are drawn to non-Christian religions and New Age practices; and some claim that they have allegiance to any religion. There is, of course, a middle-ground between the two religious sensibilities, which will be the focus of this dissertation. This middle-ground constitutes the reality, and the difficulty, of developing a religious life in contemporary culture. It might be best understood in terms of a search for faith and meaning without, often, adhering to any particular doctrinal framework or authority. Many are choosing to follow their own instincts in searching for something that will provide a spiritual nourishment or enrichment for their lives. While the goal is to encounter something that lies beyond our own selves, the seeker and their own personal experience remains at the heart of this spiritual quest. As a seeker, one is free to search, to engage with others, and to express oneself without being confronted with a set framework of beliefs. This middle-ground is not necessarily free from all Christian influence; many events, courses, and spiritual practices are rooted in Christianity, yet retain the freedom for participants to ask and to answer without being restricted by the parameters set by institutional religions. This search for meaning marks a shift away from the emphasis on institutions and beliefs, focusing more on the pragmatic and experiential elements of faith as a way of life.

The current religious landscape, and the difficulties of coming to faith in such a setting, provides the backdrop for this dissertation. How indeed might we access, or come, to faith in contemporary culture? I will explore this question in relation to the work of Gianni Vattimo and how one might come to faith from the perspective of his writings. I will, for example, tease out his thinking on the use of sacred and secular space in our engagement with works of art as an opening up to the religious dimension of life. In considering this position, it is important not to confuse framework with content. Indeed, many practices that are not affiliated with a formal framework or institution may, nonetheless, act as a point of access to faith. In discussing the question of faith, this dissertation offers a contribution to fundamental theology. The pathway explored here is, of course, only one of the possible avenues left open to us for coming to faith in postmodernity, but, nonetheless, presents a fresh approach to such a question.

Gianni Vattimo's work may be understood as the intersection of his religious, political, and philosophical beliefs. Born in Turin in 1936, his education and upbringing were firmly in the Catholic tradition.[1] He was, for example involved with the Catholic Action Group, (becoming a leader), and he was the diocesan representative of the Student Movement's Catholic Action Group. He was, however, mainly involved with the group for socio-political reasons. During this time, he became friends with Umberto Eco, who was studying with the existentialist, Luigi Pareyson. Vattimo's introduction to Pareyson was through Eco. Vattimo opted to study philosophy in order to combine his interests in religion and politics. His interest in politics and social justice grew, with his socialistic ideology eventually becoming too progressive for the Catholic youth groups with which he was still involved. He was asked to

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[1] The details in this introduction concerning Vattimo's personal history are drawn from the following publications: Santiago Zabala, "Introduction: Gianni Vattimo and Weak Philosophy" in *Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo,* ed. Santiago Zabala (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2007); Gianni Vattimo with Piergiorgio Paterlini, *Not Being God: A Collaborative Autobiography*. Translated by William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Gianni Vattimo, "Philosophy as Ontology of Actuality: A Biographical-Theoretical Interview with Luca Savarino and Frederico Vercellone," *Iris* 1(2009): 311-350.

leave. Following this, he was approached by the director of RAI, the Italian television network, and asked to do some television programmes and documentaries. He did so from 1955-1957, until the directorship of RAI passed to a director who was sympathetic to the Christian Democratic Party. The Party were behind some of the news censorship at the time, with which Vattimo was not comfortable. Simultaneously, Pareyson was encouraging him to teach, so Vattimo put an end to his television career and began teaching. Once again, his political activism proved too much and he was fired from his post after bringing some students to a demonstration against South African Apartheid in 1959. He did, however, continue to teach at the Rosmini high school in Turin until 1962. On finishing the Laurea at the end of 1959, he became Pareyson's assistant. Pareyson had founded the Aesthetic Institute in the University of Turin and Vattimo assisted him with both his publications and with his teaching, sometimes substituting for him in his courses on aesthetics. On gaining his PhD, Vattimo taught aesthetics in Turin, from 1964 onwards.

Vattimo spent two years in Heidelberg while undertaking his PhD, studying under Hans-Georg Gadamer and Karl Löwith. Influenced by his reading of Heidegger, Vattimo began to interpret the God of the Bible in terms of the Heideggerian Being. This reading excluded the discipline of the Church, with which Vattimo was always at odds. His politics and professional work continued to intersect. He succeeded Pareyson as the chair of aesthetics and became the dean of the faculty, holding that position until 1983. While dean of the faculty, Vattimo and other academics were threatened by the Red Brigades, an anarchist group, for not being radical enough. He was involved with the Italian Radical Party at that time. These years were certainly formative for Vattimo. His entire discussion on weak thought, *il pensiero debole*, is, in part, a reaction to the terrorism of the Red Brigades. Vattimo does not, however, condone violence. Weak thinking maintains the dissolution of stable structures (or metaphysics), presented as solid certainties, that act as foundations or truths. Influenced by Nietzsche and Heidegger, weak

thinking claims that there is a plurality of truths, rather than reducing everything to a single ideology. Crucially, for Vattimo, while Nietzsche and Heidegger focused on the dissolution of any such structures, they did not propose a new philosophy to replace them. This way of thinking is hermeneutical, allowing for various experiences and interpretations rather than adhering to a single version of ultimate truth. It appeals and announces, calling for a response instead of demanding.

While Vattimo's political and philosophical beliefs influence his understanding of thought as being weak, *il pensiero debole*, so too do his religious convictions. For him, the incarnation is an event that, at its core, includes a dynamic of weakening. Not only does it have a propensity for weakening, but, given Vattimo's reading of René Girard's work *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World,* he believes is a rejection of both violence and victimization. He maintains further that secularization is in fact a continuation of the process of weakening that began in the incarnation.

This dissertation sets out to examine the form that faith might take in contemporary culture in light of Vattimo's philosophy. The project aims to explore the possibility in his work of a way of coming to faith in a post-modern world that is reflective of the meaning of God's action in Christ, the nature of the Godself, and the character of our own response. His thinking invites a reconsideration of metaphysics, its relationship with Christian faith, and what that might entail in a post-metaphysical age. The recognition that the Christian tradition has been marked by metaphysics, requires us to re-examine our approach to faith in light of what is understood by many to be the dissolution of metaphysics. The emphasis on the need for a new relationship with religion reflective of the current cultural climate is central to this discussion. The aim, then, is to explore a possible avenue through which one might come to faith in our culture that does not rely on a foundational metaphysics.

In order to facilitate the discussion, the thesis is structured tripartitely. To begin with, Part One focuses on Nietzsche and Heidegger as Vattimo's work draws significantly on their thought. The primary focus is to show that we are always dealing with interpretations rather than ultimate, definitive truths. As regards Nietzsche, for whom interpretations can be understood as a response to a particular historical situation, our discussion includes a consideration of the past as a manifestation of historical malady and the eternal return. With regard to Heidegger, as Heideggerian Being underpins to a large degree Vattimo's thought, it will be necessary to explore Heidegger's work on Being, paying attention, particularly, to the ontological difference. Again, the central focus of this section of the thesis is the idea that we do not have an objective worldview; it is, rather, always coloured by our culture, background, and so on. Ultimately, Part One deals with the importance and centrality of the two German philosophers for Vattimo. Indeed, their thinking on the dissolution of strong metaphysical structures is a central theme in Vattimo's work and, therefore, germane to this thesis. It is their respective emphases on nihilism and interpretation that ultimately facilitates Vattimo's development of weak thinking.

Part Two looks to Girard's influence on Vattimo's thought. I will examine, in particular, mimetic theory, which is Girard's discussion of human interrelations. While focusing on the violence arising from mimetic desire, it connects religion, culture, and violence. This is grounded in Girard's recognition that primitive religion is centred on violence itself and on the means by which societies deal with such violence. In terms of Vattimo's later appropriation, the crucial category here is myth. Key to Girard's thought is the fundamental difference between the Gospels and traditional mythic accounts, which seek to cover up the outbreaks of violence in a community. The Gospels exposed the truth of what exactly happens when an outbreak of violence occurs, and, in this way, can be read and understood as a process of desacralization. Going beyond Girard, Vattimo views these same dynamics in terms of his own

discussion of weak thinking. Girard's work offers Vattimo a further foundation on which to develop his thinking on violence in conjunction with social justice, the political, and religion. The section will also discuss Vattimo's particular understanding of what he considers to be the core tenets of Christianity. It will show that, while his work demonstrates a departure from the more classical metaphysics associated with Christianity, he retains what he considers to be its central teachings.

While Part One and Part Two of the dissertation focus on the fundamental influences and themes underpinning Vattimo's work, Part Three will be the culmination of this discussion, offering an exposition of how one might access faith from Vattimo's perspective in contemporary culture. Taking up the theme of myth explored in the previous section, here, the connection between philosophy and religion will be examined as expressed through lived experience in myth. Because of the dissolution of strong metaphysical principles, or truths, Vattimo maintains that a new theory of myth that takes this into account is required. In addition, he maintains that a new understanding of the relationship between religion and secularization is necessary for the same reason. In order to explore what such a new understanding of the relationship between religion and secularization might entail, this section will focus on Vattimo's understanding of aesthetics, which raises questions that are of particular concern in contemporary culture. An example here might be the use of sacred and secular space in our engagement with works of art. Continuing the discussion of art as an opening up to the religious dimension of life leads to a discussion of the eschatological and prophetic character of art itself, recognizing art as a message or form of communication that calls on us to respond.

As a whole, the dissertation seeks to show that Vattimo's thought invites us to engage in new explorations of the possibility of faith in contemporary culture. Of course, the dissertation discusses only one possibility of coming to faith that is independent of a foundational metaphysics. It does, however, illustrate that Vattimo's work offers a pathway for

a renewed engagement with the religious tradition, opening up possibilities for serious reflection with regard to religious questions amid the changing cultural conditions of life. The thesis will emphasize that, ultimately, for Vattimo, there remains the hope that we can still glimpse the God at the centre of weak thought, and that faith itself continues to be a possibility in terms of human existence.

PART ONE

A Foundation for a Contemporary Discussion of Faith

Chapter One

Only Interpretations: Vattimo's Reading of Nietzsche

1.0   Introduction

Nietzsche's thought features extensively throughout Vattimo's writings. In particular, his understanding of nihilism plays a central role in the Torinese's work. This chapter begins by considering the origins of his interest in Nietzsche, both academically and politically. Following on from this, attention is paid to Vattimo's understanding of Nietzsche's nihilism, focusing on active and passive nihilism. We will see that the figure of the artist is the one best able to face the challenges thrown up by nihilism. For Vattimo, nihilism and historicism form the basis of Nietzsche's philosophy, developing together throughout his work. Because of this, the chapter next discusses our relationship to the past in the light of Nietzsche's concept of the historical malady and the eternal return.

Continuing the discussion of Vattimo's understanding of Nietzsche's thought, the chapter's focus shifts to Nietzsche's appreciation of culture. This begins with an exploration of the relationship between philology and philosophy that shaped Nietzsche's writings. Here, the focus is on Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, with its discourse on the Apollonian and Dionysian drives that, according to him, epitomize Greek culture. The next section will explore how Nietzsche's experience as a philologist formed his understanding of truth. Our perception of what is true is coloured by our belonging to a particular era and culture. This leads, then, to an exploration of Nietzsche's morality, encompassing his well-known declaration that 'God is Dead.'

The final part of this chapter deals with Vattimo's treatment of Nietzsche's thought concerning aesthetics. It opens with Vattimo's exploration of the dichotomy between appearance and identity in Nietzsche's work, considering the connection between excess and art. The penultimate section discusses the will to power, considering both the concept and the manuscript of *The Will to Power*. This leads to the very final section, which focuses on art and the will to power where we will see that art is the model of the will to power. The figure of the artist makes a reappearance as Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, who is capable of living through the tragic element in contemporary culture. Essentially, what Vattimo takes from Nietzsche's work is that there is no such thing as an ultimate foundation but only interpretation.

1.1 Vattimo's Understanding of Nietzsche's Nihilism

This section discusses some of the aspects of nihilism that are central to Vattimo's writings on Nietzsche. Beginning with Vattimo's early interest in Nietzsche, it moves to a more in-depth discussion of nihilism, dealing with active and passive nihilism. The next part explores Vattimo's understanding of the development of Nietzsche's thought, which, he maintins, is centred on nihilism and historicism. The section closes with a discussion of the historical malady and the eternal return.

1.1.1 Nietzsche's Influence For Vattimo

Vattimo's supervisor, Luigi Pareyson, encouraged him to study Nietzsche's philosophy.[1] Originally planning to study the work of the German philosopher and

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[1] Vattimo studied at the University of Turin, receiving his degree, the Laurea, in 1959 under the tutelage of Luigi Pareyson. At that time, the Laurea was the highest degree that one could receive in an Italian university. Afterwards, he worked for Pareyson as his assistant, editing publications and occasionally teaching some of Pareyson's courses on aesthetics. Further details are available in Santiago Zabala, "Introduction: Gianni Vattimo and Weak Philosophy" in *Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo*, ed. Santiago Zabala (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2007). See

social critic, Theodor Adorno, Vattimo acted on his supervisor's advice and, in the summer of 1960, began reading Nietzsche. Unable to read German at that time, and, with the works not yet translated into Italian, Vattimo read the French translations of *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Untimely Meditations*. He states that he enjoyed his study, as he found a common thread running through Nietzsche's and Adorno's work, believing that Nietzsche's critique of modernity resembled Adorno's critical perspective.[2] His reading of Nietzsche continued in Heidelberg during the following summer of 1961. This time Vattimo read Nietzsche through a Heideggerean lens. As he was learning German at that time, he read Heidegger's lectures on Nietzsche, which had been published in German. From then on, Vattimo began publishing on Nietzsche, with four essays dating from 1961-1967 collected in *Ipotesi su Nietzsche*.[3] These essays compose the first four chapters of his volume *Dialogue with Nietzsche*: "Nietzsche and the Problem of Temporality," "Nietzsche's Vision of the World;" "The Problem of Historical Knowledge and the Formation of the Nietzschean Idea of Truth," and "Philosophy as Ontological Activity."[4] The latter was also presented at the Royaumont Conference in 1964, in which Nietzsche was first treated as a major philosopher in France.[5] Vattimo also delivered a lecture for the Italian Society of Philosophy entitled

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also Gianni Vattimo with Piergiorgio Paterlini, *Not Being God: A Collaborative Autobiography*. Translated by William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

[2] See Gianni Vattimo, "Philosophy as Ontology of Actuality: A Biographical-Theoretical Interview with Luca Savarino and Frederico Vercellone," *Iris* 1(2009): pp 311-350. For more on Adorno's and Nietzsche's critiques of modern culture, see Karin Bauer, *Adorno's Nietzschean Narratives: Critiques of Ideology, Readings of Wagner* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

[3] Gianni Vattimo, *Ipotesi su Nietzsche* (Turin: Giapichelli, 1967).

[4] Gianni Vattimo, *Dialogue with Nietzsche*, trans. William McCuaig. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. Originally published as *Dialogo con Nietzsche: Saggi 1961-2000* (Milan: Garzanti, 2000).

[5] See Alan D. Schrift, ed, *Poststructuralism and Critical Theory's Second Generation* (Acumen, 2010; reprint Oxon: Routledge, 2014). The French interest in Nietzsche increased after Heidegger's

"Who is Heidegger's Nietzsche?" which became the first chapter for his book *Essere, storia e linguaggio in Heidegger*.[6] In 1964 Vattimo gained his first official teaching post, which was in the University of Turin; the first course he offered was on Nietzsche. Later, he hoped that his 1974 publication *Il soggetto e la maschera*: *Nietzsche e il problema della liberazione* would become the ideology for the radical libertarian Left.[7] Although the Torinese failed to realize these hopes for *Il soggetto*; nonetheless, the result of the publication was that Vattimo was accepted into the company of politically-active Nietzscheans. He lectured on Nietzsche, Marx, and nihilism to the newly elected Left-wing councils of 1975.[8]

The troubled political situation in Italy from the 1960s to the 1980s significantly influenced Vattimo's thought on Nietzsche. Social conflict was widespread and terrorist acts were carried out by both Left-wing and Right-wing groups during this time. The period is known as the 'Years of Lead' (*Anni di piombo*), which is a reference to the number of bullets fired during the unrest. Student activist groups sided with the

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publication in 1961. Royaumont, an international colloquium on Nietzsche was held in 1964. Along with Gianni Vattimo, scholars such as Michel Foucault, Karl Löwith, and Gilles Deleuze attended it. The second conference solidifying Nietzsche's place in the French philosophical canon was held in Cerisy-la-Salle in June 1972. This took place over a ten-day period with many leading philosophers present. Indeed, according to Alan Schrift, the focus on Nietzsche changed the French philosophical landscape; for example there was a greater emphasis on the nature of language, which reflects Nietzsche's background and interest in philology (see Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction* [New York: Routledge, 1990]).

[6] Gianni Vattimo, *Essere, storia e linguaggio in Heidegger* (Turin: Edizioni di Filosofia, 1963).

[7] Vattimo hoped, specifically, that *Il soggetto* would form the basis for a communist newspaper, *Il Manifesto*, as it examined Nietzsche's work in the light of liberation. Gianni Vattimo, *Il soggetto e la maschera*: *Nietzsche e il problema della liberazione* (Milan: Bompiani, 1974). See Lieven Boeve and Christophe Brabant, eds, *Between Philosophy and Theology: Contemporary Interpretations of Christianity* (Ashgate Publishing, 2010; Reprint, Oxon: Routledge, 2016); see also Gianni Vattimo, "Philosophy as Ontology of Actuality: A Biographical-Theoretical Interview with Luca Savarino and Frederico Vercellone," *Iris* 1(2009): pp 311-350. See also Stefano G. Azzarà, "Left-Wing Nietzscheanism in Italy: Gianni Vattimo," *Rethinking Marxism* 30, no. 2 (2018): 275-290.

[8] For details, see Vattimo, "Philosophy as Ontology of Actuality: A Biographical-Theoretical Interview with Luca Savarino and Frederico Vercellone," *Iris* 1(2009): 311-350.

working-class factory workers, who conducted a mass series of strikes in what became known as the 'Hot Autumn' of 1969 in order to establish better pay and working conditions. The most infamous group of the period was known as The Red Brigades (*Brigate Rosse*), which was student led, Marxist-Leninist based, and dedicated to an armed struggle against a capitalist state. Vattimo was in danger at this time, as, although he was Left-wing, he was not considered revolutionary enough by the *Brigate Rosse.* Even though they wanted him to join the movement, they required him to renounce his work *Poesia e ontologia.* He was not prepared to do so. Subsequently, Vattimo received threats from the *Brigate Rosse*. Other academics that did not hold with the terrorism of the *Brigate Rosse* were also threatened. Though placed under surveillance by the police for his own protection, Vattimo eventually fled to Tuscany.[9] His experience during the *Anni di piombo* significantly affected hid philosophy, particularly his reading of Nietzsche. The reality of the Leninist attitude of the *Brigate Rosse* was, he realized, completely at odds with what he had held as revolutionary in Nietzsche's work. Indeed, his own students were responsible for this realization as several of them were arrested during the worker's strikes, corresponding with Vattimo while they were in prison. It was in reading their letters that the Torinese came to the conclusion that the type of deception that the students practised in convincing themselves that they were workers and joining the worker's protests, did not, after all, correspond with Nietzsche's liberated subject. The "liberated subject" that Vattimo refers to is Nietzsche's "Overman" or "*Übermensch*."[10] While Vattimo had previously understood the *Übermensch* as a revolutionary, the events of the *Anni di piombo* brought him to the

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[9] See Vattimo, "Philosophy as Ontology of Actuality."

[10] The *Übermensch* is liberated because they are able to set aside the principles that they were raised with and face new challenges as they arise, with their own interpretation of the world.

conclusion that this was not, as he had previously thought, a correct reading of Nietzsche.

As the result of the terrorism of the *Anni di piombo*, Vattimo's fresh understanding of Nietzsche marked a new chapter in the Torinese's thinking. At that particular time, his philosophy was concerned with responding to two positions arising from his experiences of the *Anni di piombo*. The first position was concerned with a supposed political transformation that still contained elements of what it attempted to overthrow: "which promised a political transformation which was still imbued with authoritarian elements."[11] The second position looks to the possibility of simply replacing one foundation with another. From a Nietzschean perspective, it is not possible to replace the regime that one is protesting against; "the best that Nietzscheans can do is to conspire against the state, rather than attempting to found a new one."[12] Should revolution wish to retain its own integrity, it cannot directly acquire political power. Vattimo's new philosophical focus was a response to both the acts of terrorism and the self-deception of his students.

1.1.2   Active and Passive Nihilism

Vattimo claims that in his work regarding nihilism, which is the devaluation of our highest values, Nietzsche alludes to two responses to this devaluation or loss of meaning.[13] These responses are namely, active and passive nihilism. Passive nihilism

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[11] Vattimo, "Philosophy as Ontology of Actuality," 319.

[12] Ibid., 328.

[13] Nihilism is derived from the Latin, *nihil*, which means nothing or what does not exist (Rex Welshon, *The Philosophy of Nietzsche* [Chesham: Acumen, 2004], 57). Friedrich Nietzsche worked extensively on nihilism. His posthumous volume *The Will to Power* contains some of, what David Rowe describes as, his "most vivid ideas relating to this topic" (David Rowe, "The Eternal Return of the Same: Nietzsche's "Value-Free" Revaluation of All Values." *Parrhesia* 15 (2012): 72). Nietzsche understood nihilism as the devaluation of our highest values. While they once held meaning and value for us, they

accepts, in an attitude of despairing resignation, that the world is meaningless. Active

nihilism seeks to destroy all remaining categories of valuation. "Nietzsche's attacks on

traditional religious, moral, and philosophical values such as God, metaphysics, truth,

pity, compassion, humility, and the distinction between good and evil, can be seen as

active nihilism in action."[14] Vattimo claims that they are best described in terms of the

power of the spirit, or *Geist*. The word '*Geist*' may be translated as 'mind' (also

intellect) or 'spirit.' Both meanings are intended in Nietzsche's work, referring at times

to the mind (or mode of thought) of an individual or group, and at other times to their

spiritual practices.[15] For Nietzsche, power is not measured in bodily strength, but

through reason. Indeed, reason, intellect, and spirit are all indicative of the same drive

to which our passions may be reduced.[16] Reason gives humankind the skills required to

reach a conclusion based on evidence and logic, and it also allows us to control our

impulses. "Foresight and patience, and above all 'great self-mastery' . . . that is,

according to Nietzsche, of the very essence of *Geist*."[17] Those who are strong in spirit

are those persons who have outgrown previous values that are no longer vitalizing.

"The power of the spirit is increased, above all, by the dissolution of everything that

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no longer do so. The result of this is that there is no objective meaning; there is only the meaning that
we ourselves give to something. There is nothing that we may hold to as fact, but, instead, there are many
interpretations of the same. Nihilism is, for Nietzsche, a normal condition for humankind.

[14] Ashley Woodward, "Nihilism and the Postmodern in Vattimo's Nietzsche." *Minerva: An
Online Journal of Philosophy* 6, (2002): 51-67, at 55. For further discussion of Nihilism in Vattimo's
thought see Ashley Woodward, *Nihilism in Postmodernity: Lyotard, Baudrillard, Vattimo* (Colorado:
The Davies Group, 2009), see also Robert T. Valgenti, "Vattimo's Nietzsche," in *Interpreting Nietzsche:
Reception and Influence* ed. Ashley Woodward (London: Continuum, 2011), 149-163.

[15] See Katrina Mitcheson, *Nietzsche, Truth and Transformation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave
Macmillan, 2013), 136.

[16] See Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton
University Press, 1947), 29.

[17] Ibid., 230.

requires our acceptance of an objective structure, of a meaning, or of a value."[18] Active

nihilism, then, is the attitude that is possessed by those who are strong in spirit.

"Nihilism as a sign of the *increased power of the spirit: as active nihilism . . .* nihilism

as a *decline and retreat of the spirit's power: passive nihilism*." [19] Those who are strong

in spirit annihilate all that presents itself as an objective foundation. "For this reason,

saying no is per se a sign of activity."[20] Vattimo believes that active nihilism

corresponds to a far freer way of life since it creates new interpretations that are not

presented as objective truths. Rather, those who reflect this position are fully aware of

the hermeneutic structure of life and thought. "They correspond to a more adventurous

form of life, which is free, rich and open."[21] In contrast, those persons that adhere to

passive nihilism cannot present any interpretation as belonging to someone, but,

instead, must always be portrayed as an objective truth. "In the form of life of the herd

. . . no interpretation is strong and courageous enough to present itself as the

interpretation of *someone*. It always has to appear as the 'objective' truth."[22] Thus, any

sense of creativity or individuality is stifled. [23]

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[18] Gianni Vattimo, "Nihilism: Active and Reactive" in *Nietzsche and the Rhetoric of Nihilism: Essays on Interpretation, Language and Politics* eds. Tom Darby, Belá Egyed, and Ben Jones (Ottowa: Carleton University Press, 1989), 16.

[19] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and ed. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), 17, quoted in Gianni Vattimo, *Dialogue with Nietzsche*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 134. Emphasis original.

[20] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 134. Reactive nihilism refuses to acknowledge the evanescence of values. "The attempt in twentieth century culture to resist nihilism through the re-establishment of a realm of use value or through humanism is seen by Vattimo as a type of reactive nihilism" (Marta Frascati-Lochhead, *Kenosis and Feminist Theology: The Challenge of Gianni Vattimo* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 70).

[21] Vattimo, "Nihilism: Active and Reactive," 17.

[22] Ibid. Emphasis original.

[23] See Vattimo, "Nihilism: Active and Reactive."

Vattimo claims that Nietzsche fails to make a clear distinction between the two forms of nihilism. He further argues that the German philosopher's notes for *The Will to Power*, to claim that the work points to the same conclusion. Vattimo draws on the fragment "European Nihilism" — a fragment found in Nietzsche's late notebooks and dated 10th June, 1887 — to show the lack of a clear distinction between active and passive nihilism. This fragment's sixteen paragraphs deal with the main themes in Nietzsche's later works, including nihilism, and argues that these themes are central to European culture. It also discusses the historical development of nihilism in European thought, contending that it forms the basis of contemporary European life.[24] "European Nihilism" offers a description of nihilism, which Vattimo sets out in his own *Dialogue with Nietzsche* as "the growing awareness of the senselessness of existence, the absence of purposes or goals, and the essence of Being as the will to power."[25] The weak suffer as a result of the absence of purpose, unable to hide behind the shield of values (be they religious, moral, or other) created by reactive nihilism. The strongest, those who are able to survive the loss of this facade, are those who are so sure of their own power that they have no need for such values. The artist, for Nietzsche, is best able to survive the loss of values. He defines the artist, whom he refers to as 'tragic,' by an ability to accept the more terrible aspects of life, such as evil and suffering. "The tragic artist . . . 'says

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[24] See Jeffrey Metzger, ed., *Nietzsche, Nihilism and the Philosophy of the Future* (London: Continuum, 2009); see also Nuno Nabais, translated by Martin Earl, *Nietzsche and the Metaphysics of the Tragic* (London: Continuum, 2006). Europe's heritage is rooted in Christianity, which means that European nihilism's history is bound up with Christianity. Humankind was receptive to the morals that Christianity offered, due to the problem of suffering in the world. Christianity offered a solution to this problem in the form of an absolute value, contrasting to humankind's own smallness and brevity. This also gave suffering a fullness of meaning as Christianity was life affirming. However, in time, the absolute truths that Christianity offered were undone, leaving the present European situation poised on the tension that resulted, as, on the one hand, we still have the same needs that made our predecessors disposed towards morality, on the other we are aware that these needs form the very 'truths' that we recognise to be untrue.

[25] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 139.

yes to precisely everything questionable and terrible.'" [26] The artist's acceptance of this instability, according to Vattimo, overrides the instinct for self-preservation, and so it is in the artist that we find a reckless pride or hubris. This hubris may be seen as a disposition to taking risks or a lack of need for objective, supreme truths or beliefs. The artists' hubris may be seen as a kind of experimental courage.

> The artist who presents through appearance certain versions or segments of reality is contributing to a greater presence of life by virtue of amplifying reality, amplifying and highlighting the here and now, and not merely when it comes to life's pleasant Romantic landscapes but precisely when life's questionable and terrible manifestations are at stake — this is affirmation at its best.[27]

The artist possesses the ability to rise and face the challenges thrown up by the absence of purpose.[28] Indeed, it is only through leaving behind the instinct of self-preservation and questioning that this hubris or courage is developed.[29] "The possibility of an active nihilism is the capacity, to which the artist bears witness, to transcend the instinct of self-preservation and achieve a condition of moderation that also forms the

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[26] Adrian Del Caro, *Grounding the Nietzsche Rhetoric of Earth* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 78, emphasis original.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 140.

[29] The loss of self-preservation is particularly evident in modernity with increased technological advancement: the use of machinery, for example, allows us to extract fuels at an environmental cost to the planet, our shared home; "our whole attitude towards nature, the way we violate her with the aid of machines and the heedless inventiveness of our technicians and engineers, is *hubris*." (Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), 113, emphasis original). Even our attitude towards our own selves disregards the instinct for self-preservation. "Our attitude towards *ourselves* is *hubris*, for we experiment with ourselves in a way we would never permit ourselves to experiment with animals and, carried away by curiosity, we cheerfully vivisect our souls: what is the 'salvation' of the soul to us today? ... We violate ourselves nowadays, no doubt of it, we nutcrackers of the soul, ever questioning and questionable, as if life were nothing but cracking nuts; and thus we are bound to grow day-by-day more questionable, worthier of asking questions; perhaps also worthier-of living?" (Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), 113, emphasis original); see also Gianni Vattimo, *Dialogue with Nietzsche*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 140; see also Tyler T. Roberts, ""This Art of Transfiguration Is Philosophy": Nietzsche's Asceticism." *The Journal of Religion* 76, no. 3 (July 1996): 402-27. Accessed June 29, 2017. doi:10.1086/489802.

basis of the heedless, disinterested hubris."[30] In order to further examine this 'disinterested hubris,' Vattimo draws on Schopenhauer's understanding of aesthetic disinterestedness. Schopenhauer maintains that we do not experience beauty and sublimity in the same way as we do other experiences. We become detached and uninvolved from the experience or the object that we contemplate. For Schopenhauer, this allows us to step back and view things more objectively. "The adoption of a disinterested attitude amounts to the adoption of a state of pure objectivity. For when we look at the world disinterestedly, we see it independently of our will, and therefore independently of our own individuality."[31] This experience is not entirely a passive one; Schopenhauer believes that it is active in the sense that we are aware that during this experience we lose our will and are reduced to what Schopenhauer describes as 'pure will-less subject of cognition.'[32] The aesthetic experience temporarily allows a person to disengage from both his or her desires and sense of self.[33] Indeed, Vattimo believes that once aesthetic disinterestedness is taken into account, there is very little difference between active and passive nihilism. The figure of the artist, for the Italian philosopher, illustrates Nietzsche's inability to distinguish clearly between active and passive nihilism. Active nihilism in the artist transcends the instinct for self-preservation; yet, this leads to the creation of the 'disinterested hubris' that brings about a detachment or

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[30] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 140.

[31] Thomas Hilgers, *Aesthetic Disinterestedness: Art, Experience, and the Self* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 45. See also Julian Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[32] Hilgers, *Aesthetic Disinterestedness*, 46. See also Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, translated by E.F.J. Payne, vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, 1966).

[33] Ibid. See also Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*.

uninvolvement from the world.[34] "The fact that the characterization of active nihilism must, in the last analysis, refer to the capacity to transcend one's own interest in self-preservation indicates that at bottom active nihilism is always passive and reactive too."[35] For Vattimo, Nietzsche has failed to present a clear distinction between the two types of nihilism; instead, by examining them in light of the artist, there is very little to differentiate active nihilism from passive or reactive nihilism.[36]

1.1.3 Nihilism and Historicism: The Historical Malady

Historicism emphasizes the historical character of human existence. As history influences our comprehension of the world, paying attention to this historical character is central to human knowledge and understanding.[37] Historicism cannot be reduced to one, single movement, but, instead, stresses the importance of historical context, which influences interpretation, maintaining that history reflects the interests of the society and culture of the time; even historians, for example, are influenced by the conditions of the age in which they write.[38] As a movement within nineteenth century German

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[34] The artists' disinterestedness is based on 'a condition of moderation' (Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 140). Moderation, for Nietzsche, is a useful virtue. Those who practice moderation possess great self-control, as it is more difficult to partake of things in moderation than to forego them entirely (Ruth Abbey, *Nietzsche's Middle Period* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], 52). Nietzsche also associates moderation with free-spiritedness, as those who are moderate do not need to adhere to extreme beliefs or values.

[35] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 140.

[36] Ibid.

[37] See Charles R. Bambauch, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

[38] See Paul Hamilton, *Historicism* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

philosophy historicism may be described as one in which human events are examined in the light of historical context.[39]

Vattimo claims that nihilism and historicism are significant for Nietzsche's philosophy, having developed together in his work, particularly in the essay "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life."[40] He approaches historicism through Nietzsche's understanding of the historical malady. The historical malady is a problem that arises from our relationship with the past. An excessive awareness of history effectively shatters humankind's ability to live in the present as it prevents the creation of new and original cultural achievements.

> The historical malady is a species of consumption, manifesting itself in a civilization that, through the excessive study and knowledge of the past, loses all creative capacity. This, in Nietzsche's view, is the situation of our epoch: the enormously expanded array of aids to historical knowledge and the quantity of notions and documents available regarding past epochs have reduced large areas of culture to mere 'cultural history,' as we see in the syllabuses of the educational institutions, with no more productive élan.[41]

The historical malady is a characteristic of humankind as it is our acknowledgement of, and engagement with, the past that produces the difficulty of the historical malady.[42] It reduces both our creativity and our culture, resulting in the loss of our ability to create anything new due to our awareness that we are simply transitory; we are merely a tiny particle in the flow from past to future.[43] To illustrate this effect of the historical malady,

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[39] See Charles R. Bambauch, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*; see also Terrence Tice and Thomas Slavens, *Research Guide to Philosophy* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1983).

[40] The essay "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life" is found in Nietzsche's *Unfashionable Observations*, trans. Richard T. Gray in *Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Bernd Magnus and Ernst Behler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995-). vol. 11, 1999.

[41] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 5.

[42] See Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 6.

[43] Ibid.

Vattimo draws on a passage from Nietzsche's "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life:"

> imagine the most extreme example, a human being who does not possess the power to forget, who is damned to see becoming everywhere; such a human being would no longer believe in his own being, would no longer believe in himself, would see everything flow apart in turbulent particles, and would lose himself in the stream of becoming; like the true student of Heraclitus, in the end he would hardly dare to lift a finger. All action requires forgetting.[44]

Instead of being able to forget this "stream of becoming," we view ourselves as a stepping-stone in the river of time; we are simply a product of the past and a preface to the future. For Vattimo, it is precisely this awareness of being stuck in this rut that renders us incapable of making history, since the historical malady leads to a loss of confidence and a lack of belief in our own capabilities.[45] In order to revive our creative capacity we would have to restore confidence and belief in our decisions and abilities.

Vattimo believes that our awareness of, and relationship to, the past is what makes us differ to other species. "Humans are set apart from the other animals precisely because, at a certain point, they learn to say "*es war*" ("it was")."[46] By our engagement with the past, we acknowledge that our lives are part of the continual flow of history. Often, we only realize the real worth of an experience once it is over. "By learning to say '*es war*,' man also acknowledges his own deepest nature as a never to be completed imperfect [*ein nie zu vollendes Imperfectum*], in other words an uninterrupted

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[44] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observations*, trans. Richard T. Gray, vol. 2, 1995 in *Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, 3 vols. Ed., Bernd Magnus and Ernst Behler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995—), 89, quoted in Gianni Vattimo, *Dialogue with Nietzsche*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 5.

[45] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 5.

[46] Ibid.

succession of instants, each negating the last."[47] Due to our reliance on the past to make sense of, and give meaning to, our experiences, the present is left devoid of meaning. The past is imbued with the quality of greatness, retaining the "character of a lost paradise: 'the demigods always lived only in earlier ages, the present generation is always the degenerate one.'"[48] Due to the emphasis on the illustriousness of the past we are left feeling inferior. We are reduced to simply being poor imitators of our predecessors and hoping, somehow, to acquire the skills or creativity to match them. Because of this focus on past greatness, instead of having a vibrant, living culture, we simply have a knowledge of culture that is devoid of all originality and creativity. "Having contracted the historical malady, an individual wanders about like a tourist in the park of history, or as Nietzsche will say later, behaves like an actor playing various parts, losing himself in historical situations, none of which really belongs to him."[49] Contrary to the supposition that an historical awareness broadens an individual's character as it widens the confines of their own particular situation, historical awareness does exactly the opposite. It reduces the individual's outlook and gives rise to a sense of displacement as we are aware of, and connected to, a variety of situations to which we do not belong.[50] "The historical malady . . . results in an imbalance between internal content and form evident in our civilization, which is highly cultivated and barbarous

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[47] Ibid. Translation modified.

[48] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 6. If we look to Greek mythology, for example, Hesiod's myth of the five ages of man illustrates this point. Hesiod outlines five ages of man, with each age, bar one, degenerative of the previous. It is indicative of the degeneration of the human condition and of the struggles of humankind in the writer's age; this is in contrast to the "Golden Age" of humankind when an existence akin to that of the gods was in place. See Hesiod, *Works and Day*s, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

[49] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 6.

[50] Ibid., 7.

at the same time, which has no style, no living unifying principle of its own."[51] Vattimo sums up the historical malady by claiming it to be the amalgam of all that is wrong in our culture.[52]

For Vattimo, in "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life," Nietzsche takes the historical malady as a starting point. He believes that Nietzsche's examination of a person or culture lacking the capacity for creativity due to an engagement with the past offers a particular sense of historicism, "the attribution of a providential order to history, and the complete relativization of mankind to the epoch in which it occurs, without reference to a larger natural order of becoming."[53] The providential order is rooted, for Nietzsche, in the Christian idea of the Last Judgement. The worldview of the *memento mori* is retrospective, focusing on the past and seeing oneself and one's culture as the culmination of history.[54]

> A religion which of all the hours of a man's life holds the last to be the most important, which prophesies an end to all life on earth and condemns all who live in the fifth act of a tragedy . . . is inimical to all new planting, bold experimentation, free aspiration; it resists all flight into the unknown because it loves and hopes for nothing there.[55]

The '*memento mori*' of the Middle Ages is a reminder of the ephemerality of human life. It later developed into the conviction that nothing new could be created and, instead, everything is ceaselessly born and destroyed.[56] A culture or person having an

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[51] Ibid.

[52] See Vattimo, *Dialogue,* 7.

[53] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 12.

[54] Anthony K. Jenson, *An Interpretation of Nietzsche's "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life"* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 130. *Memento mori* is a phrase meaning 'remember you must die.'

[55] Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 101-102.

[56] Gianni Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, trans. Nicolas Martin (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 35.

excessive awareness of the past loses the capacity for creativity, due to the realization of being simply a transitory moment in the cycle of history. "For it seems pointless and fruitless to devote oneself to sketching that which sooner or later must disappear in the unstoppable flow of history."[57] There is a sense that it is too late to do anything better than what been produced in the past; our age is always the ultimate age, with an emphasis on perfecting what has gone before, rather than creating anything new. Thus, creativity, for Nietzsche, requires a contrasting *memento vivere*, which is a reminder to live and produce our own values instead of looking back towards past ones.[58]

1.1.4 Temporality and the Eternal Return

For Vattimo, the historical malady illustrates the connection between historicism and nihilism in Nietzsche's work. He claims that nihilism signals the endpoint of a providential order to history and the sense of historicism that Nietzsche identifies in "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life" validates this point. First, the providential order gave meaning and order to the world. Our knowledge of the past, however, has expanded our worldview, rendering the providential order redundant: "actually there is no providential order or comprehensive meaning in historical becoming."[59] The collapse of the providential order leads to the complete relativization of humankind to a particular epoch, without reference to a larger natural order of becoming.[60] The realization that there is no providential order means that there is no

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[57] Ibid.

[58] Anthony K. Jenson, *An Interpretation of Nietzsche's "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life"* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 130.

[59] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 13.

[60] Ibid., 12.

longer any absolute meaning or value in the world. "Everything that comes into existence deserves to pass out of it."[61] This loss of meaning and value represents the most general form of nihilism.[62] Such an understanding of historicism highlights how nihilism is an issue of temporality. For Vattimo, the resolution to this issue lies in Nietzsche's concept of 'eternal return.' The eternal return involves two strands of thought, cosmological and moral. The cosmological aspect structures reality in a cyclical manner. Its circular framework means that there is no rational order, and, for Nietzsche, given the vast amount of time that has passed, if there was a purpose or goal then it would already have been attained.[63] There is, then, only the repetition of what has gone before; nothing new is created and every situation is repeated. "The actions of man are simply produced by the cyclical becoming of the cosmos."[64] The moral aspect of eternal return is more a task set before us. If each moment of our lives was to be eternally repeated, then we must ask ourselves if we have lived in such a way as to desire to live each one once again. "We would have acquired an excellent evaluative criterion for our actions, for only an entirely happy being would desire this endless repetition."[65] Such repetition acts as a measure against which to gauge our actions and choices. "Only he who regards his own existence as fit to be eternally repeated endures."[66] Vattimo draws on *The Gay Science* to reiterate the importance of the eternal

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[61] Ibid., 13.

[62] Ibid., 12.

[63] Ibid., 3.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Vattimo, *Nietzsche*, 107.

[66] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 3. "Nur wer sein Dasein für ewig wiederholungsfähig hält, bleibt übrig" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli, Mazzino Montinari, et al. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967-. 5.2 11 [338], spring-autumn 1881, quoted in Gianni Vattimo, *Dialogue with Nietzsche*, trans. William McCuaig [New York: Columbia University Press, 2006], 3).

return as a moral choice. "The wording, taken literally, implies a proposal made to mankind: 'do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?'"[67]

Vattimo identifies an issue arising from the two strands of thought in the eternal return: both give rise to the problem of determinism, which holds that all events and human action are determined by causes outside of the will. For Vattimo, this issue of determinism is most evident in a line from Nietzsche's unpublished papers from around the time he was writing *The Gay Science*. "My doctrine says: the task is to live in such a way that you must desire to live again — you will in any case."[68] It also implies that human beings have no free will. In order to overcome the problem of freedom and determinism, Vattimo considers what a proper relationship with the past ought to entail. "[It] would somehow reveal the possibility of a closer, more profound link between the eternity of the world and human choice."[69] The historical malady afflicts only those

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[67] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 341, as quoted in Gianni Vattimo, *Dialogue with Nietzsche*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 3. Vattimo cites the entire passage in *Nietzsche: An Introduction*:
"The greatest weight — What if, some day or night a demon were to creep after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live one more and innumerable times over; and there will be nothing new in it, rather every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will return to you, all in the same succession and sequence — even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The endless hourglass of existence is turned upside down over and over again, and you with it, speck of dust!' Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: 'You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine!' If this thought took hold of you, it would transform you as you are, or perhaps crush you; the question for each and everything, 'Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?' would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to demand nothing more fervently* than this ultimate, eternal confirmation and seal?" (Gianni Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, trans. Nicolas Martin [Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001] 105-106. Emphasis original).

[68] Ibid., 2. "Meine Lehre sagt: so leben, dass du wünschen musst, wieder zu leben ist die Aufgabe—du wirst es jedenfalls!" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werk: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli, Mazzino Montinari, et al. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967-. 5.2 11 [163], spring-autumn 1881 in Gianni Vattimo, *Dialogue with Nietzsche*, trans. William McCuaig [New York: Columbia University Press, 2006], 2).

[69] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 3.

who allow it to do so, with the degree determined by what Nietzsche terms plastic power. For humankind, plastic power is the capacity to develop out of oneself in one's own way, to transform and incorporate into oneself what is past and foreign, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, and to recreate broken moulds.[70] "The capacity to draw boundaries by choosing, accepting, and refusing is . . . plastic power."[71] Plastic power involves an active and creative way of interpreting the past. It is formative, as, for Nietzsche, one must form oneself, growing in this fashion as opposed to passively imitating a model.[72] Historical knowledge is only useful to those who have this capacity; for those who do not, the historical malady infects them and diminishes their creative capacity.[73] In order to overcome the historical malady, we need to have a relationship with the past that is not purely historical. "Our relationship with the historical past has its appropriate site only within something that is not reducible to history."[74] There must be a nonhistorical element in order for creativity and this is located in forgetfulness. The moment of forgetfulness is a moment in which historical awareness is suspended, thereby allowing action and creativity to take place. "This moment of forgetting, which cuts the decision-making subject off from historical awareness like a cone of shadow, is what Nietzsche calls the nonhistorical element, the

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[70] See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 62.

[71] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 3. See also Jeffrey Church, *Nietzsche's Culture of Humanity: Beyond Aristocracy and Democracy in the Early Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[72] Phillip Lacoue-Labarthe, "History and Mimesis," in *Looking After Nietzsche: Interdisciplinary Encounters with Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Laurence A. Rickels (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 219.

[73] "The utility of study and knowledge of the past for life is measurable by the plastic power that an individual or civilization commands: the less the subject's plastic power, the greater the danger that the study of history may lead to the historical malady" (Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 8).

[74] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 8.

only environment in which action can occur."[75] As our inaction (the product of the historical malady) is the result of our historical awareness, action requires and springs from the forgetfulness of this sensibility. Forgetting, for Vattimo, is the correct attitude to take towards history, as this means that the nonhistorical is given precedence over the historical. We look to the past only insofar as it serves the present. The focus must be on action in the present, as opposed to the past.

Vattimo believes that the solution to nihilism as the problem of temporality is found in the eternal return itself. He locates this solution in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, referring to the section titled "Of the Vision and the Riddle."[76] The book records the travels of its fictitious character, Zarathustra, with "Of the Vision and the Riddle" focusing on a particular vision of Zarathustra's. The vision is of the eternal return. Here, Zarathustra stops at a gateway where two paths join. "They are but one road, which loops round and is sealed into a perfect ring by the gate itself. These roads are the past and the future, and on the gate which joins them is written the word '*Augenblick* [instant].'"[77] This vision illustrates the circular structure of time that is contrary to the usual perception of time, which is rectilinear, "composed of an irreversible succession of instants."[78] It is the rectilinear vision of time that creates the impression that we cannot shake off the weight of the past. In Zarathustra's vision, however, while the past

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[75] Ibid.

[76] See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, trans. and intro. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991).

[77] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 21.

[78] Ibid., 21. Vattimo does not believe that there is real happiness to be found in a linear structure of time, as in this form, there is no meaning to the 'lived moment.' "There can be no true happiness in this construction . . . because no lived moment carries within itself the fullness of its own import." The solution is a change in attitude if we are to live moments of which we would truly desire their eternal recurrence. "Eternal recurrence can only be desired by happy people, yet a happy person can only exist in a world quite differently conceived" (Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, 108).

influences the future, the future also influences the past. The 'instant, or 'moment,' saves this circular structure of time from becoming meaningless. "It is in a sort of immediate rapport with the totality of time, which is how Nietzsche conceives of eternity . . . The moment is not now defined in relation to the past and the future; rather the past and the future acquire profile and meaning only in relation to it."[79] While connected to both past and future, the instant is more than simply a point in the flow of time; it is a moment of decision that gives meaning to both the past and future.

1.2   How the World Became a Fable: Myth, Interpretation, and Culture

This section focuses on Nietzsche's appreciation of culture, beginning with the relationship between philology and philosophy. Vattimo claims that this relationship played a significant role in shaping Nietzsche's thought, including his position concerning truth. This will lead to a discussion of the German philosopher's well-known dictum, 'God is dead.'

1.2.1 From Philology to Philosophy: Nietzsche's Understanding of Culture

For Vattimo, the relationship between philology and philosophy plays a seminal role in Nietzsche's thought. The German philosopher taught philology at Basle, although his work was not consistent with the established academic philology of the time.[80] In fact, the very nature of academic philology was distasteful to him as he felt that not only did it break with the classical spirit, but it also created a chasm between the philologist and the object of study.[81] Rather than treating antiquity as a model with much to offer, it

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[79] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 22.

[80] See Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*.

was reduced to the subject matter of an objective academic study. The lectures that
Nietzsche delivered in Basle show his dissatisfaction with the way that academic
philology treated antiquity and reflect his concerns about the manner in which the study
of antiquity was treated and handed on.

> We may consider antiquity from a scientific point of view; we may try to
> look at what has happened with the eye of a historian, or to arrange and
> compare the linguistic forms of ancient masterpieces, to bring them at all
> events under a morphological law; but we always lose the wonderful
> creative force, the real fragrance, of the atmosphere of antiquity; we forget
> that passionate emotion which instinctively drove our meditation and
> enjoyment back to the Greeks. From this point onwards we must take
> notice of a clearly determined and very surprising antagonism which
> philology has great cause to regret. From the circles upon whose help we
> must place the most implicit reliance—the artistic friends of antiquity, the
> warm supporters of Hellenic beauty and noble simplicity—we hear harsh
> voices crying out that it is precisely the philologists themselves who are
> the real opponents and destroyers of the ideals of antiquity.[82]

Nietzsche's concern for how the study of antiquity was treated in academia continued
throughout his early writings. He further elaborated on this theme in his volume, *The
Birth of Tragedy*.[83]

For Vattimo, antiquity is central to Nietzsche's understanding of culture. Indeed,
Nietzsche's focus on antiquity's potential as a model worth imitating is the essence of
The Birth of Tragedy.[84] Vattimo believes that this work combines Nietzsche's interest
in philology and culture with philosophy. "One of the main attractions of this
unparalleled work lies in its peculiar fusion of philology and philosophy. The scope and
impact of this work have no equal, not even in the great philosophizing of philologists

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[81] See Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, 10-11.

[82] Nietzsche, "Homer and Classical Philology" in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*,
ed. Dr Oscar Levy, trans. J.M. Kennedy (Edinburgh: T.N. Foulis, 1909), 148-149.

[83] See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans.,
with commentaries, by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library, 1968.

[84] Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, 7.

in the Romantic period."[85] The work analyses and reappropriates the Apollonian and the Dionysian drives that epitomize Greek culture. Each represents a different part of the Greek attitude that is both beautiful and chaotic. "*The Birth of Tragedy* is at once a re-interpretation of ancient Greece, a philosophical and aesthetic revolution, a critique of contemporary culture, and a programme to revitalize it."[86] Indeed, the polarity between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, Vattimo claims, is the central premise of Nietzsche's work as it was the foundation for his work in philology.[87] He maintains the connection between philosophy and philology throughout his work, although it is subtler in the later stages.[88]

The European tradition focused on the classical aspects of Greek culture, which are the beautiful and the harmonious. These aspects are found in the Apollonian drive. The Greeks were deemed to be capable of producing such beautiful works because they as a people had a beautiful existence. Nietzsche believes that Christianity is responsible for upholding this ideal, since it held to the classical and so influenced our knowledge of antiquity in this way. "The prime contributor to this stereotyping of our image of Greece has been Christianity, through which our knowledge of ancient culture had been filtered."[89] The classical, Apollonian ideal, however, is only one aspect of the Greek culture. The Dionysian represents the other side, which is found in more marginal elements such as folklore. In contrast to the Apollonian drive, which seeks to promote

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[85] Ibid., 7.

[86] Ibid., 13.

[87] See Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, 8-9.

[88] Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, 7.

[89] Ibid.

harmony, the Dionysian is based on chaos. "In the same way that the Apollonian drive attempts to produce definable images, harmonious and reliable forms which bestow security, the Dionysian drive possesses . . . a sensitivity to the chaos of every existence."[90] Both drives are representative of the duality that defined the Greek spirit.[91]

Vattimo draws on *The Birth of Tragedy* to illustrate this duality:

> The Greeks knew and felt the terrors and horrors of existence: in order to be able to live at all they had to expose the radiant dream-birth of the Olympians between themselves and those horrors. That terrible mistrust of the Titanic forces of nature [. . .] – the Greeks repeatedly overcame all this, or at least veiled and concealed it, with the artistic *middle world* of the Olympians.[92]

Here, the gods represent the Apollonian drive as they served to justify existence through the quality of their own existence: "they live it [life] in bright sunlight and beyond the terrifying threat of death."[93] The world of the gods was a higher order of existence. The gods knew and understood the suffering of those on earth. They were not without their own squabbles and amusements, yet were free of the misery and horrors of nature that humankind must endure. The Apollonian drive gives form and structure and some measure of security combined with a strong sense of self. In contrast to this, the Dionysian drive leans towards chaos and formlessness, encouraging humankind to embrace the maelstrom. The boundaries that exist between persons and the world in order to ensure the proper functioning and maintenance of society are tested by Dionysius as he coaxes humankind to abandon them.[94] Vattimo remarks that in

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[90] Ibid., 16.

[91] Ibid, 15.

[92] Gianni Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, trans. Nicolas Martin (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 15, quoting Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, in *Nietzsche: Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), 31.

[93] Ibid.

Nietzsche's argument we cannot have one drive without the other, and in order to fulfil their roles the Apollonian gods must have a connection to the Dionysian. "The relation of the Olympian gods to the dark ground of the primal Oneness is not . . . a mere antithesis."[95] This connection, Vattimo believes, allows for an understanding of Greek culture as a struggle between the Dionysian and Apollonian drives; even certain art forms are recognised as belonging to one or the other. "So Doric art can only be read as the result of a defence by the Apollonian against attacks which were real attacks by invading peoples, attacks by the Dionysian and orgiastic cults of barbarians."[96] Greek history, then, may be seen as emerging in the contention between the two drives, reflected in the art forms that developed throughout Greek antiquity.

Nietzsche focuses on Greek drama to illustrate the relationship between the Apollonian, the Dionysian, and culture, where "the apogee is represented by Attic tragedy which is the perfect synthesis of the two impulses."[97] Like the idea of the Olympian gods, Greek tragedy helped to render the unbearable bearable as it depicted death and mortality through the duality of the Apollonian and Dionysian drives. Here, the Dionysian was portrayed though an Apollonian lens, which lent it structure and logic. Vattimo maintains that it was this combination of the two drives, for Nietzsche, that made Greek tragedy the apogee of Greek culture. The decline of tragedy was brought about, Nietzsche claims, by Euripides who "recast tragic myth in realistic and rational terms."[98] This recasting was to satisfy Socrates, who presented the world and

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[94] Here, Vattimo refers to Schopenhauer's *principium individuationis*, or the principle of individuation which is crucial to our perception of the world. It allows us to mentally order the world, distinguishing things and animate objects from one another.

[95] Vattimo, *Nietzsche*, 16.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid., 19.

the human condition in rational terms. If a person lived a just life, then they would come to no harm, and vice versa. "Because everything had to proceed according to a pre-ordained, rational scheme, it was easy to understand the need for a *deus ex machina*."[99] In turn, the excitement of the drama itself was lost as everything unfolded as expected.

1.2.2 Philology: A Basis for Truth

Vattimo maintains that Nietzsche's experience as a philologist reinforces his connection to the European philosophical tradition. This is, he suggests, due to philology's standing as a model, rather than as a specialized academic discipline. Philology's primary concern is understanding humankind's existence in the world and time, and, as such, is connected to some of the significant movements in the European philosophical tradition, such as the Renaissance's focus on humanism.[100] "The philologists of Renaissance humanism and eighteenth-century classicism, or at any rate the leading ones, were never pure masters of erudition, specialists in the past for its own sake."[101] He argues that this is Nietzsche's primary concern, and while he pursued other areas of interest, such as the natural sciences, this was done in a cursory fashion. Nietzsche's refusal to immerse himself in philology as a specialized discipline, Vattimo

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[98] Ibid, 22. Euripides was the last of the three great tragic dramatists in classical Athens, the previous two being Sophocles and Aeschylus. There are approximately ninety-two plays attributed to him. For more on Greek theatre, see David Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[99] Ibid.

[100] See Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 40-41.

[101] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 41.

claims, confirms his connection to the European philosophical tradition, placing him firmly in the category of humanistic thought.[102]

Nietzsche focuses on philology so as to examine humankind's existence in relation to the past, as opposed to treating antiquity solely as the subject matter of an academic discipline. "Philology for Nietzsche signifies principally the posing of the problem of our relationship to the past."[103] Vattimo draws on *The Birth of Tragedy* in order to further his argument regarding the centrality of philology for Nietzsche. This volume examines the connection between the idea of classical antiquity, such as the beautiful and harmonious that are found, for example, in architecture, and the epigonic mentality towards this idea of classical Greek culture.

> You could say that Nietzsche does no more than put starkly the paradox of the classicist mentality present in German pre-romanticism: the longing for antiquity as the only world authentic, balanced, and worthy of mankind— together with the awareness, accompanied by acute nostalgia, that this condition is lost forever.[104]

Regarding the Greek world as the 'classical' shapes our vision of that same world via an epigonistic attitude that imagines it as a more authentic world than the present, which is a lesser imitation of what has gone before and which fails to live up to its ideals. In

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[102] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 40. Peter Levine describes Nietzsche as a *Weltanschauung* historicist; the *Weltanschauung* is a shared outlook on the world, or worldview, that enables those within that culture or society to understand one another. *Weltanschauung* enables communication, with members gaining "their belief in truth and morality as a result of their unswerving allegiance to a coherent set of values." These values, however, differed from culture to culture and, for Nietzsche, "if two cultures adopted a common perspective, this only meant that one had overcome the other, so that there was now just one culture." To Nietzsche, this resulted in a lack of communication due to conformity. From this, his notion of truth may be discerned. "Words, ideas, and propositions were only comprehensible in terms of other words and ideas," as it is the commitment to these ideas that made them either true or false." As soon as people recognized that world-views were plural and culturally relative, they lose faith in the universal validity of their own *Weltanschauung*, and, so Nietzsche thought, slipped down the slope towards nihilism, recognizing that all truth was contingent" (Peter Levine, *Nietzsche and the Modern Crisis of the Humanities* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995], 40-42).

[103] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 41

[104] Ibid., 42.

effect, then, we place ourselves in an era of decadence. 'Decadence' originally refers to those who believed that civilization was in decline and that they were, in fact, in an age of mediocrity.[105] For Nietzsche, however, the term has a broader significance.

> Nietzsche explicates decadence in *Ecce Homo* as any unhealthy, failed response to the threat of pessimism and despair; physiologically, decadence is a lack of discipline to such stimuli, so that the threat of pessimism (the reality of death, say) provokes an undisciplined response (for example, the idea of eternal life).[106]

Nietzsche's use of the term 'decadence' encompasses everything that he held in an ill light, such as morality, reason, and Christianity. For Nietzsche, everything that springs from weakness, such as all philosophies, art, and religion, are decadent.[107]

Vattimo understands that for Nietzsche philology as an academic discipline was an unsatisfactory approach to antiquity as the Greeks were not primarily scholars. "Whereas classical philology trains men of erudition, the Greeks were anything but *érudits*, and there was no trace of erudition in their educational ideal."[108] They were, he maintains, poets rather than scholars. "The relationship of scholars to great poets has something ridiculous about it."[109] As the Greeks were poets, Nietzsche argues that the rational scholar is incapable of fully comprehending the poetic and artistic achievements of Greek civilization. Academic philology is disproportionate in the

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[105] See Seth Taylor, *Left-Wing Nietzscheans: The Politics of German Expressionism 1910-1920* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), 17.

[106] Nicholas D. More, *Nietzsche's Last Laugh: Ecce Homo as Satire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 62.

[107] See George de Huszar, "Nietzsche's Theory of Decadence and the Transvaluation of All Values." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 6, no. 3 (1945): 259-72. doi:10.2307/2707290, 257.

[108] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 44.

[109] Gianni Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, trans. Nicolas Martin (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 44, quoting Friedrich Nietzsche, *Gesammelte Werke* (Munich: Musarion, 1922), vol. 2, 340.

object that it claims to know, which is classical antiquity, and its method of approach, which is rational and detached. Rather, historical knowledge, properly speaking, is rooted in the aesthetic, the self-expression of a people, so that our relation to truth must be approached in a way that honours this. "The kind of aesthetics that characterizes Greek civilization and the works it bequeathed to us has to do with our relation to truth, in a way neither rational nor reflective, one that somehow has the immediacy and the simplicity characteristic of the work of art."[110] Nietzsche, keeping this in mind, attempted to find a new way of looking at the past, marked by a break with the classicist mentality. He focused on Greek civilization through the lens of the tragic, which transforms our understanding of antiquity, shifting away from an epigonistic view. Vattimo argues that Nietzsche's sense of antiquity is shaped by the Apollonian and Dionysian, that, in turn, influences his understanding of culture. This is so since the two drives underpin culture in its entirety. "The Apollonian and Dionysian therefore define not only a theory of civilization and culture but also art."[111] As Greek drama combined the classic, or Apollonian, with the tragic, or Dionysian, it showed the full spectrum of human existence and not simply an ideal.[112] For Nietzsche, the aesthetic is a particular way of understanding the becoming of the world.[113] "It is only as an *aesthetic*

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[110] Gianni Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 44, quoting Friedrich Nietzsche, *Gesammelte Werke* (Munich: Musarion, 1922), vol. 2, 364-365. Nietzsche frequently considers the aesthetic in his writings. Indeed, the aesthetic features in all his works, up to *The Birth of Tragedy* (Friedrich Ulfers, "Introduction" in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Dionysian Vision of the World*, translated by Ira Allen [Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2013], 1).

[111] Vattimo, *Nietzsche*, 17.

[112] Randall Ott discusses the two drives in relation to architecture, specifically Crown Hall in the University of Illinois, and how this melding of the static, ideal of the Apollonian and the chaotic, dynamic of the Dionysian impacts on the spectator. See Randall Ott, *German Façade Design: Traditions of Screening from 1500 to Modernism* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016).

[113] Friedrich Ulfers, "Introduction," 1.

phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally *justified*."[114] When taken on its

own, the Apollonian cannot do justice to the aesthetic dimension of life. Nietzsche

attributes a state of 'dreams' to the Apollonian. This implies that the Apollonian

emphasis on the beautiful is merely a 'dream,' or 'appearance' that does not capture

adequately the real substance of all that the world is.[115] The Apollonian veils the horrors

of existence. "The Apollonian . . . symbolizes the tremendous artistic powers which

need to be employed in order to transfigure the horror and absurdity of existence."[116]

Thus, the Apollonian is a form of self-deception that allowed the Greeks to lie to

themselves about the nature of the world; it fails to acknowledge the reality of the world

as it is. In contrast, the 'intoxication' of the Dionysian allows us to see through the

Apollonian so as to acknowledge the suffering and destruction in the world. This

perspective offers a more profound view of the world. If we accept this contention, the

tragic becomes another way of engaging with the past, one which does not simply invite

a decadent way of thinking.[117] "We must now seek to discover a new and different way

of establishing a rapport between us and the past that will correspond to the new tragic

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[114] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Press 1967), 52. This volume contains also *The Case of Wagner*, translated by Walter Kauffmann. Emphasis original.

[115] Friedrich Ulfers, "Introduction," 4.

[116] Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche Contra Rousseau: A Study of Nietzsche's Political and Moral Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 25.

[117] Nietzsche's thought concerning art is influenced by Arthur Schopenhauer's work, and, in particular, Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* (Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Representation*, translated by E.F.J. Payne, vol. 1. [New York: Dover Publications, 1966]). Nietzsche was twenty one when he first came across that particular volume. *The World as Will* certainly influenced Nietzsche as *The Birth of Tragedy*, his first book, also dealt with the question of suffering and the value of life (see Julian Young, *Schopenhauer* [London: Routledge, 2005], 222-223). Greek tragedy, for Nietzsche, enables us to cope with the horror of existence as it allows us to identify with the chorus, who are simply watchers of the unfolding drama. "It allows us to experience ourselves as the other-worldly *spectator* rather than the this-worldly *bearer* of life's pain" (ibid., 224. Emphasis original). Nietzsche held that pain and suffering allowed an opportunity for growth, referring to the person that welcomed the occasion as the 'Dionysian pessimist' (ibid, 225).

conception of Greek antiquity."[118] The German philosopher develops his understanding of truth as the search for a new way of engaging with the past. "Nietzsche's initial thinking about truth develops in relation to this problematic: the search for a way we might be able to call authentic, or in any case not decadent, of assuming a stance vis-à-vis the past."[119] For Nietzsche, philology encounters the past as if it were a dead, mummified thing on which specific judgements may be announced as historical fact.[120] It is impossible for philology in this academic sense to encounter the past in a 'living manner,' in which the past has an infinite character, one that cannot be pronounced as a single objective fact.[121] Like the past, it is not possible to approach truth adequately in the same manner as the *érudits*; but it must be encountered in 'living manner,' taking into consideration its 'infinite character.'

1.2.3 The Death of God

Vattimo explores the nature of truth for Nietzsche and the implications of what it designates as the 'death of God.' The German philosopher disagrees with the assumption that truth is that which is generally clear and distinct. It is, he believes, folly to assume that what is clear must be true, as our common experience of the world is far from this. The main reason that we consider certain things to be evidently true, as truth is because we belong in a certain time and place, and our historicity has left us with an inherent intuition for the appreciation of certain things but not for others. Any

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[118] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 43.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Ibid., 46.

[121] Ibid., 43.

philosophies that fall within the parameters of traditional metaphysics tend to strike us as being true, since we are already inclined to believe them as they reflect our presuppositions of our ambient world.[122] "They do no more than state explicitly the presuppositions upon which the world we inhabit rests, presuppositions that we cannot do without on pain of renouncing our own humanity."[123] These presuppositions form the cornerstones of our way of living as they provide us with a structure that forms the basis of our epoch. We cannot do without these constructs as they are necessary for the functioning of our society, for the way in which we live. What this amounts to is that the world is, in essence, a fable constructed by humankind.

For Nietzsche, morality, too, is a fable because the traditional systems of metaphysics and religious morality are founded on a system of values that is also a human construct. The most fundamental error is the belief that there can be moral acts as our very belief in morality rests on the preconception that we are fully aware of our actions.[124] According to Vattimo, for Nietzsche, this too is a fable. Morality, rather, rests on a dynamic of sublimation, which is the transformation of an impulse into a more creative activity. Thus, "the barbarian's desire to torture his foe can be sublimated into the desire to defeat one's rival, say in the Olympic contests."[125] In this light, morality, then, is a division of human nature, whereby one part of our nature is sacrificed for the promotion of the other.[126] Nietzsche offers, as an example, a soldier wishing that he

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[122] Ibid., 66.

[123] Ibid., 66.

[124] Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, 62.

[125] Walter Kaufmann, "Morality and Sublimation," in *Nietzsche: On Morality*, ed. Daniel Conway and Peter S. Groff (London: Routledge, 1998), 121.

[126] Vattimo draws on a passage from *Human, All Too Human* to illustrate this point. "*Morality as the self-division of man.* — A good author whose heart is really in his subject wishes that someone would come and annihilate him by presenting the same subject with greater clarity and resolving all the

could die for his country on the battlefield. The soldier is driven by an egoistical, self-interest, which is to stay alive. This self-interest is, however, is annulled by a subsequent action, which is done in the name of something else, namely, the soldier's desire of sacrificing himself for his country. The soldier is a split subject, with an egoistical interest developing in both of his parts. "The body has immediate needs; the body wants life and health; but an *idea* overrides these pressing concerns and imposes upon the subject another urgency."[127] The idea is also something precious to the subject, creating the division. The division may be described in terms of an internal voice. "It is as if a voice within the soldier . . . commands 'you ought to . . .' – a voice that consequently splits the subject into an 'I' talking and a 'you' listening."[128] If the voice suggests that the subject ought to, or should do, something, then this is a moral message. It is the case that the moral message is something that is internalized as a part of the subject's identity, "an idea that has now become something that 'man loves of himself.'"[129] The moral message is an idea that is understood as something virtuous or noble and forms a

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questions it contains. A girl in love wishes the faithfulness and devotion of her love could be tested by the faithlessness of the man she loves. A soldier wished he could die on the battlefield for his victorious fatherland; for his supreme desire is victorious in the victory of his fatherland. A mother gives her child that of which she deprives herself: sleep, the best nourishment, if necessary her health, her strength. – But are all these selfless states of mind? Are these moral deeds *miracles* because they are, in Schopenhauer's words, "impossible and yet real"? Is it not clear that, in all these cases, man loves *something of himself*, an idea, a desire, an offspring, more than *something else of himself*, that he thus *divides* his nature and sacrifices one part of it to the other? Is something *essentially* different when some obstinate man says: "I would rather be shot down that move an inch out of that fellow's way"? –*The inclination to something* (wish, impulse, desire) is the present in all the above instances; to give in to it, with all the consequences, is in any event, not "unegoistic". – In morality man treats himself not as an *individuum* but as *dividuum*. (HAH, § 57, 74)" (Gianni Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, trans. Nicolas Martin [Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001], 66-67, quoting Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too* Human, in Friedrich Nietzsche*: Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), 74. Emphasis original).

[127] Peter Bornedal, *The Surface and the Abyss: Nietzsche as Philosopher of Mind and Knowledge* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co., 2010), 217.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Ibid., 218.

precious part of the subject's self-identity.[130] Sublimation, then, rests on two principles, or drives, namely, preservation and pleasure. The need to establish security, for example, can be traced back to the drive for preservation.[131] Indeed, security is a factor serving to create the fable of morality. The individual learns, much like animals do, to fall in with the herd and hide in the security and reliability that the herd offers. "For this reason the animals learn to master themselves and alter their form, so that many, for example, adapt their colouring to the colour of their surroundings . . . Thus the individual hides himself in the general concept 'man,' or in society."[132] Vattimo claims that, for Nietzsche, religion offers a level of security that is greater than that which the herd, or society, can provide. Religion offers stability that comes from a higher being and from a higher plane than our own. This security is manifest in the form of divine will. Everything that happens to the individual, whether good or bad, may be seen as a manifestation of the divine will. In addition to the drive for preservation and the need for security, there is one too for pleasure-seeking. In the case of pleasure seeking, sublimation leads to morality acting as a source for dramatizing the subject's inner life.[133] This dramatization is played out as an inner struggle between honour and desire.

> The most usual means the ascetic and the saint employs to make his life nonetheless bearable and enjoyable consists in occasionally waging war and in the alternation of victory and defeat, for this he needs an opponent and he finds him in the so-called 'enemy within.' Specifically, he exploits his compulsive vanity, his thirst for honour and domination, then his

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[130] Ibid.

[131] Vattimo, *Nietzsche* , 71.

[132] Gianni Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, trans. Nicolas Martin (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 70, quoting Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, in *Nietzsche: Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), 32. Emphasis original.

[133] Vattimo, *Nietzsche*, 71.

sensual desires, in an attempt to see his life as a prolonged battle and himself as a battlefield.[134]

This inner struggle between the preservation and pleasure drives disrupts the unity of the self. The self is reduced to being simply the arena, where the battle between conflicting motives takes place, and this inner disruption affects morality. "Once the belief in the ultimate immediacy and unity of the self was undermined, everything that man characterized with this name appeared doubtful."[135] We view this battle of conflicting impulses, of pleasure and preservation, as the development of our moral code. In the end, the winner will be the most powerful impulse. These impulses, however, are nothing more than human constructs. What we believe to be moral imperatives are habits or actions first performed for the benefit of society. As they were necessary for survival, people continued to perform these actions for the benefit of all. As time passed, subsequent generations executed the same habits, yet for different reasons, such as "out of fear or reverence for those who demanded and recommended them, or out of habit because their performance everywhere produced joy and concurring faces, or from vanity because they were praised."[136] The original motive, which was for reasons of utility, was forgotten and morality was born. "Such actions, whose basic motive, that of utility, has been *forgotten*, are then called *moral* actions: not because, for instance, they are performed out of those *other* motives, but because they

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[134] Gianni Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, trans. Nicolas Martin (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 72, quoting Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, in *Nietzsche: Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), 134).

[135] Vattimo, *Nietzsche*, 72.

[136] Gianni Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, trans. Nicolas Martin (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 68, quoting Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, in *Nietzsche: Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), 208).

are *not* performed from any conscious reason of utility."[137] For Nietzsche, then, our moral actions are produced for motives of utility, rather than as the result of our own conscious reasoning.

Nietzsche's interest in sublimation rests on a particular philosophical problem; namely, how something can originate in its opposite.[138] He suggests, as an example, that truth can originate in an error.[139] This was denied by metaphysics, which maintained that this could not occur. "It was assumed, for example, that values derived to be 'higher' could only come from above or from a mysterious 'thing in itself.'"[140] Nietzsche, however, disagrees, deeming that higher values are simply the product of human circumstances. Morality, for example, is the product of sublimation and utility, which are human factors. One of Nietzsche's most famous dictums, "God is dead," corresponds to the self-sublimation of morality. "The self-sublimation of morality refers to the process whereby 'faith in morality is withdrawn — but why? *Out of morality!*"[141] Nietzsche believes that the root of the self-sublimation of morality is, in fact, morality's very commitment to truth. Morality, he maintains, is built on an error. In morality's quest for truth, it discovered that morality itself was a lie. This 'error' is reflected in the observation that 'God is dead.' In the same manner in which the world is a fable constructed by humankind, God too is a construct. This dictum, however, is not a denial of God's existence. Rather, it is a reflection on how changing social conditions

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[137] Ibid., 68-69. Emphasis original.

[138] Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, 59.

[139] Ibid.

[140] Ibid., 60.

[141] Gianni Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, trans. Nicolas Martin (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 68, quoting Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, in *Nietzsche: Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), 8.

determine the shape of human existence. Changed conditions have made God superfluous to our existence. This particular fable was rooted in an age where it fulfilled a need for security in an uncertain world. "The ultimate decisions (concerning so-called eternal questions) lose their importance when the character of life in society is *less violent*."[142] We are in different circumstances in today's society to when the 'fable' of God was created out of a need for security. According to Vattimo, Nietzsche believes that as conditions change the need for such security recedes. "And under these (at least relatively) secure new conditions, the possibility of a new form of human existence grows and takes shape, which Nietzsche dubs the self-sublimation of morality, the death of God."[143] The death of God, far from being a pronouncement on the reality of God's existence, is, instead, an announcement, an event that may set other events in motion.[144] The death of God is, for Nietzsche, a pronouncement concerning the idea of an ultimate truth. "Everything that declares itself superior and transcendent, in other words everything we deem valuable, is nothing more than a product of the sublimation of 'human, all too human' factors."[145] What we consider to be an ultimate truth is unveiled as a construct, when the need to maintain it has passed. "It is only unveiled as fiction at the moment when, having done its job of guaranteeing a certain organization of social life and also scientific and technical progress, it turns out to be no longer strictly

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[142] Gianni Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, trans. Nicolas Martin (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 76, quoting Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nietzsche: Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), 437. Emphasis original.

[143] Ibid., 78.

[144] "This prodigious event is still on its way, and is travelling—it has not yet reached men's ears. Lightning and thunder need time, the light of the stars needs time, deeds need time, even after they are done, to be seen and heard. This deed is as yet more further from them than the furthest star, —*and yet they have done it*" (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* trans. Thomas Common [New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2006], 91). Emphasis original.

[145] Vattimo, *Nietzsche*, 61.

necessary."[146] Truth is, for Nietzsche, simply a set of principles to which we commonly adhere. "What we believe to be truth . . . is nothing more than the ideological projection of a certain form of life."[147] The idea of objective truth, then, is reduced to interpretation as we only have contact with human constructs. For this same reason, historical knowledge and scientific knowledge fail to provide us with any form of objective truth. "Nietzsche's thinking on the problem of historical knowledge inevitably had to expand to the point of bringing the whole metaphysical theory of truth as objectivity into question."[148] Vattimo maintains that although science is not capable of giving us any objective truth, it provides us with an example of how we ought to think; it does so in a way that allows us to discern without succumbing to our interests or emotions, nor does it allow us to yield to fanaticism or erraticism. For Vattimo,

> the critique of the concept of truth as evidentness—as the immediate, psychologically convincing, and irrefragable givenness of something, and "object" or a proposition, as time, as corresponding to "what is the case"— is one of the most constant and important themes of Nietzsche's speculative career.[149]

It could be argued that lying is inherent to our society, then, as we know the world only through metaphorical constructs. By lying collectively, we conform to the metaphors that make up our reality, which means that we conform to the predominant customs of 'the herd.' "The principal convention is to believe in the 'objectivity' of 'objects,' to believe that the world gives itself up, like a panorama totally translatable into logical

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[146] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 171.

[147] Ibid., 136.

[148] Ibid., 55. Vattimo believes that, for Nietzsche, there is no distinction between the humanities and natural sciences as "all the sciences are historical sciences, to the extent that they never deal with *things* but only with metaphors" (Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 55). As there is no objective truth, both sciences deal with metaphorical constructs.

[149] Ibid., 28.

schemes, to knowing."[150] Truth is merely our compliance with the metaphors to which we generally adhere. "A truth impresses itself on consciousness in a certain and unquestionable manner . . . to a historical world whose conventions, or more generally, whose very language, are accepted more or less unconsciously and without resistance."[151] We know nothing of the world as it is of itself, all we know is a world shaped by these constructs, and there can be no truths in a world of such illusions, merely conformities. We cannot judge truth by what is evident as 'truths' are propositions that conform to certain established conventions.

1.3   Vattimo's Exploration of Nietzsche's Aesthetics

This final section focuses on Vattimo's exploration of the arts and culture in Nietzsche's work. It begins by discussing the dichotomy between identity and appearance, paying particular attention to the connection between excess and art. The discussion shifts to both the concept and the manuscript of *The Will to Power*, exploring further the importance of art and the figure of the artist in Nietzsche's work.

1.3.1   The Death of God: Excess and Art

Vattimo is concerned with the dichotomy between appearance and identity in Nietzsche's work, which is a reflection of the death of God. The death of God illustrates Nietzsche's thinking that the world is a human construct, with 'fables' created in order to fulfil a particular function or need. Even God was a construct designed to fulfil a need for security. For Nietzsche, the symbolic world of appearance, characterized by the

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[150] Ibid.

[151] Ibid., 29.

metaphors or constructs that have been created by humankind, is not a stable one.[152] The stability of this world is threatened by one particular element; namely excess. Excess, then, blurs the boundaries between reality and appearance, particularly when the subject itself is threatened. "Excess . . . is nothing more than the excess of the drive to masking and appearance."[153] The death of God illustrates this, as the 'death' occurs precisely because of its own excess. "God is dead as the result of the extreme degree of refinement reached by religiosity."[154] The self-sublimation of morality occurs because of morality, which cannot tolerate the 'error' of the construct that is God. "Excess: fiction, although arising 'at the outset' for utilitarian ends, it becomes autonomous once those ends are attained and actually revolts against the very canons of order that it had itself established."[155] Excess threatens the stability of the hegemonic social order of the created, symbolic world.

In Vattimo's exploration of aesthetic appearance, the negation of social roles, and identity in Nietzsche's work, he relies heavily on the tension between the Apollonian and Dionysian drives. He draws, in particular on the connection between appearance and identity with respect to the arts. The Apollonian is now associated with illusion and appearance, as well as the *principium individuationis* or the principle of individuation,

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[152] Vattimo claims that there are problems with this impulse to constantly produce and destroy new metaphors and symbols (fables). He believes that if, as Nietzsche claimed, these metaphors were to safeguard humankind then there would be no need for this impulse to function. This critique is, however, not a question that Nietzsche chose to address because, according to Vattimo, this would result in Nietzsche having trapped himself in exactly the type of metaphysical exploration that he wished to avoid. See Vattimo, *Dialogue*.

[153] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 113.

[154] Ibid., 113- 114.

[155] Ibid., 111.

whereby each individual stands permanently alone, apart from all others.[156] The principle of individuation is crucial to our perception of the world. It allows us to order mentally the world, distinguishing things and animate objects, for example, from one another.[157] In contrast, the Dionysian threatens the equilibrium of the *principium individuationis* as this drive desires to negate identity. "The devotee of Dionysus is consumed by the horror and ecstatic rapture that result when the *principium individuationis* (the principle that each individual is himself alone and stands permanently apart from all the others) is violated."[158] The rupture of the principle of individuation breaks with societal convention, returning humankind to an almost primal state of unity, both with nature and with other human beings.

> Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man . . . Now the slave is a free man; now all the rigid, hostile barriers that necessity, caprice, or 'impudent convention' have fixed between man and man are broken.. Now, with the gospel of universal harmony, each one feels himself not only united, reconciled, and fused with his neighbour, but as one with him.[159]

While we may perceive things as individuated or distinct, they are in fact connected. The principle of individuation is illusory. "The more fundamental truth about the world is that the things and creatures that we perceive as distinct entities are all intimately

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156 Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 101. Vattimo suggests, that, although Nietzsche draws on Schopenhauer's *principium individuationis*, ultimately he breaks with Schopenhauerian thought. Nietzsche does so as he wishes to avoid becoming entangled in a metaphysical discussion on the tragic.

157 See Kathleen Marie Higgins, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2010), 15.

158 Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 101.

159 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy & The Case of Wagner*, translated, with commentary, by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 37.

connected in the life of the whole of which they are parts."[160] Vattimo claims that it is,

in fact, the ongoing struggle between the Dionysian and Apollonian drives that impacts

on appearance and identity. "The dichotomy between the real and apparent worlds is

already embedded in a certain historical configuration of the balance of power between

Dionysus and Apollo."[161] He considers this power struggle between the two figures as

a socio-political one, that is evident in for example, issues of race, social standing, and

politics. This means that culture is the result of the struggle between the Dionysian and

Apollonian. "Culture is born of conflict, and the beauty of ancient Hellas must be

understood in terms of a contest of two violently opposed forces."[162] Here a sort of peace

treaty was drawn up between the two opposing forces, "the two antagonists were

reconciled; the boundary lines to be observed henceforth by each were sharply defined,

and there was to be a periodical exchange of gifts of esteem."[163] The dichotomy between

reality and appearance continues to live in the arts. It is for this reason that excess,

according to Nietzsche, may be most evident in art as art blurs the distinction between

reality and appearance. "For excess . . . is nothing more than excess of the drive to

masking and appearance."[164] The struggle between Dionysus and Apollo, then, is

mirrored in the struggle between appearance and reality, which is evident in art as a

locality of excess. "The confines between reality and appearance quiver and dissolve,

indeed the very distinction between the two spheres is nullified (which is the essence of

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[160] Kathleen Marie Higgins, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, 15.

[161] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 104.

[162] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 129.

[163] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann in Friedrich Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy & The Case of Wagner*, translated, with commentary, by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 39.

[164] Ibid., 113.

excess), only when the identity and continuity of the subject with itself come under attack."[165] Theatre is a quintessential example of this essence of excess, as, here, the distinctions between appearance and reality are indistinct: it is the site where appearances elicit emotion, making them are as good as real. "The subject is (herself, himself) drawn in and made to become other than (her-, him-) self."[166] This act of becoming other means that theatre reigns as the principal site of artistic imitation. Indeed, born out of the capacity for adaptation that goes beyond what is necessary in terms of utility, the actor characterizes the connection between excess and art.

> Falseness with a good conscience; the delight in simulation exploding as a power that pushes aside one's so-called "character," flooding it and at times extinguishing it; the inner craving for a role and a mask, for *appearance*; an excess of the capacity for all kinds of adaptations that can no longer be satisfied in the service of the most immediate and narrowest utility.[167]

The ability to step in and out of roles as one chooses, however, destabilises individual identities. Any centre that would establish the individual as a solid pillar of society is lost.[168] The individual truly becomes the actor, losing any sense of inner truth, and this disidentification is the site of the struggle between Dionysus and Apollo, which is played out through art.[169] Vattimo identifies the Apollonian and Dionysian struggle in Nietzsche's aesthetics. Art is not, he claims, chosen casually as the principal site of

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[165] Ibid., 114.

[166] Ibid.

[167] Gianni Vattimo, *Dialogue with Nietzsche*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 113, quoting Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans, and ed., with commentaries, by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1968). Emphasis original.

[168] See Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 117.

[169] This refers to *The Gay Science*, aphorism 356, entitled "How Europe will become ever 'more artistic.'" See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans, and ed., with commentaries, by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1968).

excess, but because it is in art that the boundary between reality, appearance, and identity is blurred.[170]

> Only a reading of the vicissitudes of art (its productions, its social status, its psychological significance for the art-maker and the spectator) that views it as the locus of a historic struggle between the principle of identity (the system of roles) and the Dionysian revel would have meaning.[171]

Art, then, as the site of excess continually violates the boundaries between appearance and identity, and in doing so threatens the social order. Vattimo believes that this Nietzschean reading of art has much to offer towards enabling an understanding of the subversive character of art in contemporary aesthetics.

1.3.2   The Will to Power

The Will to Power is a collection of writings from Nietzsche's notebooks, dating from 1883 to 1888. This collection was published posthumously by Nietzsche's sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, in 1901, the year after his death. Neither the arrangement nor the numbering of these notes were Nietzsche's; the notebooks contained drafts for several works and were never intended to be published in this particular format. Not all the notes were published in the 1901 edition. In 1904, his sister published a biography of Nietzsche, which contained additional notes from *The Will to Power*. Later, in 1906, another version was published, offering new notes blended in with the old in two volumes.[172] Originally, *The Will to Power* was considered to be the culmination of Nietzsche's thought. This view, according to Walter Kaufmann, was propagated by

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[170] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 113.

[171] Ibid., 118.

[172] For further information concerning these editions of *The Will to Power*, plus a discussion of its reception, see Walter Kaufmann, "Introduction," in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kauffmann and R.J Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968).

Nietzsche's sister, when the book was first published. It was upheld by Alfred Bäumler, who supplied the postscripts for a one volume edition of the work in 1930, which proved popular (probably because it was cheaper than other versions). Bäumler became a professor of philosopher in Berlin after Hitler came to power, which meant that his views on *The Will to Power* as Nietzsche's *magnum opus* were widely accepted in Germany.[173] Bäumler supported the Nazi regime and, by distorting Nietzsche's work, did much to bring about Nietzsche's Nazification. "Two years before the Seizure of Power, he wrote *Nietzsche the Philosopher and Politician*, which sought to cast him as the greatest intellectual forefather of Nazism."[174] After World War II, however, due to this connection with the Nazi regime, both the book itself and Bäumler's view of the book were discredited.

Vattimo notes that the traditional division of Nietzsche's work marks three distinct periods: the early works; the middle period, which encompasses his writings from *Human, All Too Human* to *The Gay Science*; the later period that begins with *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. For him, *The Will to Power* stems from a turn in Nietzsche's philosophy and so, in contrast to the traditional division of Nietzsche's corpus, Vattimo suggests alternatives. The first is to view all of the writings from *Human, All Too Human* onwards as a unified body of work, and the second is to treat *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as separate from the later works as "the latter are on the whole dominated by the (ultimately

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[173] Walter Kaufmann, "Introduction," in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kauffmann and R.J Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), xiii.

[174] Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity 1919-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 105. Bäumler distorted much of Nietzsche's work to suit his own agenda. Nietzsche's distaste for anti-Semitism, for example, was explained as a means of drawing German attention towards him so that they would listen to him (ibid). For a further discussion of Bäumler's appropriation of Nietzsche's work during the Third Reich, see Max Whyte, "The Uses and Abuses of Nietzsche in the Third Reich," *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 2 (2008).

abandoned) project to write a great, systematic work with the title *The Will to Power*."[175]
For Vattimo, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* marks a new phase in Nietzsche's thought: it is
the beginning of Nietzsche's focus on his planned project *The Will to Power*. Vattimo
believes that even from a stylistic viewpoint *Zarathustra* is different from Nietzsche's
previous works. "It is a kind of long prose poem, whose most obvious model would be
the New Testament. *Zarathustra* is similarly set out in verses, in which the didactic and
cultic aims of the text are expressed."[176] He suggests that the reason for this difference
is the prophetic character of the work, which holds that a radical redevelopment of
culture and civilization must take place, owing to a distancing from the metaphysical
tradition that produced the fable of morality.[177]

The term 'will to power' made its first appearance in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.[178]
Although no work prior to *Zarathustra* mentions the term, it is possible to chart its
development throughout Nietzsche's writings. 'Power' (*Macht*) frequently appears in
his works and is used in the early *The Birth of Tragedy* in the context of the ability of
art, music, and myth to affect people.[179] His usage of the word 'power' developed over
the course of his writings, with Nietzsche later speaking of the lust or desire for power
(*Machtgelust*) in *The Wanderer and his Shadow* and *Daybreak*.[180] Here, power is

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[175] Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, 87. Vattimo notes that the division of Nietzsche's corpus is usually a threefold one: a) the early works; b) the genealogical and deconstructive thought from *Human, All Too Human to The Gay Science*; c) the philosophy of Eternal Recurrence that begins with *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. See Vattimo, *Nietzsche*, 87.

[176] Ibid., 89.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Linda L. Williams, "Will to Power in Nietzsche's Published Works and the Nachlass," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 57, No. 3, 448.

[179] Ibid., 449.

[180] Ibid.

associated with a psychological motivation. This shift from power as an external force

to an internal one continued to develop in his writings.[181] In *Daybreak*, for example, the

phrases *Gefühl der Macht* (feeling of power) and *Machtgefühl* (powerfeeling) began to

appear, illustrating a deepening of his use of the idea of power.

> This move, however, does not make the external and internal positions
> mutually exclusive; rather, it appears to mark a broadening of the notion
> of power from more overt, physical expressions of power to more subtle,
> covert, psychological or motivational expressions.[182]

Eventually, *Wille zur Macht* (will to power) became Nietzsche's most frequently used

term in relation to power. Linda Williams suggests that, as his thought concerning power

evolved, Nietzsche needed a phrase that would convey more than what the word 'power'

usually did.[183]

The will to power is, for Nietzsche, the basis of reality. It is the driving force

behind all human behaviour. Life, he maintains, is not so much a struggle for survival

but a will to power.[184] Reality consists of quantities of force in varying degrees of

tension in relation to each other.[185] This relation of tension means that every force is

related to others, with every force being either dominant or submissive towards another.

The dominance or submissiveness of a force does not diminish it in any way as obeying

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[181] Ibid.

[182] Ibid., 449.

[183] Ibid., 451. For a more in-depth analysis of the evolution and use of Nietzsche's terms for power, see Linda L. Williams, "Will to Power in Nietzsche's Published Works and the Nachlass," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 57, No. 3, 449; see also Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947).

[184] Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 179.

[185] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (London: Continuum, 2002), 40.

and commanding both relate to power. "Individual power is by no means surrendered. In the same way, there is in commanding an admission that the absolute power of the opponent has not been vanquished, incorporated, disintegrated. 'Obedience' and 'commanding' are forms of struggle."[186] The dominant (or superior) forces are known as active, while the submissive (or inferior) forces are known as reactive.[187] We have an awareness of reactive forces as they tend to be forces of adaptation or conservation. Reactive forces fulfil "the conditions of life and the functions and tasks of conversation, adaptation and utility."[188] Active forces, in contrast, tend to escape our awareness and are creative, affirmative, and transformative.[189] "Consciousness merely expresses the relation of certain reactive forces to the active forces which dominate them. Consciousness is essentially reactive; that is why we do not know what a body can do, or what activity it is capable of."[190] Force may be characterised in terms of quantity and quality, which is determined by their relationship to each other. "Of two forces in a relation, one will be dominant and the other dominated, and each will have a specific quality, that of being active or reactive."[191] The will to power, then, as the inner will of force determines the relationship between both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of force. Forces are simply instruments of the will to power; they cannot achieve

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[186] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kauffmann and R.J Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 342.

[187] Gilles Deleuze observes that the relation between forces constitutes a body, be it physical, social, political, and so on. It is in a body that forces are known as active or reactive. See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (London: Continuum, 2002), 40.

[188] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 40.

[189] Marco Checchi, "Spotting the Primacy of Resistance in the Virtual Encounter of Foucault and Deleuze" in *Foucault Studies*, No. 18, pp. 197-212, October 2014.

[190] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 41.

[191] Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze and Guattari* (Oxon: Routledge, 1989), 21.

anything without it. The will to power, while being the inner will of force, is not reducible to it. It has qualities that must be distinguished from those of force. While 'active' and 'reactive' are terms used in relation to force, 'affirmative' and 'negative' are used in relation to the will to power. While linked to 'active' and 'reactive,' 'affirmative' and 'negative' denote something more beyond these terms. "Affirmation is not action but the power of *becoming active*, becoming active personified. Negation is not a simple reaction but a *becoming reactive*."[192] The qualities of the will to power are more subtle and primordial than those of force. The will to power, then, decides the qualities of forces, interpreting and evaluating, and determining whether a force is active or reactive. "*In this way the will to power is essentially creative and giving*: it does not aspire, it does not seek, it does not desire, above all it does not desire power. It *gives*."[193]

Vattimo takes up the will to power through the lens of nihilism and the eternal return. With Christian morality, humankind managed to chart a way out of the chaos of what the Italian philosopher describes as a 'first nihilism.'[194] Morality, for several reasons, was beneficial to humankind. It combatted humankind's 'smallness' by providing an absolute value: morality gave meaning to suffering and evil; it implied that humankind possessed adequate knowledge of what was important; and it was also a mean of preservation.[195] What Vattimo terms a 'second nihilism' is associated wit hthe collapse of Christian. Morality was built on an error, and, in following morality's imperative to be truthful, humankind discovered that it was a lie. The collapse of

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[192] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 54; see also Bogue, *Deleuze and Guattari*.

[193] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 83. Emphasis original.

[194] Vattimo, *Dialogue*, 120.

[195] See Friedrich Nietzsche, "Book One: European Nihilism" in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kauffmann and R.J Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 9-10.

morality, however, brought about a 'second nihilism' as the lens through which humankind had interpreted the world for centuries was broken. "The world no longer had any aim or purpose: 'life as it is, without meaning or goal, a descent without any finale into nothingness: 'Eternal Recurrence."[196] While morality provided values to live by, Vattimo maintains that it concealed the root of these values, which was the will to power. With morality's collapse, these roots are exposed, revealing that everything is rooted in the will to power.[197] The tension between forces, the instruments of the will to power, compels each individual to choose a side. While morality enabled the weak to survive by condemning the strong, with its collapse so too has this very safety net of condemnation. "These people will go under if they expressly and honestly acknowledge the struggle going on between the fundamentally opposed tendencies of the Will to Power."[198] There is a hermeneutical dimension to the will to power; in deciding the qualities of forces, it interprets and evaluates, determining if a force is active or reactive. In contrast to the weak, those that will prove themselves able to cope with the struggle thrown up by the will to power are those, who do not need to abide by absolute values.[199] "The strong man is characterized less by features that belong to the world of struggle

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[196] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kauffmann and R.J Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 35, quoted in Gianni Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, trans. Nicolas Martin (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 121.

[197] Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, 122.

[198] Ibid.

[199] Vattimo quotes Nietzsche to illustrate this. "The most moderate, who do not *need* extreme dogmas, who not only admit to a good chunk of chance and nonsense in themselves but also love the idea, who can think of man as considerably reduced in value without becoming small and weak themselves: those who are the richest in health, who can cope with the greatest number of *malheurs* and who therefore do not fear these *malheurs* — those who are sure of their power and who represent with conscious pride the strength that man has achieved" (Gianni Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, trans. Nicolas Martin (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 123, quoting Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, in *Nietzsche: Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), 221. Emphasis original).

than by a kind of 'hermeneutic' character."[200] For Vattimo, the struggle between forces is, in essence, a struggle between two competing interpretations. As the will to power is, for Nietzsche, the basis of reality, what we perceive as the real world is simply a myth. Each of the forces competes with others, bringing forth different perspectives that make up our "apparent world."[201]

1.3.3   The Will to Power as Arts

Art, Vattimo writes, is the model of the will to power. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche remarks that "existence can be justified aesthetically because art protects us from the truth."[202] While originally, for Nietzsche, art protects us from the truth, Vattimo claims that he later revisits and expands this thought. While art's beauty shielded us from the ugliness of the chaos of reality, Its functioning is more than that of a mere shield. Art protects us from the truth because it is a creative activity of lying.[203] Art does not hide an objective "truth behind" its forms. As a creative activity of the lie it opposes passivity, reactivity, and the spirit of revenge, that determine the search for truth.[204] Vattimo draws on Nietzsche's *Nachlass* to illustrate this:

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[200] Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, 123-124.

[201] Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, 124. Vattimo also refers to Nietzsche's Nachlass to support this: "each power centre has its *perspective* on all the rest, i.e. its own quite specific *assessment* of them, its own way of acting, its own way of resisting. The "apparent world" reduces itself [...] to a specific way of acting on the world, proceeding from a centre. Now there is no other kind of action at all: and the "world" is only a word for the sum total of these actions. (N 18888, VIII.3, 163, 14[184])" (Gianni Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, trans. Nicolas Martin [Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001], 124, quoting Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, in *Nietzsche: Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari [Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967], 163. Emphasis original).

[202] Vattimo, Nietzsche: *An Introduction*, 134.

[203] Ibid.

[204] Ibid.

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> There is only One world and it is false, cruel, contradictory, seductive, meaningless. . . A world so constituted is the real world. . . *We need lies* in order to conquer this reality, this 'truth', that means in order to *live* [. . .] Metaphysics, morality, religion, science – these are considered merely as various forms of lying: with their aid, life can be *believed* in. 'Life *should* inspire trust': presented in these terms, the task is immense. In order to solve it, man must naturally be a liar; more that anything else he must be an *artist* [. . .] Metaphysics, morality, religion, science – all simply monstrous products of his will to art. (N Autumn 1887 – March 1888, VIII.2, 435, 11[415]).[205]

 The recognition of the will to power removes the comfort of the world of illusions and leaves us with the stark 'reality' of the world of chaos. Nietzsche views the will to power as art positively, given that it is not trapped within the cycle of metaphysics and morality that mask 'reality.' Art is free from these traditions, so that Vattimo points out that the *Übermensch*, today, only exists in the guise of the artist. The *Übermensch*, or overman, is one who does not look to an other-worldliness because of a dissatisfaction with this world, but instead meets new challenges as they arise. The *Übermensch* sets aside the principles by which he was raised and develops his own interpretation of the world. Nietzsche believes that those who do not follow suit are condemning themselves to a condition of slavery, subject to the traditions of morality and metaphysics. Vattimo regards the will to power as art and as represented in the *Übermensch* to be a portrayal of life without metaphysical structures. "Less a theory of art than as the working out of a picture of life in a world conceived as subordinate to the Will to Power, a world, in other words, free of stable foundations and structures, devoid of ultimate determiners and stripped of any guarantees."[206] For Nietzsche, even the expression itself of art is demonstrative of the will to power as those, for example, who take pleasure in tragedy

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[205] Gianni Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, trans. Nicolas Martin (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 135-136, quoting Friedrich Nietzsche, in *Nietzsche: Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), 435. Emphasis original.

[206] Vattimo, *Nietzsche:* An *Introduction*, 138.

show an ability to cope in a world, where nothing can be considered as being 'normal.' It marks them as being strong characters, able to accept the world as a fable. In contrast to this, those who delight in the pretty and the delicate show an inability to cope under the same circumstances, as they are of weak character and require a suppport in the form of metaphysics or morality. "The concept of tragedy becomes a synonym for every healthy art form, because the enjoyment of tragedy is only open to those who have no need of ultimate solutions."[207] Strength is measured by the ability to cope with the difficulties of life, while weakness is reflected by the gravitation towards the beautiful. The pleasure in tragedy, then, distinguishes the strong from the weak. Strength is not only defined by rising to new challenges. Although the *Übermensch* is strong in the sense of being capable of rising to new challenges, Vattimo even notes that Nietzsche takes this in a physical sense. The denial and contempt for the body that is characteristic of both ascetism and of Platonic-Christian morality and metaphysics are suggestive of *ressentiment* and the desire for definitive solutions.[208] He claims that, in being remote from the body, morality, metaphysics, and religion demonstrate a nihilistic spirit: nihilistic because they have reduced the body by removing its vitality.[209] Art, for Nietzsche, has the opposite effect. Rather than distancing itself from the body, it possesses 'enlivening qualities,' acting contrariwise to ascetism and nihilism.[210] In this

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[207] Ibid., 140.

[208] See Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, 140.

[209] See ibid, 140-141.

case, art does not provide a fleeting outlet for the emotions, as with metaphysics and morality, nor does it comfort us with a sense of rationality. There are echoes here of Nietzsche's thought concerning tragedy. "Dionysus speaks the language of Apollo, but ultimately Apollo speaks the language of Dionysus."[211] The Apollonian, the beautiful, was rooted in Dionysian chaos, and here we see the same idea in the understanding of art being rooted in the body. However, in a similar manner to how the death of God was brought about by morality, asceticism too works towards freeing one from one's own interests of self-preservation[212]. This is something akin to the *Übermensch*, who possesses ability to live through the tragic.

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[210] See Vattimo, *Introduction*, 140-141. Vattimo draws on Nietzsche's *Nachlass* to illustrate the "enlivening qualities" of art.

The feeling of intoxication, corresponding to an *increase in strength*:

most powerfully in the coupling of the sexes:

new organs, new skills, colours, forms . . .

"beautification" is a consequence of *heightened* strength

beautification as a necessary consequence of strength-heightening

beautification as the expression of a victorious will, a heightened

co-ordination, a harmonization of all strong desires [. . .]

logical and geometrical simplification is a consequence of strength-heightening: conversely, the *perception* of such a simplification

in turn heightens one's feeling of strength . . .

Peak of development: great style [. . .]

the state of desire one calls *intoxication* is precisely a high feeling of *power* . . .

sensations of space and time are transformed: immense distances are surveyed and indeed are only now *perceptible*

the *extension* of one's gaze over vast subjects and expanses

the *refinement of the organ* used to detect the smallest and most fleeting of things

the *power of divining*, the ability to understand with only the slightest prompting,

the slightest suggestion, "intelligent" *sensuality* . . .

strength as a feeling of power in one's muscles, as suppleness

and pleasure in movement, as dance, as lightness and *presto* [. . .]

artists, if they can cut the mustard, have strong (physically strong) constitutions,

have reserves, are powerhouses, sensual: without a certain overheating of the sexual organs no Raphael would have been possible. (N Early 1888 — Early 1889, VIII.3., 85ff., 14[117]). Gianni Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, trans. Nicolas Martin (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 141-142, quoting Friedrich Nietzsche, in *Nietzsche: Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), 85. Emphasis original). I have opted to keep the formatting as per Vattimo in *Nietzsche: An Introduction*.

[211] Gianni Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, trans. Nicolas Martin (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 143, quoting Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, in *Nietzsche: Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), 136.

[212] Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, 146.

> The *profundity of the tragic artist* lies in the way that his aesthetic instinct ignores more distant consequences, that he does not become preoccupied with what is nearest, that he affirms *the economy in great things*, which justifies *the terrible, the evil, the questionable* and not only . . .justifies. [213]

It is only because of our capacity to look beyond our own self-interests, our need for self-preservation, that it is possible for the *Übermensch* to exist. Ascetism made this possible by turning on itself in much the same way that morality brought about the death of God. For Vattimo, this "radical disinterestedness" characterizes a world in which there is no ultimate foundation, but only interpretation.[214]

1.4 Conclusion

Vattimo believes that in Nietzsche he has found a thinker whose work is charged with meaning for the future. The German philosopher has contributed to the transformation of modern thought, and, in particular, to our understanding of truth. With the dissolution of strong, metaphysical structures that we regard as 'true', Nietzsche moved away from the idea of a foundational truth towards one that allows for a plurality of truths. Our beliefs are coloured by our belonging to a particular era or culture, meaning that what one person may hold as being true, may not be so for another. Indeed, this chapter examines how Nietzsche's experience as a philologist colours his understanding of truth. In turn, this led to an exploration of Nietzsche's idea of the death of God. While Nietzsche may have significantly altered the philosophical landscape with his emphasis on nihilism, he did not put forward a new foundation to replace the old. For Vattimo, of central importance in his appreciation of Nietzsche's work, is the idea that there is

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[213] Ibid.

[214] Ibid.

no longer an ultimate foundation but, instead, only interpretation. As a result, he believes that there is a vitality to Nietzsche's work, limited only by the interpreter themselves.

Chapter Two

Vattimo's Reception of Heidegger

2.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on Vattimo's understanding of Heidegger's thought. Indeed, much of Vattimo's thinking is rooted in Heidegger's work. As the problem of Being is central to Heidegger's thought, I first begin with a discussion of his treatment of this problem. This involves an exploration of his early work. In particular, Vattimo points to three publications that he believes play a significant role in the structuring of *Being and Time*: Heidegger's doctoral thesis, his habilitation thesis, and his inaugural lecture on *The Concept of Time in Historiography*. In *Introduzione a Heidegger*, Vattimo pays particular attention to Husserl's influence in the eventual formation of *Being and Time*, which I will explore in this section.

The chapter next moves to discuss Being in relation to temporality. The problem of Being, Vattimo affirms, must be discussed in relation to time. This leads to an exploration of existence, including the important category of Dasein. This is the term used by Heidegger to characterise our being in the world. It encapsulates our existence and the disclosure of being, which I will discuss in relation to the meaning and significance of things in the world. Following on from this, I will consider our understanding of the world in relation to historicality, as the world is given to us as an already always. This means that we do not have an objective worldview, but already have certain ideas and understandings that shape it for us.

The ontological difference, or the difference between Being and beings, is central to Heidegger's work. I will examine the ontological difference through Vattimo's

reading of Derrida, as he contrasts Heidegger's ontological difference to Derrida's *différance*. The first of Derrida's two points, in which he is distinguished from Heidegger, is that any attempt to name difference is futile. The second point is that difference is erased as it is presented to us: that we can only search for the traces left behind. I will explore Vattimo's presentation of Heidegger's side of the debate, focusing on metaphysics.

The discussion leads to a consideration of Heidegger's thought on nihilism, focusing primarily on Being. For Heidegger nihilism is the forgetting of Being, in which the ontological difference is erased. The discussion of nihilism in relation to Being leads to an exploration of values; these are the medium through which we understand the things we encounter in our everyday world. Our awareness of Being is trapped in a table of values, which contribute to our inability to discuss the question of Being. We will see that Vattimo examines nihilism through a Heideggerian and a Nietzschean lens. One of the main similarities between Nietzsche's and Heidegger's understanding of nihilism is their respective concern with values; I will explore this in the chapter through an analysis of exchange-value.

The exploration of the relationship between Heidegger's and Nietzsche's work leads to a consideration of the crisis of humanism. Vattimo sums up the crisis of humanism with the ironic remark: "God is dead but man isn't doing so well himself."[1] The Torinese believes that there is a link between the death of God and the crisis of humanism, as we will see in the chapter. The crisis of humanism, for Heidegger, is linked to technology, which is discussed in this section. This leads, penultimately, to a consideration of Vattimo's understanding of *Verwindung*, a word that Vattimo believes

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[1] Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 31.

Heidegger uses in the sense of a healing or convalescence. It is through the concept of *Verwindung* that the crisis of humanism may be understood.

The final section focuses on the healing of the crisis of humanism. This comes about in relation to the *Ge-Stell*, which Vattimo translates as an 'im-position.' The *Ge-Stell* connects technology and Being, in that it allows technology to reveal the traits of humanism and metaphysics. Vattimo sees this unveiling itself as a gift of Being. This unveiling means that the *Ge-Stell* is the place where we get a glimpse of the *Ereignis*, or the event. It may also be spoken of in terms of something coming into view. The chapter concludes with this discussion.

2.1 Heidegger on Being

This section focuses on the central question in Heidegger's thought: Being. In his own writings, Vattimo identifies three publications that he believes were central to the development of Heidegger's publication, *Being and Time*. I will discuss further temporality in relation to Being, and Dasein, Heidegger's term for our being in the world. Finally, the section discusses the ontological difference. Vattimo juxtaposes Heidegger's ontological difference against Derrida's *différance*.

2.1.1 The Question of Being

The question of Being is central to Heidegger's thought. The philosopher questioned how "being" could be understood, or, rather, what it means "to be." He drew attention to the problem of "being", which had been neglected by Western philosophy. "Being" was more complex than simply acknowledging or identifying things or objects that exist in terms of their characteristics. Rather, the problem of Being means looking past the various forms of characteristic identification and focusing instead on actual existence.

This prompted Heidegger to make a distinction between "Being" and "beings." For him, beings are entities; they are things that exist in the world and have characteristics or properties that define them. Being, in contrast means the being of these entities, as the expression of their very existence. Heidegger found that Western philosophy had focused on appraising particular entities, and, in the process, neglected the Being of entities.

In order to examine the question of Being, Heidegger turned to three particular philosophical periods: the Greeks, the Scholastics, and, finally, to modern philosophy. With regard to the Greek philosophers, Aristotle's work on the categories proved to be particularly interesting for Heidegger. In his philosophy Aristotle approaches beings through the two significant categories of were substances and attribute. Substance is what the thing is in itself, allowing one to distinguish one substance from other substances. For example, a table is identifiable and separate from a chair, a plant from an animal, and so forth. Attributes mark out the qualities that a substance possesses, such as its size, colour, and so on. A substance such as a table, then, may have any number of attributes. It could, for instance, be made of wood, it could be painted, it may be large or small, it may be round or square. While Aristotle identified different categories in approaching beings, which, then, became a cornerstone of Western ontology, this was not adequate in addressing Heidegger's question concerning Being itself. A substance or attribute did not explain the Being of something, in terms of its actual existence. Seeking to explore this further, Heidegger turned to the Scholastics. Duns Scotus, the Scottish Franciscan, read Aristotle in a manner that was consistent with Christian theology. He was concerned with how entities were thought to exist. As God encompassed and generated all other beings, it was impossible to place God simply in either of Aristotle's categories of substance or attribute. God was not merely a being

among other beings, and so God became the origin and explanation of Being. God, then, became the ground, the ultimate origin, of Being. Heidegger became dissatisfied with the idea of any sort of ground for Being. He believed that trying to explain Being by grounding it in something else did not adequately explain Being. And so, he turns to modern philosophy in order to further explore the question of Being. In particular, he draws on the work of Edmund Husserl, whose thought forms the foundation of phenomenology. Husserl's work focused on consciousness, specifically on subjective consciousness as the condition for all experience. His primary focus was on how our consciousness is the condition for all experience; in other words, how we become aware of things is crucial to our sense of what actually is. God as the ground of Being was replaced with consciousness in Husserl's work. While Husserl was certainly influential for Heidegger, his discussion was still not adequate in terms of dealing with the question of Being.

The next phase on his search regarding the question of Being brought Heidegger back to Aristotle. It was not, however, a return to the categories, but to the practical ways in which the world is known, i.e. *phronesis*. This is found in Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*. Heidegger believed that the focus on Aristotle's categories, which was prominent through the Scholastic period and, indeed, carried through to the late nineteenth century, needed to be replaced. The emphasis ought to be on encountering being practically. To further this train of thought, he drew on William Dilthey's work. Dilthey concentrated on lived experience or 'factical life.' This was the lived experience of the practical and social world with all that it implies, such as perceptions, evaluations, and responses. This lived experience is, essentially, interpretative as our experiences of the world change throughout time. For Heidegger, the factical life is where entities appear before they become objects of theoretical

knowledge and it is that he decided to focus his energies. As Being is, essentially, always the Being of something, he opted the human being as the place of emergence of Being, which he referred to as Dasein. Dasein comes from Da, there, and Sein, being, so literally means there-being. It was also the eighteenth century translation of the Latin *praesentia*, which means existence or existence. Dasein could not be reduced to consciousness, to a species, or to a body. Dasein, then, is not simply human being, but human being in all its ways of being. This study of Dasein lead to his major work, *Being and Time*, which is his investigation of the relationship between being and time.

2.1.2 The Early Heidegger on Being

Vattimo believes that three of Heidegger's works prior to *Being and Time* play a crucial role in the development of its structure.[2] The first is Heidegger's doctoral thesis, *The Doctrine of Judgement in Psychologism*. Heidegger completed his doctorate in philosophy in 1913. Husserl's influence on Heidegger is evident in this work with its emphasis on "the claim of the validity of 'logic' against the 'psychologistical' tendency, that . . . reduced the laws of logic to empirical laws on the working of the human mind."[3] This focus on logic continued in Heidegger's habilitation thesis, *Duns Scotus' Doctrine of Categories and Meaning*, which continues the discourse on the world of meaning that he began in his doctoral thesis.[4] Indeed, Heidegger's own way of philosophizing becomes visible in the habilitation thesis, where we already see some of the themes and interests that will become characteristic of his later work. The third

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[2] See Gianni Vattimo, *Introduzione a Heidegger* (Roma-Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli Spa, 2000), 4.

[3] Ibid., 5. "La rivendicazione della validità della « logica » contro la tendenza « psichologistica» che . . . riduceva le leggi logiche a leggi empiriche sul funzionamento della mente umana."

[4] Ibid., 6. "Il discorso sull'autonomia del mondo dei significati."

publication that Vattimo views as a precursor to *Being and Time* is Heidegger's inaugural lecture on *The Concept of Time in Historiography*. Once again, he believes, we see an important foreshadowing of the structure of *Being and Time*: "The explicit connection of metaphysics with that which Heidegger calls a '«teleological-metaphysical clarification of consciousness»', that is the living spirit, already clearly alludes to the structuring that will become explicit in *Being and Time*."[5]

Vattimo underlines the importance of the years preceding and succeeding the First World War. He believes that these years play a central role in the formation of Heidegger's thought through Husserl's influence. Indeed, after the First World War, Heidegger became his assistant in Freiburg. Even though *Being and Time* breaks with Neo-Kantianism, regardless of the Neo-Kantian affinity present in Husserl's work, Vattimo considers that the fact that the work is dedicated to Husserl is in itself significant. He maintains that it shows that Heidegger saw a way of developing his own discourse through Husserl's phenomenology.

> The fact that *Being and Time*, has no longer anything to do with Neo-Kantianism, is dedicated to Husserl, shows that Heidegger saw in Husserl and phenomenology, more than a change and a deepening of the Neo-Kantian transcendental point of view, the way for enlarging his own discourse in the direction of the dimensions of history, or effectivity, we might say of concreteness alluded to in the closing pages of the thesis on Scotus.[6]

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[5] Ibid., 7. "L'esplicita connesione della metafisica con quela che qui Heidegger chiama una «chiarificazione teleologico-metafisica della coscienza», cioè dello spirito vivente, allude già chiaramente alla impostazione che diverrà esplicita in *Essere e tempo*." Living spirit, according to Gregory Bruce Smith, for Heidegger, is subjectivity "recast as *lebendinger Geist*, living spirit embedded in historical practice" (Gregory Bruce Smith*, Martin Heidegger: Paths Taken, Paths Opened* [Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007], 45). In Heidegger's later works living spirit "is what will . . . be called Being" (ibid).

[6] Ibid.,8- 9. "Il fatto che *Essere e tempo*, che con neokantianismo non ha più nulla da spartire, sia dedicato a Husserl, dimostra che Heidegger vedeva in Husserl e nella fenomenologia, più che una variazione e un approfondimento del punto di vista trascendentale neokantiano, il modo per allargare il suo discorso proprio nella direzione di quelle dimensioni di storicità, di effettività, potremmo dire di concretezza, a cui alludevano le pagine conclusive della tesi su Scoto.

Indeed, Vattimo's opinion is that Heidegger was able to find 'a radical novelty' in Husserl's works.[7] In regard to his own interests, Heidegger focused on areas in Husserl's work that differed from Neo-Kantianism. While Neo-Kantianism, for example, favoured science as a valid form of knowledge, Husserl turned toward intuition. "For Husserl the cognitive act is resolved in *Anschauung*, intuition (of the essences), that cannot be reduced to scientific knowledge but is an encounter with things, so to speak, in flesh and bone."[8] For Vattimo, importantly, Heidegger's interpretation of phenomenology was a reflection of the wider interests of German and European culture during that period. He argues that Heidegger's acceptance speech on becoming a member of the Academy of Sciences in Heidelberg is an indicator of how Heidegger he the cultural climate of the time.

> It is not possible to describe adequately the significance of the vivid years between 1910 and 1914; one can at best try to clarify it through a choice of names and events: the second edition, redoubled, of the *Will To Power* of Nietzsche, the tradition of the works of Kierkegaard and of Dostoyevsky, the incipient interest for Hegel and Schelling, the poetry of Rilke and of Trakl, the *Gesammelte Schriften* of Dilthey.[9]

The speech is certainly indicative of the other influences on Heidegger, such as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Dilthey. Nietzsche, in particular, proves to be a dominant force, especially in later years. Dilthey too takes a central role in the formation of *Being*

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[7] Ibid., 9. "Una radicale novità."

[8] Ibid. "Per Husserl l'atto conoscitivo si risolve nella *Anschauung*, l'intuizione (delle essenze), che non si riduce alla conoscenza scientifica . . . un incontrare le cose, per dir così, in carne e ossa." For Husserl, intuition is whatever is given to us immediately. It is not a separate source of truth, but rather a generic term for whatever any privileged consultant tells me. "One can say in general, that in order to be quite clear as to the sense of an expression (or as to the content of a concept) one must construct the corresponding intuition: in this intuition one can see what the expression 'really means'" (Husserl, Logical investigations I, Chap. 2. § 21, 306).

[9] Ibid, 11. "Non è possibile descrivere adeguamente quel che portarono i vivaci anni tra il 1910 e il 1914; si può al massimo cercare di chiarirlo attraverso una scelta di nomi e di avvenimenti: la seconda edizione, raddoppiata, della *Volontà di potenza* di Nietzsche, la tradizione delle opere di Kierkegaard e di Dostoievskij, l'incipiente interesse per Hegel e Schelling, la poesie di Rilke e di Trakl, le *Gesammelte Schriften* di Dilthey."

and Time, and, for Vattimo, this is evident in the discussion of care and historicity. Dlthey's influence is especially evident in Being and Time "where the existential analytic culminates in the recognition of temporality as the ontological sense of care, that is of all the structures constitutive of being human."[10] Indeed, *Being and Time* marks the point where Heidegger's interest in the problem of the historical sciences shifts from a methodological problem to an ontological problem: "the real foundation of history and historiography is possible only in the light of a restatement of the problem of being: the problem of historicity is that then of a "philosophy of life" . . . the same fundamental problem of *Being and Time*."[11] It is here, too, in Heidegger's turn to the ontological, that we find Kierkegaard's influence. He is credited in *Being and Time* as having affirmed the problem of existence as an existential problem.[12]

For Vattimo, what lead Heidegger to study the problem of Being in *Being and Time* is developed between two poles.[13] First is the German philosopher's religious formation, beginning with his interest in both the New Testament and the Church Fathers. "Both the problem of history and in general of 'life' that is found in the culture of the time, led him to put more radically in question the ideas of validity, of reality, of being, inherited from metaphysics."[14] Indeed, Heidegger's interests after the First

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[10] Ibid. "Là dove l'analitica esistenziale culmina nel riconoscimento della temporalità come senso ontologico della cura, cioè di tutte le strutture costitutive dell'essere dell'uomo."

[11] See Vattimo, *Introduzione a Heidegger*, 11. "Un vera fondazione della storicità e della storiografia è possibile solo alle luce di una riproposizione del problema dell'essere; il problema della storicità è poi quello della "filosofia della vita" . . . con lo stesso problema fondamentale di *Essere e tempo*."

[12] Ibid., 12. "In *Essere e Tempo*, Kierkegaard viene nominato come un pensatore che «ha espliciamente affermato e accuratamente penetrato il problema dell'esistenza come problema esistentivo»." "In *Being and Time*, Kierkegaard was nominated as a thinker that has explicitly affirmed and accurately penetrated the problem of existence as an existential problem." Vattimo quotes from Heidegger's *Being and Time*, pg 357.

[13] Vattimo, *Introduzione a Heidegger*, 15.

World War include religion; he taught courses in mysticism, the phenomenology of religion, and on Augustine and Neo-Platonism. This religious interest plays a part in the formation of *Being and Time* in exploring the question of Being. The second pole is in relation to the question of the validity of knowledge, which stems from the Neo-Kantian polemic against psychologism. This question, combined with the problem of truth and the application of the categories of the object introduces Heidegger to the great themes of the metaphysical tradition.[15] These two poles mark the difference, for Heidegger, between the living spirit and the more conceptual schemes found in Western philosophical thought.

2.1.3 Being in the World

Given that Heidegger considers the problem of Being in relation to time, temporality is key to Vattimo's understanding of Heidegger's contribution. "[The notion of Being] is dominated by the idea of presence — that is thought of in relation to a specific temporal determination — the proposal of the problem of being must be made in relation to time."[16] This means that temporality, then, is central to any discussion of existence.[17] Indeed, Vattimo maintains that the. term existence can be understood in its etymological sense, which points beyond the simply-present reality in the direction of

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[14] Ibid., 16. "Sia il problema della storicità e in genere della «vita» che trova nella cultura del tempo, lo conducono a porre sempre più radicalmente in questione le nozioni di validità, di realtà, di essere, ereditate dalla metafisica."

[15] Ibid., 16.

[16] Ibid., 18. "[La nozione di essere] rivela dominata dall'idea della presenza — cioè pensara in rapporto a una specifica determinazione temporale — la riproposizione del problema dell'essere va fatta in rapporto al tempo."

[17] Vattimo notes that "the essence of man is existence." "L'«essenza dell'uomo» è l'«esistenza»" (Vattimo, *Introduzione a Heidegger*, 20).

possibility.[18] Here *exsistere* means to stand outside (*star fuori*), going beyond the simple present. This means that being is not given to us solely as a determined reality, but has potentiality, opening up future possibilities and other ways of being. Prior to recognizing this potentiality, however, there is the ordinary, everydayness of being, being-in-the-world, or Dasein.

> It [Dasein] expresses well the fact that existence is not defined only as an overcoming, that transcends the reality given in the direction of the possibilities, but that this overcoming is always an overcoming *of something*, that is always concretely situated, *there is*. Existence, being there, being in the world are therefore synonyms.[19]

As Heidegger writes of Dasein as the activity of existing or being in the world, Vattimo considers it necessary to further discuss the world as being existential. "« The 'world' is not only a determination of being dissimilar to Dasein, but is, on the contrary, a character of Dasein itself », namely that the world is existential."[20] The world is a feature of Dasein itself. We encounter things in the world that are tools or instruments for us which belong equally to Dasein as the projection of Being.

> Simple-presence is the way in which things are manifest in relation to a precise operation of man; and in general things are not first of all in themselves, but first of all in relation to us as tools; their being is radically and constitutively in relation to being of Dasein.[21]

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[18] Ibid., 21.

[19] Ibid., 22. "Esso [Dasein] esprime bene il fatto che l'esistenza non si definisce solo come oltrepassamento, che trascende la realtà data in direzione della possibilità, ma che questo oltrepassamento è sempre oltrepassamento *di qualcosa*, è sempre, cioè, concretamente situato, *ci* è. Esistenza, esserci, essere-nel-mondo sono dunque sinonimi." Italics original.

[20] Ibid., 23. "«il 'mondo' non è affatto una determinazione dell'ente difforme dell'esserci, ma è, al contrario, un carattere dell'esserci stesso», ossia che il mondo è un esistenziale" (Gianni Vattimo, *Introduzione a Heidegger* [Roma-Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli Spa, 2000, 23, quoting Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, *Gesamtausgabe* 2 [Frankfurt a.M., Stand: Klostermann, 1977]).

[21] Ibid., 25. "La semplice-presenza è un modo in cui le cose si manifestano in rapporto a una precisa operazione dell'uomo; e in generale, le cose non sono anzitutto «in sè», ma anzitutto in rapporto con noi come strumenti; il loro essere è radicalmente e costuitivamente in rapporto all'essere progettante dell'esserci."

Tools or instruments have their being in relation to Dasein; their totality can only be because they are put to use by someone or because there is someone there to use them. The world itself is rooted in Dasein. For Vattimo, the world is a totality of instruments, with signs as a guide to their use: "we can in fact say that, if the world is the totality of the instruments [or tools] of man, signs are a bit like the instructions for the use of these instruments."[22] For Vattimo, it is the relation to the totality of these instruments, the idea of understanding, that signifies being in the world.[23]

The world is given to us as an 'already always,' meaning that we already have certain ideas, prejudices, and understandings.[24] Vattimo describes it in Plato's words: "we can recognise the truth when we meet it because in some way we know it already."[25] He takes care to point out that although we have a pre-comprehension of the world, it is far from being a complete knowledge of the same; our knowledge of instruments, for example, rests in their possible uses, which is the opening up of possibility or a guide for potentiality.[26] We do not have an exhaustive knowledge of their uses, but much more a rough outline that must be built upon. Vattimo likens it to the "form of a sketch that must be further elaborated."[27] Our knowledge, then, rests on

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[22] Ibid., 27. "Si può infatti dire che, se il mondo è la totalità degli strumenti dell'uomo, i segni sono un po' come le instruzioni per l'uso di tali instrumenti."

[23] Ibid.

[24] See Vattimo, *Introduzione a Heidegger*, 29. "Già sempre."

[25] Ibid. "Noi possiamo riconoscere il vero quando lo incontriamo perché in qualche modo lo conosciamo già."

[26] "Our being in the world is not only or first of all a being in the middle of a totality of instruments, but a being familiar with a totality of meanings . . . Il nostro essere nel mondo non è solo o anzitutto in essere in mezzo a una tonalità di strumenti ma un essere familiari con una totalità di significati". Vattimo, *Introduzione a Heidegger*, 27.

[27] Ibid, 30. "Forma di un abbozzo che deve essere ulteriormente elaborato."

interpretation as further uses and possibilities are open to discovery. "Knowledge is the articulation of an original comprehension in which things are already always discovered."[28] Indeed, Dasein is always open to possibilities and is always in relation to the world. Knowledge, as interpretation, is open to development, yet retains its original relation with the world as the articulation of an original comprehension. In addition, not only does Dasein reflect a comprehension of "the totality of significances," but also exhibits what Vattimo describes as a "certain affective tonality."[29] Things are significant, or meaningful, but provide an emotional value. This emotional value is not merely an accompaniment to pre-comprehension, but is, in itself, a type of pre-comprehension. This, Vattimo acknowledges, is his own hypothesis, but he maintains that it is supported by Heidegger's position; "every specific relationing with individual things (but then also the comprehension and its interpretative articulation) is made possible by the opening to the world guaranteed by the affective tonality."[30] Affective tonality is the original way in which one find and feels oneself to be in the world; it is, thus, a form of prehension of the world.[31]

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[28] Ibid., 31." La conoscenza è l'articolazione di una comprensione originaria in cui le cose ci somo già sempre scoperte."

[29] Ibid., 32-33. "Totalità di significati." "Una certa tonalità affettiva."

[30] Ibid., 33. "Ogni specifico rapportarsi alle cose singole (ma quindi anche la comprensione e la sua articolazione interpretativa) è reso possibile dalla apertura al mondo garantita dalla tonalità affettiva."

[31] "The affective tonality, that is the original way of finding oneself and feeling oneself in the world, is a type of first global prension, that founds in a certain way the same understanding." "La tonalità affettiva, cioè il modo originario di trovarsi e di sentirsi nel mondo, è una specie di prima «prensione» globale del mondo, che fonda in qualche modo la stessa comprensione." Vattimo, *Introduzione a Heidegger*, 34.

2.1.4 The Ontology of Difference

Vattimo emphasizes the centrality of the ontological difference in Heidegger's thought, particularly in his volume *Introduzione a Heidegger*. The ontological difference is the difference between Being and beings, or, rather, entities and the being or existence of these entities. Indeed, Vattimo describes the ontological difference as the light in which Being distinguishes itself from being; it is that light by which an entity becomes visible.[32] He discusses the ontological difference not only in regard to foundation, but also technology. His understanding of the ontological difference is, in fact, best appreciated in *The Adventure of Difference*.

In *The Adventure of Difference*, Vattimo explores the question of Heidegger's ontological difference by examining it in the light of Derrida's *différance*. Derrida played on the word difference with its orthographic variant, *différance*. In French, the verb *différer* has two meanings: it can mean to differ and to defer. Derrida exploits this ambiguity in his philosophy. Vattimo, for his part, identifies these meanings as "'being distinct or divergent' and 'deferring' in time."[33] So, for example, *différer* can be used to distinguish two different spatial objects, such as the red coat being different from the blue coat. It may also be used in the sense of to defer something, as for an appointment, in terms of temporality. Normally, one meaning or the other is used. In Derrida's *différance*, however, the two meanings are combined so that both meanings are present simultaneously. In other words, *différance* itself is a play on its two senses. First, as it has two different meanings, it differs in itself. Secondly, it also defers any single meaning being applied to it. For example, if we use *différer* in the sense of a distinction

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[32] See Vattimo, *Introduzione e Heidegger*, 66-67.

[33] Gianni Vattimo, *The Adventure of Difference: Philosophy after Nietzsche and Heidegger*, trans. Cyprian Blamires with Thomas Harrison (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 37.

between one object and another, its other meaning, to defer, is simply held in reserve until it is required for use in another context. Derrida's play on the meaning of the term *différance* is reflected in the spelling of the word itself where he introduces the variant spelling to underline the ambiguity. This underlines the difference between the audible and the written and, at the same time, the imperceptibility of that difference. "Wishing thereby to show that the differential element that constitutes the sign is not at the same time something that can be grasped as 'different.'"[34] We can speak of things, objects, and so on, because we cannot speak of the absence that difference produces. As any word used to describe the absence, or difference, is subject to the effects of *différance*, it is trying to say the unsayable. Derrida emphasises this inaudible and invisible trace. As the meaning of the sign is derived from the difference, from the meaning held in reserve, the sign always contains a trace of that other meaning. Or, in other words, the sign contains a trace of what it does not mean. Trace, then, may be understood as a term for the absence of a presence, an always-already absent presence.

Derrida considered the possibility of a connection between *différance* and Heidegger's ontological difference. Vattimo believes that, while he was aware of a connection between the two, ultimately Derrida had an issue with it.[35] This is because,

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[34] Ibid. Here Vattimo notes that it is important to remember that the sound of the word remains the same, regardless of whether an 'e' or 'a' is used in the spelling. Derrida draws on Ferdinand de Saussure's work on semiotics, which is the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretations. Although Saussure's model gave priority to linguistics, Derrida preferred a more general outlook. For him, focusing on linguistics meant that semiotic was restricted as it failed to take prelinguistics into account. Terms derive their meanings in relation to other terms; this is the interplay of differences. For Derrida, this does not occur solely in language, but in all systems of signs or codes. For more on Derrida and Saussure, see Russell Daylight, *What If Derrida Was Wrong About Saussure?* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) and Carol Sanders, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Saussure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[35] Ibid., 139. Although Derrida was aware of the connections between his idea of difference and Heidegger's ontological difference, he believed that Heidegger still remained within a metaphysical framework. For more on Derrida's critique of Heidegger, see Nicholas Waghorn, *Nothingness and the Meaning of Life: Philosophical Approaches to Ultimate Meaning Through Nothing and Reflexivity* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014) and Stephen Burik, *Comparative Philosophy and the Task of*

for Derrida, Heidegger's ontological difference is caught in a "metaphysical nostalgia."[36] This is so as he, Heidegger, is caught in a search for a single word that will accurately sum up the essence of being. Derrida is not of the opinion that this is possible, and *différance* emphasises this impossibility. There will never be such a name as it is not possible for there to be one name. There cannot be a word to describe the essence of Being as human experience always originates in *différance*. There can, then, only ever be a trace and never an original. "Difference is prior to everything."[37] Vattimo asserts that if Derrida's position on the matter were to be summed up in one sentence it would be "in the beginning was the trace."[38] For Derrida, even using the term ontological difference is an attempt to name that difference between Being and beings that cannot be named. Vattimo adds that this is not a shortcoming of language, but rather it is simply that there can be no such name: "the moment difference is enunciated it disappears . . . to name difference is merely to open up the system of differences that constitutes the symbolic in its effective differential structure; it discloses differences as *différance*, that is, as simulacra."[39] As difference cannot be named, and as it erases itself in presenting itself to us, we must search for the traces it leaves behind. Derrida calls these clues undecidables.

Comparative Thinking: Heidegger, Derrida, and Daoism (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009).

[36] See Vattimo, *The Adventure of Difference*, 138.

[37] Ibid., 139.

[38] Ibid, 139. "A trace, then, and never a presence to which the trace can be related; for the differences that structure the field of human experience originate from the start in a difference, a difference that is at the same time divergence and indefinite deferment, and in which what is there beforehand is always a trace and never an original" (Vattimo, *The Adventure of Difference*, 139).

[39] Ibid., 141.

Vattimo, however, rebuffs Derrida's critique of Heidegger's ontological difference. His issue with Derrida lies in his belief that Derrida failed to consider the problems that Heidegger took into consideration in his thinking on the ontological difference. He maintains that Derrida failed to acknowledge the problem of difference relative to our time, or, rather, who and what makes such a difference? "All Heidegger's thinking on difference, for example, may be read as the development of a problem Derrida never stops for a second to consider – the problem of how difference can seem to be the most appropriate term for conceiving our epoch."[40] In other words, Vattimo believes that the problem with Derrida's thought is that it is itself still trapped within a metaphysical framework and does not take into account the possibility of moving into a post-metaphysical era. *Différance*, he believes, fails to offer any alternative to metaphysics, and, as a result, takes on the very attributes of metaphysical Being that Heidegger's ontological difference opposes.[41] The problem rests in the undecidables; as difference cannot be named, and as it erases itself in presenting itself to us, we must search for the traces it leaves behind. Derrida calls these clues undecidables and these undecidables are what allow us to speak of difference. The problem is that to speak of difference within a metaphysical framework can only be done parodistically. "Parody is the only way of 'making the difference' in a situation in which all differentiation is always only the process of duplicating the trace, that is a situation in which the absolutization of difference has taken away all possibility of difference."[42] Parody makes the philosophy of difference nothing more than a simulacrum of the

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[40] Ibid., 140.

[41] Ibid, 144.

[42] Ibid, 143.

metaphysical text that it seeks to rewrite. For Vattimo, parody is defined from a "position of consciousness," which is typical of a metaphysics and of presential thinking.[43] "*Différance* is in every respect an archstructure, diametrically opposed to Heideggerian ontological difference."[44] Difference, then, does not offer any alternative to metaphysics, but, instead, constitutes a return to it, albeit indirectly.

Vattimo further claims that, in his thought on the ontological difference Heidegger shows that the work of a particular thinker is not a complete and finished product. Rather, it is a foundation on which others may build, elaborating on and furthering the original idea. "Heidegger showed that the inheritance we receive from a given thinker is the nucleus he leaves us of what is still to be thought, not acquired results but ways thinking feels called on to follow again and again."[45] Given that thinking concerning Heidegger's ontological difference appears to be in decline, Vattimo asks if it is possible that it could be considered as such a nucleus. For him, this decline does not indicate a complete deterioration of the interest in the ontological difference. "Far from signifying any decline in or exhaustion of the idea of the ontological difference put forward by Heidegger . . . ontological difference taps into its still-productive core, a core that constitutes an authentic future for thinking."[46] Thus, he believes that one can continue to develop Heidegger's thought on the ontological difference, even in the light of criticism from other thinkers. The ontological difference

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[43] Ibid, 144.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid, 137.

[46] Ibid, 138.

may act as a means through which further discussion on hermeneutics may continue to take place.

2.2 Heidegger's Nihilism

I now turn to Vattimo's appropriation of Heidegger's on nihilism. Again, Being is at the forefront of this exploration. This analysis leads to an exploration of values, which contributes to our further engagement with the question of Being. Finally, the section returns to Vattimo's understanding of nihilism, now through a Heideggerian and Nietzschean lens.

2.2.1 Nihilism

Heidegger's discussion of nihilism, Vattimo believes, is inextricably linked to his thought concerning Being. For Heidegger, nihilism is focused on Being and the forgetting of Being, as characterised in the ontological difference. The kind of nihilism defined by Heidegger is a "process in which, at the end, 'there is nothing left' of Being as such.""[47] This Heideggerian definition addresses the forgetting of Being by humanity, but acts as a deception or self-deception of knowledge against which one could seek refuge in the solidity of Being as though forgotten but not vanished. The forgetting of Being and the concomitant neglect of the ontological difference meant that Being was eventually equated with God as the supreme being. Heidegger's definition of nihilism, however, fundamentally counters this equation, and in this sense, even goes beyond Nietzsche's death of God.[48] Western philosophy had focused on

[47] Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 19.

[48] For further discussion, see ibid., 20.

appraising particular entities rather than the Being of these entities, thereby continuing to neglect the ontological difference. For Heidegger, then, the question of Being per se was not treated in such a way that it would have overcome the ontological difference. This meant that from Heidegger's perspective, Western philosophy may be seen as the history of the forgetting of Being.

Vattimo, underlines the significant role of values in Heidegger's understanding of nihilism. Values are the medium through which we understand the things we encounter in the everyday world. If we take the example of a lamp, it is more than simply a certain size, weight, or appearance. We might attempt to describe the 'more' in terms of usefulness or purpose. In the lamp's case this is its capacity to provide light. What we are actually doing in taking from the lamp what belongs to it and replacing this with a value is an attempt to restore what we have taken away. This process applies to Being and how it has not been appreciated in Western philosophy. "For Heidegger, Being is annihilated insofar as it is transformed completely into value."[49] Our awareness of Being is thought of in terms of value. "He [Heidegger] describes nihilism as the stagnation of our awareness of Being in an anthropocentric table of *values*."[50] We arrived at this point through Plato and the Theory of Ideas, which, as it developed, led to the forgetting of the ontological difference. Plato's Theory of Ideas or Forms maintains that alongside the visible world of sights and sounds, there is another invisible one that gives it being. This is the world of Forms or Ideals such as Beauty, Temperance, and Courage, among others. The Forms themselves are unchanging, abstract, and ideal. An object has a characteristic because it participates in the Form of

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[49] Ibid, 20.

[50] Ruth Irwin, "Heidegger and Nietzsche: The Question of Value and Nihilism in Relation to Education." *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 22(2003): 227-244, at 228, emphasis original.

that characteristic; a painting, for example, is beautiful because it participates in the Form of Beauty. Objects may be categorized as being similar because they participate in the same form. We can only have genuine knowledge of things that are perfect and unchanging, i.e., Forms.[51] Being, then, is replaced by a concern with value. Values became the forum of discourse on Being, albeit one that, for Heidegger, entraps us in a philosophical cul-de-sac with regard to the question itself of Being. As values have taken a prominent place in our discussion of the question of Being, they are a significant feature of Heidegger's understanding of nihilism.

2.2.2 Vattimo's Reading of Nihilism through Nietzsche and Heidegger

For Vattimo, Nietzsche's and Heidegger's respective understandings of nihilism are complementary. There is a certain amount of agreement between them with regard to nihilism. For Vattimo, Nietzsche's understanding contributes to Heidegger's, which concentrates on the ontological difference and the forgetting of Being. Acknowledging this means recognizing that "nihilism is the process of the eroding of foundations, the loss of objective values, the dissolution of the strong characteristics that metaphysics has always attributed to Being."[52] Nietzsche's and Heidegger's contributions to a discourse on nihilism form the basis of Vattimo's own discussion. Indeed, he maintains that nihilism can now be taken as a combination of these respective positions.

Vattimo claims that Heidegger's and Nietzsche's respective understandings of nihilism are largely in agreement. This is due to the way in which nihilism manifests

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[51] See R.M. Dancy, *Plato's Introduction of Forms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and William A. Welton, *Plato's Forms: Varieties of Interpretation* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2002).

[52] Marta Frascati-Lochhead, *Kenosis and Feminist Theology: The Challenge of Gianni Vattimo* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

itself. "Over and above the differences in their theoretical approaches to the question, Nietzsche's and Heidegger's respective arguments are also in agreement with regard to the contents—that is, the ways of manifesting itself—of nihilism."[53] For both philosophers, nihilism's manifestation may be seen in its relation to values. In Nietzsche's case, it may be summed up with his dictum that God is dead, or, the devaluation of the highest values. "For Nietzsche the entire process of nihilism can be summarized by the death of God, or by the devaluation of the highest values." [54] God is, for Nietzsche, an example of a supreme or ultimate value. Our society is built on such constructs or values that are created to fulfil a particular need. God, for example, is a construct that is created to fulfil a need for security. As we are in different social circumstances in today's society than when the 'fable' of God was created out of a need for protection, we can no longer maintain this fable. To say, then, that God is dead is to say that this construct has fulfilled its purpose and we may allow the dissolution of this value. For Vattimo, Heidegger's understanding of nihilism focuses on Being, which is transformed into value. "For Heidegger, Being is annihilated insofar as it is transformed completely into value."[55] Nihilism, then, is a concern of Being itself. Vattimo maintains that although for Heidegger is seems possible and desirable to go beyond nihilism, nihilism is actually the post-metaphysical mode of thought for which he is looking.[56]

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[53] Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 20.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

2.2.3 Dissolution of Being in Exchange-Value

Vattimo acknowledges that there may be some difficulty in appreciating the connection between Nietzsche's and Heidegger's treatment of nihilism. He believes that this can be achieved best through their respective approaches to values. In particular, Vattimo turns to the exchange of values in order to show the affinity between Nietzsche and Heidegger. This exchange refers to the relative value of one commodity against the worth of another. For Heidegger, nihilism is the reduction of Being to exchange value.[57] This is so since Being is replaced by value and loses its intrinsic quality and, instead, becomes hostage to a subject who acknowledges this value. "Nihilism would therefore be, in the Heideggerian sense, the illegitimate claim that Being, instead of existing in an autonomous, independent, and foundational way, is in the power of the subject."[58] Examining this claim in terms of exchange-value allows us to better see the connection between Heidegger's understanding of nihilism and Nietzsche's.

For Vattimo, Heidegger's view of nihilism can coincide with Nietzsche's because of the transvaluation of values. This is summarised in the highest value par excellence, namely, God. The Torinese sees this transvaluation as a process of liberation. With the death of the highest values, other values can take on their true natures, which is "the capacity for convertability, and an indefinite transformability or processuality."[59] The highest values no longer act as a limit on other values. For both Nietzsche and

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[57] Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 21. "Il nichilismo . . . è la reduzione dell'essere a valore di scambio" (Gianni Vattimo, *La fine della modernità* [Milan: Garzanti, 1985], 29). See also Daniel Barbiero, "A Weakness for Heidegger: The German Root of Il Pensiero Debole," *New German Critique* 55 (1992): 159-172.

[58] Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 21.

[59] Ibid. "Solo là dove non c'è l'istanza terminale e «intermittiva», bloccante, del valore supremo-Dio, I valori si possono dispiegare nella loro vera natura, che è la convertibilità, e trasformabilità/processualità indefinite" (*La fine della modernità* [Milan: Garzanti, 1985], 29).

Heidegger, then, nihilism may be understood as the triumph of exchange-value over use-value.[60] While the exchange-value refers to the worth of one commodity over against another, the use-value refers to the commodity as a utility. In other words, the use-value of a commodity rests in its ability to satisfy needs and wants according to its properties. Vattimo explores further the relationship between values and Being by examining some philosophical currents that he believes are indicators of twentieth century culture and its response to the emergence of nihilism.[61]

One such current is Marxism, which in is various theoretical forms has strived toward a response to nihilism on a political plane. "Marxism . . . has dreamed about the recovery at a practical/political level, prior to a theoretical one, of use-value and its norms."[62] One of the principles of a socialist society was to liberate work from the negative characteristics that are typically associated with commerce. This was supposed to come about by means of a separation from the cycle of consumerism, meaning that the products would retain a relationship of fundamental identity with their producer.[63] It failed, however, because the more the ideology struggled to free itself from the negative characteristics of alienation, the more it turned to increasingly complex political systems to achieve this. Ultimately, these political interventions only served to make the ideology more problematic, failing to achieve its goal. There is a common thread running through much of the thought that dominates European culture. Not only Marxism, as outlined, but phenomenology and early existentialism, among others, are

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[60] Ibid., 22.

[61] See Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 22.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

united by what Vattimo calls "a resistance to the accomplishment of nihilism."[64] He believes that this strand of thought has even appropriated a tradition that originally began as an alternative to this line of thinking. This tradition originated with Wittgenstein, specifically during the period in which he wrote the *Tractatus*, and continued through the twentieth century in the development of Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophy.[65] In this tradition there was an effort made to develop an ideal zone of use-value, where the dissolution of Being into value did not occur.[66]

In reality, however, Vattimo maintains that the various strands of thought dominating European culture fail to realise that nihilism is now the only avenue open to us in terms of a future for philosophy. "Nihilism arrives at the phase of its accomplishment, that it reaches its extreme form, by consuming Being in value. This is the event that finally makes it possible, and necessary, for philosophy today to recognize that nihilism is our (only) chance."[67] The consumption of Being in exchange-value, or, the transformation of the real world into a fable is nihilistic even to the point that ir leads to a "weakening of the cogent force of 'reality'."[68] This weakening of the 'reality' of our world echoes Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God, that long process of leave-taking, of saying goodbye to the metaphysical constructs that act as the foundations of the 'real'.

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[64] Ibid., 23.

[65] Ibid., 23.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid, 27.

2.3 Vattimo and the Crisis of Humanism

In his exploration of the connection between Heidegger's and Nietzsche's work Vattimo turns next to the crisis of humanism. This section explores the link that Vattimo perceives between the death of God and the crisis of humanism. I will examine the use of *Verwindung* the German word that Vattimo claims conveys the sense of healing of convalescence. Finally, the section finishes with a discussion of the *Ge-Stell*.

2.3.1 The Crisis of Humanism

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, European culture, in particular, is reeling from a succession of setbacks. These include the turning of socialism into dictatorship and the use of technology as an instrument of war (as opposed to being used to humankind's well-being).[69] Outbreaks of violence, at local and global levels, contribute to the crisis of humanism. Such realities lead to a loss of faith in humankind, which is further aggravated by our refusal to resolve the underlying issues, even though we have the means to do so.

Vattimo examines this crisis of humanism through the nexus of Heidegger's and Nietzsche's thought. He begins the discussion with a humorous remark, "God is dead, but man isn't doing so well himself."[70] This joke, he maintains, is a reflection of the situation that provides the backdrop to the crisis of humanism. There is a connection

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[69] See Abraham Edel, "Where is the Crisis in Humanism?," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 22, no. 85 (1968): 284-95. According to Abraham Edel, various events have marked our culture for the worst. These include the descent of Nazism into genocide, socialism in the Soviet Union ending in dictatorship, and scientific technology, instead of assisting humankind, becoming an instrument of war. Edel considers our placement within social structures as another contributing factor to the reasons for the crisis of humanism. The reason for this is that we feel increasingly standardized, not only within social structures, but by role-patterns, tastes, and reactions which serve only to limit our development as an individual. In addition, there are increasing outbreaks of violence within communities and on the larger global scale to be a contributing factor.

[70] Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 31.

between the death of God and the crisis of humanism. "Humanism is in crisis *because* God is dead."[71] We can no longer appeal to any such foundation to assist us in resolving matters.

For Vattimo, Heidegger's *Über den Humanismus* is a key text in the discussion of the crisis of humanism. He believes that it is the first text to draw attention to, and open up an awareness of, the crisis of humanism.[72] Indeed, for Heidegger, humanism is, in fact, synonymous with metaphysics. This is so since it is only in the perspective of metaphysics as a general theory of the Being of entities that humanity can find a foundation for its culture. Of course, this general theory thinks of Being in objective terms, thereby forgetting the ontological difference. Nonetheless it provides the general framework from within which we can 'construct' and educate through *Bildung*.[73] "There is no humanism without the bringing into play of a metaphysics in which the human subject determines a role for itself which is necessarily central or exclusive."[74] The fate of humanism and metaphysics, Vattimo claims, are henceforth intertwined. Should one of these decline, then the other will follow suit. "For this reason the death

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[71] Ibid, 32, emphasis original.

[72] See Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 32.

[73] Ibid., 32. *Bildung* is a German term for which there is no direct translation in English, although it is usually translated as culture, formation, self-cultivation, and cultural process. Here, *Bildung* is a German word for education, culture, formation, and it corresponds to a tradition of self-cultivation. There are two main foundations to the process of *Bildung*. The first is the *cultura animi* tradition found in Hellenism, which is a type of spiritual cultivation based on the idea that it is possible for persons to shape their own soul. The second foundation is the *Imago Dei*. This is rooted in the Judaeo-Christian tradition in which humankind are created in God's image. The linguistic roots of *Bildung* are found in this tradition. "*Bild*" means image and in its derivative forms are the idea of a formative process. *Bildung* as a creative process in which a person develops or shapes their own self and also their cultural environment. A second characteristic is that during the process of *Bildung* a person seeks to improve or advance their life. See Pauli Siljander, Ari Kivelä, and Ari Sutinen, *Theories of Bildung and Growth: Connections and Controversies Between Continental Educational Thinking and American Pragmatism* (Rotterdam, DEU: Sense Publishers), 2012.

[74] Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 32.

of God, which is at once the culmination and conclusion of metaphysics, is also the crisis of humanism."[75] With Nietzsche, metaphysics has arrived at the moment of its decline, and with it humanism has fallen into crisis. This is what Heidegger has determined for us.

2.3.2 Humanism and Technology

The crisis of humanism is not only connected to metaphysics but also to technology. So much so, in fact, that for Vattimo the technological dimension of the crisis has consumed all aspects of its discourse. Specifically, technology displaces humanistic cultural constructs in favour of those based on scientific rationality. It is, he notes, precisely this displacement that brings about the very changes in society that Adorno critiques. For Adorno, capitalist production is the very reason that there is such inaction in the face of human suffering, such as poverty and hunger, among others. He maintains that technological and scientific advancement means that humankind possesses the power to eradicate, or at least ameliorate, such issues. However, what we have is capitalism dominating the social order, creating pockets of wealth and power.[76]

For Vattimo, the debate between the natural sciences and the sciences of the spirit that developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is a significant reflection of the crisis of humanism.[77] The natural sciences gained increased

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[75] Ibid., 32-33.

[76] See Lambert Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy After Adorno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) for more on Adorno and social theory. See also M. Horkheimer and T. W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (1947), ed. G. S. Noerr, trans. E. Jephcott, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

[77] Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 34-35. The debate concerning *Geisteswissenschaften* and *Naturwissenschaften* developed during the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, particularly in German academia. These terms are usually translated as the human and the natural sciences. A debate over the methodology between the two sciences occurred between Wilhelm Dilthey and Wilhelm Windelband, who "defends the nomothetic (law-governed) foundations of the physical or

significance and created a perception that other areas of human knowledge, outside the realms of quantifiable data, must be safeguarded against the rationalization of the sciences. The natural sciences were seen to be a threat, and the sciences of the spirit sought to protect what was specific to our humanity but irreducible to the field of natural science. Vattimo holds that philosophy responds to the threat posed by the crisis of humanism (and technology) in two ways. First, it focuses on the areas that lie outside the specifically scientific, and, secondly, it seeks to restore its own centrality. He looks to Husserl, who sees the crisis of humanism as being the result of a neglect of human subjectivity brought about by the growing emphasis on scientific and technological objectivity. In order to escape from the crisis, it is necessary to shift the focus once more to the central function of the subject. "Husserl's subject continues to harbour no doubts about its own true nature, which is only externally threatened by an ensemble of mechanisms created by this same subject, but still capable of being reappropriated by it."[78] While the subject has set in motion science and technology, it cannot fail to recognise its own involvement in what it is attempting to overcome.

For Vattimo, Heidegger's understanding of humanism would seem to be the most "theoretically rigorous."[79] This is because it addresses the very nature of humanism itself as opposed to being concerned with questions of his historical realization.[80]

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natural sciences. Dilthey defends the "independence" of the human sciences." Windelband believed that there is, due to their methods, a distinction between the two sciences. The natural sciences use the nomothetic methods as they seek to discover law-like properties. The social sciences are not interested in this, but in the more unique aspects of an experience or case. For Dilthey, the subject matter of each science acts as their distinguishing feature. For example, the main distinction happens to be their separate categories, that of the 'natural,' and that of the 'human spirit.' Lydia Patton, "Methodology of the Sciences," in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth Century German Philosophy* eds. Michael N. Forster and Kristin Gjesdal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 595.

[78] Ibid., 35.

[79] Ibid., 37.

[80] See Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 36.

Heidegger's understanding of the crisis of humanism is, broadly speaking, the stance taken by Expressionism. This is a movement that emerged as a response to the growing unease arising from humankind's increasingly fractured relationship with the world. It was accompanied by the loss of a feeling of authenticity and spirituality. New technologies and mass urbanization altered the individual's worldview and artists reflected on the impact of these developments on the individual by portraying their own emotions in their work. The focus shifted, if you like, from the external to the internal. Instead of art simply being a depiction of or reaction to external scenes, artists were now called upon to summon a vision from within themselves. The techniques involved, such as swirling brushstrokes, were meant to convey the emotional state of the artist as they reacted to the world around them. The artist's feelings became the new criterion for assessing the work. Vastly different from the Impressionist renderings of idyllic landscapes, or middle-class leisure outings in the city, the Expressionists depicted alienated individuals, including prostitutes. Their art became a form of social criticism, a comment on capitalism's role in the emotional distancing of individuals in urban settings. Expressionism impacted on dance, drama, literature, sculpture, and architecture.[81] While Heidegger's understanding of the crisis of humanism is linked to the artistic movement of Expressionism, Vattimo claims that he was influenced in addition by philosophers such as Ernst Jünger, Oswald Spengler, and the early Ernst Bloch, amongst others. Vattimo's main focus is on Spengler and Jünger. Spengler's

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[81] Expressionism "arose in a period in which analyses of the alienation, reification, and dehumanization of the individual, and the fragmentation of the human personality, has become widespread" (Douglas Kellner, "Expressionism, Industrial Capitalism, and the Crisis of Subjectivity" *in Art and Humanist Ideals: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. William Kelly [Australia: Macmillan Art Publishing, 2003], 51). Expressionism "sought an inward realm of retreat, whereby individuality and humanity could be preserved, protected against assaults from a repressive society and a destructive socio-economic order" (ibid). For more on expressionism see Ashley Bassie, *Expressionism* (New York: Parkstone Press International, 2014), and Dietmar Elgar, *Expressionism: A Revolution in German Art* (Köln: Taschen, 2002).

Der Untergang des Abendlandes (1918) and Jünger's *Der Arbeiter* (1932) are like two bookends that mark the beginning and the end of the period in which this crisis fully develops.[82] These works are important in that they emphasize the historical and social components of the crisis of humanism.[83] These components, Vattimo claims, are missing from other, theoretical works, and can clearly be seen here.[84] The crisis is above all a crisis of Eurocentrism and of the "bourgeois" model of *Bildung*. In contrast to the 'bourgeois' Bildung, both Spengler and Jünger put forward a sort of 'military' ideal of existence. Spengler advocates a technological, scientific, and economic organization of the world. "The most suitable activities for humanity are no longer those that involve the creation of works of art or of thought, for these are characteristically adolescent and youthful in nature."[85] This culminates in the establishment of an authority that it essentially militaristic in nature.[86] Jünger focuses on the life of the industrial worker, in which, what he terms 'the war of materials' finds its highest ideal in the model of the worker (as opposed to the soldier). "The exaltation of the 'war of materials' . . . gives weight to the 'mechanical' aspects of reality."[87] The worker's individuality is lost, becoming a cog in the wheel of production. The industrial worker is "no longer an individual, but a moment in an 'organic' process of production."[88] As the workers are

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[82] Ibid., 37.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid., 37-38.

[86] Ibid., 38.

[87] See Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 38.

[88] Ibid.

no longer concerned about existence, they become 'flexible' and "detached from any reference to the self."[89] Although these two ideals may appear to be simply a contrast to the bourgeois Bildung, they are significant in that they respond to the provocative call of modern technology, while running the risks that such a response entails.[90]

In order to make sense of the crisis, Vattimo draws on Heidegger. Specifically, Vattimo holds that the crisis of humanism may be interpreted as an aspect of the crisis of metaphysics.[91] Both crises may be described in terms of a *Verwindung*, which Vattimo claims suggests an "overcoming" as in a resigning oneself to something, accepting (another's judgement), or a recovery from an illness.[92] Heidegger does not use this word frequently; it appears primarily in *Identität und Differenz*, in one passage from *Holzwege*, and in an essay in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*.[93] Vatimo claims that prior to Heidegger we may see the use of this idea of *Verwindung* in Nietzsche's work, even though Nietzsche did not actually use the word itself. Instead, he spoke in terms of healing or convalescence. The crisis of humanism may be described in terms of *Verwindung*; namely, as an overcoming, which is a recognition of belonging, a healing of an illness, and a taking of responsibility.[94] For Vattimo, it is only through the

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[89] Ibid., 38.

[90] See ibid., 38.

[91] Ibid., 40.

[92] Ibid. The word *Verwindung* literally means distortion, twisting, deformation, etc. It is derived from the verb *verwinden*, which means to twist, to deflect, to get over, etc.

[93] Gianni Vattimo, ""Verwindung": Nihilism and the Postmodern in Philosophy," *Substance* 16, no. 2 (1987): 7-17.

[94] See ibid., 40.

viewpoint of that which both belongs to, and yet remains relatively outside, the humanistic tradition that we may make sense of it and take responsibility for it.[95]

The *Verwindung* of both the crisis of metaphysics and the crisis of humanism may only take place through a relationship with the *Ge-Stell*. The word, Vattimo notes, refers to a pedestal, shelves, or framework. Heidegger, however, treats it in his own way, as a compound of *Ge* and *Stell*. "Heidegger treats it [the word Ge-Stell] as a composite of *Ge* and *Stell*, by analogy with words like *Ge-birg*, in which the prefix *Ge* placed before *Birg*, *Berg* (mountain) has the idea of 'together', so that *Ge-birg* is a range of mountains."[96] *Ge-Stell* treats *stellen*, or 'setting in place' in a similar way so that it is in the ensemble, or collection, of 'setting in place'. For Heidegger, the technical world is the one in which Being is *set in place*.[97] According to Vattimo, everything, then, that is in the world is connected to *stellen* in all its various forms. *Stellen* may, for example, be *her-stellen* (producing), *vor-stellen* (representing), *be-stellen* (ordering), and so on.[98] *Ge-Stell*, in English, usually means a framework, but Vattimo suggests using "im-position" where the hyphen indicates a particular 'etymological' use of the term and provides and echo of 'setting in place,' suggesting an inescapable urgency.[99] The technical world as the world of planned production is an example of *Ge-Stell*.[100] "*Ge-*

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[95] Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 39.

[96] Gianni Vattimo, *The Adventure of Difference*, 169.

[97] Ibid. Italics reflect original.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Gianni Vattimo, ""Verwindung": Nihilism and the Postmodern in Philosophy," 11.
See also Gianni Vattimo, "Toward an Ontology of Decline" in *Recoding Metaphysics: The New Italian Philosophy* ed. Giovanna Borradori (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988) pp. 63-76.

[100] Ibid.

Stell represents for Heidegger the totality of the technological "setting," and of the summoning, provoking and ordering that constitutes the historical/*geschicklick* essence of the technological world."[101] In its essence technology is the fulfilment of metaphysics since metaphysics has always understood Being as the foundation of reason.[102] "Metaphysics has always understood Being as a *Grund* or a foundation which assures the rule of reason and of which reason always assures itself."[103] Technology is not only a part of the process that produces metaphysics, but represents its most advanced development.

> It is in the very nature of technology that the defining traits of metaphysics and humanism — which both had previously kept hidden from view — should be brought out into the open. This unveiling and disclosing is at once the final moment, the culmination, and the beginning of the crisis of metaphysics and humanism.[104]

Vattimo considers that the unveiling and disclosure of the traits of metaphysics and humanism in technology to be the beginning and the culmination of the crisis of humanism and of metaphysics.[105] In fact, he deems this moment to be a gift of Being, consisting of a "sending-forth, a mission and an announcement."[106] It is precisely for this reason that the crisis of humanism is a call to *Verwindung*; it is not, he maintains, an overcoming of humanism, but rather a healing in which humankind acknowledges that humanism remains our destiny.[107] The *Ge-Stell* is not only the place where

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[101] Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 40. *Geschicklich* is commonly translated as "fateful."

[102] Ibid., 40.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid., 40-41.

[105] Ibid., 41.

[106] Ibid., 41.

metaphysics and humanism come to an end, but it is also the announcement of the event of Being, the *Ereignis* as its place of giving-forth beyond the limits of the forgetfulness of metaphysics. [108] "The *Ereignis* alludes to an event in which Being occurs as a game of 'appropriation', *eigen* meaning 'proper.' In *Ereignis* man is appropriated (*vereignet*) to Being, while Being is consigned (*zugeeignet*) to man."[109] In the *Ge-Stell*, then, Being and humankind are united in a reciprocal trans-appropriation, and the framework, or im-position in which this trans-appropriation takes place stands in contrast to the alienation of technology.[110] The history of metaphysics is the history of the forgetting of the ontological difference, in other words, the history of the forgetting of the difference between Being and beings, which is equally the forgetting of Being as *Ereignis*. It appears, however, to be so *only* when reviewed from the dis-location in which *Ge-Stell* locates us.[111] The *Ereignis* may only be understood in these terms from within the location of the *Ge-Stell* as it is within the framework of the *Ge-Stell* that this trans-appropriation occurs. Vattimo affirms that while the *Ereignis* may mark out the forgetting of the ontological difference, it allows for Being to be understood in terms other than as foundation, allowing for a 'position,' rather than foundation. "Everything amounts to 'position,' every foundation is founded in turn and man lives within the arc of this foundation."[112] The cycle of transpropriation highlights the very difference that has been forgotten within the metaphysical tradition. Being and beings are caught in a

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[107] Ibid.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Gianni Vattimo, *The Adventure of Difference*, 170.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Ibid. Italics reflect original.

[112] Ibid., 171.

transitive cycle, one constantly leading back to the other. "Being is what beings are, it is the Being of beings, while beings in their turn are to be defined only as the beings of Being, those beings that have Being, that are."[113] When we think of Being and beings in this way, it highlights the connectedness between them. It means that we bypass the metaphysical thought of 'Being as foundation,' which reduces Being and beings to a metaphysics of beings, and we realise that both are transitive.[114] To consider technology within this setting means to keep in mind the *Verwindung* of humanism and refrain from treating technology as another foundation of that could impose its own reality on the world. Everything in the technical world can be manipulated by humankind, who, in turn, are themselves in danger of manipulated.

2.4   Conclusion

This chapter introduced some of the principal points in Heidegger's work that underpins Vattimo's own. I began by outlining how Heidegger came to examine the problem of Being, including a discussion of the three volumes that Vattimo believes played a key role in the structuring and development of *Being and Time*. This led to a consideration of Being in relation to temporality. Here, Heidegger's term Dasein was also discussed.

Next, I examined the ontological difference through Vattimo's reading of Derrida. The ontological difference, or the difference between Being and beings, is fundamental to Heidegger's work. Vattimo analysis of the ontological difference contrasts Heidegger against Derrida. This discourse led to a consideration of Heidegger's thought on nihilism, which focused primarily on Being. Indeed, for

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[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid.

Heidegger nihilism is the forgetting of Being, in which the ontological difference is erased. I discussed values (the medium through which we understand the things we encounter in the everyday world) as for Heidegger our awareness of Being is trapped in values, which contributes to our inability to discuss the question of Being. Values are important for Vattimo, as they are a common ground between Nietzsche and Heidegger's understanding of nihilism.

The exploration of the relationship between Heidegger and Nietzsche's work brought about a reflection on the crisis of humanism. As outlined in the chapter, Vattimo believes that not only is there a link between the death of God and the crisis of humanism, but that there is also a connection to technology.

The discourse paved the way for the introduction of *Verwindung*, a German word, which, for Heidegger, is used in the sense of a healing of convalescence. Vattimo believes that it is through *Verwindung* that the crisis of humanism may be understood in Heidegger's thought. Finally, leading on from *Verwindung*, the last section focused on the healing of the crisis of humanism. This was discussed in relation to the *Ge-Stell* as allowing technology to reveal the traits of humanism and metaphysics, which Vattimo maintains is a gift of Being. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the *Ge-Stell*, not only as unveiling but also in terms of the *Ereignis*, which may be spoken of both as an event and in terms of something coming into view.

PART TWO

The Death of Propitiatory Religion and the Birth of Christianity

Chapter Three

Deceit and Desire: Girard's Mimetic Theory

3.0 Introduction

The preceding chapters examined some of the philosophical foundations on which Vattimo bases his work, focusing on the writings of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Continuing in the same vein, this chapter focuses on another scholar whose writings greatly influence Vattimo. The academic in question is René Girard, formerly Professor Emeritus at Stanford University. As Vattimo draws heavily on Girard's work, it is necessary to have an understanding of the same in order to fully appreciate the manner in which Vattimo utilizes it.

The chapter introduces Girard's theory of human behaviour, known as 'mimetic theory.' This discussion leads to an exploration of the violence that occurs when multiple desires converge on the same object. Girard concentrates on the connection between culture, violence, and religion. He believes that primitive religion is centered on violence and the need for society to protect itself from the violence that arises from mimetic desire. Central to this discussion, and indeed to this chapter, is Girard's scapegoat mechanism, which, as we shall see, is the means by which societies safely channel violence in order to protect themselves. Furthermore, he focuses on understanding religion in the light of the conflict that stems from mimetic desire.

The final focus of the chapter is Girard's understanding of the Gospel texts. These accounts are different to the mythic, which conceal the workings of the scapegoat mechanism. The Gospels reveal these workings, laying them bare to us. They depict a God that wishes to put an end to violence. The Gospels can be read and understood as

the beginning of a process of desacralization, through which we ought to change our relationship to violence. In particular, this process of desacralization will prove to be significant for Vattimo's own appropriation of Girard. Vattimo understands this process in revelatory terms; it is the ongoing education of humankind, breaking away from violence inherent to the natural, sacrificial religions. What Vattimo takes from Girard's work is the idea of the incarnation as the dissolution of the sacred as violence. While, ultimately, he goes beyond this premise, Vattimo owes much to Girard's theses.

3.1 The Collapse of the Autonomous Self

Girard's work deals with what can be described as the collapse of the autonomous self. Human behaviour is guided by imitation. Essentially, another determines our desires for us. This is Girard's mimetic theory, which is explored in this section. Beginning with its discovery, in the works of five European novelists, the section moves to explore the potential for rivalry that is inherent to mimesis. Continuing, metaphysical desire is discussed. This occurs when the being of another is the object of desire. The hatred that arises with the loss of the autonomous self is the central focus of this section.

3.1.1 Mimetic Theory

Mimetic theory is a theory of human behaviour particular to René Girard. The word 'mimetic' comes from the Greek *mimētikos* meaning 'imitation,' which is itself derived from the verb *mimeisthai*, or 'to imitate.' Girard realized that our behaviour follows a particular pattern. He believes that human behaviour is guided by imitation. For instance, we learn from one another by imitation. Our languages, gestures, and social behaviours are learned from following another's example. Girard opts to use the word 'mimetic' or 'mimesis' rather than 'imitation' as he claims that the latter implies a

conscious effort to duplicate someone else's behaviour, as opposed to mimesis, which is an unconscious form of imitation. It is rarely the case that we consciously decide to copy another's behaviour, although there are exceptions, such as replicating how another dresses. Mimesis, as a form of unconscious imitation, is usually the norm. An infant, for example, does not decide consciously to copy an adult's gestures or sounds.

While working on his first book, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (1959), Girard realized that desire is mimetic. He is careful to maintain a distinction between needs and desire. Needs are preconditioned by biology and are essential requirements. Our needs are easily identifiable. Food, water, and shelter, for example, are needs. Essentially, needs are things that we must have in order to survive. In contrast, desire is more complex than need. The objects of desire are a product of culture and therefore are infinitely varied. Our instincts guide us in order to satisfy our biological needs, yet do not direct our desire. As we do not instinctually desire, we do not have a desire that we can truly call our own. Rather, we borrow our desire from others. It is the Other's representation of these objects of desire that make them desirable to us.[1]

Deceit, Desire, and the Novel deals with the works of five European novelists; Stendhal, Proust, Dostoevsky, Flaubert, and Cervantes.[2] It was while examining these author's writings that Girard noticed a common thread running through their works. Each novelist dealt with human desire in terms of mimesis, illustrating how another determines our desire for us. Girard draws on Miguel Cervantes' *Don Quixote* to support this claim. The title character, Don Quixote, is an avid reader of courtly

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[1] Majuscule reflects Girard's use of the word 'Other' to refer to the other persons whose desires we borrow. See René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1965). See also Pierpaolo Antonello and Heather Webb, *Mimesis, Desire, and the Novel: Rene Girard and Literary Criticism* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015).

[2] Girard originally taught French language and literature at Indiana University.

literature. Obsessed with chivalrous ideals from his reading, Quixote aspires to become a knight errant like Amadis de Gaul, who is one of the more prominent fictional characters in Quixote's books. By taking de Gaul as his model, Quixote allows the fictional character to determine for him the objects of his desire. In permitting de Gaul to effectively choose his desire for him, Don Quixote surrenders his own autonomy and independence.

> I want you to know, Sancho, that the famous Amadis of Gaul was one of the most perfect knight errants. But what am I saying, one of the most perfect? I should say the only, the first, the unique, the master and lord of all those who existed in the world . . . I think . . . that, when a painter wants to become famous for his art he tries to imitate the originals of the best masters he knows; the same rule applies to the most important jobs or exercises which contribute to the embellishment of republics; thus the man who wishes to be known as careful and patient should and does imitate Ulysses, in whose person and works Homer paints for us a vivid portrait of carefulness and patience, just as Virgil shows us in the person of Aeneas the valour of a pious son and the wisdom of a valiant captain; and it is understood that they depict them not as they are but as they should be to provide an example of virtue for centuries to come. In the same way Amadis was the pole, the star, the sun for brave and amorous knights, and we others who fight under the banner of love and chivalry should imitate him. Thus, my friend Sancho, I reckon that whoever imitates him best will come closest to perfect chivalry.[3]

The passage illustrates Don Quixote's willingness to surrender his own autonomy and take Amadis de Gaul as his model. Here, Quixote's desire to imitate de Gaul is clear, the text making it plain that Quixote believes that he will come close to attaining his chivalrous ideals if he can faithfully imitate de Gaul.

Girard discovered, upon his reading of the five novelists, that desire does not have a linear structure. Instead, it is triangular. If it were the case that desire followed a linear

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[3] Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, chapter 25, as quoted in René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*. Translated by Yvonne Freccero. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1965, 1. Originally published as *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset, 1961). For a brief sketch of Girard's works and theory, see P. Dumouchel, 'Introduction,' in *Violence and Truth*, ed., P. Dumouchel, (London: The Athlone Press, 1996). For an introduction to Girard's thought, see Michael Kirwan, *Discovering Girard* (UK: Cowley Publications, 2005).

formula, it would be that A (the subject) desires B (the object); Don Quixote (A), for example, desires to be a perfect knight errant (B). Instead, desire has a triangular structure; A desires B because of C. Thus, Don Quixote (A) desires to be a perfect knight errant (B) because of Amadis de Gaul (C). The third point, C, is known as the model or mediator as it is point C that models, or mediates, the subject's desire.[4] Here, Amadis de Gaul is the model or mediator as he directs Don Quixote's desire.

When more than one person desires a particular object rivalry may occur. The possession of the object is a determining factor. If the object is something that can be shared, then rivalry will not be an issue. Learning a language is an example of a process whereby rivalry does not occur. A single individual cannot possess exclusively a language, and, as the language can be shared, this means that if more than one person desires to learn that language then rivalry will not ensue. Conflict will not arise if the object can be shared. By contrast, when more than one person desires an object that may be exclusively possessed then rivalry may occur. Generally, conflict arises when the object cannot be shared. Girard draws on Stendhal's novel *The Red and the Black* as an example of a situation where rivalry takes place. Keeping in mind the triangular structure of desire, A (the subject) desires B (the object) because of C (the mediator), we see how two of Stendhal's characters, M. de Rênal and M. Valenod, illustrate how rivalry emerges. M. de Rênal (the subject) is the mayor of Verriéres. M. Valenod (the mediator/model) is another wealthy, influential man living in the same village. M. de Rênal wishes to engage Julian Sorel (the object) as a tutor for his children. His desire to engage Julian is not out of any concern for his children's education, but only because he thinks that M. Valenod also wishes to hire Julian. As it is feasible that M. Valenod could employ Julian, he becomes a rival. The rivalry is evident when it comes to the

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[4] See Michael Kirwan, *Discovering Girard* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 2004).

financial aspect of the negotiations. M. de Rênal makes a generous offer for Julian's services, because he mistakenly believes that M. Valenod is doing the same. So great is M. de Rênal's desire to hire Julian that he continues to increase his already-generous offer in order to thwart M. Valenod. "The ever-increasing price that the buyer is willing to pay is determined by the imaginary desire which he attributes to his rival."[5]

It is the distance between subject and mediator that determines whether or not rivalry occurs. Girard identifies two categories of mediation that take distance into account. We speak of external mediation when the distance between subject and mediator is great enough to prevent them from coming into contact with one another, and, thereby preventing rivalry or conflict. The distance is not solely geographical but may also be intellectual or social. In Cervantes' novel, for example, Amadis de Gaul will never be Don Quixote's rival. This is because De Gaul is a fictional character and the distance between him and Don Quixote can never be reduced, meaning that rivalry cannot ensue. In contrast, we speak of internal mediation when the distance between the subject and mediator is not great enough to prevent rivalry from occurring. M. de Rênal and M. Valenod's rivalry is a prime example. "Valenod is the richest and most influential man in Verriéres, next to M. de Rênal himself. The mayor of Verriéres always has the image of his rival before his eyes during his negotiations."[6] Both men occupy a similar social sphere in the same village and so the distance between them is not sufficient to prevent rivalry from taking place.

For Girard, *ressentiment* (resentment) is the outcome of internal mediation. It arises from suppressed feelings of hate and envy that have not been acted upon. It stems

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[5] Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 6.

[6] Ibid., 7.

from the repression of negative emotions, such as hate and revenge, which are a part of human nature and occurs particularly when these emotions are strongly roused but, for various reasons, are also repressed. This is usually down to some form of inadequacy on the part of the individual, such as physical or mental weakness, or fear.[7] According to Girard, internal mediation is responsible for what he asserts to be a type of 'psychological self-poisoning.'[8] The subject's desire for the object is, he claims, really a desire directed toward the mediator. "The impulse toward the object is ultimately an impulse toward the mediator."[9] In external mediation the subject is happy to proclaim their admiration for the mediator. Take, for example, Don Quixote, who openly worships Amadis de Gaul. However, in internal mediation the subject tries to conceal their admiration for the model. The subject's admiration for the model is actually halted by the model's possession of, or own desire for, the object desired by the subject. In Dostoevsky's novella *Notes from the Underground*, for example, the character known as the underground man competes with his peers for the same social space. He admires his fellows, yet, at the same time, loathes them, gate-crashing a banquet to which he was not invited in order to be near to them.

> Smiling scornfully, I paced backwards and forwards on the side of the
> room opposite the sofa, along the wall from the table to the stove and back.

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[7] See Max Scheler, *Ressentiment* (Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1998). Girard believes that all the characteristics that Scheler describes in his understanding of ressentiment are the product of internal mediation, although Scheler was unaware of the dynamic of mimetic desire.
It is of note that Girard takes issue with Nietzsche's particular understanding of *ressentiment*. For Nietzsche, it is the essence of Christianity. Girard, however, disagrees. He acknowledges that *ressentiment* is an outcome of Christianity, but it is not its essence. It is the outcome of Christianity in the sense that Christianity has not succeeded in eliminating violence, but only diminished it. "*Ressentiment* is the manner in which the spirit of vengeance survives the impact of Christianity" (René Girard, "Dionysus versus the Crucified," MLN, Vol. 99, No. 4 (1984): 816-835. 825). See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans, Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1969). For more on Girard's understanding of *ressentiment*, see Stefano Tomelleri, *Ressentiment: Reflections on Mimetic Desire and Society* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2015).

[8] Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 11.

[9] Ibid., 10.

> I was trying with all my might to show that I could do without them; meanwhile I purposefully made a clatter with my boots, coming down hard on the heels. But it was all in vain; they didn't even notice. [10]

For the subject, the mediator's own desire for, or possession of, the object is a clear indication that the model bears hostility towards the subject. The mediator's occupation of the social sphere that the underground man wishes to be a part of is proof, for the underground man, of the mediator's hostility. This perceived hostility does not prevent the subject from continuing to admire the model. It reinforces the subject's belief that the model considers the subject to be inferior. The subject, then, vacillates between feelings of deep reverence and awe and feelings of immense hatred toward the mediator. "Only someone who prevents us from satisfying a desire which he himself has inspired in us is truly an object of hatred."[11] The mediator's original role, in which the mediator was a model to be imitated, becomes secondary. Consequently, the mediator's secondary role, as an obstacle to the subject, becomes primary and the subject views the mediator solely as an obstacle or rival. "Now the mediator is a shrewd and diabolical enemy; he tries to rob the subject of his most prized possessions; he obstinately thwarts his most legitimate ambitions."[12] For Girard, *ressentiment* sums up the experiences of the subject as the result of internal mediation. "The impassioned admiration and desire to emulate stumble over the unfair obstacle with which the model seems to block the way of his disciple, and then these passions recoil on the disciple in the form of impotent hatred."[13]

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[10] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Underground Man*, quoted in Michael Kirwan, *Discovering Girard* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2004), 26-27. For further discussion of Dostoevsky's underground, see René Girard and James G. Williams, *Resurrection from the Underground: Feodor Dostoevsky* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2012).

[11] Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 11.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

3.1.2 Metaphysical Desire and the Divine Inheritance

Desire takes on a metaphysical aspect when the subject's desire is directed toward the mediator's being. "The object is only a means of reaching the mediator. The desire is aimed at the mediator's *being*."[14] The subject is drawn towards a mediator, who appears to be superior to the subject in some way. The model may give the impression of enjoying a higher social status or of having more autonomy than the subject. The subject wishes to change their own being, desiring to absorb the particular quality that they so admire in the mediator. The object, then, is not the focus of the desire, and is nothing more than a means of attaining the mediator's being. The subject believes that the metamorphosis of their own being will take place once they are in possession of the object. "Every hero of a novel expects his being to be radically changed by the act of possession."[15]

At surface level the root of metaphysical desire appears to be self-hatred. As the subject wishes to alter his or her own being, this implies an abhorrence towards particular personal qualities that they possess. Girard draws on Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* to illustrate this point. In the novella, an unnamed narrator, commonly referred to by readers as the underground man, relates his memoirs. It is certainly possible to accept that the underground man desires to change his being because of self-hatred. "The wish to be absorbed into the substance of the Other implies an insuperable revulsion for one's own substance. The underground man is in fact puny and sickly."[16] His desire to absorb the mediator's being is evident in the following.

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[14] Ibid.,53.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., 54.

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I composed a splendid, charming letter to him, imploring him to apologize to me, and hinting rather plainly at a duel in case of refusal. The letter was so composed that if the officer had the least understanding of the good and the beautiful he would certainly have flung himself on my neck and have offered me his friendship. And how fine that would have been! How we should have got on together! "He could have shielded me with his higher rank, while I could have improved his mind with my culture, and, well . . . my ideas, and all sorts of things might have happened."[17]

The passage illustrates the underground man's desire to combine his own intelligence with the strength of the mediator, who is an officer that accidentally bumped into him in a billiard room. As the underground man is sickly and puny, it is easy to see why he desires to become more like the officer. Yet Girard claims that the individual's hatred of a particular personal quality is not a sufficient source for metaphysical desire. "All heroes of novels hate themselves on a more essential level than that of 'qualities.'"[18] What the subject truly hates is their own subjectivity. In allowing another to choose the object of their desire for them, the subject losest what Girard describes as a 'most fundamental individual prerogative.'[19] With autonomy surrendered, the individual questions his or her existence believing that there is no reason or purpose to it. Dostoevesky illustrates this curse perfectly with the character of Myshkin.

He saw before him a dazzling sky, at his feet a lake, and all around a luminous horizon, so huge it seemed boundless. He gazed at the sight a long time, his heart torn with anguish. He remembered now having stretched out his arms to that ocean of light and blue and wept. He was tormented by the idea that he was separated from all that. What was this feast, this endless festival, to which he had so long felt himself drawn, ever since his childhood, without ever being able to participate in it? . . . Every being has a path and knows it; he comes and goes singing; but he, he alone knows nothing and understands nothing, neither men nor the voices of nature, for he is everywhere a stranger and an outcast.[20]

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 55.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

In contrast to the individual, who feels lacking in a purpose or reason for existence, everyone else's existence appears to be more authentic and seemingly endowed with a happiness and passion. The individual is set apart from this happiness, filled with a self-hatred that reduces the individual's existence and surroundings to mere mediocrity. "The hero contaminates everyone and everything with which he is in contact."[21] Girard calls this subjectivity the curse of the individual being, of one who is set apart.[22] For him, the characters in Stendhal's, Proust's, and Dostoyevsky's works are portrayed as the victims of a 'false promise' that has left them devoid of their proper being, with the victims believing that the Other possesses all that they themselves lack. The root of this 'curse of the individual being' does not lie within the individual. Rather, the cause is what Girard describes as the 'false promise' of metaphysical autonomy, which is a particular problem of modernity. "Modernity, with its spiritual bleakness and assimilation of everything to the politics of democracy, has exacerbated this perennial and universal phenomenon."[23] The 'death of God' promised metaphysical autonomy, leaving humankind to step up and fill the vacant place left by God's 'death.' Girard claims that this elevation of humankind is both the foundation of every Western doctrine and the false promise of metaphysical autonomy that is responsible for the 'curse of the individual.'[24] "For two or three centuries this has been the underlying principle of every 'new' Western doctrine: God is dead, man must take his place."[25]

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[21] Ibid., 56.

[22] Ibid., 55.

[23] Ibid.

[24] See Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the* Novel, 56; see also Scott Cowdell, *René Girard and Secular Modernity: Christ, Culture, and Crisis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013).

[25] Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 56.

There is an extraordinary sense of pride and expectation for humankind within this promise, yet it turns out to be false. "The more deeply it [the promise of metaphysical autonomy] is engraved in our hearts the more violent is the contrast between this marvelous promise and the brutal disappointment inflicted by experience."[26] Each individual realizes that it is impossible to live up to this divine inheritance of metaphysical autonomy, yet the individual is unable to share this experience with the Other. This is due to the belief that each person alone is suffering from this subjectivity. The divine inheritance, then, becomes a burden as each individual believes that the promise of autonomy is true for the Other. Unable to universalize their experience, the individual shoulders the burden of subjectivity alone, attempting to conceal it from the Other: "everyone thinks that he alone is condemned to hell, and that is what makes it hell."[27] Even if the individual realizes that this hell, which is created by the illusion of autonomy, is not just theirs alone, pride prevents them from speaking out. The individual's silence is guaranteed by the feelings of fear and shame that would be brought about by the exposition of this failure to the Other. It is this very silence that sustains and perpetuates the false promise, as each person continues to proclaim the lie in order to mask the real experience.

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[26] Ibid., 56.

[27] Ibid., 57. Andrew O'Shea notes that our inner life is based on self-deception, and that, for Girard, humankind's attempt to take over from God results in the fragmentation of the soul. The individual can no longer trust in the self but, instead, follows a mediator. "In this world every statement designed to justify human's existence as noble and worthy rings so hollow that they must dig even deeper into the illusory substance of their being to try, in vain of course, to compensate for the profound sense of being out of joint" (Andrew O'Shea, *Selfhood and Sacrifice: René Girard and Charles Taylor on the Crisis of Modernity* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 46).

3.2 Propitiatory Religion

This section focuses on the repercussions arising from the rivalry that is inherent to mimesis. It will explore the connection between mimetic violence, religious, and cultural development. At the heart of Girard's work is the connection between violence and the sacred, which he considers to be the foundation of religion. His particular understanding of this foundation is explored here in the light of primitive religion. An exploration of the scapegoat mechanism provides an understanding of how violence is played out in communities and how myth conceals the reality of what has taken place.

3.2.1 Violence and the Sacred

Girard develops his theory of mimetic desire by studying the repercussions of the rivalry that arises when desires converge on the same object. For this second phase of his study, he turns from literature to cultural anthropology, still examining it through the lens of mimesis but from within a broader framework.[28] Rather than continuing to concentrate on the limited interactions of literary characters, he shifts his focus to primitive societies and the connection that he sees between cultural formation, religion, and violence. Girard believes that violence is central to understanding religious and cultural development.

The French scholar's second volume, *Violence and the Sacred*, explores the link between sacrifice, violence, and the pivotal role that they play in society. "Violence is the heart and secret soul of the sacred."[29] Sacrifice acts as a buffer between the

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[28] For more on the sacred through the lens of literary fiction, see Cesáreo Bandera, *The Sacred Game: The Role of the Sacred in Modern Literary Fiction* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994). Bandera's book examines literary fiction and the sacred through a Girardian lens. For more on Girard and myth, see Richard J. Golsan, *Rene Girard and Myth: An Introduction*. 1st paperback ed. (New York: Routledge Ltd, 1993).

[29] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*. Translated by Patrick Gregory. New York: Continuum, 2005, 32. Originally published as *La violence et le sacre* (Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset, 1972).

community and the conflict that proceeds from internal mediation. Girard maintains that expiation has little or nothing to do with sacrifice. Instead of being a means of atonement, sacrifice's purpose is to ensure societal harmony. Sacrifice, then, is society's way of dealing with violence when it arises as the community as a whole suffers while its members are not at peace with one another. "When men no longer live in harmony with one another, the sun still shines and the rain falls, to be sure, but the fields are less well tended, the harvests less abundant."[30] Violence affects all aspects of the community, including its material success; all the quarrels that occur prevent the smooth running of the social order.

The violence that arises from internal mediation cannot be prevented. However, the ritual framework surrounding the sacrificial act channels the violence safely, preventing it from spilling unchecked into the community. The framework's ability to fulfil this function rests on two characteristics that operate conjunctively, namely, substitution and misunderstanding. If it is necessary, substitution allows society to protect its own members by allowing a surrogate victim to be chosen as a sacrifice. The community members select the surrogate victim, diverting the violence away from the original victim and allowing the violence to fall on another. The surrogate may not be a member of the community in which the conflict has arisen; "society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a 'sacrificeable' victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it desires most to protect."[31] Certain criteria must be adhered to in order for the substitution to work. The victim must be carefully selected. If the wrong victim is chosen the ritual will be ineffective

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[30] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*., 8.

[31] Ibid., 4.

and the violence will not be checked. The victim is deliberately chosen in order to avoid any further repercussion of violence. Those selected are normally individuals who are on the fringes of society, such as slaves, prisoners of war, and disabled persons. The victim does not share in the bonds that weave the rest of the community together, having little or no social ties. Women, although certainly on the margins of society, however, are rarely sacrificed. Girard claims that this is due to familial connections as a woman retains connections to her clan even when she marries into her husband's tribe. Thus, should she be sacrificed, there is a risk of reprisal from her own clan. Girard concludes that great care is taken with the victim's selection in order to minimize the risk of vengeance or retribution.

The substitution requires a degree of misunderstanding in order to operate successfully. Once a surrogate is selected, the original victim must then fade into insignificance. The community's focus must be directed away from the original, who carries the risk of vengeance or retribution, for example, from family members. Instead, the surrogate, who is the victim that is capable of satisfying violence's 'raging hunger' without jeopardizing the community, must now be the centre of attention.[32] For the violence to be successfully diverted in this manner, from one victim to another, the substitution must be obfuscated to a degree by removing the original sacrifice from plain view. "Its [the sacrificial substitution] vitality as an institution depends on its ability to conceal the displacement upon which the rite is based."[33] In Girard's words, sacrificial substitution depends on a degree of misunderstanding; the efficacy of the sacrificial rite depends on the community lacking a full awareness of the substitution

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[32] See Girard, Deceit, Desire and the Novel, 4.

[33] Ibid., 5.

that has occurred [34] Yet, paradoxically, a small degree of awareness must remain, as without it the substitution could not actually take place. Girard draws on the Bible, specifically Genesis 27, in order to illustrate both substitution and misunderstanding in operation. Here, Girard uses the story of Isaac blessing his son, Jacob. The take begins with Isaac instructing Esau, his other son, to go hunting and to return to him with a savoury meant. He intends to bestow his blessing on Esau on his return. Jacob, meanwhile, learns of Isaac's intentions and turns to his mother, Rebekah, for help. She kills two goats, turning them into the savoury meat. As Esau is hairy and Jacob smooth, Rebekah then covers Jacob with goatskin. As Isaac's sight is not good, when he feels the goatskin on Jacob's arms and neck he is duped by the ploy. Thus, he gives Jacob his blessing instead of Esau. Here, the goats protect Jacob from the violence intended towards him in two ways. First, they provide Jacob with the meat that his father requires, meaning that Isaac gives Jacob his blessing, rather than a curse. Secondly, with Jacob wearing their skins, the animals act as a buffer, preventing violence from occurring between father and son. "They [the skins] serve as a sort of insulation, preventing the direct contact that could lead only to violence."[35] In this story we see two kinds of substitution; one brother is substituted for another and an animal is substituted for a person.[36] The passage also illustrates the degree of misunderstanding required for the substitution to take place effectively. Girard believes that the first act of substitution, one brother for another, overshadows and half-conceals the second, that of an animal for a person. "The narrative itself, then, might be said to partake of a

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] See Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 5.

sacrificial quality; it claims to reveal one act of substitution while employing this substitution to half-conceal another."[37]

In order to operate successfully, Girard claims, sacrifice must take place within the sacrificial framework. If it occurs outside the ritualistic form, the sacrifice fails to dispel the violence within the community. Girard offers a Greek hero, Ajax, as an example. Ajax fought for the Greeks in the Trojan War and was second only to Achilles. When Achilles was killed in the fighting, Ajax returned his body and armour to the Greeks while another hero, Odysseus, held off the Trojans. A dispute arose over Achilles' armour, as both heroes laid claim to it. The dispute was settled by a vote, with the Greek army awarding the armour to Odysseus. Enraged at their decision, Ajax planned to attack the Greeks. Instead, he slaughters a flock of sheep, mistaking them for the Greeks in his anger. Even though sacrifice is designed to halt the violence that arises from internal mediation, it only does so through structured, controlled channels. Even though sheep were commonly used in sacrificial rituals, Ajax is deemed to be a madman as he killed them outside of the sacrificial framework. Indeed, the framework acts as a restraint. As violence is contagious, with the potential to spread and to contaminate others, it is necessary to curtail it. "There is something infectious about the spectacle of violence."[38] It has a mimetic character; each violent deed is seen as a legitimate response to an 'original' act of violence, which may be real or perceived.[39] Violence is always believed to be initiated by an opponent, meaning that the responsibility lies with someone else. This allows for 'tit-for-tat' acts of violence, with

[37] Ibid., 6.

[38] Ibid., 31.

[39] See René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. Translated by Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer. London: Continuum, 2005. Originally published as *Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (Paris: Editions Grasset et Fasquelle, 1978).

each side blaming the other.[40] Even individuals who were not involved in the original dispute may be drawn into the conflict. The only thing that can prevent violence from spreading is violence itself. "Only violence can put an end to violence, and that is why violence is self-propagating. Everyone wants to strike the last blow, and reprisal can thus follow reprisal without any true conclusion being reached."[41] Only a properly conducted sacrifice can break the cycle. Ritual, then, is simply a framework that permits the violence to fall on a victim from whom there will be no further reprisals. "Religion directs violence as a defensive force against those forms of violence that society regards as inadmissible."[42]

Violence, in Girard's reading, has a dual nature, possessing both harmful and beneficial aspects. On the one hand, violence appears to be terrifying in nature as it is random, ruinous, and disorderly. This type of violence destroys the social order; it is the same kind of violence that allows for 'tit-for-tat' acts of reprisal to spread throughout the community. On the other hand, violence is beneficial as it restores peace to the group. This is the violence that takes place within the sacrificial framework, which acts as a restraint on any further violent outbreaks and reinstates order. "At times violence appears to man in its most terrifying aspect, wantonly sowing chaos and destruction; at other times it appears in the guise of peacemaker, graciously distributing the fruits of sacrifice."[43] Essentially, the method used to restore peace is the very same

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[40] See Duncan Morrow, "Violence Unveiled: Understanding Christianity and Politics in Northern Ireland After René Girard's Rereading of Atonement," in *Mimesis and Atonement: René Girard and the Doctrine of Salvation*, eds. Michael Kirwan and Sheelah Treflé Hidden (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 135-153.

[41] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 27.

[42] Ibid., 21.

[43] Ibid., 38.

as the violent acts that it seeks to overcome: violence is used to check violence. "Ritual is nothing more than the regular exercise of 'good' violence."[44] For Girard, the dual nature of violence is best understood by religion, and, in particular, the symbolism of and treatment of blood is an example of the paradoxical nature of violence. "Blood serves to illustrate the point that the same substance can stain or cleanse, contaminate or purify, drive men to fury and murder or appease their anger and restore them to life."[45] Primitive societies generally attempt to avoid any contact with blood, unless it is within the context of a sacrificial act. Girard claims that this is due to its connection to violence.[46] In times of peace blood is not a common sight, however, during times of conflict and violence blood is shed. "When violence is unloosed . . . blood appears everywhere—on the ground, underfoot, forming great pools. Its very fluidity gives form to the contagious nature of violence."[47] The blood spilt by violence is allowed to dry and congeal on the victim, becoming dark and rough. By contrast, the blood spilt in a ritual is bright and free flowing. It is not allowed to dry on the victim but is carefully removed.[48] In the same paradoxical way in which violence puts an end to violence, blood itself is required to purify blood. The blood of the sacrificial victim purifies the contaminated blood, cleansing the community. In order to illustrate the duality of blood Girard draws from Euripides' *Ion*. In this passage, we see the queen, Creusa, explaining

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[44] Ibid., 38.

[45] Ibid., 38.

[46] This is particularly true, for Girard, in the case of menstrual blood. Frequently, primitive religions believed menstrual blood to be impure. The French scholar maintains that this impurity is to do with menstruation's link with sexuality. Often, violence is at the heart of sexuality: for example sadism, masochism, and rape. In childbirth, the death of mother, child, or both is possible. Violence may also arise as the result of incestuous or adulterous relationships. "Sexuality leads to quarrels, jealous rages, mortal combats. It is a permanent source of disorder even within the most harmonious of societies" (Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 36).

[47] Ibid., 35.

[48] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 38.

to her slave the significance of two drops of blood that she has in her possession. Both

drops fell from the Gorgon, Medusa, when she was slain by Perseus, yet both have

different attributes.

> *Creusa*: When the fatal blow was struck a drop spurted from the hollow
> vein. . . .
> *Slave*: How is it used? What are its properties?
> *Creusa*: It wards off all sickness and nourishes life.
> *Slave*: And the other drop?
> *Creusa*: It kills. It is made from the Gorgon's venomous serpents.
> *Slave*: Do you carry them mixed together or separate?
> *Creusa*: Are good and evil to be mixed together? Separate, of course.[49]

It is possible for the distinction between pure and impure to become blurred. The two

final lines of dialogue between Creusa and the slave hint at such a thing. The two drops

of blood that Creusa possesses must be carried separately lest they mingle. Should they

do so, there would no longer be any distinction between them and the difference

between pure and impure would be eroded. The pure blood's efficacy, then, would be

destroyed. "As long as purity and impurity remain distinct, even the worst pollution can

be washed away; but once they are allowed to mingle, purification is no longer

possible."[50] The same is true for 'good' and 'bad' violence; once the difference between

them has been erased then violence cannot be purified. Sacrificial violence, which takes

place within a ritual framework, and nonsacrificial violence, which occurs outside the

ritual framework, bear a close resemblance to each other. Violent acts that are

prohibited in society may be permitted within the context of ritual. The ritual

framework provides a distinction; the sacrificial violence is good, as this is controlled

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[49] See Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 39; see also Euripides, *Ion*, trans, George Gilbert Aimé Murray (London: George Allen & Unwin; New York Oxford University Press, 1954; Project Gutenberg, 2011), 78-80:1003-1017. https://gutenberg.ca/ebooks/murrayeuripides-ion/murrayeuripides-ion-00-h.html. Although Girard draws on Euripides' *Ion*, he has omitted any bibliographical details. I have provided a reference to a freely available version of the text, accessible online, and included the location of the lines that Girard discusses here.

[50] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 39.

and may be safely watched, while the nonsacrificial, which is uncontrolled and unsafe as it does not operate within a set framework, is bad. The sacrificial process is a finely balanced system; any interference with, or failure to adhere to its regulations, prevents it from functioning properly. If, for example, the sacrificial victim is too close to the community, there will be no distinction between the violence taking place throughout the community and the 'good' violence of the ritual. The rite, then, is rendered ineffectual and is unable to check the violence that threatens to engulf the community.

3.2.2 The Sacrificial Crisis and the Scapegoat Mechanism

The sacrificial process is a finely balanced operation, with the efficacy of the process resting on the careful selection of the victim. Any deviation from the correct criteria prevents the sacrifice from working properly. If, for example, a victim is chosen that has ties to the community then the repercussions will be disastrous. The distinction between the 'good' violence and 'bad' is erased, meaning that there is no longer any differentiation between the controlled, purifying violence of sacrifice and the uncontrolled, impure violence that takes place outside the ritual framework. Murder and sacrifice are rendered one and the same.

Girard claims that once the distinction between sacrificial and nonsacrificial violence is obliterated then all other differences within the community are erased.[51] The sacrificial crisis, which is the loss of distinction, affects the entire social order. The community is not only threatened by physical violence, but also by the erosion of its very foundations. Primitive societies depend on cultural distinctions for order and peace: when the religious framework flounders, then the resulting sacrificial crisis is a

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[51] Ibid., 51.

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threat to the harmony and stability of the entire social order. The French scholar draws on *Oedipus the King* as an example of the sacrificial crisis' effect on the social order.[52] Many acts of violence occur throughout the Oedipus myth; "at the core of the Oedipus myth . . . is the proposition that all masculine relationships are based on reciprocal acts of violence."[53] Originally, Laius casts out Oedipus, fearful that he will die at Oedipus' hands. Even with this preventative measure, the prophecy is fulfilled and Oedipus is responsible for Laius' death. Further violence erupts between Oedipus, his brother in law Creon, and the blind prophet Tiresias. The familial differences in the myth are erased. Oedipus, for example, is both son and husband to Jocasta. Differences are erased within the community too, for example, with Oedipus and Tiresias. In their roles, as king and prophet, Oedipus and Tiresias are the spiritual leaders of Thebes. Pitted against one another, Oedipus threatens to expose Tiresias as a failure and false prophet; Tiresias retaliates by challenging Oedipus. It is easy to see the exchange as one that takes place solely between two individuals, yet, due to their respective positions, it is one that has implications for the entire community. It is not just the individuals that suffer; because both Tiresias and Oedipus are figures of authority the institutions that they represent also suffer. "Although the targets are the individuals, it is the institutions that receive the blows. Legitimate authority trembles on its pedestal, and the combatants finally assist in the downfall of the very order they strove to maintain."[54] The conflict

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[52] *Oedipus the King* is a play by Sophocles, performed, approximately, during the 430's BCE. The play opens with the citizens of Thebes pleading with their king, Oedipus, to save them from the plague that is sweeping through the city. While attempting to find a cure, Oedipus discovers that Laius, the former king of Thebes, whom he killed unintentionally, is his father. Not only has Oedipus killed his father, but also, in marrying Jocasta, Laius' widow, he has married his own mother. For an edition of this play, with introduction and commentary, see, P. J. Finglass, *Sophocles*: *Oedipus the King*. Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[53] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 50.

[54] Ibid., 51.

becomes more intense. "The institutions lose their vitality; the protective façade of the society gives way; social values are rapidly eroded, and the whole cultural structure seems on the verge of collapse."[55] Girard maintains that the social order is founded on distinctions. Due to this, when these distinctions are erased the stability and harmony of the entire social order is threatened. "[The] cultural order is nothing more than a regulated system of distinctions in which the differences among individuals are used to establish their 'identity' and their mutual relationships."[56] In primitive religion differentiation gives stability to a community. Girard uses the example of the treatment of twins in primitive societies to illustrate this point. The terror inspired by twins often leads to one, or both, of them being put to death. He believes that it is the dread of violence that drives the community, or, in some cases, the parents, to do so. Twins frequently look very similar to one another and often share a cultural identity.[57] It is, he claims, the lack of differentiation between twins that gives rise to the fear of violence. Even the manner in which twins are put to death is an indication of this fear. No direct physical violence is used, for fear of contamination or revenge, instead, they are usually abandoned, left somewhere outside the community, and exposed to the elements. Their deaths are inevitable due to the exposure. Due to their dying in this fashion, the community is safe in the belief that there will be no reprisals.

Mimetic desire is at the heart of the sacrificial crisis. Internal mediation occurs when the distance between the subject and mediator is not sufficient to stop them from coming into contact with one another. The distance acts as a buffer, preventing conflict

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[55] Ibid., 52.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid., 59.

from arising between the subject and mediator. In the case of internal mediation there is not enough distance to prevent rivalry or conflict from occurring. The distance is not only geographical but may also be intellectual or social. Once all distinctions are eroded there are fewer obstacles to prevent conflict from transpiring and so the discord increases. When the subject desires a particular object, this is known as acquisitive mimesis. However, as the rivalry intensifies the object does not remain at the centre of the contention; there is a shift to metaphysical desire, as in the place of an object, the rivals now desire prestige or recognition. The rivals are locked into a bitter fascination with one another.[58] Shakespeare's play, *Troilus and Cressida* is a prime example of the shift from acquisitive desire to metaphysical; it is also an illustration of the rivals' fascination with each other.[59] The play's subject is the futility of the Trojan War. Initially, the Greeks and Trojans battle over Helen, whom the Trojans abducted. However, Helen does not remain the focus of desire. As the war drags on and Helen ages, the focus shifts from the acquisitive to the metaphysical; rather than fighting for Helen, both sides are fighting for the prestige of winning.[60]

At the height of the sacrificial crisis we find what Girard calls 'doubles.'[61] The doubles are the antagonists who are caught in the crisis. The object of desire has faded away and the antagonists are firmly focused on each other. In their attempts to establish difference between themselves they succeed only in becoming increasingly indistinguishable from one another. The antagonists' struggle for difference simply results in each imitating the other and the erosion of difference in the social order means

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[58] For further information see Michael Kirwan, *Discovering Girard*, 42.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

[61] See Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*; see also Girard, *Things Hidden*.

that any antagonist may be the double of any other at any time. "As the crisis grows more acute, the community members are transformed into 'twins,' matching images of violence . . . they are each *doubles* of the other."[62] Although the sacrificial crisis results in the erosion of difference, paradoxically, in the case of the doubles, the differences are never completely erased as their relationship is based on a system of reciprocity. Each antagonist trades blows with the other, and this successive trading of blows means that they do not occupy the same position at the same time. Rather, they occupy it successively. "The reciprocal relationship between the characters is real, but it is the sum of nonreciprocal moments. The antagonists never occupy the same positions at the same time, to be sure; but they occupy these positions in succession."[63] The faster the antagonists trade blows with each other, the faster they successively occupy each position. Eventually, all distinctions between them appear to be erased. To those on the outside, there is effectively no difference between those striking the blows and those receiving them. In contrast, the antagonists usually fail to realize the reciprocal nature of their relationship and only recognize the differences between one another. The collapse of the social order transforms the normal, everyday into a monstrous blend of things that under normal circumstances are distinct; the doubles are trapped in a state in which their differences are not entirely erased, but instead are mixed up and disordered.[64] Primitive societies fear the double as the double appears at the height of the sacrificial crisis when the entire social order is under threat. Anything that could

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[62] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 83, emphasis original. Each antagonist's actions closely resemble that of the other. "They make the same gestures, they have the same desires and the same thoughts" (René Girard, 'Dionysus and the Violent Genesis of the Sacred,' trans. Sandor Goodhart in *Boundary 2*, Vol. 5, no.2 [Winter, 1977], 487-506, here, 491).

[63] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 167.

[64] See Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*.

potentially produce a double was looked upon with dread. Imitative magic, for example, such as voodoo, was feared.[65] The voodoo dolls are an example of imitative magic as they are a simulacrum or double of an adversary. Voodoo's adherents believe that what is done to the doll figure is also done to the person that it represents. Great care was taken in some societies with hair or nail clippings, or indeed with any body part that could be used as a potential double.

The scapegoat mechanism is a process that re-establishes the social order. For Girard, there are, currently, three distinct meanings to the term 'scapegoat.' The first is the biblical meaning, derived from Leviticus 16. Here, we see a ritual performed on the Day of Atonement, in which one goat has the sins of the community laid upon it and is banished to the wilderness. A second goat is then sacrificed. 'Scapegoat' refers to the first goat and its purpose. The second is the anthropological meaning of 'scapegoat' as there are similarities between the Leviticus ritual and those in other cultures. The term was used, freely, in connection with the other rituals, based on the belief that guilt and suffering could be transferred (usually to an animal). Recently, Girard notes, anthropologists believe that no such distinct type of ritual can be recognized. Due to an inability to clearly define such practices the term 'scapegoat' now carries an air of disrepute in anthropological circles.[66] Thirdly, the term has a psychosocial meaning. Here, the term is used to denote victims of unwarranted violence.[67] The French scholar uses the term scapegoat in this psychosocial, everyday sense, as an individual who is

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[65] See René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World.*

[66] René Girard, 'Generative Scapegoating,' in R.G. Hamerton-Kelly ed., *Violent Origin: Walter Burkert, René Girard and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 74.

[67] See René Girard, 'Generative Scapegoating,' in R.G. Hamerton-Kelly ed., *Violent Origin: Walter Burkert, René Girard and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 73-74.

blamed for the faults or wrongdoings of others. For Girard, the scapegoat mechanism breaks the cycle of reciprocal violence that occurs at the peak of the sacrificial crisis. Indeed, the violence may be described in terms of a vicious circle that is difficult to break free from. "Once a community enters the circle, it is unable to extricate itself. We can define this circle in terms of vengeance and reprisals."[68] The uncontrolled violence raging throughout the community must be diverted in order to break the cycle and restore peace. The double has a significant role to play in the restoration of harmony. All the antagonists are interchangeable; as all difference between them has been erased this means that any antagonist, at any time, may take the place of another. One is chosen and acts as a surrogate for all the others; "a single victim can be substituted for all the potential victims, for all the enemy brothers that each member is striving to banish from the community."[69] By this, Girard means that it is possible for any one of the doubles to take on the collective hatred of all the others.[70] The antagonists' hatred is transformed into a single, collective force that is aimed towards one individual; Girard calls this surrogate victim a scapegoat. This process, then, by which the crisis is resolved is known as the scapegoat mechanism. The scapegoat is held responsible for causing the conflict that threatened to engulf the entire social order. It is not necessary for the victim to be guilty. Any flimsy pretext, or rumour, is enough to convict the victim. Mimesis cements the guilty verdict as, one by one, the group unites to apportion blame to the victim.

> The slightest hint, the most groundless accusation, can circulate with vertiginous speed and is transformed into irrefutable proof. The corporate sense of conviction snowballs, each member taking confidence from his neighbor by a rapid process of mimesis. The firm conviction of the group

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[68] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 86.

[69] Ibid., 83.

[70] Ibid., 83.

is based on no other evidence than the unshakable unanimity of its own illogic.[71]

It is simply the case that the group unites, directing all their hatred and anger towards one individual. Although any one of the antagonists may be chosen, once the victim is selected the decision is final and will not be reversed. The victim is expelled from or destroyed by the community. It is an immediate and final solution to end the outbreak of violence that threatens to destroy the entire social order.

3.3 Things Hidden: Sacrifice and Christianity

Here, I delve deeper into the connection between religion and violence. Beginning with a discussion of ritual and prohibition, the section moves to explore the difference between myth and persecution texts. The earlier accounts of the scapegoat mechanism are the mythic accounts in which the workings of the scapegoat mechanism are shrouded from view. The persecution texts are later texts, in which the mechanism's workings are not fully concealed. As we progress through the various accounts, Girard turns his attention to the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures. He examines both the Old and New Testaments in the light of the scapegoat mechanism, paying close attention to the desacralizing purpose of the Gospels.

3.3.1 Religious Foundations

Girard claims that in order to gain a better understanding of religion it must be examined in the light of the conflict brought about by mimesis. He focuses particularly on religious rites and prohibitions, maintaining that they exist solely because of the conflict

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[71] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 83-84.

arising from mimetic desire. Prohibitions exist in order to prevent violence from occurring.[72] He maintains that primitive cultures have a better understanding of violence than we do currently. In the contemporary world, the judicial system prevents us from seeing an act of violence in its wider context. By this, he means the contagion of violence, whereby, the smallest dispute has the potential to seriously disrupt the existing social order. In fact, the judicial system operates in the same way as sacrifice in the sense that is it designed to limit any vengeance or reprisals. Given that the decision made by the presiding judge is presented as final, the judicial system normally restricts vengeance to a single act of reprisal. Due to this limiting effect, the wider context, in which violence threatens the community, only becomes visible if there is a breakdown in the judiciary system that reduces its efficacy. In contrast, primitive societies, rather than taking an act of violence as an isolated incident, take the imitative and reciprocal character of violence into consideration. An act of violence, far from being isolated, has the potential to escalate and become something far more than a single crime. Religious prohibitions function as a preventative measure.

> When all antimimetic prohibitions are considered as a whole . . . it becomes apparent that they correspond roughly to the steps of an *escalation* of mimetic contagion that threatens more and more members of the community and tends towards progressively more aggravated forms of rivalry over objects which the community is incapable of dividing peacefully: women, food, weapons, the best dwelling-sites, etc.[73]

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[72] Prohibitions may be both religious and nonreligious. Imitative behaviour, for example, such as the repetition of another's words or gestures may be prohibited by primitive societies. In this section, however, the discussion will focus on religious prohibitions.

[73] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 19. Girard uses the term 'acquisitive mimesis' to describe what takes place when people desire the same object with a view to appropriating it. The quotation provides examples of different objects, such as food and weapons, which all act as varying sources of acquisitive mimesis; they are limited resources and so individuals will struggle to acquire them for themselves. When the struggle escalates, eventually the object is no longer the focus of the struggle and violence is the end in itself. This is what Girard describes as 'conflictual mimesis.' See David Pan, *Sacrifice in the Modern World: On the Particularity and Generality of Nazi Myth* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 93-94).

While violence itself is forbidden, very often behaviour that may lead to violence is considered taboo. Many societies have prohibitions in place, for example, regarding sexuality. Sexual offences pose a real risk of violence, with significant potential to cause conflict within society. Violence may arise from deeds such as incest, adultery, rape, and sadism, for example. Childbirth, which is a consequence of sexual relations, is fraught with danger as death is a very real possibility for both parent and infant.[74] While prohibition forbids the violence of the mimetic crisis, ritual replicates it. Paradoxically, the ritual allows what is disallowed by the prohibitions. Although it is strictly taboo in normal circumstances, incestuous relations, for example, may take place during the ritual.[75] The purpose of ritual is to take the very transgressions that would cause conflict in the community and to transform them so that the community peacefully collaborates together. "In order to reproduce a model of the mimetic crisis in a spirit of social harmony, the enactment must be progressively emptied of all real violence so that only the 'pure' form is allowed to survive."[76] In ritual the communities engage in the very transgressions that they fear, but in a safer form, in order to prevent the transgressions from occurring outside the protective structure of the ritual framework.

Generally, a ritual concludes with a sacrifice. This may not be limited to the slaughter of an animal but may include exorcism or mutilation.[77] The sacrificial

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[74] See Girard, *Things Hidden*.

[75] As an example of rituals involving sexual taboos, the Jaiminiya Brahmana describes the *go-sava*. In this ritual the sacrificer plays the part of a bull. He is allowed to urinate and defecate wherever he chooses, as a bull would. During his time as a bull, in direct contravention of normal prohibitions, he must also have sexual relations with members of his own clan, including his mother and sister. See David M. Knipe, *Vedic Voices: Intimate Narratives of a Living Andhra Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[76] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 21.

[77] Ibid., 23.

conclusion to the ritual fulfils a similar function to that of the scapegoat, who acts as a surrogate victim at the height of the sacrificial crisis. In the same way that the community draws together to direct their hatred towards the scapegoat, they unite in the immolation of the sacrificial victim. Ritual safely replicates the mimetic crisis and concludes, similarly, with the sacrifice of a surrogate victim. "Where previously there had been a chaotic ensemble of particular conflicts, there is now the simplicity of a single conflict: the entire community on one side and on the other, the victim."[78] The sacrifice unites the community at the expense of the victim, who is, of course, chosen to minimize the risk of further violence.

Girard believes that ritual is based on an original, or founding, murder that took place in the past. The ritual is not designed simply to re-enact or commemorate but rather to reproduce the effects of that murder. The reason for this reproduction is that at some point a crisis occurred, bringing chaos and unrest to the community. During this conflict a murder would have taken place, which would have brought about both the resolution of the crisis and the unification of the community. "In this light, ritual becomes comprehensible as an attempt to avert the real threat of crisis: the crisis would be reproduced not for its own sake but for the sake of its resolution."[79] After the murder has taken place and the crisis is resolved, harmony descends on the community. The group is blind to their own involvement and holds the victim responsible for both the newfound sense of calm and for the preceding events of the crisis. The victim, as a

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[78] Ibid., 24. According to Rowan Williams, the rivalry itself helps to unite the community. The elimination of the victim ensures that the obstacle between the community and the desired object is removed. "Rivalry itself creates a community of sorts, and its culmination comes at a point where a whole ensemble of rivals comes to agree that *all* are being denied possession of what they desire by *one* paradigm possessor. To eliminate that one person secures, *de facto*, access to what is denied by all the others" (Rowan Williams, *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology* ed. Mike Higton [Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007], 173). Emphasis original.

[79] Ibid., 25.

consequence of appearing capable of bringing both disorder and order, becomes a deity and is deemed sacred. The victim, or deity, is believed to possess not only the knowledge of what transgressions originally triggered the crisis but also the knowledge of the solution. As the deity is believed to pass on this knowledge to the community, this explains why prohibitions and rituals are in place. "It is logical to believe that the terrifying aspects of the epiphany is designed to impress in all hearts and minds the rules that the deity wants established."[80] Girard also believes that the victim's newfound status as a deity also lays the foundation for the 'first outlines' of transcendence.[81] He claims that as the victim is reputed to bring both death (the murder during the crisis) and life (with the resolution of the crisis) to the community then the victim must surpass the normal limits of the human condition.[82] As the deity establishes the rules and resolutions that the community must abide by, this explains why religion is at the heart of primitive societies. "All cultures attribute their foundation to supernatural powers which are also believed to demand respect for *the rules that they transgress*, and to sanction their transgression with the most terrible punishments."[83] The punishments are not simply some superstitious delusion but are in fact all too real. If the prohibitions are

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[80] Ibid., 41.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid., emphasis original. Religion, then, operates on the basis of a misunderstanding. The community do not realise what is truly taking place. The misunderstanding paves the way for religious and cultural diversity as it allows for a variety of practices. Even though all of these practices fall under the umbrella of ritual and prohibition, they are all an attempt to prevent or dispel violence. Girard believes that we must look beneath the surface of what is presented to us in order to discover the reality of the religious foundations underneath. He likens the sacred to Johann Joachim Becher's theory of phlogiston, which was an early attempt (1669) to explain what is now known as oxidation. Becher thought that phlogiston, a non-existent chemical, was released during combustion, leaving behind ash as the 'dephlogisticated' substance. For Girard, both the sacred and the theory of phlogiston are attempts to explain a very real phenomenon, although in both cases one must delve deeper in order to gain a better understanding of these phenomena. "Phlogiston does not exist any more than the sacred, yet the theory of phlogiston allowed for a relatively exact description of certain aspects of the real phenomenon of combustion" (René Girard, *Things Hidden*, 45).

ignored the community then faces a real risk of plunging back into the cycle of vengeance and violence once more. Therefore, religion, for Girard, is an immense effort to keep peace within the community, prohibiting violence and dispelling it when it occurs.

3.3.2 Myth and Persecution Texts

For Girard, both earlier and later accounts of the scapegoat mechanism at work describe its principal structural traits. He distinguishes between earlier accounts, which are found in mythology, and later ones, such as texts from the Middle Ages. Although both types of account describe the phenomena of collective violence, there is a key difference between them. In myth, the workings of the scapegoat mechanism are obscure; all the elements of its workings are there but are not made clear to the reader. In the later accounts, the workings of the mechanism are clearer. The later accounts are, according to the French scholar, persecution texts rather than myths. He believes that myths are no longer produced due to society's increasing awareness of collective violence and ability to decipher it in the myths. Due to this awareness persecution texts, instead of myths, are produced.[84] For Girard, myth gives way to the persecution text due to society's increasing awareness of collective violence. This growing awareness did not cease with the introduction of persecution texts. "Medieval texts of persecution . . . can be situated in an intermediary zone between mythology and the more radical demythification of which we ourselves are capable."[85] He emphasizes that the consciousness of collective violence is not a seamless transition from unawareness to

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[84] See Girard, *Things Hidden*, 126.

[85] Ibid., 127.

awareness, but, instead, is a process of discovery varying from culture to culture. He believes, for example, that it is highly visible in Judaeo-Western society.[86]

Girard believes that mythology only partially reveals the workings of the scapegoat mechanism. In order for this mechanism to work effectively and put an end to the conflict that might arise within a community, there must be an element of misunderstanding. The substitution of one victim for another requires a degree of misunderstanding in order to operate successfully. The community's focus must be directed away from the original victim and focused on the new. For the violence to be successfully diverted in this manner, from one victim to another, the substitution must be obfuscated to a degree, removing the original sacrifice from plain view. In addition to the misunderstanding required for the victim's substitution, the mechanism requires a degree of misunderstanding with regard to the group's involvement in the process. The group lays all responsibility for both the disorder of the crisis and the subsequent restoration of order on the part of the victim, yet it remains blind to its own involvement in the crisis. Mythology follows the same pattern of misunderstanding. All the essential elements of the scapegoat mechanism at work are present in the myth, yet the account carefully avoids any acknowledgement of what is truly taking place.

As a starting point for his analysis, Girard takes Claude Lévi-Strauss' analysis of two myths in order to demonstrate the simultaneous awareness and concealment of the mechanism.

> I can show you analyses in the work of Lévi-Strauss that concern the founding murder itself, that reveal the principal structural traits involved, without demonstrating any awareness of what is being shown or any understanding of the fact that they are in the process of revealing the generative mechanism of all mythology.[87]

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[86] Ibid.

[87] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 105.

He draws on two myths that Lévi-Strauss discusses in his work *Totemism*, both recounting the story of a collective murder.[88] The myths come from two different societies, one from the Ojibwa Indians and the second from the Tikopia. The Tikopia come from a small island in the Pacific Ocean that is now grouped with the Solomon Islands, while the Ojibwa come from North America. Although the two tribes are some considerable distance apart, Girard is certain that both myths recount how a mimetic crisis occurred and was resolved within the respective communities. In both myths, strangers described as gods visit the tribes. Lévi-Strauss' account of the Ojibwa myth reads as follows:

> The five 'original' clans are descended from six anthropomorphic supernatural beings who emerged from the ocean to mingle with human beings. One of them had his eyes covered and dared not look at the Indians, though he showed the greatest anxiety to do so. At last he could no longer restrain his curiosity, and one occasion he partially lifted his veil, and his eye fell on the form of a human being, who instantly fell dead 'as if struck by the thunderers.' Though the intentions of this dread being were friendly to men, yet the glance of his eye was too strong, and it inflicted certain death. His fellows therefore caused him to return to the bosom of the great water. The five others remained among the Indians, and 'became a blessing to them.' From them originate the five great clans or totems.[89]

In the Ojibwa myth, a group of strange gods, who emerge from the sea, visit the clan. Even though he appears to be friendly and does not intend to do any harm, one of the visiting gods kills a member of the tribe. The myth tells us that the five other gods join forces, sending the sixth god back to the great water for his transgression. Girard believes that this myth tells the story of a murder, and, in this story, the sixth god dies by drowning as he is returned to the 'great water.' In the Tikopia account, Tikarau, a strange god, visits the tribe.

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[88] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, trans. Rodney Needham (London: Merlin Press, 1964). Girard draws directly from Lévi-Strauss' accounts and analyses of the myths.

[89] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, trans. Rodney Needham (London: Merlin Press, 1964), 19, quoted in René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (London: Continuum, 2005), 106.

A long time ago the gods were no different from mortals, and the gods were the direct representatives of the clans in the land. It came about that a god from foreign parts, Tikarau, paid a visit to Tikopia, and the gods of the land prepared a splendid feast for him, but first they organized trials of strength and speed, to see whether their guest or they would win. During a race, the stranger slipped and declared that he was injured. Suddenly, however, while he was pretending to limp, he made a dash for the provisions for the feast, grabbed up the heap, and fled for the hills. The family of gods set off in pursuit; Tikarau slipped and fell again, so that the clan gods were able to retrieve some of the provisions, one a coconut, another a taro, another a breadfruit, and others a yam. Tikarau succeeded in reaching the sky with most of the foodstuffs for the feast, but these four vegetable foods had been saved for men.[90]

In the Tikopia account, a strange god, named Tikarau, steals from the community of local gods by pretending to fall in order to abscond with the goods. He flees and the local gods give chase. Tikarau then falls for a second time.[91] As far as Girard is concerned, this is Tikarau's final fall. Girard refers to Raymond Firth's account of the same myth.[92] In this version, Tikarau launched himself into the sky from the edge of a cliff and is revered as a god because of this feat. For the French scholar this is enough; this is an account of Tikarau's death in a fall from the cliff. In both accounts, the victims, or gods, are accused of certain crimes; the unnamed god killed an Indian and Tikarau stole the totemic plants belonging to the local gods.[93] The actions of both strange gods threatened the communities as a whole, which justifies their expulsions. Not only are their actions sufficient to unite the wrath of the community against them, but they also fit the criteria required for the surrogate victim or scapegoat. In both myths the gods are visitors from outside the community and without any

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[90] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, trans. Rodney Needham (London: Merlin Press, 1964), 25-26, quoted in René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (London: Continuum, 2005), 106

[91] Girard points out that in Lévi-Strauss' text the line reads '*cette fois, Tikarau tomba pour de bon*' (Girard, *Things Hidden*, 107).

[92] See Raymond Firth, *Tikopia Ritual and Belief* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967).

[93] Girard believes that the plants represent the theft of the entire cultural order. See Girard, *Things Hidden*, 106.

ties to it. As the unnamed god is blind and Tikarau limps, due to these infirmaries, they would have lived on the fringes of society. The myths illustrate the element of misunderstanding that is required in order for the scapegoat mechanism to work effectively, as, even though all the elements of the mechanism are present, the myths carefully avoid acknowledging the truth of what takes place. The accounts conceal the violence that occurs, hiding it from plain sight.

The persecution texts are similar in structure to the mythic accounts of the scapegoat mechanism in that the principal structural traits of the mechanism are present in the text. Like the mythic accounts, they still distort the workings of the mechanism but not to the same extent as myth. They still contain the same elements of the scapegoat mechanism at work that the mythic accounts do. There is a crisis, perhaps a flood or famine, which causes chaos and weakens the social order. Some sort of violent crime is committed, one which is read as a direct attack on the social order. It may be the breaking of a sexual taboo or the murder of an authoritarian figure. The blame is laid upon an individual, or group; social or ethnic minorities are particularly susceptible to persecution.[94] Again, the criteria for the surrogate or scapegoat are upheld in this type of persecution story. The blame is always placed on those who are on the fringes of society. There is, however, a significant difference between the mythic and persecution accounts. In the mythic, the victim is sacralized. In contrast, there is

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[94] René Girard, *The Scapegoat*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986, 17. Originally published as *Le Bouc émissaire* (Paris: Editions Grasset, 1982). In addition to those who may be part of an ethnic or religious minority, or have some form of handicap, the wealthy may be at risk of persecution. "Crowds commonly turn on those who originally held exceptional power over them . . . The rich and powerful exert an influence over society which justifies the acts of violence to which they are subjected in times of crisis. This is the holy revolt of the oppressed" (Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 19). Girard uses the French queen, Marie Antoinette, as an example. Not only was she Austrian by birth, marking her as a foreigner, but also faced accusations of incest at her trial. For an anthropological account of a regicide conducted by a community, see S. Simonse, 'The Killing of the Queen of the Pari,' in *Kings of Disaster*, S. Simonse (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992). In this account, the Queen is accused of being a drunkard and due to this disorder appears to be guilty of allowing her people to suffer. The event took place in the 1980's.

either a poor attempt at sacralization or else none at all in the persecution texts.[95] As an example of a persecution text, Girard puts forward a work by the French poet and composer Guillame de Machaut, who survived the plague, the Black Death, which swept through Europe during the fourteenth century. For his purposes, Girard is only interested in the opening of the poem, *The Judgement of the King of Navarre*.[96] The poem opens with de Machaut's account of a crisis in which a series of catastrophic events occurred. During this crisis he fears for his life and eventually seeks refuge in his house awaiting a resolution. "There are signs in the sky. People are knocked down by a rain of stones. Entire cities are destroyed by lightning."[97] People died until, eventually, the crisis was resolved and normal life could resume. Although some of the events are highly improbable, Girard does not doubt that some catastrophe occurred. He believes that de Machaut is actually speaking about the Black Death, even though de Machaut does not name it. "Medieval communities were so afraid of the plague that the word alone was enough to frighten them. They avoided mentioning it as long as possible."[98] The poet blames the Jews for the catastrophe, claiming that they poisoned the drinking water to ensure that the populace fell ill. His account also describes the slaughter of the Jews in retaliation for what they had done, which Girard points

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[95] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 127.

[96] Guillame de Machaut was a fourteenth century poet and composer. Having trained as a clerk, he eventually rose to the position of secretary to the King of Bohemia, John of Luxembourg. With the King's aid, he also became a canon of Reims Cathedral Chapter. In addition to his office at Reims, De Machaut gained other canonical posts at Amiens, Arras, and St-Quentin. Due to a papal bull issued by Pope Benedict XII in 1335, de Machaut had to relinquish his posts in Arras and Amiens as the Pope restricted the number of appointments that an individual could hold. For more on de Machaut and his works, see Deborah L. McGrady and Jennifer Bain, eds. *A Companion to Guillaume de Machaut* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), and Anne Walters Robinson, *Guillaume de Machaut and Reims: Context and Meaning in his Musical Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[97] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 1.

[98] Ibid., 2.

out is based on a real event. Girard quotes the passage from de Machaut's poem concerning the Jews.

> After that came a false, treacherous and contemptible swine: this was shameful Israel, the wicked and disloyal who hated good and loved everything evil, who gave so much gold and silver and promises to Christians, who then poisoned several rivers and fountains that had been clean and pure so that many lost their lives; for whoever used them dies suddenly. Certainly ten times one hundred thousand died from it, in country and in city. Then finally this mortal calamity was noticed.
> He who sits on high and sees far, who governs and provides for everything, did not want this treachery to remain hidden; he revealed it and made it so generally known that they lost their lives and possessions. Then every Jew was destroyed, some hanged, others burned; some were drowned, others beheaded with an ax or sword.[99]

Here, we see no sign of the sacralization that characterizes the mythic accounts. The Jews are blamed for the crisis, turned upon and massacred, but they are not credited with uniting the community once the crisis is resolved. Unlike the mythic accounts of collective violence, there is no attempt to veil the violence behind the sacralization of the victim. "These texts are much easier to decipher than myths because the transfiguration of the victim is much less powerful and complete than myth."[100] The persecution texts do not use the figure of a god to conceal what has taken place. Without the sacralization of the victim in the persecution texts the workings of the scapegoat mechanism are easier to decipher.

Girard sees an evolution taking place between the mythic and the persecution text. He is enthusiastic about this evolution, believing that it represents an improvement with regard to humankind's intellectual and ethical development. He believes that as our awareness of collective violence and the workings of the scapegoat mechanism grow, there is a price to pay for this understanding. The French scholar believes that our awareness reduces the

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[99] Guillame de Machaut, *Oeuvres*, Sociéte des anciens textes français, vol. 1, *Le Judgement du Roy de Navarre* (Paris: Ernest Hoeppfner, 1908), pp. 144-145 as quoted in René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 2.

[100] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 127.

efficacy of the scapegoat mechanism, leading to an increase of recurring outbreaks of violence. As the mechanism becomes increasingly ineffective the violence itself may escalate, with the crimes themselves becoming more heinous in a futile attempt to resolve the sacrificial crisis.[101] There is, in addition, a significant risk of increasing the number of victims in an effort to counteract the ineffectuality of the mechanism. Girard believes that totalitarian movements and the violence associated with them are prime examples of a community attempting to resolve the crisis through violent means; "entire categories of human beings are distinguished from the rest of humanity and are singled out for annihilation."[102] There is, however, the potential to use the knowledge of the workings of the scapegoat mechanism in order to disengage from violence.[103] It is no longer possible to conceal the arbitrariness of the victim behind the facade of myth and ritual. This means that myth and ritual can no longer be produced. Instead, we have persecution texts. "Myth and ritual can no longer grow and spread. One can only find intermediate, mixed phenomena that are increasingly transparent to criticism; there can be read as persecution."[104] The persecution texts then, due to the increasing awareness of the workings of collective violence, are evidence of an inability to produce a true myth; the community cannot be united through ritual, and the victim is no longer sacred.[105]

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[101] Ibid., 128.

[102] Ibid., 128-129.

[103] Ibid., 127.

[104] Ibid., 129.

[105] Ibid., 130.

3.3.3 Desacralization in Progress

Girard developed his theory of the scapegoat mechanism by examining the accounts of collective violence present in myth. Although these accounts describe the workings of the mechanism, they do not openly declare the reality of the collective violence that takes place. When he turned his attention to the persecution texts, the French scholar found evidence of a growing awareness of collective violence. Even though the persecution texts do not acknowledge the collective violence that takes place they do not sacralize the victim; this makes it easier for the reader to understand what it truly taking place in the account. Girard believes that the loss of a transfigured victim is a clear indication of an ongoing process of desacralization; "a society that replaces myth by an awareness of persecution is a society in the process of desacralization."[106] Society is undergoing this process precisely because of our awareness of the workings of the scapegoat mechanism. Girard believes that this growing awareness has been present in history, for quite some time, as a long process of change that is not yet complete. Our awareness of the mechanism has deconstructed our religious and cultural foundations to the detriment of the sacrificial order. "It [humanity] is no longer capable of producing idols of violence around which it might achieve unanimity."[107] As the victim is no longer sacralized we are no longer capable of achieving unity through sacrificial rites. Sacrifice's efficacy is inexorably diminishing.

Girard believes that religion is responsible for setting the process of desacralization in motion. Specifically, he claims that it is the Judaeo-Christian

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[106] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 126.

[107] Ibid., 136.

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scriptures that demythologized religion's violent foundations.[108] Girard examines both the Old and New Testament in the light of this claim. The Old Testament contains many of the elements of collective violence that we find in mythology and in persecution texts. First, it contains accounts of communities in crisis, for example, Sodom and Gomorrah, two cities in which the inhabitants were so sinful that it resulted in their destruction by fire (Genesis 19).[109] Secondly, we see several examples where collective violence is directed towards one individual. Girard offers an account of Jacob's wrestling with the angel in Genesis 32 as an example. Jacob meets a stranger on a riverbank where they wrestle through the night until daybreak. He then refuses to let the stranger go until he gives Jacob his blessing. Girard believes that this is an account of a conflict between doubles because the angel is firstly called a man; it is only after he is defeated that the stranger is described as a God. "In other words, the combat of doubles results in the expulsion of one of the pair and this is identified directly with the return of peace and order."[110] Thirdly, we see the development of prohibitions and rituals in the Old Testament accounts. After Jacob is finished wrestling with the angel a prohibition is established forbidding the eating of the thigh muscle near the hip socket. This is prohibited because during the conflict the angel struck Jacob there, displacing it. There is, for Girard, a vital difference between the Old Testament and the mythic and persecution accounts. Collective violence is condemned

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[108] Girard maintains that the mechanism cannot be understood in purely secular terms. He believes that the mechanism can only be understood in terms of Christian revelation. "My ultimate purpose is to show that this special Christian revelation can and must be approached in rational terms, in terms of the Gospels' own critique of all human religion" (René Girard "Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard by Rebecca Adams" in *Religion and Literature*, 25 (2), 1993, 20-33, 31).

[109] Girard offers other examples of conflict in the Old Testament, such as the ten plagues of Egypt. See Girard, *Things Hidden*, 142.

[110] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 142.

in the Old Testament, which does not occur in either the mythic accounts or persecution

texts. The French scholar, as an example of this condemnation, turns to the narrative

of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4). Following the established pattern of the scapegoat

mechanism, Cain murders his brother Abel and then founds an entire community. A

prohibition is put in place, with vengeance wreaked sevenfold on anyone who commits

murder. The key difference between the Cain and Abel narrative and the mythic and

persecution accounts is that the narrative contains a moral dimension that the others

lack. "The condemnation of the murder takes precedence over all other considerations.

'Where is Abel they brother?'"[111] Cain's behaviour is condemned in this text, even

though, in the aftermath of the murder, calm is restored. He has murdered and he is

presented to us as a murderer.[112] The narrative, unlike the myths and persecution texts,

takes the part of the victim and does not side with the persecutors. The victim's defence

is not specific to the Cain and Abel narrative but occurs throughout the Old Testament,

particularly in the psalms. The psalms do more than take the part of the victim; they

give the victim a voice. Unlike the mythic and persecution accounts, the psalms allow

the victims the freedom to express their suffering and to curse their persecutors. "These

texts are the first in human history to allow those who would simply become silent

victims in the world of myth to voice their complaint as hysterical crowds besiege

them."[113] Even though the Old Testament is more revealing than either the mythic

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[111] Ibid., 147.

[112] Ibid. Girard claims that few scholars have properly engaged with this dimension of the Biblical texts. He believes that, in his work *Ancient Judaism*, Max Weber has come the closest to acknowledging that these texts, in contrast to the myth and persecution texts, take the part of the victim and condemn the persecutors. See Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, trans H.H Garth and D. Martindale (Illinois: Free Press, 1952) and Girard, *Things Hidden*, 167.

[113] René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like* Lightning. Translated byJames G. Williams. Herefordshire, England: Gracewing, 2001, 116. Originally published as *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair* (Paris: Editions Grasset & Fasquelle, 1999).

accounts or persecution texts, it is not free from collective violence. It lends voice to the victims, but, nonetheless, the sacrifices and prohibitions still continue. Indeed, the Ten Commandments, which are a set of prohibitions, are found in the Old Testament (Exodus 20:1-17). Girard focuses on the second half of the Commandments, as he believes that numbers six to nine specifically prohibit acts of violence, or acts that may lead to violence, forbidding murder, adultery, theft, and calumny. The tenth and final commandment differs, however, in that it specifically prohibits a desire, rather than an act.[114] It reads as follows; "you shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Exodus 20:17). Girard claims that the word 'covet' is misleading; it should, he maintains, simply be translated as 'desire.' For him, the commandment is not just about the house, the slave, or the donkey. He believes that the commandment began as a list of items that could be a source of conflict, with the lawgiver quickly realizing that the list was endless. The one constant is the neighbour; "one always desires *whatever belongs to that one*, the neighbor."[115] This final commandment, the French scholar argues, demonstrates an understanding that it is the mimetic nature of desire that leads to conflict.

Girard believes that the full truth of the scapegoat mechanism is revealed in the New Testament, particularly in the Gospels. The Gospels differ to myth and persecution texts in that they are non-sacrificial. "The Gospels only speak of *sacrifices* in order to reject them and deny them any validity."[116] He claims that there is nothing

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[114] Ibid, 7.

[115] Ibid., 9, emphasis original.

[116] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 180, emphasis original. Simon Taylor notes that because of the concealing nature of the scapegoat mechanism, we were not capable of freeing ourselves from it by ourselves. "We literally need to be saved from the salvation offered by scapegoating, because there is no way that we can see on our own that it is a murderous lie" (Simon J. Taylor, "Save Us From Being Saved:

in the Gospel texts that present Jesus' death as a sacrifice. The God presented in the

Gospels, for example, is not a violent one.[117] There is no duality surrounding God here.

This is a God who is not responsible for any conflict that may arise within a

community. The following text, Girard believes, depicts a God that is not only is

unassociated with violence, but wishes to see an end to violence altogether.

> You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate
> your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who
> persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for
> he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just
> and on the unjust (Matthew 5:43-45).[118]

With this nonviolent God, reconciliation, then, does not require any form of sacrifice.

In fact, by refusing to place the blame for the ills and conflicts present in society on

God, the Gospels differentiate God from the deities found in primitive religions. God

cannot be considered one of these deities as He cannot be held responsible for the

conflict that may arise within a community The deities are deemed sacred because they

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Girard's Critical Soteriology" in *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, And Culture* no. 12-13, [2005-2006]: 21-30, here, 23-24).

[117] In mythology the birth of a god is usually a violent event. The Gospels present Jesus' birth as nonviolent. In contrast, in mythology, the birth of a god always contains an element of violence; "the birth of the gods is always a kind of rape" (Girard, *Things Hidden*, 220). Semele, for example, was the mortal mother of the Greek God Dionysus and the mistress of Zeus, the ruler of the Olympian gods. Semele became pregnant and, out of jealousy, Hera, Zeus' wife, sowed doubt in Semele's mind about Zeus' divinity. Bound by an oath, Zeus agreed to appear to Semele in his divinity. Although he tried to spare her, showing her the least of his glory, she perished. Dionysus was rescued from the ashes of her body and sewn into Zeus' thigh until he was ready to be born. Later, Dionysus brought Semele out of Hades and brought her to reign on Mount Olympus as the goddess Thyone, presiding over the frenzy produced from his revels. There are many stories of a god having sexual relations with a mortal woman to produce a hero. These stories, Girard observes, always contain violence.

> In every case we find the doubling effects, the mad oscillation of differences, and the
> psychotic alternation between all and nothing. These monstrous couplings between men,
> gods, and beasts are in close correspondence with the phenomenon of reciprocal violence
> and its method of working itself out. The orgasm that appeases the god is a metaphor for
> collective violence.[117] (Girard, *Things Hidden*, 220)

In contrast to the violence of the mythic births, the virgin birth is non-violent. The relationship between God, Mary, and the Angel is peaceful; there is no history of violence between them. Another crucial difference between the mythic and Gospel accounts is the absence of sexual references in the Gospel account. "The fact that sexuality is not part of the picture corresponds to the absence of the violent mimesis with which myth acquaints us in the form of rape by the gods" (Girard, *Things Hidden*, 221).

[118] See Girard, *Things Hidden*, 183.

are considered responsible for both the breakdown and return of order within a particular society. "The Gospels deprive God of his most essential role in primitive religions—that of polarizing every thing mankind does not succeed in mastering, particularly in relationships between individuals."[119] By portraying a God that is detached from violence, the Gospels highlight both the role of violence in primitive religions and the desacralization of the victim. "It is precisely because this role is abandoned that the Gospels can pass for having established a kind of practical atheism."[120] For Girard, then, the God of the Gospels signifies a change in humankind's engagement with violence. This is a God that requires the cessation of violent practices, as, due to the awareness of the workings of the scapegoat mechanism, humankind's conflict cannot now simply be resolved by recourse to a mechanism that produces a violent deity.

The Passion narrative does not conform to the established pattern of the scapegoat mechanism. Instead of attempting to conceal collective violence, the Passion may be read as the full revelation of the scapegoat mechanism at work. The narrative contains an account of mimetic contagion in operation. Mark's account of Peter's denial offers the best example of this contagion in operation. Although Peter is loyal to Jesus, being the only one that follows him after his arrest, once he encounters the crowd's hostility in Jerusalem, he is incapable of resisting the contagion and he denies Jesus. Girard unpacks the account of Peter's denial in Mark 14:66-72, believing that the mimetic contagion adds a complexity to a scene in which it appears that Peter is simply being asked to acknowledge that he is in Jerusalem with Jesus. The answer, however, is not so straightforward. Although Peter certainly was with Jesus, this is no

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[119] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 183.

[120] Ibid.

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longer the case. Jesus has been arrested and the other disciples have scattered; with the arrest their community has been dissolved.[121] Peter is displaced, no longer belonging to a group. According to Girard, Peter joins the crowd at the fire in the courtyard for more than heat. He joins them because his own community no longer exists and, deprived of that, he is seeking another to which he can belong. The fire not only allows the servant girl in the story to see Peter but it also highlights that he is not a member of this community. It is Peter's attempt to belong, in joining the group around the fire, which incenses the servant girl so much that she calls on Peter twice to confirm his association with Jesus. Peter is an outsider and this fire and this community is not his. By calling on him to acknowledge his association, she highlights that Peter does not belong and is intruding on their group. Her goal is to unite the group in order to drive Peter away and she succeeds in rousing the crowd against this stranger encroaching on those who actually belong in the courtyard, such as the other servants of the household. The scene clearly shows mimesis at work. The servant girl acts as a model and, when her initial example is not followed, she repeats herself the second time in order to make it more effective. "She emphasizes her own role of model and details mimetically what she expects from her companions."[122] We clearly see the servant girl triggering the collective violence in this milieu as, finally, the others in the courtyard follow her example and turn on Peter.

The Passion narrative clearly shows Jesus' substitution for all the other potential victims that could be chosen instead. Mark 15:6-15 recounts the scene in which Pilate offers to execute Barabbas and release Jesus instead. In fact, Barabbas is

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[121] See Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 150.

[122] Ibid., 153.

an ideal candidate. His death will not transgress any laws as he has already been condemned and, as a result, his death would serve to limit the disorder threatening the social order.[123] From Pilate's own point of view, as governor, it would be better if he did not submit to the crowds' demands. However, the mob refuses Pilate's offer and, instead, demands Barabbas' release. The crowd is unanimous in their decision; the victim has been chosen and the selection is final. "The time for substitutions is over, and the moment of violence has sounded. Pilate understands this. When he sees that the crowd rejects Barabbas, he immediately hands over Jesus."[124] It is all too clear that the mob will not be satisfied until they receive a victim and Pilate succumbs to the crowds' wishes. Both Pilate and Peter share a commonality; they are caught in the mimetic contagion that sweeps through the Passion narrative with both of them making Jesus the victim so as not to become victims themselves. "The best way not to be crucified, in the final analysis, is to do as everyone else and join in the crucifixion."[125]

Girard argues that the Gospels use Satan to represent mimetic contagion. Satan acts as both model and obstacle; he encourages desires that breach prohibitions, yet also acts as an obstacle preventing the subject from obtaining that desire. "The *seducer* of the beginnings is transformed quickly into a forbidding *adversary*."[126] Matthew 16:21-23 gives an account of Jesus' foretelling of his death and resurrection. In this pericope Jesus rebukes Peter for expressing his disapproval of the events to come, reprimanding him with the words "'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things' (Mark 16:23)." The

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[123] Girard, *I See Satan*, 25.

[124] Ibid.

[125] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 155.

[126] Girard, *I See Satan*, 33. Emphasis original.

French scholar's reading of this passage places Peter in Satan's shoes, as, in this case, Peter wishes to become a model for Jesus. Peter's desire, however, is one of a worldly ambition that would allow Jesus to forego the suffering ahead. The results would be disastrous. "If Jesus were to turn away from his Father to follow Peter, he and Peter both would quickly fall into mimetic rivalry, and the venture of the kingdom of God would melt away in insignificant quarrels."[127] Satan not only represents mimetic contagion but also the scapegoat mechanism. In order for Satan's kingdom on earth not to be torn apart by the conflict arising from mimetic rivalry he must have the power to dispel this violence. Girard believes that this ability is the reason why Satan is given the title of prince. He expels himself through the scapegoat mechanism, restoring order so as to prevent complete destruction. This ability not only protects but also renders Satan indispensable as disorder dispels disorder.[128] It is important to bear in mind that as Satan corresponds to mimetic rivalry and the scapegoat mechanism he is not one individual deity but many, representing all those who have fallen to its machinations. Satan is simply a name symbolizing the mechanism. "Because he designates the principal consequence of the single victim mechanism, the emergence of the false transcendence and the numerous deities that represent it, Satan is always *someone*."[129] For Girard, the Cross triumphs over Satan. It does so because the Crucifixion reveals the full workings of the scapegoat mechanism without any falsification. Like the victims represented in mythology, Jesus is innocent. The Gospels, however, unlike the mythic accounts, do not conceal the truth of the persecution.

> [Christ has] canceled the accusation that stands against us with its legal claims. He set it aside, nailing it to the cross. He thus disarmed the

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[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid., 35.

[129] Ibid., 46. Emphasis original.

principalities and powers and made a public spectacle of them, drawing them along in his triumph (Col. 2: 14-15).[130]

The principalities and powers here are simply another name for Satan, or the scapegoat mechanism. The accusation, Girard believes, is the false accusation laid upon the innocent victim. This time, the lie has been exposed, nailed to the Cross so that all may see. The revelation of the lie, for Girard, frees humankind from the bondage of the mechanism, revealing 'things hidden since the foundation of the world.'[131]

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the key elements of Girard's thought, focusing on the violence that arises from mimetic desire. This violence is central to understanding the role that religion plays in primitive violence. Violence is, after all, for Girard, at the heart of the sacred. Indeed, prohibitions and rituals are designed specifically to keep violence in check and to prevent it from spilling over into the community. Without these checks, the very fabric of society is threatened.

For Vattimo, Girard's work is not simply a cultural anthropology. It is a reflection on the very origins and development of human civilization.[132] Violence is at the centre of our development. The connection between violence and the sacred is fundamental. For Vattimo, Girard's reading of the Gospels, however, is one which focuses on the dissolution of the sacred as violence. Girard's argument that the Judaeo-Christian texts are responsible for the process of desacralization that is currently underway. It is here,

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[130] Ibid., 137Bbrackets original. The three days between Jesus' death and resurrection serves to highlight the difference between the Gospels and the myths. In the normal workings of the victimage mechanism, the community is filled with a sense of harmony and well being after the victim's death, attributing to them the status of sacred. In the case of the Gospels, the crowd is left waiting; this death is not a sacrifice. See Girard, *I See Satan*.

[131] Girard, *I See Satan*, 138.

[132] Vattimo, *Belief*, 37.

in the Gospels, for the first time that the victim is not sacralised as the result of the scapegoat mechanism. The workings of the scapegoat mechanism are not obscured, but clearly visible. For Vattimo this is part of God's education of humanity, an education that seeks to put an end to the violence inherent to the sacrificial religions.[133]

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[133] Ibid., 38.

Chapter Four

The Dissolution of the Sacred

4.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on Vattimo's understanding of weak thought. It may, in part, be read as a reaction to the terrorism of the *Brigate Rosse*. However, not only may it be read in political terms, but also in a theological and philosophical light. Weak thought, ultimately, is Vattimo's understanding and development of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Girard's thought. Here, he melds his philosophical and political interests with the religious, producing his own particular reading of the incarnation. This reading allows Vattimo to understand secularization as a continuation of the process of weakening that began in the incarnation.

4.1 Vattimo's Theory of Weakening

As weak thought is central to Vattimo's work, it is necessary to have some understanding of the role it plays in his thought. This section focuses on weak thought's development, paying particular attention to Vattimo's thinking on truth. Particular attention here is paid to Nietzsche's and Heidegger's influence. Their emphasis on nihilism and the end of metaphysics is of particular importance.

4.1.1 Weak Thought

Since the early eighties, weak thought, or, *il pensiero debole*, has played a central role in Vattimo's thought. He co-edited *Il pensiero debole* with the Italian philosopher,

Pier Aldo Rovatti, in 1983.[1] The expression 'weak thought' was originally drawn from an essay by Carlo Augusto Viano, who used the phrase 'weak reason' in 'Reason, Abundance, and Belief' in the volume *Crisi della ragione*, which was edited by Aldo Giorgio Gargani in 1979.[2] Viano admits that, while perhaps he was one of the first to actually write on weak thought, he does not deserve any credit for the inception of this expression.[3] He claims that 'weak' was already a part of the philosophical landscape of the time. Certainly, the first time that Vattimo uses the concept of weak thought is in his essay, "Toward an Ontology of Decline," which interprets Heidegger's ontology as one of weakening.[4] Weak thought offers an alternative, modern way of thinking for the human sciences (and philosophy in particular) that is not focused on seeking credible answers to particular questions but, instead, allows for interpretations and reinterpretations of past premises. As a result, weak thought is an interdisciplinary movement that does not seek to impose one particular viewpoint over another, thereby encouraging dialogue between different fields or points of view. "It [weak thought] is

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[1] Gianni Vattimo and Pier Aldo Rovatti, eds., *Il pensiero debole* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1983).

[2] Carlo Augusto Viano, "La ragione, l'abbondanza e la credenza," in *Crisi della ragione*, ed. A.G. Gargani (Turin: Einaudi, 1979).

[3] Carlo Augusto Viano, "The Irresistible Power of Weak Thought," *Iris* II, no. 3 (April 2010): 147.

[4] See Santiago Zabala, "Introduction: Gianni Vattimo and Weak Philosophy," in *Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo*, ed. Santiago Zabala (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2007), 12. A translation of Vattimo's essay, "The Ontology of Decline," can be found in the edited volume, *Recoding Metaphysics* (Gianni Vattimo, "Toward an Ontology of Decline," in *Recoding Metaphysics: The New Italian Philosophy* ed. Giovanna Borradori [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988], 63-76). In this essay, Vattimo interprets Heidegger's ontology as a weak ontology, or one of decline. This is because interpreters continue to think of Heidegger's thought concerning Being in metaphysical terms (see Santiago Zabala, "Introduction: Gianni Vattimo and Weak Philosophy," in *Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo*, ed. Santiago Zabala (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2007), 12. He believes that to read Heidegger in such a way is to read Heidegger as a thinker that calls for a return of, or to, Being (see Gianni Vattimo, "Toward an Ontology of Decline," in *Recoding Metaphysics: The New Italian Philosophy,* ed. Giovanna Borradori [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988], 63). One can only speak of an ontology of decline in Heidegger's work if we look at metaphysics as the history of Being.

by far the most interdisciplinary 'movement' in modern Italian social history, strangely disorganized and wary of issuing another specialized lexicon or staking out a series of methodological steps."[5] With its emphasis on hermeneutics, weak thought opposes any suggestion of setting up an alternative foundation that could be considered to be a better truth than what is already on offer.[6] Weak thought's originality lies in this refusal to offer an alternative truth, or foundation, with its focus, instead, on interpretation which "represents the most striking current of thought in Italian philosophy in the post-WWII period."[7] Weak thought, then, may be understood as another way of looking at rationality in postmodernity and it is perhaps best to speak of this manner of thinking "as an attempt to reconstruct rationality in a postmodern, postmetaphysical way."[8] Weak thought avoids any 'strong' claims to truth, as it professes that we cannot have any objective truth, given that our view of the world is already coloured by our history and culture.

> Vattimo intends to move contemporary construals of reality away from purely modern notions of reason, with their aggressive assertions about the 'certainly true,' the 'really real' and 'absolute objectivity,' with their insinuations that evidence and warrants are unproblematic concepts, readily available to settle questions of interpretative adequacy.[9]

[5] Peter Carravetta, "What is "Weak Thought"? The Original Theses and Context of *il pensiero debole*," in *Weak Thought*, eds. Gianni Vattimo and Pier Aldo Rovatti, trans. Peter Carravetta (New York: SUNY Press, 2012), 3.

[6] For a comparison of weak thought and poststructuralism, which examines them both in the light of alternative foundations, see Giovanna Borradori, "'Weak Thought' and Postmodernism: The Italian Departure From Deconstruction," *Social Text* 18, Postmodernism (Winter, 1987-1988): 39-49. Published by: Duke University Press Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/488689 Accessed: 15-09-2016 09:50 UTC

[7] Peter Carravetta, "What is "Weak Thought"? The Original Theses and Context of *il pensiero debole*," in *Weak Thought*, eds. Gianni Vattimo and Pier Aldo Rovatti, trans. Peter Carravetta (New York: SUNY Press, 2012), 1. See also Umberto Eco, "Weak Thought and the Limits of Interpretation," in *Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo* ed. Santiago Zabala (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 37-56; and Dario Antiseri, *Weak Thought and Its Strength,* trans. Gwyneth Weston (Avebury: Ashgate 1996).

[8] Thomas G. Guarino, *Vattimo and Theology* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 9.

[9] Ibid.

As such, weak thought maintains that there is no truth or experience that may be considered free from historical or cultural conditions. Thus, the "experience with which we may begin and to which we must remain faithful is above all and largely that of the everyday, which is also and always historically qualified and culturally dense."[10] This way of thinking recognizes that we are shaped by the history and the culture from which we emerge, as "human rationality is profoundly contextualized and circumscribed, rather than autonomous and neutral."[11] Weak thought, then, for Vattimo, is a positive approach to the current conditions of existence, which are characterized by the end of metaphysics and the loss of strong foundations.

4.1.2 Weak Thought and Truth

Vattimo's thought concerning truth in relation to weak thinking is heavily influenced by his reading of both Nietzsche and Heidegger. Specifically, it is their emphasis on nihilism and the end of metaphysics that guides Vattimo's thought, such as Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God. Certainly, weak thought does not retain any sentimentality for metaphysics but, instead, focuses on overcoming it.[12] Indeed, Heidegger's understanding of truth is central to Vattimo's development of weak thought, particularly his emphasis on freedom; "The freedom that Heidegger identifies as the essence of truth may also, and perhaps exclusively, be freedom in the

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[10] Gianni Vattimo, "Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought," in *Weak Thought*, eds. Gianni Vattimo and Pier Aldo Rovatti, trans. Peter Carravetta (New York: SUNY Press, 2012), 40. Vattimo believes that there is no experience that may be considered 'pure.' Every experience is subject to historical and cultural conditions. Vattimo uses the example of art criticism to illustrate exactly what he means by this. The evaluation is not a 'pure' one; it arises "from a set of canons constituted historically by art and taste" (ibid).

[11] Guarino, *Vattimo and Theology*, 11.

[12] See Giovanna Borradori, "' Weak Thought" and Postmodernism: The Italian Departure From Deconstruction," 40.

most ordinary sense: the freedom we live and act as members of a society."[13] This call

to freedom is one of four ways in which Vattimo examines the experience of truth.

Firstly, Vattimo believes that truth does not have a metaphysical nature. As the

world is given to us as an already always, we already have certain understandings and

ideas, or a pre-comprehension of the world. Thus, we can recognise the truth when we

meet it "because in some way we know it already."[14] This pre-comprehension is not a

complete understanding but, instead, is one that is open to possibilities and

development. It also retains its original relation with the world as an articulation of an

original comprehension as "the true . . . is the result of a process of verification that

produces such truth through certain procedures always already given time and

again."[15] Our experience of the world is never free from tradition but is shaped by it,

as the world "plays itself out in horizons constructed by a series of echoes, linguistic

resonances, and messages coming from the past and from others (others alongside us

as well as other cultures)."[16] For weak thought, rhetoric may be seen as the nature of

the true, in the sense of a discourse between people. The term *Verwindung*

encapsulates the idea of the freedom of truth perfectly, as it denotes a recovery from

'strong' truths.[17] Vattimo claims that this overcoming of strong truth is not only

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[13] Gianni Vattimo, "Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought," 49. This is freedom in the sense that open dialogue is possible between individuals and groups. For a reading of Vattimo's understanding of truth in light of Gadamer's, rather than Heidegger's, thought, see Gaetano Chiurazzi, "The Experiment of Nihilism: Interpretation and Experience of Truth in Gianni Vattimo," in *Between Nihilism and Politics: The Hermeneutics of Gianni Vattimo*, ed. Silvia Benso and Brian Schroeder (New York: State University of New York Press, 2010), 15-32. See also Gaetano Chiurazzi, "Pareyson and Vattimo: From Truth to Nihilism," in *The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics,* eds. Jeff Malpas and Hans-Helmuth Gander (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2014), 179-190.

[14] Gianni Vattimo, *Introduzione a Heidegger* (Roma-Bari: Gius. Laterza &Figli Spa, 2000), 29.

[15] Gianni Vattimo, "Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought," 50.

[16] Ibid., 44-45.

[17] This is a German word that has several different meanings. It suggests a resignation towards something, an acceptance, a recovery from an illness, or an overcoming. Heidegger does not use this

evident in Heidegger's work, but also in Nietzsche's; "this relation of overcoming and distortion is already exemplified in Nietzsche's announcement that God is dead."[18] This announcement signifies a departure from Being's equation with a foundation or stable structure. "*Verwindung* is the most radical effort in terms of a 'taking account of' (*presa d'atto*) which is at once a 'taking-leave of,' for it neither conceives Being as a stable structure nor registers and accepts it as a logical outcome of a process."[19] Being, then, cannot be a foundation as it is 'already gone.'[20] We can, however, speak of Being in terms of 'destiny-forwarding,' or 'transmission,' in the sense of a heritage or tradition. Consequently, due to this forwarding, or sending, it is not possible to sever all contact with metaphysical concepts. As such, postmetaphysical thinking "cannot avoid working with metaphysical concepts, declining and distorting them, entrusting itself (*rimettendosi*) back to and away from them, transmitting them as its own heritage."[21] This difficulty in avoiding metaphysical concepts leads to Vattimo's second point concerning truth and weak thinking.

Secondly, Vattimo considers the verification of what we perceive as truth. Such a verification takes place within the freedom that Heidegger describes in, *On the*

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word frequently; it appears primarily in *Identität und Differenz*, in one passage from *Holzwege*, and in an essay in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (see Gianni Vattimo, ""Verwindung": Nihilism and the Postmodern in Philosophy," *SubStance* 16, no. 2, Issue 53: Contemporary Italian Thought [1987]: 7-17). He believes that prior to Heidegger we may see the use of *Verwindung* in Nietzsche's work, although Nietzsche did not actually use the word itself and spoke instead in terms of healing or convalescence. Vattimo believes that this is the sense in which Heidegger uses *Verwindung*.

[18] Gianni Vattimo, "Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought," 50.

[19] Ibid., 46.

[20] See Gianni Vattimo, "Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought," 47. As Being is viewed as 'already gone,' we cannot hold to it as a stable foundation. Vattimo notes, in *The Adventure of Difference*, that Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God bespeaks the end of the metaphysical foundation. He believes that this cannot be ignored as he sees this announcement as destiny.

[21] Ibid., 47.

Essence of Truth; specifically, "in the openness that *On the Essence of Truth* speaks about as the space of freedom both of interpersonal relations and of the relations between cultures and generations."[22] This 'space of freedom' acknowledges that we always begin from a particular bond, faith, or belonging to.[23] Truth, then, is hermeneutical and verifiable only from the perspective of that particular bond, or background, to which one belongs. This brings us once more to *Verwindung*, which dispels any assumption that we have access to any objective *ontos on*, or a 'really real.'[24] *Verwindung*, then, frees us from the metaphysical frameworks that are still in place when we speak of Being in terms of destiny-forwarding, or sending. It does so by freeing them from the very thing that makes them metaphysical, which is the presumption that they are an objective foundation.[25] "Once this presumption is dispelled these [metaphysical] categories become 'valid' as monuments, as a heritage evoking the *pietas* due to the traces of what has lived."[26] Vattimo maintains that *pietas* is another term that could encapsulate weak thought. For him, *pietas* is the love for the living, and of those traces received from the past. It is not meant in the Latin sense, which is a sense of familial devotion. Rather, it is in the modern sense, that of piety as devoted attention to that which has only a limited value and to which we give our devotion because it is the only value we know.[27] In this light, *pietas*, then, "suggests

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[22] Gianni Vattimo, "Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought," 50. See Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," in *Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1978), 59-82

[23] Gianni Vattimo, "Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought," 50.

[24] See Gianni Vattimo, "Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought," 47.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Si tratta di un atteggiamento che possiamo anche chiamare di *pietas*, non tanto nel significato latino dove aveva per oggetto i valori della famiglia, ma nel senso moderno di pietà come attenzione devota per ciò che, tuttavia, ha solo un valore limitato, e che merita attenzione perché questo valore,

primarily mortality, finitude, and passing away."[28] This, Vattimo maintains, means

that to think of weak thought with regard to *pietas*, means to think of it in light of

Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God. As such, supreme values are reduced

to being simply symbolic formations rather than concrete foundations.[29]

Thirdly, Vattimo believes that truth is derived from interpretation. It is important

to note that, it is not because interpretation acts as a pathway to an absolute truth, but

rather because truth is constituted through expression.[30] Vattimo draws on Aristotle's

hermeneia, which deals with discursive articulation or interpretation. In Aristotle's *De*

interpretatione and *De anima 3,* he explores the manner in which reality is

experienced and communicated in discourse. For him, interpretation in the sense of

hermeneia refers to the intellectual formulation of a judgement on the truth or falsity

of a thing.[31] Aristotle maintained that the intellect holds meaning as statement;

"'interpretations' are therefore not statements aiming towards a use — as is a prayer

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pur limitato, è l'unico che conosciamo: *pietas* è l'amore per il vivente e le sue tracce—quelle che egli lascia e quelle che porta in quanto le riceve dal passato.

It is an attitude that we can call *pietas*, not so much in the Latin sense of the word where it has the values of the family as its object, but in the modern sense of piety as devoted attention to that which, however, has only a limited value and that deserves attention because this value, although limited is the only one we know. *Pietas* is the love for the living and its traces—those that are left and those carried since they are received from the past. Gianni Vattimo, *Etica dell'interpretazione* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1989), 20.

[28] Gianni Vattimo, "Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought," 47. Andrzej Zawadzki notes that this may be a forerunner to Vattimo's religious thought. See Andrzej Zawadzki, *Literature and Weak Thought* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang GmbH, 2013). For more on *pietas*, see Luca D'Isanto, "Gianni Vattimo's Hermeneutics and the Trace of Divinity," *Modern Theology* 10, no. 4 (October 1994).

[29] Gianni Vattimo, "Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought," 48.

[30] Ibid., 50.

[31] See Jussi Backman, "Hermeneutics and the Ancient Philosophical Legacy: Hermēneia and Phronēsis," in *The Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics*, eds., Niall Keane & Chris Lawn (Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2016), 25. See also Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 21. For a more comprehensive volume on Aristotle's formulation of truth, see Paolo Crivelli, *Aristotle on Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

or command — but rather statements of something that is true or false. Aristotle defines them as 'speech in which there is truth and falsity.'"[32] This is what Nietzsche develops considerably in his philosophy, as discussed in chapter one.

> Truth . . . first come into existence with the creation of a fixed and universally binding language, created in order to establish a firm foundation for social existence . . . Given this, truth needed to become solid and binding, something whose value was henceforth determined by the fact that it could be exchanged only in exceptional cases.[33]

Truths are simply fables constructed by humankind in order to serve a purpose. Once it is no longer needed, the dissolution of a particular principle allows for another to take its place.

Vattimo's fourth point emphasizes weak thought's acceptance of various strands of thought and tradition, which allows for dialogue and interaction to take place. In this 'rhetorical' conception of truth, "humans experience the fullness of its decline. . . . Being can only appear to us as *Über-lieferung*, trans-mission, a dissolving into procedures, into 'rhetoric.'"[34] We respect these processes (transmission and destiny-forwarding) because of *pietas*; it is because of our respect for the living and its traces that we acknowledge the dialogue that occurs between groups etc. As such, "there is not one *pietas*, but *pietates* that are historically determined and consist in the

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Wayne Klein, *Nietzsche and the Promise of Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 75-76.

[34] Gianni Vattimo, "Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought," 50. Vattimo notes that "tradition is the transmitting of linguistic messages that constitute the horizon within which Dasein is thrown as an historically determined project: and tradition derives its importance from the fact that Being, as a horizon of disclosure in which things appear, can arise only as a trace of past words or as an announcement that has been handed down to us. This transmitting or handing down is closely connected to Dasein's mortality, for Being is an announcement that is handed down only because the generations of mankind follow one another in the natural rhythm of birth and death" (Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 120).

development of truth on the basis of persuasive actions."[35] In the same way, there is not one truth, but many. 'Truth' is simply an agreement on topics of common use and when we inquire into truth, "we are in fact exploring the nature and extension of our agreement."[36] Therefore, it is only through language, through interpretation, and the process of interpreting and deciphering, that truth is formulated.[37]

4.1.3 Weak thought and Kenosis

Vattimo's reading of kenosis as weakening is not only based on religious thought but also on the philosophical. It is underpinned by his understanding of Nietzsche and Heidegger.[38] To begin with, his abhorrence of violence is at the core of his reading of kenosis as weakening. The years of unrest in Italy during the 1970s are, in part, to thank for this. Some of his students were arrested for participating in the strikes that took place at that time. While they were imprisoned, they wrote to Vattimo and it is this correspondence that caused him to rethink his reading of Nietzsche in regard to the liberated subject, or the *Übermensch*. Far from being 'liberated subjects', that Nietzsche writes about, the students would simply convince themselves that they were workers and join in the day's "operations."[39] Obviously, they were not workers

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[35] Robert T. Valgenti, "Weak Thought and the Recovery of Reason," in *Between Nihilism and Politics: The Hermeneutics of Gianni Vattimo,* eds. Silvia Benso and Brian Schroeder (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 73.

[36] Franca D'Agostini, "Vattimo's Theory of Truth," in *Between Nihilism and Politics: The Hermeneutics of Gianni Vattimo,* eds. Silvia Benso and Brian Schroeder (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 33. See also David Edward Rose, "The Ethical Claims of *Il pensiero debole*: Gianni Vattimo, Pluralism and Postmodern Subjectivity," *Angelaki* 7, no. 3 (2002): 63-78.

[37] Peter Carravetta, "What is "Weak Thought"? The Original Theses and Context of *il pensiero debole*," 8.

[38] Emil Halloun, "Conflict Resolved: The Amity between Postmodern Philosophy and Theology in Gianni Vattimo's Weak Thought," *Open Theology* 5, no. 1 (2019): 309-319.

[39] Vattimo, "Philosophy as Ontology of Actuality," 327.

and Vattimo recognized this self-deception for what it was. He realized that the *Übermensch* could not be identified in the same way as his students, who were Leninist revolutionaries. The liberated subject, for Vattimo, is a weak subject.

> The aspect of all this which I would strongly wish to underline here is precisely the ethico-political dimension of demythologising the traditional revolutionary ideal and repudiating the use of violence. It was an attempt to remain faithful to the revolutionary attitude towards capitalist society without falling into Leninism.[40]

Weak thought, then, may be understood in terms of Vattimo's response to the terrorism and violence that was rampant in Italy at the time.

With regard to Heidegger's thought, violence again is at the core. Vattimo equates metaphysics with violence, as he believes that, by forcing an 'objective' truth on the other, it effectively silences them. It does not acknowledge that there are cultural and societal influences that shape our backgrounds and understandings and that these are not universal, but highlights instead that they vary. He reads Heidegger through a Nietzschean lens with regard to this. In relation to Nietzsche, he focuses on the German philosopher's thought concerning nihilism, in which the belief in ultimate truths comes to an end. For Nietzsche, truth is simply the product of our historicity. We belong to a particular time and place that gives us an appreciation for certain things and not for others. However, any philosophies that fall within the parameters of traditional metaphysics tend to strike us as being true, since we are already inclined to believe them, as they reflect our suppositions of the world around us.[41] Truth is simply a perspective, or interpretation, that makes up our reality. As such, "there is no longer a 'true world' or, better, truth is reduced entirely to what is 'posited' by the human

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[40] See Vattimo, "Philosophy as Ontology of Actuality," 329.

[41] Gianni Vattimo, *Dialogue with Nietzsche*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 66.

being.[42] Vattimo understands Heidegger's thought in a similar way. While the focus is on Being, it may be viewed in a similar fashion. Metaphysics comprehends Being as something that may be understood in objective terms, forgetting the ontological difference. In identifying Being in these terms, as an object, we remain trapped within "the metaphysics of objectivity."[43] This inability to define and understand Being, other than in terms of an object, shapes Heidegger's understanding of nihilism. Nihilism, then, for Heidegger, tolls the death-knell for metaphysics and, in turn, for the identification of Being with an object. Following Heidegger, Vattimo states that "nihilism . . . heralds the end of metaphysics, namely the thought . . . that identifies Being with the objectively given, the thing before me."[44] For Heidegger, in embracing nihilism as the end of metaphysics we embrace freedom. This is in the sense of emancipation from the constraints of 'strong' truths, as what we call 'reality' is pluralistic and not limited to one single foundation. This interpretation of Heidegger's thought concerning metaphysics and Being is what the Italian philosopher terms 'weak ontology.'

For Vattimo, the history of nihilism may be read, thanks to kenosis, in a religious light. Kenosis is the central event of Christianity and, for him, underpins the development of weak thought, even though it may also be read in a philosophical light. Clearly, at the heart of Vattimo's thought concerning kenosis is St. Paul's letter to the

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[42] Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*, trans. Luca D'Isanto and David Webb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 30.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

Philippians.[45] This is, for P. Henry, the strongest and most renowned expression of Paul's Christology.[46] Indeed 'kenoticism,' which is the name for the theological explanation of the self-emptying of God inherent in the incarnation, comes from this text.[47] The text begins by describing Christ's pre-existence, which is his state of existence as one with God prior to the incarnation. This state is highlighted by the words that St. Paul uses; "though he was in the form of God" (Phil 2:6). Christ, however, did not regard this state of equality with God as a thing to be exploited, instead, he took the form of a slave, taking on human likeness. On this, P. Henry notes that it is "certain that in this second state he did not present himself in the majesty of the divine condition, but in the humility of its very real, very complete, and very apparent human condition."[48] For P. Henry, the wording that Paul uses in the text complements Christ's lowering to the human condition and the "progression of the abasement, from step to step, is admirably marked by the choice of terms and the

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[45] See Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*, trans. Luca D'Isanto and David Webb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 39. See also Matthew Edward Harris, "Vattimo, *kenosis* and St. Paul," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 75, no. 4 (2014): 288-305. For a further discussion on kenosis in the thought of Levinas, Derrida, and Vattimo, see Marie L. Baird, "Whose Kenosis? An Analysis of Levinas, Derrida, and Vattimo on God's Self-Emptying and the Secularization of the West," *Heythrop Journal* XLVIII (2007): 423-437. See also Anthony C. Sciglitano Jr., "Gianni Vattimo and Saint Paul: Ontological Weakening, Kenosis, and Secularity," in *Paul in the Grip of the Philosophers*, ed. Peter Frick (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 117-141.

[46] P. Henry, "Kénose," in *Supplément Au Dictionnaire De La Bible*, vol.5, eds. L. Pirot, A. Robert, Henri Cazelles, et al. (Paris VI: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1957), 8.

[47] P. Henry, "Kénose," 8. C'est . . . l'expression la plus vigoureuse et la plus ramassée de sa christologie: c'est aussi, pour le nom tout au moins . . . le fondement d'une explication théologique célèbre de l'Incarnation: le *kénotisme*. Emphasis original. The text of Philippians 2:6-11 (NRSV) reads as follows: **6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, **7** but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, **8** he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. **9** Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, **10** so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth **11** and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

[48] P. Henry, "Kénose," 37-38. "Il est bien certain que dans ce seconde état il ne se présentait pas dans la majesté de la condition divine, mais dans l'humilite de sa très réelle, trés complète et très apparente condition humaine."

movement of the sentence. Although he is in a divine condition, Christ does not attach himself to his state of equality with God, but he takes the real condition of servant."[49] What Paul does not say is that Christ exchanged one nature, or condition, for another. Paul acknowledges Christ's retention of both natures and, in this passage, does not write of Christ as a servant of God, even though he takes on the real condition of, and appears as, servant, which is that of a man in the presence of the Lord.[50] Certainly, kenosis may be regarded as the answer to the question, "what did the incarnation do to God?"[51]

This self-emptying, or abasement, marks the distance between the divine and the human; "it is the distance between the divine 'to be' and the human 'to be,' but with the emphasis on the humble condition of man's ordinary life, far removed from God's splendor."[52] The chasm between Christ's equality with God and the death that he suffered on the cross emphasizes this distance between the divine and the human. "Christ accepts the human condition to the point of suffering with us the humiliation of death, but his humiliation will be more marked than that of his brothers in humanity, for that death will be the death of the cross."[53] Indeed, it is Christ's willingness to

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[49] Ibid., 31. "La progression dans l'abaissement, d'échelon en échelon, est admirablement marquée par le choix des termes et le mouvement de la phrase. Bien qu'il soit en condition divine, le Christ ne s'attache pas à son état d'égalité avec Dieu, mais il prend la condition réelle de serviteur."

[50] Ibid., 31-32. Paul ne dit pas que le Christ *échange* la condition divine pour la condition humaine, encore moins un *nature* pour une autre: il ne cesse pas d'être Dieu pour devenir homme. Emphasis original.

[51] Gerald O' Collins, *Incarnation* (London: Continuum, 2002), 55.

[52] Jean Galot, SJ, *Who is Christ?*, 258.

[53] P. Henry, "Kénose," 32. Le Christ accepte la condition humaine jusqu'à subir avec nous l'humiliation de la mort, mais son humiliation sera plus accusée que celle de ses frères en l'humanité, car cette mort sera la mort de la croix

empty himself, to remove himself from the divine splendour, and to embrace the cross, that gives the incarnation the quality of humility.

Vattimo connects his philosophical and religious thought through kenosis. He believes that the recognition of this connection offers us the opportunity to reflect on how we regard the sacred. Vattimo equates the self-emptying or abasement of God inherent in kenosis to the dissolution of metaphysics.

> The relation between the end of metaphysics and the Incarnation is, moreover, double. On the one hand, it is the end of metaphysics which enables a rediscovery of the core of the Biblical message (the Incarnation, God's kenosis). On the other hand, the end of metaphysics is the culminating point of the movement initiated by the Incarnation, namely a movement of continuing dissolution, abasement, dismantling, weakening.[54]

Indeed, his reading of Philippians gives St. Paul a character of plurivocity.[55] In this light, kenosis offers us the opportunity for a renewal of religious life, free from the violence of a metaphysical framework; "the end of metaphysics is also and above all the rebirth of the sacred in its many forms."[56] He believes that the dissolution of metaphysics, and the freedom of interpretation, or hermeneutics, that follows, is firmly rooted in the religious tradition.

> Modern hermeneutic philosophy is born in Europe not only because there is a religion of the book that focuses attention in the phenomenon of interpretation, but also because this religion has at its base the idea of the incarnation of God, which it conceives as *kenosis*, as abasement and, in our translation, as weakening.[57]

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[54] Frederiek Depoortere, "Gianni Vattimo and René Girard on the Uniqueness of Christianity," *The Heythrop Journal* 50, no. 5 (2009): 877-889. Quote page 878.

[55] Gianni Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 48.

[56] Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, trans. Luca D'Isanto (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 23. See also Randy J. C. Odchigue, "The Radical Kenotism of Gianni Vattimo and Interreligious Dialogue," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 16, no. 2 (2006): 173-189.

[57] Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation*, 48. Emphasis original.

In recognizing the centrality of hermeneutics within the Western Christian tradition, we recognize the centrality and significance of interpretation, for hermeneutics "allows the many religious myths of humanity to be heard."[58] Given the emphasis on hermeneutics, Vattimo claims that his understanding of Heidegger can be understood as a kenotic reading of the dissolution of metaphysics. The weak reading of Heidegger, as such, "was nothing but the transcription of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of God."[59] For Vattimo, then, the weakening of Being is realized as kenosis. The weakening, or dissolution, of absolute truths that characterizes the end of metaphysics is nothing more than a continuation of the self-emptying of God that we see in Philippians 2:7. The Torinese maintains that, in this light, weak thought is faithful to the Christian religious experience.

4.2 Secularization as a Continuation of Kenosis

This section explores Vattimo's thought on secularization as a continuation of kenosis. For him, it is not a process that should be considered negatively but, instead, ought to be viewed in a positive light, as it is a process that is fully aware of its sacred origins. Vattimo draws on Girard's work in order to develop this thesis, which is considered in this section.

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Vattimo, *Belief*, 36. See also Gianni Vattimo and Richard Kearney, "Anatheism, Nihilism, and Weak Thought," in *Reimagining the Sacred*, eds. Richard Kearney and Jens Zimmermann (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). See also Ulrich Engel, "Philosophy in Light of Incarnation: Gianni Vattimo on Kenosis," *New Blackfriars* 89 (2008): 468-477.

4.2.1 A Positive View of Secularization

For Vattimo, secularization is positively and firmly rooted within the Christian tradition. He wishes to move away from the more traditional understanding of secularization, which denotes a shifting away from religion.[60] "This, as is well known, indicates the process of 'drifting' that removed modern lay civilization from its sacral origin."[61] Rather, he believes that secularization is the continuation of the process of weakening, that is, kenosis, as initiated in the incarnation. It should not be regarded negatively but, on the contrary, seen as intrinsic to the incarnation and to the Christian message. Secularization, then, is the way in which kenosis, as weakening, continues to realize itself increasingly clearly. "The 'positive' meaning of secularization is the idea that lay modernity is constituted above all as a continuation and desacralizing interpretation of the biblical message."[62] Indeed, our very civilization emerged from, and has been shaped by, the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Vattimo's view of a positive secularization recognizes this background, both acknowledging and taking our Christian heritage into consideration, as we are "the heirs of a tradition that has absorbed 'Christian' values . . . this vision has its foundation in the idea . . . of

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[60] The Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 marked a shift in the use of the terms 'secular' and 'secularization.' Prior to the treaty, 'secular' was used to denote priests who served outside a religious order. 'Secularization' referred to the dispensation of priests from their vows. After the treaty 'secularization' refers to the process in which political authorities took control of territories relinquished by the Church. By the end of the nineteenth century it was commonly associated with its current meaning, which holds secularization to be a process of social change in which religion loses its social and cultural significance. Religion's role in society is restricted and little room is left for the supernatural.

[61] Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*, 41.

[62] Ibid. Vattimo takes Girard's meaning of secularization, as "the effective realization of Christianity as a non-sacrificial religion." However, this is only a starting point for Vattimo, he carries it further than Girard does. René Girard & Gianni Vattimo, ed., Pierpaolo Antonello, trans., William McCuaig, *Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 28.

incarnation, the *kenosis* of God, as Saint Paul calls it."[63] For Vattimo, secularization does not mean a shifting away from religion, but rather is fully aware of its sacred origins. Thus, it "is not the relinquishment of the sacred but the complete application of the sacred tradition to human phenomena."[64] As such, there are many processes taking place that may be linked to Vattimo's positive view of secularization; "for example, the transformation of state power, from the divinely sanctioned to constitutional monarchy up to contemporary representative democracies."[65] Vattimo argues that, while weakening may appear to be a more accurate description of these processes, he prefers to use 'secularization' to describe them "because it seems to underline the religious sense of all this process."[66]

Indeed, for Vattimo, secularization forms the relation between philosophy and the Christian message. He claims that it is precisely this weak reading of Christianity that allows him to connect his philosophical views with his religious roots. "This notion of weak ontology as the 'transcription' of the Christian message . . . allowed me to re-establish a continuity with my own personal religious origin."[67] This connection is not solely limited to his personal life but also applies to Western culture. Our culture has a distinctly Christian heritage, with many Christian values permeating society, such as charity, and the recognition of the relation between the Western Christian tradition and weakening, or secularization, provides a basis for further

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[63] Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 23-24.

[64] Ibid. Christianity truth and weakening faith. 28

[65] Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*, 42.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*, trans. Luca D'Isanto and David Webb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 40. See also Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 24.

reflection on this matter. Certainly, the Torinese connects the Christian tradition to the philosophies of Nietzsche and Heidegger through weakening. He claims that Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God did not mean severing ties with faith. Indeed, he maintains that Nietzsche did not separate himself from all Christian ties; "when announcing the death of God, Nietzsche anticipates that the latter's shadow will continue to be cast upon our world for a long time."[68] Furthermore, he connects Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God with Heidegger's thought on the end of metaphysics in the belief that they carry similar meanings. "In Heidegger's thought, the event of the end of metaphysics has basically the same meaning of the death of God: the moral God, in Nietzsche's view, is '*ueberwunden*,' overcome, or put aside."[69]

The link is possible because Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God is simply an announcement and not a strong 'truth;' whereby "Nietzsche is not putting forward an atheistic metaphysics, which would imply the claim to describe reality correctly as something from which God is excluded."[70] Metaphysics, for Heidegger, Vattimo believes, is synonymous with Nietzsche's moral God, as both are representative of an objective world order: as announcements, neither can be ascertained objectively but are, instead open to interpretation; they are events to which we are called to respond. "The Nietzschean announcement of the death of God and the Heideggerian announcement . . . of the end of metaphysics can provide the general framework for characterizing late-modern experience."[71] Indeed, it is the late-

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[68] Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 11.

[69] Ibid., 13.

[70] Ibid., 13.

[71] Ibid., 12.

modern world that substantiates the connection between Nietzsche's death of God and Heidegger's end of metaphysics. "It is precisely the Babelic world of late modernity that 'verifies' the Nietzschean announcement of the death of God and the Heideggerian announcement of the end of metaphysics—which are identical in meaning—by legitimizing them."[72] In other words, our very existence has been transformed by a series of events, such as the nihilistic characteristics of technology and science, which allow for the renewal of religion through weak ontology. Vattimo credits the decline of metaphysics, the death of the moral God, and the resulting plurality, for the return of religion; "the liberation of metaphor has allowed philosophers to speak of God, angels, and salvation once again: it is only the pluralism of late-modern societies that has conferred visibility to religion."[73] This is, Vattimo believes, because there are no longer any strong reasons to be non-religious. As these reasons were connected to metaphysics, its decline has also brought about their demise.[74]

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[72] Ibid., 15. By the "Babelic world," Vattimo refers to the fragmentation of society that has contributed to the death of the objective world order. For example, the "pluralism of modern society" and the "proliferation of cultures" that make believing in one stable, objective world order impossible.

[73] Ibid.,19. Here Vattimo refers to Pascal, who, in his "Memorial," wrote "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and savants." As Romano Guardini notes, the God of Christian life is different to the God of philosophy. Guardini maintains that the God of the philosophers is the God of the absolute. The problem with this idea of God is that it is almost impossible to grasp; "this God is more absolute than man can conceive him." This is because the "characteristic of this definition of God is that it attempts to grasp him in pure unconditionally, free from everything which could in any way mean limitation, finization, secularization, anthropomorphism." In contrast to this, the God of Abraham etc. is the God of Jesus Christ; this is, according to Guardini, the "Living God." The Living God "is precisely the being of whom one must say, if one wishes to speak of him truthfully: he comes, he acts, he speaks. God has confronted him as "This Person," and it is only possible to speak of such an encounter with the words found on every page of Holy Scripture." All quotations from R. Guardini, *Pascal For Our Time* (New York: Herder, 1966), 33-44.

[74] Amongst others, such reasons include scientific bases such as being unable to verify God's existence. With the end of metaphysics, we cannot say that this is either 'true' or a 'fact,' as all strong, absolute thought has been overcome. See also Santiago Zabala, "A Religion Without Theists or Atheists," in *The Future of Religion*, ed. Santiago Zabala (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 1-27.

4.2.2 Secularization: An Ongoing Kenosis

Vattimo continues to build on his theory of secularization as a continuation of the process of weakening begun in the incarnation. He draws on the work of René Girard in order to do so, stating that "if the natural sacred is the violent mechanism that Jesus came to unveil and undermine, it is possible that secularization . . . is precisely a positive effect of Jesus' teaching, and not a way of moving away from it."[75] The natural sacred is the victim-based, sacrificial religions that Girard has illustrated in his work, in particular, by looking at mythology. At first, it appears that Christianity continues in the same manner in these victim-based religions, with Jesus as the victim, crucified on the Cross. Girard, however, argues to the contrary, claiming that Christianity breaks with this tradition. Jesus is not a victim; he did not die because he was yet another sacrificial victim. He died because, in order to put an end to it, he revealed the workings of the scapegoat mechanism. He was sentenced to death because this revelation was anathema to a society that was still deeply rooted in the sacrificial tradition. Indeed, the deep-rootedness of the sacrificial order is evident, as remnants remain present in the way that we speak about Christianity. "The Christian churches continue to speak of Jesus as a sacrificial victim."[76] Certainly, though Jesus revealed the workings of the scapegoat mechanism in order to break the cycle, this goal has not yet been fully realized. "God's education of humanity, which is proceeding towards an increasingly clear-cut break from the natural religions of sacrifice . . . has yet to be completed"[77] In the same way, for Vattimo, kenosis is not

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[75] Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*, 41. For more on Vattimo's and Girard's thought, see Frederiek Depoortere, *Christ in Postmodern Philosophy: Gianni Vattimo, René Girard, and Slavoj Žižek* (T&T Clark: New York, 2008).

[76] Ibid., 38.

[77] Ibid.

yet fully realized but, rather, is increasingly fulfilled through secularization. Indeed, by following Girard's thought, he connects kenosis and secularization through violence. Girard furnishes this connection through his reading of the Gospel accounts as the revelation of the workings of the scapegoat mechanism. These workings were revealed in order to put an end to the mechanism by making humankind aware of the cycle of violence inherent to the mechanism, whereby "Jesus' incarnation did not take place to supply the father with a victim adequate to his wrath; rather, Jesus came into the world precisely to reveal and abolish the nexus between violence and the sacred."[78] For Vattimo, then, at the heart of the incarnation is a vocation of weakening, kenosis, the weakening of the violence at the heart of the scapegoat mechanism. In this light, secularization is a continuation of this dissolution of violence that was begun by Jesus with the incarnation.

Having drawn on Girard's work in order to make the connection between kenosis and secularization, Vattimo makes a further step. He equates the violent, natural sacred with metaphysics, noting that the natural sacred "is violent insofar as it attributes to such divinity all the predicates of omnipotence, absoluteness, eternity and 'transcendence' . . . in short, Girard's violent God is from this standpoint the God of metaphysics."[79] He equates this God of metaphysics with the God of whose death Nietzsche spoke; "the dissolution of metaphysics is also the end of this image of God,

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[78] Ibid., 37. See also Michel, Andreas, "The Strength of Weakness: Vattimo and Gauchet on Secularization," in *Radical Secularization?,* eds. S. Latré, W. Van Herck and G. Vanheeswijck (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 67-82.

[79] Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*, 39. Girard limits the natural sacred to a victim based mechanism requiring sacrifice. He does not include God's attributes to the natural sacred, and it is here that Vattimo moves outside the bounds of Girard's thesis. See also Erik Meganck, "'Nulla in Mundo Pax Sincera ...' Secularisation and violence in Vattimo and Girard," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 74, no. 5 (2013): 410-431.

the death of God of whom Nietzsche spoke.[80] This dissolution does not mean that the way is now clear for a recovery of the 'Christian God.' It simply pushes aside natural religion. For Vattimo, the incarnation is an announcement, and in the same way as Nietzsche's death of God and Heidegger's dissolution of metaphysics are an announcement of the ontology of weakening, so too is the incarnation.

> God's abasement to the level of humanity, what the New Testament calls God's kenosis, will be interpreted as the sign that the non-violent and non-absolute God of the post-metaphysical epoch has as its distinctive trait the very vocation for weakening of which Heideggerean philosophy speaks.[81]

Vattimo views this reading of weak ontology as a "'transcription' of the Christian message" as an event.[82] It allows him to understand secularization as an event that takes place within the framework of Christianity, linked to both the incarnation and to the dissolution of metaphysics. The Torinese believes that this has much to offer philosophy; "the basis for a critical reflection on the forms that the sacred has taken in our time."[83] As our society has come out of, and has been shaped by, the Christian tradition, secularization is important to any discussion of the philosophical debate concerning the end of metaphysics and of the sacred in modernity; "if the mode in which the weakening of Being realizes itself as the kenosis of God, secularization shall no longer be conceived as abandonment of religion but as the paradoxical realization of Being's religious vocation."[84] Although our civilization may be

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[80] Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*, 39.

[81] Ibid. Here, Vattimo references Philippians 2:7, which reads; "but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave."

[82] Ibid., 40

[83] Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 23.

[84] Ibid., 24.

considered a post-Christian society, its roots lie firmly within the Judeo-Christian Scripture and it has been, for Vattimo, significantly shaped by this foundation.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter focused on Vattimo's understanding of weak thought. It may, in part, be read as a reaction to the terrorism of the *Brigate Rosse*. However, not only may it be read in political terms, but also in a theological and philosophical light. Weak thought, ultimately, is Vattimo's understanding and development of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Girard's thought. Here, he melds his philosophical and political interests with the religious, producing his own particular reading of the incarnation. This reading allows Vattimo to understand secularization as a continuation of the process of weakening begun in the incarnation.

PART THREE

Believing Anew: A Form of Faith

Chapter Five

Myth and the Recovery of Religion

5.0 Introduction

The connection between philosophy and religion in modernity is a prominent theme in Vattimo's work. Indeed, he understands this connection in a similar way to his supervisor, Luigi Pareyson, for whom the religious experience is primary. For him, it is impossible to consider religion outside the realms of lived experience. This is examined though the lens of myth. Thus, given myth's significance for both philosophers, this chapter will move to explore Vattimo's critique of the current philosophies of myth that dominate the current era. He maintains that these are wholly inadequate and incapable of accurately reflecting the current position concerning metaphysical constructs. Vattimo claims that a new comprehension of the relationship between religion and secularization is necessary as it is in a similar position to that of myth. He suggests that, currently, the return of religion may be marked by two types of return. This recovery is linked to the hermeneutics of the Christian tradition, which is examined here. Given the prominence that Vattimo places on hermeneutics in his work, the issue of limits arises. Finally, then, the chapter will examine charity as a limit to hermeneutics.

5.1 Vattimo and Myth

This section focuses on Vattimo's understanding of myth, where the connection between philosophy and Christianity is examined through the lens of myth. In particular, the section focuses on the work of Vattimo's mentor, Luigi Pareyson, as

both understand the connection in a similar fashion. Following from this, I will examine Vattimo's understanding of theories of myth, concentrating on his analysis of their suitability in the current era.

5.1.1 Existentialism and Myth (Pareyson)

As noted, Vattimo understands the connection between philosophy and Christianity in much the same way as that of his mentor, Luigi Pareyson, who he studied under at the University of Turin.[1] Many of the themes present in Vattimo's own writings, such as truth and interpretation, are also found in Pareyson's. In Vattimo's article, "Ermeneutica e secolarizzazione: A proposito di L. Pareyson," he discusses some of these themes in light of Pareyson's thought, and, in particular, is drawn to Pareyson's 'actuality of existentialism.'[2] Pareyson understands this a philosophy of the person meaning that questions regarding truth, freedom, and Being are always connected to the person. Because of this connection there cannot be an objective solution to philosophical problems.[3] Thus, Pareyson's work presents Vattimo with the outline of a philosophy that he builds on and enriches. "Although the book [*Esistenza e persona*] is rich in theoretical development that outlines the framework of a fairly 'systematic' philosophical position . . . it is this aspect that attracts the most attention in the current

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[1] Vattimo studied philosophy under Luigi Pareyson in Turin. He chose philosophy in order to combine two of his main interests, namely, religion and politics. Pareyson supervised Vattimo's thesis on Aristotle. After Vattimo finished his studies, receiving the Laurea in 1959, he became Pareyson's assistant.

[2] Gianni Vattimo, "Ermeneutica e secolarizzazione. A proposito di L. Pareyson," *Aut Aut*, no. 213 (1986): 17-27. See Giovanna Borradori, 'Recoding Metaphysics: The New Italian Philosophy,' in *Recoding Metaphysics: The New Italian Philosophy,* ed. Giovanna Borradori (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 14.

[3] Ibid.

philosophical situation."[4] Vattimo claims that, at the time, it was relatively bold of Pareyson to connect Christianity and philosophy through existentialism, thereby making Christianity the central problem of philosophy.[5]

Vattimo's thinking concerning hermeneutics contains similarities to Pareyson's, and particularly to Pareyson's thought in *Veritá e interpretazione*.[6] Like Vattimo, truth, for Pareyson, can only be accessed through openings that are subject to time and history.

> Also the interpretation is at the same time revealing and historic, because on the one hand the truth is accessible only through each single perspective, and on the other hand it is the same historical situation as a way of access to the truth; a truth cannot be revealed that is not already determined and formulated, a thing that only happens personally and historically.[7]

It is only through interpretation that we may gain access to any understanding of truth; "the principal foundation of hermeneutics is precisely that the only adequate knowledge of the truth is interpretation."[8] Indeed, interpretation offers many paths of access to the truth, and all are equally valid, with none taking priority over another. In addition, none claim to provide the sole course to the truth.

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[4] Gianni Vattimo, "Ermeneutica e secolarizzazione. A proposito di L. Pareyson," *Aut Aut*, no. 213 (1986): 17. "Sebbene il libro sia ricco di sviluppi teorici che delineano l'ossatura di una posizione filosofica abbastanza 'sistematica' . . . è uesto l'aspetto di esso che attira di pi l'attenzione nell'attualie situazione filosofica." This essay is also printed in Vattimo's *Etica dell'interpretazione* (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1989). The book Vattimo refers to here is Luigi Pareyson, *Esistenza e persona* (Genova: il melangolo, 1985).

[5] Ibid. "Era relativamente audace, allora, dare del problema del cristianesimo il problema chetrale della filosofia."

[6] Luigi Pareyson, *Verità e interpretazione* (Milano: Mursia, 1971).

[7] Pareyson, *Verità e interpretazione*, 45. "Anche l'interpretazione è al tempo stesso rivelativa e storica, perché da un lato le verità è accessibile solo all'interno d'ogni singola prospettiva, e questa d'altra parte è la stessa situazione storica come via d'accesso alla verità; sí che non si può rivelare la verità se non già determinandola e formulandola, cosa che accade some personalmente e storicamente."

[8] Ibid., 57. "Il principio fondamentale dell'ermeneutica è appunto che l'unica conoscenza adeguata della verità è l'interpretazione."

> Truth is accessible and obtainable in many ways, and none of these ways, as long as they are worthy of the name of interpretation, is favoured over the other, in the sense that claims the possession of the truth more exclusively or more accomplished, or in any way superior.[9]

Pareyson's discussion of hermeneutics furthers the connection that he makes between religion and philosophy. For Pareyson, Vattimo maintains, philosophy was the hermeneutics of religious experience, which Pareyson referred to as myth.[10] Religious experience was presented, not through rational thought, but through other forms such as myth and poetry. Thus, for Pareyson, "the mythology of Christianity and the Christ Symbol provided the key to a true hermeneutic. Christ was the perfect symbol because he showed the partial and incomplete nature of all mythology."[11] Vattimo is of the opinion that the incarnation allowed myth to express each and every invisible and symbolic presence of the divine. As such, it does not render any particular one as obsolete, but permits a plurality of myths, acknowledging that they signify the divine.[12]

Vattimo has a similar outlook to Pareyson in terms of philosophy and religion. It is impossible, for both philosophers, to consider religion outside the realms of historical and personal experience. As an abstract, religion ceases to be, as it is the lived experience that is the essence of religion. Thus, as Pareyson states, "it is part of the very existence of religion, that its existence is with those who profess it. For to

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[9] Ibid. "La verità è accessibile e attingibile in molti modi, e nessuno di questi modi, purchè degno il nome di interpretazione, è privilegiato rispetto agli altri, nel senso che pretenda di possedere la verità in maniera esclusiva o piú compiuta o comunque migliore."

[10] Gianni Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 54.

[11] Ibid., 148. See Mary Anne Perkins, *Christendom and European Identity: The Legacy of a Grand Narrative Since 1789* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co., 2004).

[12] Vattimo acknowledges that this understanding goes somewhat further than Pareyson's work permits. Nonetheless, he claims that the centrality he affords Christ here is not contrary to Pareyson's premises. Christ's relation to other myths, however, is Vattimo's, rather than Pareyson's. See Gianni Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 118.

explore its true nature it must be considered within a historical and a personal situation, as adopted by means of an existential choice inseparable from our personal and historical substance."[13] As part of his exploration of philosophy and religion as lived experience, Pareyson examines the problem of evil. In his essay, "Philosophy and the Problem of Evil," he considers the problem of evil as an ontological problem rather than as an ethical issue. He claims that as evil is part of the human condition and is rooted in human nature, it ought to be examined ontologically. For Pareyson, the suffering of Christ confirms that the problem of evil is not so much an ethical issue as a religious one. As such, he critiques those forms of rationalist philosophy, such as logical positivism, that ignore the problem of evil as a problem of human nature.[14] These philosophies fail to consider the problem of evil as a problem of human nature because they are too removed from other philosophies that do so. Existence, then, is considered in purely rational, scientific terms that fail to take lived experience into account. Pareyson claims that myth can bridge this gap between rationalist philosophy and lived experience, that evil and pain "concealed and silenced in the rational world of philosophy, are very present in the myth, in the deepest sense of the term, that is in art and in religion."[15] Philosophy ought to recourse

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[13] Luigi Pareyson, *Ontologia della libertà* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore s.p.a., 1995), 166. "Fa parte dell'esistenza stessa della religione il suo nesso esistenziale con chi la professa. Per prospettarla nella sua vera natura bisogno vedera come assunto all'interno d'una tradizione storica e d'una situazione personale, come adottata con unascelta esistenziale dalla nostra sostanza personale e storica."

[14] Logical positivism held that all knowledge could be verified by scientific or logical analysis.

[15] Luigi Pareyson, *Ontologia della libertà*, 174. "Il male e dolore, occultati e fatti scomparire nel mondo ratzionalizzato della filosofia, sono invece ben presenti nel mito, nel senso profondo e intense del termine, cioè nell'arte e nella religione." Some of Pareyson's works have been collected and translated, including parts of *Ontologia della libertà*, in Luigi Pareyson, *Existence, Interpretation, Freedom: Selected Writings*, ed. Paolo Diego Bubbio, trans. Anna Mattei (Colorado: The Davies Group Publishers, 2009). I have opted to follow the full text of Pareyson's original works and provide my own translations.

to, and recover, its own mythical foundations, as myth is a foundation for everything that is important for humanity.[16] He is not calling for a renunciation of philosophy but, rather, for myth and philosophy to work together, as it is "precisely in and about the myth that philosophical reflection must intervene."[17] In order to do so, however, philosophy must change its usual scientific approach and adopt a more hermeneutical outlook.[18] Like Vattimo, Pareyson seeks a philosophy that shifts away from the 'truths' of metaphysics, focuses on interpretation, and allows for adequate reflection on experience. Philosophy must take care to respect the myth, allowing it to bring its meaning to light, "preserving and confirming its revealed character, aware that it says things that cannot be said in this way, that are important for philosophy itself that they are said."[19] The myth is not surpassed or exhausted by this reflection: on the contrary, through hermeneutic reflection the myth's meaning is revealed and continuously interpreted. Thus, the "myth is for the logos at the same time, source, seat, starting point, start, stimulus, accompaniment."[20] This type of philosophical reflection, Pareyson maintains, is an existential ontology that has turned to the philosophical interpretation of religious experience. As such, he notes that, in any interpretation of religious thought, the ideas present in that thought remain "typically religious and

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[16] Ibid., 157. "La fonte inesauribile d'ogni discorso che sia veramente importante e decisivo per l'umanità."

[17] Ibid., 158. "Perché nel e sul mito è appunto la riflessione filosofica che deve intervenire."

[18] Ibid., 158. " Assumere invece un carattere ermeneutico, inteso a interpretazione un sapere preesistente col proposito di chiarirne gli intimi significati." "Assuming instead a hermeneutic character, intended to interpret a pre-existing knowledge with the purpose of clarifying the intimate meanings."

[19] Ibid., 179. "Essa ha il compito di rispettare il mito, salvaguardandone e confermandone il carattere rivelativo, consapevole ch'esso dice cose che non si possono dire che in quel modo, e ch'è importante per la filosofia stessa che siano dette."

[20] Ibid. "Il mito è per il logo al tempo stesso fonte, sede, spunto, avvio, stimolo, accompagnamente."

cannot be considered philosophical in themselves."[21] Philosophy simply takes the religious elements and reflects on them in terms of human experience, allowing for both the believer and the non-believer to share in the reflection. In other words, "only philosophical mediation is able to explain to the non-believer, that is, in a way that is valid for all, what these ideas mean to the believer and can mean for humankind in general."[22] As the focus is on the human, the existential, Pareyson claims that the non-believer cannot but be interested in the religious ideas discussed by philosophy.

5.1.2 Theories of Myth and Metaphysics

Vattimo turns to myth in order to explore religion's position in modernity. He claims that, given our increasing awareness that our society is built on metaphysical constructs, we need to re-evaluate our position concerning myth. "One of the most urgent problems faced by contemporary consciousness as it becomes aware of how the world is 'fabled' by the media and the social sciences is that of redefining its own position with regard to myth."[23] In his opinion, modern philosophy lacks an adequate theory of myth, as any sufficient philosophical reflection concerning myth should not rest on a metaphysical foundation, given that no "satisfactory theory of myth — one that would define its nature and its connection with other forms of relationship to the

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[21] Ibid., 162. "Queste idee rimangone suistamente religiose, né si possono trattare come filosofiche di per sé."

[22] Ibid., 180. "Ma solo la mediazione filosofica può spiegare al non credente, ch'è come dire in modo valido per tutti, ciò che quelle idee significato per il credente e possono significare per l'uomo in generale."

[23] Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 28. Luca D'Isanto and David Webb note in their translation of *Belief* that Vattimo opts to use 'fable' instead of 'myth;' the published version of Nietzsche's work should read "How the World at Last Became a Myth;" however, Vattimo chooses to use 'fable' instead of 'myth.'

world — exists in contemporary philosophy."[24] Even though the current understandings of myth are inadequate, the term itself is widely used, even extending to political ideologies. Gorges Sorel, for example, gave myth a political function in 1908, in *Rèflexions sur la violence*; "myth in politics as an agent capable of moving the masses."[25] Indeed, Vattimo takes issue with Claude Lévi-Strauss' thought concerning myth. The anthropologist proposes that myth remains present in society today through music and literature. However, while this is a valid understanding of myth, Vattimo considers it to be a restricted one. He claims that myth is understood today in vague terms that simply places it over against the rational, scientific thought, thus reducing it to the "narrative and fantastic, playing on the emotions with little or no reference to objectivity."[26] In contrast to this understanding of myth, Vattimo draws on Ernst Cassirer's 1923 work, *Philosophie des symbolischen Formen*, believing it to be the last great word on myth.[27]

> Wherever philosophy sought to establish a theoretical view of the world, it was confronted not so much by immediate phenomenal reality as by the mythical transformation of this reality . . . Long before the world appeared to consciousness as a totality of empirical things and a complex of empirical attributes it was manifested as an aggregate of mythical powers and effects.[28]

Even though Vattimo describes Cassirer's *Philosophie des symbolischen Formen* in glowing terms, the work, for him, still fails to produce an adequate understanding of

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[24] Gianni Vattimo, trans. Jon Snyder, "Myth and the Fate of Secularization," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9 (Spring, 1985): 29-35. Quote page 29. Accessed 11/02/2013 http://www.jstor.org/stable/20166721

[25] Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, 28.

[26] Ibid., 29.

[27] See Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, 29.

[28] E. Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* vol. 2 (1923), trans. R. Manheim (Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 1966), as quoted in Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, 29.

myth. This is because, here, myth is depicted as being prior to and more 'infantile' than science.[29] Indeed, Cassirer understands myth to be part of an evolutionary process by which science replaces myth, thus relegating and confining it to the past.

For Vattimo, due to the dissolution of metaphysics our understanding of myth has been plunged into 'theoretical confusion' as its metaphysical framework has collapsed.[30] He highlights this uncertainty by discussing three views of myth that represent the typical viewpoints of our society: archaism, cultural relativism, and limited rationality, adding that all three are "born out of a rejection of the metaphysics of history . . . yet all three fail to formulate their position in theoretically satisfactory terms."[31] He claims that the failure to provide a satisfactory view of myth lies in the fact that they have simply pushed the metaphysical problem aside. As a result, these theories of myth are characterized by incoherency and confusion and fail to resolve the underlying problem of the metaphysical conception of history.[32]

First, Vattimo discusses archaism, which rests on the premise that myth is a more authentic form of knowledge that is untouched by modern science, capitalism, and technology. Archaism is marked by a mistrust of science and technology, which are believed to destroy humankind's relationships, both with one another and with nature. Science and technology are also connected to capitalism and its exploitative and imperialistic tendencies. The original point of departure for archaism was the idea that the study of humankind in non-historicist terms, and the structural study of myths and cultures, would destroy the Western idea of progress.

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[29] Ibid., *The Transparent Society,* 30.

[30] See Vattimo, "Myth and the Fate of Secularization," 30.

[31] Vattimo, "Myth and the Fate of Secularization," 30.

[32] Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, 31.

> There was originally the idea that both a purely structural study of 'primitive' myths and cultures and a general reconsideration of man in nonhistoristic terms . . . would destroy the Western myth of progress and its imperialistic and colonialistic implications.[33]

The driving force behind archaism, then, was the idea that this mode of thought would recover the relationship between humankind and nature, free from any scientific objectivization and its connections to the capitalist organization of work. Ecological concerns about the consequences of science and technology on both nature and the nature of humankind have, more recently, added to this critique. Archaism hopes to free us from the detrimental effects of techno-science through a renewed contact with myth. From this perspective, myth is seen as a more authentic and positive form of knowledge. The problem with archaism is that it calls for a restoration of traditional culture and is unable to produce any alternative view that does not require this. It idealizes and emphasizes our origins, failing to acknowledge that our current situation is, in fact, derived from these very same origins. For Vattimo, as our current condition is characterized by alienation and dehumanization, the question is why we would wish to return to the origins from which these conditions emerged.[34]

Secondly, Vattimo discusses cultural relativism. This position maintains that the fundamental principles that define rationality are not absolute. These principles are relative, in that our ideas and understandings are true only within the conditions of our own cultural context. As such, this viewpoint reduces scientific rationality to being a shared belief, on the basis of which our culture is organized, rather than a truth or strong principle. It does not hold that either mythic or scientific knowledge is

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[33] Vattimo, "Myth and the Fate of Secularization," 30.

[34] Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, 37.

superior to the other. Rather, it refuses to place them in opposition to one another.[35] This is because both types of knowledge share a common characteristic, in that they are "based on beliefs that form a part of lived experience and are not susceptible to scientific proof."[36] The issue with cultural relativism is, as Vattimo suggests, that it completely ignores the problem of history and it fails to acknowledge the impossibility of examining other cultures from an objective point of view. Thus, it is not possible, for example, for anthropologists undertaking field work to remain separate from the peoples that they study; "Rather they are involved in a dialogue, and once this is recognized it raises the problem of the common horizon within which it actually takes place."[37] This common horizon, then, is the problem of history that cultural relativism attempts to ignore, in the belief that it is possible to view other cultures as isolated objects.[38]

Thirdly, limited rationality is the final theory of myth that Vattimo discusses. This particular view distinguishes myth from scientific knowledge by retaining its links to the original etymological sense of the term, which is narration.[39] "Limited rationality describes that ensemble of cultural views that treats mythic knowledge, understood as narrative, as a more adequate form of thought for certain fields of experience."[40] He points out that, even though it emphasises the importance of mythic knowledge, it does not contest the validity of scientific knowledge. Again, limited

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[35] Vattimo, "Myth and the Fate of Secularization," 30.

[36] Ibid., 32.

[37] Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, 38.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., 35.

[40] Vattimo, "Myth and the Fate of Secularization," 32.

rationality ignores the problem of history. Originally, according to Vattimo, it was founded on a distinction between the sciences and humanities. However, although this distinction has diminished in recent years, limited rationality, problematically, ignores any such connection within the field of socio-historical sciences.

The three theories of myth have one common denominator. All are born from the dissolution of metaphysical philosophies of history and all three fail to take this into account. This, for Vattimo, makes them theoretically inadequate. The problem with archaism, for example, is that it calls for a restoration of traditional culture and is unable to produce any alternative view that does not require this. It idealizes and emphasizes our origins, failing to acknowledge that our current situation is, in fact, derived from these very same origins. For Vattimo, as our current condition is characterized by alienation and dehumanization, the question is why we would wish to return to the origins from which these conditions emerged.[41] Cultural relativism disregards the problem of historicity completely by ignoring the problem of separating cultural worlds from one another, and Vattimo describes the retrieval of other cultures as a dialogue; other cultures cannot be represented as isolated objects. They are within the common range of experience, which does away with the separation taken for granted by cultural relativism. Limited rationality is also guilty of avoiding the problem of historicity. It fails to recognize that, as it is a form of narrative, it is therefore best suited to certain fields of study such as mass culture and psychic life. However, although it is founded on a distinction between science and the humanities, in recent years this distinction has been called into question, and there is now a widespread idea that the natural sciences should be set within the field of the

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[41] Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, 37.

socio-historical sciences; thus, as the two fields can no longer be kept apart, it points to the disintegration of this distinction.[42] Vattimo claims that if the metaphysics of history could respond to these issues, it would proffer a solution in the form of a unilinear vision of history as enlightenment and the liberation of reason.[43] In other words, the idea that the course of history "could be thought of as enlightenment, as the liberation of reason from the shadows of mythical knowledge, has lost its legitimacy. Demythologization has itself come to be seen as a myth."[44] A unilinear vision of history is not feasible however, especially given that it is impossible to ignore other cultures and peoples who do not necessarily share the same views or goals.

Demythologization focused on making sense of the mythical character of a superseded world view; focusing on the rational, rather than the supernatural. As we recognise that history is not a unilinear or universal process, Vattimo maintains that demythologization itself is now exposed as a myth.[45] Our relation to myth, as a result,

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[42] Vattimo, "Myth and the Fate of Secularization," 33.

[43] Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, 39.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Demythologization comes from the German *Entmythologisierung*, "stripping off myths" (Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Christianity: A Global Introduction* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003], 122). Rudolf Bultmann's essay on demythologization and the New Testament (*Neues Testament Und Mythologie*) was published in 1941. Rather than completely eliminating the mythological aspects of the New Testament, Bultmann argues that it should be reinterpreted existentially; in terms of one's own personal existence. By demythologizing the New Testament its message may be rendered intelligible for humankind today; the mythical worldview contained in the text is no longer tenable. "Myth is Bultmann's category for talking about things that cannot be dealt with in the confines of the language of history and scientific observations" (Ibid). Bultmann, however, does not believe that the kerygma must be abandoned, but that "the entire New Testament proclamation must be demythologized" (Heinrich Fries, "Demythologizing and Theological Truth," in *Rudolf Bultmann in Catholic Thought*, eds. Thomas F. O'Meara O.P. and Donald M. Weisser O.P. [New York: Herder and Herder, 1968], 30). Bultmann wished to communicate the Gospel message in a manner in which it could be understood in modernity, yet in doing so he removed the mythical from the scientific and in this way hoped to expound the mythical. For Vattimo, it is impossible to believe that there is a universal history; there are many different cultures and peoples, which makes it clear that there cannot be an enlightenment, so to speak, or, as Vattimo puts it, a "liberation of reason from the shadows of mythical knowledge" (Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, 39). In effect, demythologization itself is viewed as a myth, and, for Vattimo, this marks the shift from the modern

has changed. Our awareness of the dissolution of metaphysics means that our relation to myth cannot be returned to its former attitude, for to "go on dreaming with the knowledge that you are dreaming is not the same as pure and simple dreaming."[46] It would be naïve to think that we could simply return to our former relation, picking up where we left off, because, as it is, it remains marked by the experience. Thus, as we cannot return to our former viewpoints, we must instead forge a new theory of myth that acknowledges these errors and takes into account our historical experience.

5.2 The Decline and Recovery of Religion

Here, the focus is on the experience of religion as a return, or recollection of something thought forgotten. Vattimo claims that, even in a secularised culture, where religion is believed to be in decline, traces of religion are still present. This section explores this idea, focusing on the two primary ways in which Vattimo suggests that the return of religion is motivated. Finally, the section examines the relationship between religion and hermeneutics in the light of the connection between hermeneutics and the recovery of religion.

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to the post-modern. It is evident in Nietzsche's work, as it is a radical demythologization; there is no longer any strong 'truth,' but rather we experience the return of myth.

[46] Vattimo, "Myth and the Fate of Secularization," 34. Vattimo paraphrases Nietzsche here. Here, Nietzsche's words indicate the need to accept the world. His concept of the eternal recurrence came to him as a need to both explain and accept the world. This aphorism expresses "in a more forthright manner than ever before the world as Nietzsche then saw it—a world of appearance with no possibility of a 'break-through' to any 'higher reality'—and his resolution to see this world as it had to be seen: as 'acceptable'" (R.J. Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy* (Routledge & Kegan Paul and Louisiana State University Press, 1965; revised edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 146 [page citations reference the revised edition]).

5.2.1 The Return of Religion: Two Forms of Return

Secularization and religion are in a position similar to that of demythologization and myth. In much the same way that myth is marked by demythologization, so too is religion marked by secularization. As such, Vattimo claims that a new theory of myth that acknowledges this changed relationship is required. The same may be said for religion as, like myth, in a secularized culture the religious traces of its past are still present; but in a different form to how they were previously. Thus, a secularized culture is not a culture that has "simply left behind the religious contents of its tradition; it is one that continues to live them as a traces, as models that are hidden and disfigured but nonetheless profoundly present."[47] In the same way that our relation to myth must take into account our historical experience, so too must our relation to the religious. It is not a return to what was, but rather a "re-presentation of the core consciousness we had forgotten."[48] He maintains that it is important to acknowledge that the recovery of religion, like myth, signifies this fallen relation. However, it is not a case of making something present again that we have forgotten, as Vattimo does not believe that this is possible since it is marked by the experience; "it is less a case of recollecting the forgotten origin by making it present again than of recollecting that we have always already forgotten it."[49] As religion is now experienced as a return, the recollection of this forgetfulness is the sole authentic religious experience, and "something that we had thought irrevocably forgotten is made present again, a dormant trace is reawakened."[50] Vattimo attributes this re-

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Vattimo, *Belief*, 21.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 22. Vattimo, "The Trace of the Trace," 79. Vattimo claims that 'it is often said that religious experience is an experience of leave-taking,' which implies a return. See Gianni Vattimo,

presentation of religion to the current conditions of existence, which have brought about new issues and threats that face humanity.[51]

Vattimo claims that there are two primary forms in which the return of religion occurs. In the first form, the return of religion is motivated by new global threats. For him, this particular motivation began immediately after the Second World War, brought about by the threat of atomic warfare.[52] Although this threat may have diminished, there are others that have taken its place, with a particular issue being that of a possible ecological disaster. Currently, it seems to Vattimo, that ecological risks are of a more immediate concern than any threat of atomic warfare. Another threat, commonly found in more affluent societies, is, he suggests, a growing fear of the loss of the meaning of existence, characterized by a "true and profound boredom which seems inevitably to accompany consumerism."[53] This loss of the meaning of

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"The Trace of the Trace," in *Religion,* eds. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 79. See also Jeffrey W. Robbins, *In Search of a Non-Dogmatic Theology* (Aurora: The Davies Group, 2003).

[51] Ibid. Vattimo references the *fin-de-siècle* state of anxiety as one of the conditions of existence contributing to the return of religion. These levels of anxiety are brought about by periods of rapid social change which result in people having to cope with new technologies and stimuli brought about by the same.

[52] See Vattimo, "The Trace of the Trace, "80. See also Nancy K. Frankenberry, "Weakening Religious Belief: Vattimo, Rorty, and the Holism of the Mental," in *Weakening Philosophy*, ed. Santiago Zabala (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 273-296.

[53] Ibid, Several scholars are concerned with the connection between boredom and consumerism in modernity: for example, Patrice Petro maintains that "with the rise of visual culture, mass society, mass production, and consumerism, boredom came to describe the modern experience of time as both empty and full, concentrated and distracted . . . if the division of labor produced sensory deprivation in the overload of repetition, so, too, did mass culture produce boredom in the distracted fullness of a leisure time become empty" (Patrice Petro, "Historical Ennui, Feminist Boredom," in *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event,* ed. Vivien Sobchack [London and New York: Routledge, 1996], 193). For Lutz Koepnick, "Baudelaire's modernism maps modern life as fundamentally fragmented and petrified, and in so doing, uncovers the melancholy, boredom, and isolation that prevails behind the scenes of enthused consumerism" (Lutz Koepnick, *Walter Benjamin and the Aesthetics of Power* [Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999], 198).

existence is characterized by the increasing emphasis on identity, be it ethnic or other.[54]

The second form of return is more philosophical, contrasting with the 'apocalyptic' character of the first form.[55] The second form is focused on more theoretical events. There is a concern that new developments, scientific and technological, have contributed to the breakdown of older systems, namely religion, which previously provided a foundation for our existence. Without religion, philosophical and critical thought are unable to fill the void created by the loss of the meaning and foundation that religion provides.[56] Science and technology, then, take on a sort of 'inhuman' character, with developments that have spirited us away from our previous foundations.[57]

The second form of return raises the issue of whether or not religion is inseparable from metaphysics; "whether, that is, one can think of God only as the immobile foundation of history from which everything arises and to which everything must return."[58] Vattimo is not of the opinion that a return to metaphysics will be

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[54] See Vattimo, "The Trace of the Trace, "80.

[55] Ibid., 81.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid. 61. Thomas Guarino notes that "the Torinese dyslogistically speaks of God as the "immobile foundation of history" [. . .] and as an "immutable metaphysical plenitude" (Thomas G. Guarino, *Vattimo and Theology* [London: T&T Clark, 2009], 170. Guarino asks "are these not caricatures of a God who is preeminently inter-relational in his very existence (as three Persons)?" (Ibid). Vattimo uses these viewpoints in order to develop his discussion of religion as a return, particularly looking at whether or not religion is separable from metaphysics. Vattimo actually points out that "Christian theology is in its deepest foundations a hermeneutic theology: the interpretative structure, transmission, mediation and, perhaps, the fallenness do not concern only the enunciation, the communication of God with man; the characterize the intimate life of God itself, which therefore cannot be conceived in terms of an immutable metaphysical plenitude" (Vattimo, "The Trace of the Trace," 88). If this were the case, Vattimo points out that then "revelation would merely be a 'subsequent' episode and an accident, a *quoad nos*." Given that Vattimo's weak thought concerning secularization centers on both the incarnation and Jesus' teachings, it is unlikely that he would reduce revelation to a mere accident. Vattimo also refers to, in *After Christianity*, the death of Pascal's God

satisfactory if critical thought wishes to present itself as the genuine interpretation of the religious need in society. Thus, this "need is not adequately satisfied by a straightforward recovery of 'metaphysical' religiousness, that is, by fleeing the confusions of modernization and the Babel of secularized society towards a renewed foundationalism."[59] The Torinese claims that we must react in the manner of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*; this overman is one who does not look to an other-worldliness because of a dissatisfaction with this world but instead meets new challenges as they arise. The *Übermensch* sets aside the principles by which he was raised and develops his own interpretation of the world. For Nietzsche, those who do not follow suit are condemning themselves to a condition of slavery, and for Vattimo, this is exactly what happens if we return to God as a metaphysical foundation.[60] If we do restore God as a metaphysical foundation, then we are simply returning to a condition that appeals only because it does not appear to be connected to the very condition that we wish to escape from. The reality is that this is merely a facade; it is no freer than the condition one wishes to shake off. If we return to God as a strong foundation, we are simply trying to escape metaphysics by recovering it in a former order.[61] For Vattimo, it is the dissolution of metaphysics has contributed to the

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of the philosophers. This is in contrast to the living God, the God of Jesus Christ, from whom the essence of Christianity is inseparable (see R. Guardini's, *Pascal for Our Time*).

[59] Vattimo, "The Trace of the Trace," 61. Vattimo, following in Heidegger's footsteps, maintains that "technology and the production of commodities increasingly configure the world as an artificial world . . . there is no longer a measuring-stick to distinguish the real from the 'invented'" (Vattimo, *Belief*, 31). The weakening of strong truths allows for the recovery, or return, of Vattimo's particular brand of Christianity.

[60] See Vattimo, 'The Trace of the Trace,' 82.

[61] For Vattimo, we should not return to a metaphysical God. "The kenosis that is the original meaning of Christianity signifies that salvation lie above all in breaking the identification of God with the order of the real world, in distinguishing God from (metaphysical) Being understood as objectivity, necessary rationality, foundation" (Gianni Vattimo, *A Farewell to Truth,* trans, William McCuaig [New York: Columbia University Press, 2011], 55).

rediscovery of religion, and it is "(only) because metaphysical meta-narratives have been dissolved that philosophy has rediscovered the plausibility of religion and can approach the religious need of common consciousness independently of the framework of Enlightenment critique."[62] For the Torinese, the dissolution of these metaphysical belief structures allows for the recovery of religion, as they no longer provide the over-arching framework of our beliefs.

5.2.2 Recovery and Hermeneutics

Vattimo claims that the recovery of religion in the present era is linked to the hermeneutics found within the Christian tradition. He argues that the Scriptures themselves are a mediated tradition, which allow for interpretation, and does not believe that these texts were ever meant to be static and unchangeable, given that they mark our religious experience. As they are handed down to us, through various generations and traditions, they are, in essence, hermeneutic. Given that the religious experience is at the heart of these texts, for Vattimo the Scriptures are actually an early indication of the recovery of religion. He claims that, currently, we are living the return of religion in terms of the Hebraic-Christian tradition and that our religious experience is marked by these very texts. "It is often said that religious experience is an experience of leave-taking. But if this is true, the journey undertaken is most likely one of return . . . In religion, something that we had thought irrevocably forgotten is

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[62] Vattimo, "The Trace of the Trace," 84. Here Vattimo draws on positivism, which is, in Western philosophy, generally any system that excludes metaphysics. Auguste Comte (1978-1857) is recognised as the founder of positivism. See also Gianni Vattimo, "Nihilism as Postmodern Christianity," in *Transcendence and Beyond: A Postmodern Inquiry,* eds. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 44-48.

made present again."[63] The Christian tradition is one of transmission and mediation; indeed, its very structure is interpretative. For Vattimo, the Trinity perfectly illustrates the hermeneutical structure of the Christian tradition. The Spirit assists the reader by breathing life into the religious texts, facilitating interpretation, and guiding the reader on their hermeneutical journey.[64] Any philosophy that calls, then, for the overcoming of metaphysics must recognize its relation to the Hebraic-Christian tradition, as its origin lies in this tradition. "The philosophy that responds to the call for the overcoming of metaphysics comes from the Hebraic-Christian tradition, and the content of its overcoming of metaphysics simply amounts to the maturing awareness of this provenance."[65] He is careful to note that the awareness of these religious origins does not mean that philosophy ought to abandon its own particular form and return to these origins, the reason being the Trinity, for the "Trinitarian God is not one who calls us to return to the foundation in the metaphysical sense of the word, but, in the New Testament expression, calls us rather to read the signs of the times."[66] He claims that as the Trinity focuses on the hermeneutical, the Christian tradition has rejected any metaphysical foundation. This rejection of metaphysics means that philosophy is not called to return to any particular foundation.

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[63] Ibid., 79.

[64] See Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 60.

[65] Vattimo, "The Trace of the Trace," 89. For Vattimo the weakening inherent in the incarnation allows for the overcoming of metaphysics. It is, he states, "God's abasement to the level of humanity," (Gianni Vatimo, *Belief*, 39) and, as such, calls for us to "read the signs of the times" rather than "return to the foundation in the metaphysical sense of the word" (Gianni Vattimo, "The Trace of the Trace," 90). See also Carmelo Dotolo, "The Hermeneutics of Christianity and Philosophical Responsibility," trans. Robert T. Valgenti, in *Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo,* ed. Santiago Zabala (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 348-368.

[66] Vattimo, "The Trace of the Trace," 90.

Vattimo draws on Max Weber's thought on the subject of capitalism, which provides a more practical application of hermeneutics to the religious experience. For Weber, the modern work ethic and orientation to success, which he calls the spirit of capitalism, has a religious origin. He claims that it originated within the Protestant tradition. According to Weber, the Protestant sects of the sixteenth and seventeenth century gave work and material success a central place in their lives, meaning that any discussion "of the spirit of capitalism's origins . . . must acknowledge this central religious source."[67] He admits that this is somewhat unusual today, given that we rarely examine human behaviour in terms of religion. Other factors, such as psychology, biology, and social class are more frequently used to explain human behaviour. If we are to understand others' actions, however, we must look at the cultural context behind them. and seek to "understand the activities of others contextually by referencing to the world in which they lived and the nature of their motives for acting."[68] While, for Weber, religion is not currently a powerful influence, this was not always the case. For example, Stephen Kalberg maintains that, if Weber were alive today, it is entirely possible that he would consider the characteristics of work-obsessed American society as "secularized legacies of ascetic Protestantism."[69] Indeed, Vattimo describes Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* as the fundamental text for a description of modernity as secularization.[70] For Vattimo, Weber has applied the hermeneutical character of Christianity to capitalism, whereby

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[67] Stephen Kalberg, "Introduction to the Protestant Ethic," in Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* trans. Stephen Kalberg (Los Angeles: Roxbury, 2002), xi.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid., xiii. Kalberg uses everyday expression as example to illustrate his point, such as working lunches, working vacations, and so forth.

[70] Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 45.

capitalism's relationship to Christian ethics "is one of interpretative application rather than abandonment or polemical opposition," and, according to Weber, "modern capitalism can be understood only as the outcome of the ethical principles of Protestantism."[71] This hermeneutical approach to capitalism may be viewed in the same light as Vattimo's understanding of secularization, focusing on the spiritual interpretation of the biblical message rather than a literal reading. An interpretative application of the biblical message "situates it beyond the strictly sacramental, sacral, or ecclesiastical realm."[72] Indeed, Vattimo claims that Weber's model of interpretative application may be extended and applied to the relationship between modernity and the Bible, as the sacred texts are central to Western hermeneutics.[73] The Bible has been "the most eminent textbook for all Western interpretations of the world, from the perspective of politics to that of family life, up to the natural sciences."[74] For Vattimo, secularization offers us the chance to recover religion, not as a strong foundation, but, rather, as one that focuses on the existential, allowing for reflection on the religious in terms of our human experience.

5.3 Vattimo's Spiritual Age

The final section of this chapter focuses on the model for Vattimo's particular brand of religious experience, namely, Joachim of Fiore. The mystic's Trinitarian division of history is central to Vattimo's understanding of secularization, particularly

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid. For more on Vattimo's thought concerning hermeneutics and politics, see Paolo Flores D'Arcais, "Gianni Vattimo, or rather, Hermeneutics as the Primacy of Politics," in *Weakening Philosophy*, ed. Santiago Zabala (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 250-269.

Joachim's Age of the Spirit. Given Vattimo's emphasis on hermeneutics, the question of limits arises. The section examines the philosopher's proposal that charity acts as this limit.

5.3.1 A Spiritual Model

Vattimo finds a model for living his particular religious experience in the work of the Calabrian abbot and mystic, Joachim of Fiore.[75] Originally a Cistercian, Joachim left to found his own order in the Calabrian mountains. He saw himself as a catalyst for the reform of the Church, with his monastic order as the forerunner of this reform. Joachim devised a Trinitarian model of time, which divided time into three ages, with each age corresponding to a person of the Trinity. The first age was that of God the Father, which began with Creation and continued throughout the Old Testament. Law, awe, and slavery marked this age. The second was the age of the Son, which was characterized by grace, filial slavery, and guilt. This age began with the incarnation and continued for the duration of the New Testament. Joachim believed that this age would end during his own time, which was around the twelfth century.

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[75] John M. Court, *Approaching the Apocalypse: A Short History of Christian Millenarianism* (London, GBR: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 73. According to John Court Joachim only converted to the spiritual life at the age of 34. He made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and in Jerusalem, at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, experienced a vision. Court says that 'an angel opened the text of the Apocalypse in front of him and sought to explain its meaning (72).' On his return from Jerusalem, Joachim joined the Cistercians and eventually became an abbot. George Tavard notes in his *Contemplative Church: Joachim and His Adversaries* that it was after the Easter of 1186 when Joachim left the Cistercians and decided to become a hermit. Joachim's life as a hermit was short-lived, as he unexpectedly gained several disciples. As a result, he set up his own monastic community in the Calabrian mountains. Although Tavard claims that the Cistercians were not best pleased with Joachim, he was very successful in his relations with those in power, both in Church and State. He had approval in his ventures from three popes, and he was also skilled in politics. Tavard notes that Joachim gained the protection of the Hohenstaufen dynasty, Henry VI became a benefactor, and Frederick II and Tancred de Hauteville (the Norman king of Sicily) were both generous towards Joachim's monastery.

The third age, marked by the Spirit, would be characterized by freedom and charity.[76] The third age would be a more perfect age, because as "the three divine Persons are one by nature and they always act together, so the two testaments must be complemented and perfected by a third, the yet unrevealed gospel of the Holy Spirit, which will necessarily be the last and eternal Gospel."[77] This third age was to be the final one, in keeping with the tripartite structure of the Trinity.

Joachim viewed history as a process of spiritualization.[78] It is due to this vision of history as a process of spiritualization that Joachim's third age is characterized by freedom and openness. Vattimo maintains that it is similar to the openness and freedom found in his own reading of the incarnation as a process of weakening. "There is an openness to the future implicit in the dogma of incarnation."[79] This

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[76] Vattimo writes in *After Christianity* (pp. 20-30) 'three are the stages of the world indicated by the sacred texts. The first is the stage in which we have lived under the law; the second is that in which we live under grace; the third is one in which we shall live in a more perfect state of grace . . . . The first passed in slavery; the second is characterized by filial slavery; the third will unfold in the name of freedom. The first is marked by awe, the second by faith, the third by charity . . . . The first period regards the slaves; the second regards the sons; the third regards the friends . . . . The first stage is ascribed to the Father, who is the author of all things; the second to the Son, who has been esteemed worthy to share our mud; the third to the Holy Spirit, of which the apostle says, "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."' Freedom is dependent on language; "discloses and reveals the reality of human beings, and to that extent makes them free." Not only do people speak because they have something to communicate, but also because they have something to be answered. Language also discloses "the reality of human beings as beings stamped by origin, tradition, society, and mediation, as historical beings." We are "indebted beings" as in order to learn how to speak we are introduced to various "relationships of belonging an communication." As freedom is dependent on speech, humankind is dependent on the freedom of speech; this is evident in the words spoken by various freedom movements, such as "the Reformation with Luther's words, 'On the Freedom of the Christian'; the French Revolution under the sign of 'Freedom, Equality, Fraternity' the Communist Manifesto: 'You have nothing to lose but your chains. Proletarians of all countries, unite!'" Heinrich Fries, *Fundamental Theology*, trans. Robert J. Daly, S.J. (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 220-221. Vattimo maintains that, philosophically, violence is the silencing of questions. See Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala, ""Weak Thought" and the Reduction of Violence: A Dialogue with Gianni Vattimo," *Common Knowledge* 8, no. 3 (2002): 452-463.

[77] George Tavard, *Contemplative Church: Joachim and his Adversaries*, 23-24.

[78] Ibid. See also David Newheiser, "Conceiving Transformation without Triumphalism: Joachim of Fiore Against Gianni Vattimo," *The Heythrop Journal* 55, no. 4 (2014): 650-662.

[79] Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 28.

freedom rests on the understanding of salvation history as an ongoing process. "We can speak of prophecies of the future only because salvation history remains unfulfilled."[80] For Vattimo, salvation history encompasses the hermeneutical process in which the Scriptures are spiritualized. The emphasis here is on the spiritual, rather than the literal. The history of salvation and the history of interpretation are, for Vattimo, very closely connected. Indeed, Joachim's teachings inject what Vattimo calls a 'historical rhythm' into divine life as "it is not scandalous to conceive biblical revelation as an ongoing history in which we are implicated."[81] An ongoing salvation history appeals to Vattimo, as, while it carries all the implications of God's action present in the world, it also means the continuation of the process of weakening that began in the incarnation. Due to the continuation of this process of weakening, revelation is hermeneutical rather than static and unchanging, where revelation is "the working out of the parable of the kenosis, the resolution of all claims into weakness— obviously sanctioning, in the process, the continual and unending reinterpretation of both the Bible and Christian doctrine."[82] Joachim's articulation of the Trinity in terms of history means that historicity, then, is constitutive of revelation.[83] It is this historicity that connects Vattimo's post metaphysical philosophy and Joachim's division of time, equating the end of metaphysics with the Calabrian abbot's third age, believing that both have the same event-like character. "The end of metaphysics

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[80] Ibid., 24, 31. For Vattimo, secularization occurs within the framework of religious history; Joachim's division of history according to the three Persons of the Trinity means that "historicity is constitutive of revelation" (*After Christianity* 31). Vattimo is particularly drawn to Joachim's teachings because, for Joachim, "salvation history is still in progress" (*After Christianity*, 29).

[81] Vattimo, *Belief*, 48.

[82] Guarino, *Vattimo and Theology* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 132.

[83] Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 31.

is an event that announces itself and demands to be recognized, promoted, and realized, or at least to be explicitly clarified as the guideline for our choices."[84] Joachim's third age has this same character, as it, like the end of metaphysics, is a reading of the signs of the times. This gives the third age the quality of freedom, as we are called to act in the spirit of revelation and interpretation.

Vattimo notes that other philosophers, such as Novalis, Schelling, and Schleiermacher, are also interested in Joachim's idea of an ongoing, historical salvation. These philosophers, he claims, are somewhat in line with his own way of thinking about Joachim of Fiore's Trinitarian division of history. Vattimo looks to Schelling, particularly to the German's collaborative work, *Aeltestes Systemprogramm des Deutschen Idealismus*.[85] He maintains that the tone of *Aeltestes* is similar to Joachim's, as it too announces the approach of a kingdom of freedom. "The advent of the kingdom of freedom that will be realized only on the basis of a 'sensible religion,' understood as the 'monotheism of the heart, the polytheism of the imagination and of art,' and the 'mythology of reason.'"[86] The work, for Vattimo, echoes the hermeneutic and interpretative character of Joachim's age of the Spirit. Although Joachim did not go quite as far in his work as *Aeltestes* did, given that it discussed the interpretation of sacred texts no longer being the sole domain of the clergy, the freedom inherent to *Aeltestes* is characteristic of the third age. Vattimo claims that the third age also has a contemplative character, given its emphasis on spiritualization. *Aeltestes*' emphasis on the aesthetic is in keeping with the third ages'

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[84] Ibid.

[85] Although this work is attributed to Hegel, Vattimo claims that it was a collaboration between Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin.

[86] Ibid., 33.

interpretative and contemplative character, where poetry, for example, "will reach a superior dignity, it will become in the end what it was in the beginning—the teacher of humanity."'[87] Novalis' essay, 'Christendom or Europe', also echoes Joachim's age of the spirit.[88] Vattimo maintains that it too emphasizes the idea of the spiritual interpretation of Scripture as "the choice for Catholicism against Protestantism echoes Joachim's tone to the extent that it is a choice against the strict literalism of the Bible."[89] Biblical literalism makes it difficult for the Spirit to do its work, and only from the ashes of the papacy and sectarianism Protestantism can a new, more intellectual religion spring forth. Vattimo admits that such a religion is, in part, his dream. He advocates a freer, more hermeneutical reading of Scripture, whereby the Bible should "not be interpreted literally, because each religious spirit should be able to write one of its own."[90]

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[87] Vattimo quotes Schelling in *After Christianity*, 33. According to Thomas Rohkrämer, for Schelling reason ought to "reveal a deeper, more human essence behind the scientific analysis of the natural world" (Thomas Rohkrämer, *A Single Communal Faith? The German Right From Conservatism to National Socialism* [New York: Berghahn Books, 2007], 40). He maintained that a purely scientific view of the world would promote discord; instead the aesthetic sphere would bring together the natural and human world in harmony.

[88] Novalis' political essay 'Christendom or Europe' was influenced by Schleiermachers' *Speeches on Religion* and appeared in 1799. According to Margaret Mahony Stoljar, "both the Reformation itself and modern philosophy, that is, the French-inspired philosophy of the late eighteenth century, are held by Novalis to be deficient in their pursuit of rational or literal knowledge at the expense of mystery or the supernatural" (Margaret Mahony Stoljar ed and trans., *Novalis: Philosophical Writing*s [Albany: State of New York University Press, 1997], 18). Novalis does, however, believe that this emphasis on reason has allowed a future where "poetry will open the door to all the riches of art and nature" (ibid). He is of the opinion that disciplines such as art, religion, philosophy, and science should work together since "if the golden age is to be realised then these discourses must flow together" (ibid, 19).

[89] Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 33.

[90] Ibid., 34. See also Teresa Oñate, "The Rights of God in Hermeneutical Postmodernity," trans. Ileana Szymanski, in *Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo,* ed. Santiago Zabala (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 369-386.

5.3.2 Charity as the Limit of Secularization

As Vattimo's view of secularization focuses on hermeneutics, the question of limits arises. Given the emphasis on the spiritual, rather than the literal reading of the Christian message, it is necessary to ask if there is any criteria that will allow us to determine what constitutes a legitimate view of the same. That criterion, he claims, is charity, or *caritas*, the love of humankind that is inherent to Christ's teachings.[91] He draws this criterion from the work of St. Augustine, from the precept 'dilige et quod vis fac' or 'love and do what you will.'[92] This injunction emphasizes the centrality of love within the Christian tradition and, as such, for Vattimo, acts as the only criterion on which to examine secularization.[93]

Vattimo maintains that the New Testament particularly stresses the importance of love, pushing us to recognize it as a supreme principle.[94] While acknowledging charity, the love of humankind, as a supreme principle may appear contradictory, given Vattimo's emphasis on the end of metaphysics and the dissolution of strong claims to truth, this is not the case. In part, it is due to his understanding of truth, which is based on weak thought. It is a truth that is not based on an objective reality but, instead, on a set of premises. "[If] we understand truth not as the correspondence of the mind with the thing (the faithful description of a state of affairs) but instead as

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[91] Erik Meganck, "God Returns as Nihilist Caritas: Secularization According to Gianni Vattimo," *Sophia* 54, no. 3 (2015): 363-379.

[92] *This precept is o*ften quoted as '*ama et fac quod vis*' and is found in *Epistolam Joannis ad Parthos* (ad 413) tractatus 7, sect. 8.

[93] Vattimo, *Belief*, 64.

[94] Ibid. See also Pierpaolo Antonello, "Introduction," in *Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue*, ed. Pierpaolo Antonello, 1-22, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010)

a plausibility and persuasiveness that is linked to a set of premises . . . we meet a phenomenon of weakening again."[95] Truth, then, is more a consensus than an objective reality, which, he claims, places charity at the heart of this understanding of truth. The centrality of charity, however, is partly due to his reading of Donald Davidson's work. Davidson's writings are concerned with a problem arising from interpretation, with regard to belief and meaning, whereby we cannot simply interpret the spoken word without ascribing a belief to it, or taking into account the person's mental state, and any accompanying gestures.[96] When we listen to others, then, Donaldson suggests that we must adopt an attitude of charity and keep two principles in mind.

> In listening to others speak we charitably assume two things: (1) that the speaker holds to be true what it is she says; and (2) that the speaker does indeed believe and mean by the words she uses what I the listener mean and believe by those same words.[97]

As we cannot know if we do indeed share the same beliefs or meanings as the other person, it is only through this attitude of charity that we may understand one another. "To charitably understand and live with one another is not necessarily to share meaning with others, but to assume that one can live with others despite any uncertainty that such sharedness exists."[98] Charity also invites us to think about the sharedness of the social world, as it allows us to set up a shared space in which interpretation takes place. It also acts as a constraint on the interpretation, as in order

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[95] Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 50.

[96] See Kathrïn Glüer, *Donald Davidson: A Short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[97] Jarett Zigon, "Narratives," in *A Companion to Moral Anthropology,* ed. Didier Fassin (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 217.

[98] Ibid.

to maintain the shared space there must be a certain degree of coherence between those involved.[99] Caritas, then, while acting as an ultimate principle is not truly ultimate. It is not truly ultimate as it does not have the same peremptory character of metaphysics. Vattimo suggests that, philosophically speaking, the violence is the silencing of all questioning that is characteristic of metaphysics.[100] Caritas cannot share this peremptoriness as it itself is an interpretation. For him, Jesus Christ himself is the interpretation of the Old Testament, revealing God's love for his creatures.[101] It is an infinite, never-ending process and, while love may be read as the ultimate meaning of revelation, it cannot be truly ultimate, given the hermeneutical nature of the Christian tradition.[102] Vattimo suggests then that, in this light, it is entirely possible to understand nihilism as being based on the Christian tradition, guided by and given meaning to by *kenosis*, in the sense of God's love.[103]

5.4 Conclusion

Vattimo's work focuses on the lived experience of religion. This chapter explored this through the Italian philosopher's understanding of myth. For him, given that we are in the era of the end of metaphysics, it is necessary to develop a new understanding of myth that will adequately reflect this. Indeed, philosophy must respect myth,

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[99] See Jarett Zigon, "Narratives," 217, and J.E. Malpas, *Donald Davidson and the Mirror of Meaning: Holism, Truth, Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 147.

[100] See Harmakaputra, Hans Abdiel. "Between Transcendence and Violence: Gianni Vattimo and René Girard on Violence in a Secular Age." *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 23, no. 1 (2016): 117-136.

[101] Vattimo, *Belief*, 64. Emphasis original.

[102] Ibid., 65.

[103] Ibid., 64.

allowing its meaning to come to light. Currently, he claims that modern philosophy lacks a satisfactory theory of myth, as these theories are still enmeshed in a metaphysical framework. Thus, a new theory must be developed that adequately reflects myth in light of the dissolution of metaphysics. The same, he suggests, may be said for religion, where he focuses on the hermeneutic structure of the Christian tradition, which reflects the importance of the lived experience of religion. The chapter explored the re-presentation of religion in the light of the current conditions of existence, examining the two primary forms that mark the return.

The final parts of the chapter centred on charity. The mystic, Joachim of Fiore's work is significant for Vattimo, as the abbot's Trinitarian division of time underpins the Italian philosopher's understanding of secularization; in particular, Joachim's Age of the Spirit, which is characterized by freedom and charity. Due to the emphasis that Vattimo places on hermeneutics, the chapter turned then to the question of limits. The answer, for him, lies in charity, the love of humanity inherent to Christ's teachings. Charity also invites us to think about the sharedness of the world while also allowing for a plurality of interpretations.

Chapter Six

Ontology and Aesthetics: The Opening Up of a World

6.0 Introduction

Vattimo's work is underpinned by his interest in aesthetics. During the 1960s he taught aesthetics in the University of Turin, while actively publishing on Nietzsche, Heidegger, and aesthetics. The seeds of his thought concerning weak thought and the religious can be found in these early texts. His volume, *Art's Claim to Truth*, may be read, not only as Vattimo's thought concerning aesthetics, but as the groundwork for his later writings regarding the postmetaphysical. This chapter focuses on Vattimo's views of aesthetics, while, at the same time, connecting this to some of the themes explored earlier in this thesis. Much of this chapter rests on Vattimo's understanding of Heidegger. Indeed the first section focuses on the relationship between philosophy and ontology, which is examined here through the lens of the aesthetic. This section, too, is built on the foundation of the ontological difference.

I will consider a number of issues that are increasing concerns in contemporary culture. Cultural tourism and the manner in which we encounter works of art in both Church and museum spaces provide important insight in relation to the division and use of such spaces and to the current relationship between art and religion. This discussion leads to the question of secularization as the destiny of art. Indeed, Vattimo claims that the roots of the idea of art as secularized religion may be found in the work of Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin. This exploration of the destiny of art gives rise to a discussion concerning the eschatological character of art. There is an openness to the future inherent in art, which Vattimo likens to prophecy. This is not something that engenders a peaceful or harmonious disposition, but, rather,

something that disturbs us and unsettles our everyday reality. For Vattimo, the artwork does not act as a definitive truth, a faithful representation of reality, but, instead, is a message that calls for a response. This is explored through the work of the artist Alfredo Jaar.

6.1 Ontological Aesthetics

This section considers the relationship between philosophy and aesthetics through an ontological lens. It examines some of the philosophical positions concerning aesthetics, while paying attention to the ontological difference. Vattimo draws on Hegel's thought on the death of art, and explores its relation to poetics. Given that the artwork requires a degree of comprehensibility, I will next turn to the role of language. Finally, this section concludes with Vattimo's understanding of Heidegger's thought concerning the setting-into-work of truth, exploring the work as the opening up of a world.

6.1.1 Aesthetics and Ontology

Vattimo discusses the relationship between philosophy and aesthetics through an ontological prism. For him, the ontological difference is crucial to the discussion. As I have discussed earlier in this thesis, the ontological difference is the difference between beings and Being, or, rather, entities and the existence of these entities. One particular aspect of the ontological difference that Vattimo claims that is necessary to pay attention to in this discussion is the *epoché*. In Heidegger's case—at least in Vattimo's reading—the *epoché* is to be read in light of the ontological difference, where it is the character by which Being reveals and conceals itself simultaneously in permitting beings to appear. There is a simultaneous giving and retreating at play. For

Heidegger, the key insight is the emphasis on difference, where being can never be confused with Being.

> The *epoché* is the character by which Being reveals and conceals itself simultaneously in the appearing of beings, or things and persons that inhabit the world . . . Being both *makes* and *lets* beings appear: one could say that Being makes place for them.[1]

It is necessary to pay attention to the ontological difference as Vattimo is concerned that such a description may give suggest the image of an actual place, where Being withdraws to in order to allow beings to appear. His fear is that such an idea would continue to confuse the issue by giving the impression that Being is, in fact, an entity and he wishes to emphasize that this is not the case. Having said that, the *epoché* does have significance not only on the level of the spatial, but also on the temporal. "Being withdraws itself and lets beings distend themselves within time. So there is authentic history only insofar as Being is always yet to come."[2] This means that history is only possible due to the epochal character of Being; "it is through Being's withdrawal that there is history, possibility, future, and so on."[3] Against the background of these

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[1] Gianni Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, ed. Santiago Zabala, trans. Luca D'Isanto (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 14. Emphasis original.

Vattimo notes that Heidegger's understanding of the *epoché* should not be read in the precise sense as in Husserl's phenomenology. According to Dermot Moran, for Husserl, the epoch requires the phenomenologist to move away from assumptions. These assumptions are those that we make about the world which are "deeply embedded in our everyday behaviour towards objects and also at work in our most sophisticated natural science." This ought to uncover a new domain of experience, which provides the "only genuine access to the infinite subjective domain of inner experience." Its focus is not on the natural world around us, but on consciousness instead; "to get it to yield up its secrets as to how the world and its meanings are constituted." In order to do this, Husserl believed that we need to bracket, or suspend, "certain fundamental structures" which allows "more basic objectifying acts of consciousness to become visible in themselves." This, Husserl maintained, "is a first step to laying bare the essence of the act, for example what precisely it *means* to perceive something, remember something, imagine something, and so on." In other words, any proper description comes from a first person point of view; we describe the item through our experience of it. (Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* [London: Routledge, 2000], 147-149).

[2] Ibid., 15.

[3] Ibid.

ontological concerns, Vattimo turns to aesthetics.[4] He considers the understanding of aesthetics as a reflection on the structure and value for human life of the experiences that put us in touch with "works of art" or the 'beautiful' to be problematic.[5] "It [aesthetic discourse] concerns the structure and value of aesthetic experience *überhaupt*, without attempting to modify, evaluate, or produce this or that experience in particular."[6] It is clear that here aesthetic discourse is not the same as a discourse on the arts (or criticism) in the conventional sense.

He begins by critiquing the foundational metaphysical mindset by contrasting Aristotle and Plato and their understandings of the "foundational ideal of knowledge."[7] In Plato's thought, he claims that there is an awareness of the ontological difference that is lacking in Aristotle's. Aristotle provided the definitive meaning of the foundational ideal of knowledge, in that we have knowledge of a thing only when we have understood its cause or its "why": "To know means knowing the causes."[8] The Aristotelian understanding survived, permeating Western philosophy and contemporary thought at the expense of ontology and of the Platonic understanding of the same.[9] Vattimo identifies certain foundational mindsets that have

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[4] See Georg Bertram, "In Defence of a Hermeneutic Ontology of Art." *Tropos: Rivista Di Ermeneutica e Critica Filosofica* 9, no. 1 (2016): 11-24.

[5] Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 15.

[6] Ibid. *Überhaupt* here means 'in the first place.'

[7] Ibid., 16. Foundationalism holds that it is possible to justify belief by reference to other beliefs. For a more thorough look at foundationalism, as per Plato and Aristotle, see Terence Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) and Franco Trabattoni, *Essays on Plato's Epistemology* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2016).

[8] Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 16. For more on Aristotle's understanding of knowledge, see David Bronstein, *Aristotle on Knowledge and Learning: The Posterior Analytics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[9] Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 17

continued to survive within contemporary philosophy and aesthetics. He admits, however, that his scheme may not be complete or historically accurate. There is, for example, a prevalent Hegelian mindset in philosophical aesthetics, especially relating to dialectics and totality.[10] For Vattimo, this Hegelian mindset still pervades aesthetics, even if it is unconsciously so. It is evident in the 'dialecticizing' of art, whereby the reality always refers to some sort of totality.

> Aesthetics always presents itself to a lesser or greater extent as the 'dialecticizing' of art; in other words, aesthetics makes it its task to understand and explain art by placing art in relation with the general structure of spirit, history, society, the evolution of styles, languages, and so on.[11]

The dialectical attitude relies on a foundation, on some form of ultimate authority, that acts as a point of reference. A being, or, indeed, even an experience, is known in relation to such a totality.[12]

For Vattimo, another mindset that falls into the category of being foundationalist is neo-Kantianism. It is, he claims, yet another foundationalist attitude that fails adequately to address ontology. In this case, the foundation is a transcendental one.[13]

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[10] "The dialectical principle, for Hegel, is the principle whereby apparently stable thoughts reveal their inherent instability by turning into their opposites and then into new, more complex thoughts, as the thought of being turns first into the thought of nothing and then into the thought of becoming" (Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History* [Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005], 38)." Although appearing to be a contradiction, we see examples of this type of thought in everyday usage, particularly in proverbs such as 'pride comes before a fall'" (G.W. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, eds E. Moldenhauer and K.M. Michel, vol III, (Frankfurt: SuhrkampVerlag, 1969ff), 175, in Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History* [Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005], 39). With regard to totality, for Hegel only the whole is true, however it is necessary to incorporate each stage of the thought process in order to understand the whole.

[11] Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 18.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 19.

While this mindset appears to be less fixed within a metaphysical framework, this is in fact not the case.

It is "a systematic presentation of the different activities of man, each of which is referred back to its own a priori, to the direction of consciousness."[14] Because of its continued emphasis on consciousness, neo-Kantianism views aesthetics in a transcendental light. "In this view, aesthetics is understood as a transcendental description of the structure of the experience of the beautiful and of art, its realm of possibility insofar as it is the identification of the dimension of consciousness in which it is actualized."[15] It is similar to Hegelianism in that the focus, again, is on self-consciousness.[16]

For Vattimo, the foundationalist attitudes within contemporary philosophy fail to take into consideration adequately the ontological difference. Rather, the ontological difference ought to take a central place in both philosophical and aesthetic thought.

> As aesthetics it should place at the center of its inquiry a consideration of the problem of art, but as a philosophical aesthetic—and precisely as philosophy—it should keep in mind the central philosophical question of the relation, and difference, between Being and beings.[17]

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 19.

[16] See Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 18. Vattimo maintains that phenomenology retains the traces of the Kantian mindset, showing that modern philosophy contains, what he considers to be, the rigid transcendental qualities of the Kantian programme. It is due to Husserl and his followers that an attempt to radicalize Kant came about. Even though Husserl disagreed with Kant in some respects, Vattimo considers that in the foundational sense, that this does not offer an alternative to neo-Kantianism as long as it follows Kantian thought; the ontological difference is once again forgotten. It also functions as "a ground from which the definite forms of experience originate." Vattimo suggests that this can be seen in phenomenology's treatment of art, particularly in Mikel Dufrenne's work. The French philosopher and aesthetician explores the links between phenomenology and art, while remaining faithful to his roots in the work of Sartre, Heidegger, and Husserl (Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 18).

For more on Dufrenne, see Edward S. Casey, "Mikel Dufrenne" in *The Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*, eds. Hans Rainer Sepp, Lester Embree (Springer: New York, 2010), 84.

He returns to the *epoché* to develop this argument in favour of the centrality of the ontological difference. For him, the *epoché* is key to a positive reading of the relationship between Being and beings. "Being is *not*, except as *epoché*: if you will, Being is nothing but its history, its epoch . . . Being is the illumination of the realm in which beings appear."[18] While Being is revealed through *epoché*, that is through its history, it is necessary to keep in mind that any comparison or investigation of different epochs cannot reveal Being to us. This would imply that being is an entity, an actual being, capable of discovery as if it actually existed just outside of our world, waiting for us to find it.[19] As Being is not such a thing, it is interpretation that holds the key to gaining access to it. "If interpretation holds knowledge of the epoch, and therefore of beings, it is the only possible path of access to Being. And it is an authentic path of access to Being to the extent that Being, not reduced to beings, does not stand outside or above the epoch."[20] Rather than a structure or foundation, Being is an event and as such is always originating.[21] It is as event that the very essence of human beings is grasped. This means that, as such, any exploration of Being must look to the ways in which beings occur as opposed to seeking an ultimate foundation.

> Genuine philosophical discourse is given always and only where the character of openness and ulteriority belonging to Being appears as such, whether in the transcendental descriptions of a certain field of experience or in the more specific discourse around a determinate work.[22]

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[17] Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 21.

[18] Ibid., 23. Emphasis original.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., 27.

Philosophy and aesthetics, then, must look to experience as a path of access to Being. Aesthetics, Vattimo claims, must be understood in light of the *epoché* in the sense that they too are a part of the way in which Being occurs in our world and, as a result, can be understood as a mode of being of art in the present epoch of Being. "They are themselves part of the region of beings that is to be understood ontologically."[23] Given that art is one of the paths of access to Being, it offers a vast array of approaches, be it through reflection on a particular artwork, through poetics, criticism, and so on. Thus, we may say, that ontological aesthetics is a cultural philosophy and its task is to explore the path of access to Being that art offers.

6.1.2 Ontology and Poetics

Vattimo takes a particular interest in the philosophical problem of poetics. Poetics is the study of literature, which operates on the basis of the assumption that a literary work possesses characteristics that can be studied in order to classify it.[24] By examining the text itself, it is possible to conduct a scientific study in order to identify and classify the texts' characteristics.[25] Vattimo maintains that because of the emphasis on identification and classification, that there is an aesthetic problem inherent to poetics. In our present century there has been a particular blossoming of poetics, which goes back to the Romantic movement of the late nineteenth century. This blossoming has prevailed over the production of works. "It is not so much the case of poetics serving us to better understand and evaluate the works as it is that the

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[23] Ibid., 25.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

works are nothing but provisional examples of 'programs' that claim to be held and recognized as such."[26] This problem, he proposes, may be examined from two perspectives. First, its representation of the arts and, secondly, the philosophical significance of the portrayal. "First, it concerns the meaning of poetics as a general characteristic of the art world in our century; second, it concerns the value and philosophical bearing of their content and statements."[27] In order to explore the problems that he has identified, the Italian philosopher approaches them by using Hegel's concept of the death of art as a basis for his exploration. The Hegelian understanding of the end, or death, of art is rooted in the secularization of art, which was brought about by the Reformation and particularly associated with the development of romantic art.[28] The increasing secularization of art means that it is unable to fulfil the same functions in modernity as it did previously. During the Middle Ages, for example, icons and other artworks were used as a doorway to the sacred in order to render the divine visible. After the Reformation, however, art is no longer used in veneration in that traditional way because it has become secularized. In its detachment from religion, art no longer fulfils this earlier function. "Art considered in its highest vocation is and remains for us a thing of the past" (*Aesthetics* 1:11)."[29] Art is no longer an integral part of religious life since its relation to the transcendent has changed. "No matter how excellent we find the statues of the Greek gods, no matter how we see God the Father, Christ, and Mary so estimably and

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[26] Gianni Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 30.

[27] Ibid.,31.

[28] For further reading, see David James, *Art, Myth and Society in Hegel's Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2009).

[29] Alan Speight, *The Philosophy of Hegel* (Stocksfield: Acumen Publishing Ltd, 2008), 112.

perfectly portrayed: it is no help; we bow the knee no longer."[30] As regards to poetics, Vattimo claims that we may only speak of the death of art "if the Hegelian expression is taken in all its weight and therefore if the contemporary situation of art is placed into a historicist and idealist frame of interpretation."[31] Outside of this interpretative framework, the phrase the 'death of art' has only a generic sociological meaning that might generate misunderstanding.[32] Hegel maintains that art still had a future, when one acknowledges a change in the function of art rather than simply pointing to its decline.[33] Similarly, poetics may be seen both as an indication of the death of art and as an attempt to save art. "They [poetics] are an indication of the ways in which art has sought and still seeks to defend itself from that death."[34] For Vattimo, poetics may be understood as an attempt to rescue art, given that art was threatened by its lack of self-consciousness, or, in other words, by a lack of philosophical or self-reflection.[35] From this perspective, he maintains, Hegelian and post-Hegelian philosophy have not been capable of doing justice to art.[36] Through the means of

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[30] Ibid. Stephen Houlgate notes that the emancipation of art from religion came at a cost; "the emancipation of the secular and the human in art marks the liberation of art itself from religion. But this autonomy is acquired at a price, Hegel believes, because in being separated off from religion art loses its equality with religion as the full revelation of the highest truth. In gaining its freedom from religion, therefore, art also discovers its own limitations" (Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History* [Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005], 237).

[31] Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 31.

[32] Ibid.

[33] For more, see Jason Gaiger, "Catching Up With History: Hegel and Abstract Painting" in *Hegel: New Directions*, ed. Katerina Deligiorgi (*n.p.*: Acumen, 2006; reprint, Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 160.

[34] Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 32.

[35] Ibid., 32.

[36] Ibid.

poetics, the artists' need to defend themselves and their art is, he claims, is an opposition to the death of art. Vattimo goes beyond the limitations of Hegel's hypothesis, choosing to apply it to social structures in his exploration of the philosophical problem posed by poetics. In this light, the death of art now refers to the artists' social condition in the nineteenth century, which significantly changes the way in which poetics are understood. "The poetics . . . are more concretely the ways in which artists, confronted with a new social position that had never before been experienced, seek to give meaning to this situation and to give a meaning to themselves in it."[37] He turns to the industrial revolution in order to further elaborate this point. The industrial revolution and the advent of mass society marked a shift, not only in society, but also in the relationship between the artist and the public. There is a certain loss of direct contact with a limited and well-known public and, against this, the acquaintance of a much wider public, albeit anonymous and removed.[38] Not only that, but whereas art was generally commissioned in the past, now, with the shifting social landscape, the artist was left to draw on himself or herself for inspiration. "In sum, the artist has lost a clearly defined social condition and has not yet acquired a new one in turn."[39] The artist is now connected to a much more extensive and more anonymous horizon than was traditionally the case. The social

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[37] Ibid., 33.

[38] Ibid. In general, the industrial revolution in the 19th century marked a period of rapid social change. Instead of small scale, domestic production, large factories sprang up, which sparked mass-migration; cities grew and the landscape altered significantly; not only with factories dotting the horizon, but agriculture went into decline as it was no longer the main industry. Artists too were affected by the changes. As Vattimo points out, commissioned art, which had been popular in the preceding eras, was frowned upon by the romantics; "the romantic artist already is an artist abandoned to himself, who generally has no commissioner in the traditional sense of the term; who has no specific, precise, or given demands to which he must respond; and who must seek solely within himself, within his own personality, the inspiration, the source, and rules of his own art" (Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 33).

[39] Ibid., 33.

figure of the 'integrated' artist (i.e. belonging to the whole) is replaced by the bohemian artist, who is a figure of transition in the first 'industrialization' of art. [40] Today the process of industrialization has been fulfilled so that the figure of the bohemian artist has been overtaken, and the figure of the integrated artist has returned, though as a figure that has been integrated into the world of mass communication: the press, cinema, radio, and television.

Vattimo continues his exploration by examining the role that language plays in relation to poetics. "What holds sway over the twentieth-century artist is not so much the problem of his own relationship to the world as it is that of his means of expression (or if anything the former mediated by the latter)."[41] He stresses the importance of the relationship between the non-linguistic arts and language. An example would be a concert, where patrons are provided with an explanatory pamphlet about the music that they are about to hear. Criticism then acts as a mediator between the arts and language by interpreting the symbols produced by the artists so that the masses may understand and appreciate them. This leads in turn to a rapid production of new symbols as criticism allows them to be absorbed at a swifter pace. Without the explanations that criticism offers, this process would take much longer. Afterall, "artwork needs a realm of comprehensibility in order to be understood and enjoyed."[42] This means further that language is central with regard to poetics and ontology. "The salient outcome of twentieth century poetics would be a re-ontologization of art through the affirmation of the originally ontological, founding

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[40] See ibid., 33.

[41] Ibid., 34.

[42] Ibid 37.

function of language."[43] The artwork serves as a point of departure, as a pathway of human experience through which we may access Being anew. It means that poetics defends the ontological bearing of art in refusing "to see and practice art as a disinterested activity beyond true and false, good and evil, and so on, or as an activity that could appear to be true only once unmasked, demythologized, and relativized by reflection."[44] It is through human experience, through history and our ways of relating to it that we access Being.[45]

6.1.3 The Setting-into-Work of Truth

In his exploration of aesthetics, Vattimo turns to Heidegger's thought concerning the work of art as the setting into work of truth. He claims that the setting-into-work of truth is connected to the decline of art. "What we experience in the moment of the decline of art is describable in terms of the Heideggerean notion of the work of art as the 'setting-into-work of truth.'"[46] The setting-into-work of truth has, for Vattimo "the same pregnant meaning as the Italian expression "putting a building to work" (*messa in opera di una construzione*), where the meaning is that it has been put in a condition to function."[47] In other words, the work of art must actually work or have some effect. If it does not, then it is not actually an artwork, but only has the potential

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[43] Ibid., 55.

[44] Ibid., 42.

[45] Ibid., 42.

[46] Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 60. Vattimo draws on two of Heidegger's essays, "The Essence of Truth," and "The Origin of the Work of Art" for his exploration of aesthetics and the setting into work of truth.

[47] Gianni Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 152.

to be one.[48] What the artwork does is open up a world that is, at the same time, both true and new: "the work opens a new 'epoch' of being as an originary event, which cannot be reduced to what it already was, and it grounds a new order of relationships within beings, a true and actually new world."[49] The 'new' is in the sense of our relation to the entities that surround us; they themselves are not new, but are given to us in a new light which allows us to see them for other than what they were.[50] The work, however, is only effective under certain conditions. "A work is in actual effect as a work only when we remove ourselves from our commonplace routine and move into what is disclosed by the work, so as to bring our own nature itself to take a stand in the truth of what is."[51] We allow the work to work and to be effective as a work, when we allow ourselves to step out of the everyday, the ordinary, and into the light of what the work discloses.

The nature of poetry, for Heidegger, is the founding of truth. 'Founding' here may be understood in the threefold sense of bestowing, grounding, and beginning. "Heidegger identifies three stages in the setting-forth of this founding truth: founding as bestowing, founding as grounding, and founding as beginning."[52] Karsten Harries

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[48] See Julian Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 51. "To be, in the full sense, an art*work*, the work must 'work', that is, to be effective . . . If it is not yet received then it does not yet 'work' — it lacks a 'work-being . . .and is at best a potential artwork. (If it *no longer* 'works', if it has 'passed over into the realm of tradition and conservation', then it is, presumably, like John Cleese's ex-parrot, an *ex*-artwork)." Emphasis original.

[49] Gianni Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 152.

[50] Karsten Harries, *Art Matters: A Critical Commentary on Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art"* (New York: Springer, 2009), 169. For more on the non-concealment of art, see Joseph J. Kockelmans, *Heidegger on Art and Art Works* (The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985), 191. For Heidegger, non-concealment is synonymous with truth, see Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1978).

[51] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1978), 129.

remarks on the three meanings:

> Key here is the term "founding," which translates *stiften*, which in turn is understood as *schenken* (bestowing), *gründen* (grounding), and *anfangen* (beginning). To understand the meaning of *stiften*, we may want to think of the religious or educational context, in which the word "foundation," *Stiften*, has an obvious home. It is not difficult to make sense here of Heidegger's triple sense of founding: such a foundation depends on a gift, a bestowal of an endowment; this endowment establishes something, say an institution; and this establishment is the beginning of something that has its own history.[53]

The first aspect is bestowing or gifting, which marks the work of art as an original creation. "The truth that discloses itself . . . can never be derived from anything else. Thus the founding of the truth has the character of an overflow, an endowing, a gift."[54] It is also a gift because it is not the creation of an artwork by one person for that one person alone, but, rather, it is projected towards others.

The second aspect is grounding, which orients the still emerging truth towards the future. "Truth is thrown toward a people that, in history, come to preserve it."[55] In this the preservation of a work is important. It is necessary in order for it to come into being and those who preserve it are not just individuals but make up a whole culture.[56] In order for the artwork to work, it requires the preservers. It must be communally received and, in doing so, brings an entire culture together. In order to illustrate this opening up and grounding of a world, Heidegger uses the example of a

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[52] Joshua Reeves and Ethan Stoneman, "Heidegger and the Aesthetics of Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 47, no. 2 (2014): 148. 137-157.

[53] Karsten Harries, *Art Matters*, 174-175.

[54] Joseph J. Kockelmans, *Heidegger on Art and Art Works* (The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985), 191.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Julian Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 51.

Greek temple. "It is the temple-work that first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being."[57]

The third aspect is beginning. It is, in a sense, a founding which retains its connection to the historical as origin.

> Every beginning of art is thus an irruption within being of a new and emergent world. This world, along with the poetry that founds it, is historical, endowing the ground with everything it will call future people to preserve; it is the origin both of art and of a community's historical existence.[58]

It is the transformation of a potential community into a living one, united by a common project. The artwork transforms the community by making this shared project possible; the people appropriate a heritage, which determines their culture, their current situation, and their destiny.[59] Indeed, when each beginning occurs, there is an unconcealment of beings. Heidegger remarks: "at each time there happened unconcealment of beings. Unconcealment sets itself into work, a setting which is accompanied by art."[60] The artwork does not just open up a world, but preserves and brings together an entire culture. This is only established if there is an openness, which takes a stand against everything that would destroy it, fixing truth in place in the figure, or, in other words, in in the self-establishment of the community.[61] Each

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[57] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 106.

[58] Joshua Reeves and Ethan Stoneman, "Heidegger and the Aesthetics of Rhetoric," 148.

[59] Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art*, 55.

[60] Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 131.

[61] See Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. & trans. Julian Young & Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1-56.

time a beginning occurs a new world irrupts, and, each time, history starts over with a potential community transformed into a living one.

Continuing his exploration of the nature of poetry as the founding of truth, Vattimo turns to Heidegger's essay on 'The Nature of Language.'[62] In this essay, Heidegger comments on Stefan George's poem "*The Word*."[63] Towards the end of the essay, Heidegger 'edits' a line of text in the poem. The line originally reads as "*Kein Ding sei wo das Wort gebricht*' ('where the word breaks no thing may be')."[64] Heidegger re-does the line, changing it to read, "'*Ein "ist" ergibt sich wo das Wort zerbricht*' ('an "is" arises where the word breaks up')."[65] Vattimo points out that "it no longer means 'no thing is where there is no word,' but rather 'an 'is' occurs where the word fails."[66] He believes that Heidegger makes no claim here for an occurrence of Being 'in person' outside the mediation of language. The connection between the setting-into-work of truth and poetry is made through Heidegger's understanding of truth as event. "Truth is not a metaphysically stable structure but an event."[67] Inaugural events, for Heidegger, occur primarily through the medium of language. "It is primarily in language that the originary familiarity with the world unfolds, which constitutes the non-transcendental, always historically finite and 'situated' condition of the possibility of experience."[68] Heidegger's term for our being in the world,

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[62] Martin Heidegger, "The Nature of Language," in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 57-108.

[63] Ibid., 60.

[64] Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 65. The poem is printed in full in Heidegger's essay.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid., 75-76.

Dasein is equivalently the disclosure of being, which is sited in, what Vattimo calls, a "horizon' of language."[69] It is this horizon of language that permits us to speak of truth, and poetics is a privileged instance in the occurrence of truth. The horizon marks the context in which something can be understood. Take for example a sign. After asking what a particular sign means, and finding out, for example, that it is a road sign, we now know that it belongs within a particular horizon.[70] That horizon is the activity of driving a car.[71] The horizon permits us to access the thing, as it provides us with a meaning so that we may understand. "What we call poetry are the inaugural events in which the historical/*geschicklich* horizons of experience of particular historical human beings are instituted."[72] Vattimo links the inaugurality of the work to the shattering of the poetic word as exemplified in the prophetic word. The prophetic word figures an alternative world with regard to which the existing order is revealed in its injustice and inauthenticity. And yet, the poetic word itself shatters and fails in the sense that it reinstates the representational relation between word and things. "The poetic word is destined to shatter just as the prophetic word does at the moment in which the prophecy is 'realized.'"[73] The inaugural significance of poetry is the founding of historical worlds, and it has the same characteristics as representational language. "It is consumed and shattered in referring to the things,

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[68] Ibid., 66.

[69] Ibid.

[70] See Philip Tonner, *Heidegger, Metaphysics and the Univocity of Being* (London: Continuum, 2010), 67.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 66.

[73] Ibid., 68.

when the thing is (now) made present."[74] Language, then, makes things appear; it shows or unconceals.[75]

Vattimo maintains that there are certain criteria to be met if the work of art can be a setting-into-work of truth. "Precisely because it is an event, truth can occur only in that shattering of the word which is monumentality, formula, and the faint light of the *Lichtung*."[76] In order to explore monumentality, formula, and the *Lichtung*, we must first turn to Heidegger's concept of the fourfold. Language here that which permits showing or appearing. "'To make appear', particularly in the sense of making each thing be reflected in the mirror-game of the fourfold."[77] The fourfold is Heidegger's formal structuring of the world in which one dwells. It is composed of earth and sky, mortals and divinities: "the first pair in the foursome, earth and sky, stands for natural elements, and the second pair, mortals and divinities, stands for cultural elements."[78] This is not a scientific account of the material world, but a poetic one. "The poet's whole attitude . . . demands that we are to think of what is called man's existence by way of the nature of dwelling . . . we are to think of the nature of poetry as a letting dwell."[79] Poetry, then, is a way of bringing the fourfold forth into

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[74] Ibid., 68.

[75] Ibid., 69. *Lichtung* here might be translated as a (forest) clearing, and is derived from the verb *lichten*, which originally meant 'to make light' (as in light, not heavy).

[76] Ibid., 76. *Lichtung* allows for both concealment and unconcealment, as it denotes a clearing, which is open to the light but ringed by darkness (such as, for example, the denser growth of the trees surrounding such a clearing).

[77] Ibid., 68. The mirroring allows each of the fourfold to belong with one another, instead of simply being a reflection of themselves, it allows other things to be present.

[78] Siby K. George, *Heidegger and Development in the Global South* (New Delhi: Springer, 2015), 234.

[79] Robert Mugerauer, *Heidegger and Homecoming: The Leitmotif in the Later Writings* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 415.

presence. We can see the importance and centrality of language here as it is in language that the elements of the fourfold are held together and appear or dwell. "Saying is given primarily as local saying; local, place-bound saying is the site where home is first given and where, at last, we might become at home . . . *Home is in dialect*."[80] Language, then, gathers a world together. Indeed, for Vattimo, we access Being through language. "It has to do with summoning, a summons that comes to me not just from words but from a lived tradition that I assimilate, recognize, and live out within language."[81] Language, then, is to be understood with Heidegger as the dwelling place of Being.

The idea of dwelling is itself connected to mortality. Our dwelling ends with death which is the mark of our mortality, and in dwelling we initiate our own nature. "In the mode of dwelling mortals . . . become mortals through their acceptance and recognition of death."[82] Heidegger further connects death with language using animals as a counterexample. Animals are unable to speak and, therefore, are incapable of experiencing death in the same way as humans. The experience of death is unique to human beings.[83] It is the possibility of non-existence that links Dasein to nothing (or mystery). It is in this mystery that the shattering of the word finds an exact point of reference. "The shattering of the word in originary saying and in poetry . . .

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[80] Ibid., 421. Emphasis original.

[81] Gianni Vattimo, *The Responsibility of the Philosopher* ed., Franca D'Agostini, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 92-93.

[82] R. Raj Singh, *Heidegger, World, and Death* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2013), 134.

[83] In contrast to humankind, animals lack the awareness of death that humans have. Singh points out that for them death is simply the cessation of life. They do not have the awareness that they are inevitably headed towards death. Secondly, they cannot contemplate their existence in terms of death; they can reflect neither on its implications, nor on its possibility. See R. Raj Singh, *Heidegger, World, and Death* page 136.

must . . . be understood as being defined by its relation to the constitutive mortality of Dasein."[84] Existence is always marked by death, and the shattering of the word that allows the 'is' is linked to mortality as the 'is' is always found in the earthly dimension of the fourfold. Vattimo draws again on Heidegger's essay, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in which he speaks about the relationship between the earth and the Greek temple. The world (*Welt*), for Heidegger, is the system of meaning which are understood as they unfold in the work (of art). Over against this, the earth (*erde*) is that element of the work which comes forth as ever concealing itself anew. It is akin to a core or nucleus that is never used up by interpretations of exhausted by new meaning. The earth is the dimension which in the work connects the world (as a system of meanings) to its 'other'; namely *physis* or nature. It is both earth and *physis* together that makes the work of art the setting-into-work of truth. The work of art is a setting-into-work of truth because "in it the opening up of a world as a context of referrals—like a language—is permanently connected to the earth as the 'other' of the world."[85] The earth has for Heidegger the features of *physis*, which is defined by birth, growth, and death.[86] "Poetry can be defined as that language in which a world

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[84] Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 69.

[85] Ibid., 63.

[86] Bret W. Davis, *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2014), 63. "*Physis* names the self-generating bringing forth of living things, but also names the presencing by virtue of which such things come into appearance within a world. *Physis*, then, is not only generative, but disclosive. *Physis* brings forth the humans necessary to disclose what *physis* brings forth. The self-producing dimension of *pysis* at work in living things resists the intrusions of the disclosive dimensions of *physis* at work through human existence. The producing done by humans is radically dependent on both aspects of *physis*: the self-producing aspect involved in the emergence of things of the earth, on the one hand, and the disclosive aspect involved in letting those things appear with a world. The name for *physis* in human existence is *poiesis*: the disclosiveness (art in its broadest sense) which makes bringing-forth (producing of all kinds) possible" (Michael E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, and Art* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990], 234).

(of unfolded meanings) opens up, and in which our terrestrial essence as mortals reverberates."[87] If, according to Vattimo, we do not wish to consider poetry within the framework of a philosophy of self-consciousness, then we must make recourse to the concept of monumentality.[88] A monument is not a function of subjective self-reference. It is, in contrast, primarily "a funerary monument built to bear the traces and the memory of someone across time, but *for others*."[89] The formal rules of poetry are the ways in which poetry achieves monumentality: "the formal rules of poetry, from rhyme and rhythm to the refined techniques through which the twentieth-century avant-garde movements have tried to make poetry into an 'essential' language."[90] The monument, Vattimo maintains, is a *formula*, which is already constituted in such a way as to transmit itself. It is not the artistic casting of a full life. This means that it is already marked definitively by mortality. The monument-formula is not constructed to 'defeat' time, but, rather, to endure in time. Heidegger's Greek temple serves as an example of whereby it carries its meanings by allowing the signs of the times to be inscribed on its stone surface: "from the changing light of day to the winds and seasons, and finally to the 'destructive' traces of the passage of the

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Language creates reality, disclosing and revealing the reality of human beings. For theology, this is particularly evident in the sacraments. "In expressions like: I promise, I forgive, I love, I believe you . . . it isn't so much that something different from word and language is established or named; instead, reality is constituted and opened up." Sacraments, then, "receive their form and their reality through word . . . Thus one can say with Karl Rahner that sacrament is the supreme instance of word." Heinrich Fries, *Fundamental Theology*, trans. Robert J. Daly, S.J. (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996). See also Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. III: The Theology of the Spiritual Life (Baltimore: Helicon, 1967). See also Günter Figal, trans. Richard Polt, "Phenomenology: Heidegger After Husserl and the Greeks" in Bret W. Davis, *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2014), 38 and Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, trans. *Martin Heidegger: Introduction to Metaphysics* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2000).

[87] Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*," 71.

[88] See ibid., 73.

[89] Ibid., 73. Emphasis original.

[90] Ibid., 73

years and centuries."[91] The temple's exposure to the passing of time, the forces of nature, all weathered on the stone has a positive sense for the work of art. The same exposure to mortality and earthliness allows for different interpretations as time and generations pass. The concealment and unconcealment that is evident in the work of art is the locus of the setting into work of truth since truth is an event as opposed to a stable, fixed structure. Vattimo uses Heidegger's term *Lichtung* to characterize the dynamic, whereby truth shines through the artwork. In its etymology the term itself, *Lichtung*, allows for both concealment and unconcealment; "*Lichtung* is synonymous with *Waldblöße*, 'clearing in the woods'; *ein Holz lichten* means to clear a wood, that is, cut down trees in order to open up a *Lichtung*."[92] In terms of a clearing sited within a wood, it is ringed by denser growth and uncut trees; it denotes a place that has been opened up to the light, but yet is surrounded by darkness. The truth present in the artwork is one that is freed from the strong structures of metaphysics, one that comes after the monumentality of the work; it is eroded by time, yet still endures.

6.2 Hermeneutics, Art, and Religion

 For Vattimo, there is a deep connection between hermeneutics and religion. Drawing on his mentor, Luigi Pareyson's work, he stresses the importance of the lived experience of religion. It is not given through objective, rational thought, but rather is presented in other forms such as myth, poetry, and art. There is, then, a relationship between art, religion, and philosophy that must be explored. Vattimo understands this connection in terms of the secularization of art, which is a process of transformation

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[91] See ibid., 74. See also Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 107.

[92] Leonardo Amoroso, "Heidegger's *Lichtung* as *lucas a (non) lucendo*," in *Weak Thought*, eds. Gianni Vattimo and Pier Aldo Rovatti, trans. Peter Carravetta (New York: State University of New York Press, 2012),156.

that emphasises the hermeneutic character of both religion and art. This exploration of the relationship between religion and the secularization of art leads to a discussion of the eschatological character of art. It is necessary to look at the artwork as an event, as something that cannot be exhausted and closed in on itself. Instead, it calls for a response rather than a definitive explanation. This is illustrated, for example, in the work of the artist, Alfredo Jaar, whose undertaking "*The Rwanda Project*" calls on the audience to listen and respond to these messages.

6.2.1 Hermeneutics: The Connection Between Art and Religion

For Vattimo, hermeneutics may be read as a narrative of modernity or a *koiné* that characterizes Western culture.[93] Where hermeneutics would previously be accompanied by an adjective, such as biblical, or literary, it now appears in contemporary culture simply as hermeneutics. It is now less limited and specialist, acting as a general theory of interpretation that applies to all areas of human experience. It is important to keep in mind that hermeneutics is not a metaphysical framework. It neither acts as, nor claims to be, an objective, metaphysical structure. Rather, it is more of a response to a sending. Vattimo draws on Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God as an example. Here, Nietzsche does not make a statement, claiming factually that God is dead, but, rather, he makes an announcement. It is "an acknowledgement of a course of events in which we are implicated and that we do not describe objectively, but interpret speculatively as concluding in the recognition that God is no longer necessary."[94] Hermeneutics is not

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[93] See Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 1.

[94] Ibid., 7.

a presentation of 'facts,' but an attention to interpretation. Indeed, hermeneutics per se is strongly connected to the Western religious tradition.

> Modern hermeneutic philosophy is born in Europe not only because here there is a religion of the book that focuses attention on the phenomenon of interpretation, but also because this religion has at its base the idea of the incarnation of God, which it conceives as *kenosis*, as abasement and, in out translation, as weakening.[95]

Vattimo makes the case that while hermeneutics is the child of modernity, modernity is the child of the Western religious tradition.[96] This is because of secularization, which, for Vattimo is not the abandonment of religion, but a continuation of the kenosis of God, which is that process of weakening that began in the incarnation. This process was carried on in the reading of Scripture as we continue to interpret the word of God. The Scriptures are a mediated tradition allowing for interpretation. They are, in essence, hermeneutic.

Vattimo draws on the thought of Joachim of Fiore in order to further illustrate the connection between hermeneutics and religion. Joachim divided time into three ages, with each age characterized by a person of the Trinity. While the first two ages were marked by the Father and Son and had already arrived, the third age, still to come, would be permeated by the Spirit. This age would be characterized by freedom and charity, with the discipline of the previous ages softened and replaced with a more spiritual sense of the scriptures. In this third age, for example, the literal interpretation of the scriptures is rendered obsolete. "A religion in which everyone can be the author of their own Bible . . . runs alongside the same dream of a Christianity that is no longer dogmatic or disciplinarian."[97] History, for Joachim, is a

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[95] Ibid., 48. Emphasis original.

[96] Ibid., 42.

process of spiritualization, and it is precisely because of this that the third age is characterized by freedom and openness.[98] Vattimo maintains that it is akin to the openness and freedom found in his own reading of the incarnation as a process of weakening. "It is Joachim of Fiore, the medieval prophet of the so-called 'third age' of salvation history, or the age of the spirit, who emphasizes the openness to the future implicit in the dogma of incarnation."[99] For Vattimo, then, we are now, in principle, in the age of spiritual interpretation rather than the age of literal interpretation when it comes to engaging with sacred Scripture.

Hermeneutics is the continuation of the Christian myth of the incarnation of God.[100] Vattimo draws on the work of his mentor, Luigi Pareyson, in order to elaborate his point. For Pareyson, philosophy is the hermeneutics of religious experience, or, in other words, myth.[101] Myth, in Vattimo's understanding, is the symbolic presence of the divine in the visible.[102] Religious experience is not given through rational thought, but is presented through other forms, such as myth and poetry. This is made possible through the incarnation. "Christ does not undermine the myths and stories of false and lying gods: he makes their signification of the divine possible for the first time."[103] The incarnation does not render any particular signification obsolete, but acknowledges that there is a plurality of myths with all of

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[97] Ibid., 49.

[98] George Tavard, *Contemplative Church: Joachim and his Adversaries*, 23-24

[99] Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 28.

[100] Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation*, 54.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid., 55.

them signifying the divine. "For Pareyson, the mythology of Christianity and the Christ Symbol provided the key to a true hermeneutic. Christ was the perfect symbol because he showed the partial and incomplete nature of all mythology."[104] Vattimo suggests that the incarnation allowed myth to express each and every invisible and symbolic presence of the divine. "The liberation of the plurality of myths, and thus the re-legitimation of religion in the wake of hermeneutics are wholly dependent on a process of secularization set in train by the story of the *kenosis* of God in the incarnation."[105] There are many ways of experiencing truth and for Vattimo two types of experience stand out as being connected; namely, the aesthetic and the religious. Hermeneutics, then, for him, must concern itself with the aesthetic and explore the relationship between art and religion in modernity.

Vattimo analyses in particular the experience of art. Taking a particular church as an example, he discusses two ways in which we encounter works of art. The church in question is Sant'Ivo della Sapienza, built by Francesco Borromini, which is considered to be a masterpiece of Roman baroque architecture. Vattimo sets the scene by describing the experience of walking into the church on a Sunday morning in order to view the architecture, only to be confronted with a celebration of mass in progress. First, you have the cultural tourist, interested in the church for purely aesthetic purposes. While, generally, undeterred by the celebration, the tourist is not at ease in the building; one is aware that, in this situation, one is somewhat of a disturbance, somewhat out of place. Secondly, you have the faithful at prayer. Vattimo maintains that they react with mixed feelings as, while they ought to welcome the tourists with

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[104] Ibid., 148. See Mary Anne Perkins, *Christendom and European Identity: The Legacy of a Grand Narrative Since 1789* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co., 2004),

[105] Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation*, 54. Emphasis original.

a charitable attitude, they are conscious of the tourists as being in conflict with what, at that time, is considered to be the proper meaning and function of the church space. It is a situation that is comparable with the (possibly unheard of) experience of someone entering a museum to kneel and pray at one of the icons or altarpieces on display. In that situation, one would be out of place with the function of the building. For Vattimo, the experiences described here are significant in terms of understanding the relationship between art and religion. The authentic experience of the work of art, according to Walter Benjamin (whom Vattimo draws on), is the 'distracted experience.'[106] This corresponds to the experience that Vattimo describes as the faithful at prayer. While they may have an idea of the architectural wonders of Sant'Ivo della Sapienza, it is a 'distracted perception' as the focus is principally on prayer. Indeed, Benjamin favours the priority of the religious meaning, what he calls the authentic experience, over the aesthetic experience. "When you live in the Middle Ages in a town full of artworks, such as Siena, you do not go around looking at the works of art as we do now. You just live there, and the works are part of your life."[107] It is this experience, rather than that of the museum, that for Vattimo is the authentic experience of the work of art. "A work of art should not be an exception in our lives: everyday life should be beautiful."[108] In contrast, the museum emphasizes the value of the work, treating the pieces as specialised phenomena rather than as part of an experience that ought to permeate everyday life. Vattimo considers that this idea of

[106] See Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation*, 59. For further discussion of this theme, see Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," trans. J.A. Underwood (London: Penguin Books, 2008).

[107] Gianni Vattimo, "The Secularization of Progress,' in *The Archive of Development*, Lier en Boog, Series of Philosophy of Art and Art Theory, Vol. 13, eds., Annette W. Balkema & Henk Slager (Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rodopi., 1998), 159.

[108] Ibid.

the experience that so to speak aestheticizes everyday life is comparable to the secularization of religion. Secularization here is taken to be the very idea of the incarnation of God. God comes into the work in the form of a servant and humanizes Godself. To begin with, he maintains that in line with the secularization theory there is an inherent relationship between art, religion, and philosophy. "There are not three sources of experience: the religious, the philosophical, the artistic, as many people tend to believe."[109] These three are in a dynamic secularizing relationship. Indeed, art could then be a way of secularizing the religious experience of the divine. By this, he means that a possible future for art could be the recovery of its liturgical and cultural value as a form of social, collective celebration of what we believe in. He proffers Bauhaus as an example of art as a collective celebration and a way of giving an authentic character to everyday life. It opposed the idea of the artist as a specialized phenomenon, valuing instead the aesthetic character of the whole of our experience.[110] The museum in contemporary culture might be reflective of this attitude, focusing on artworks as indicative of different forms of life and lifestyles, rather than being concerned with the value of the piece, or, for instance, the superiority of a particular work over another. Otherwise, the museum may simply be a slave to the fluctuating trends of the art market.[111] "Aesthetic experience is no longer the encounter with a perfect form, but a meeting with a plurality of possible forms of life."[112] The museum might be understood as a centre of collected information, where one might encounter a plurality of possible forms of life proposed through the works.

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[109] Ibid.

[110] Ibid., 160.

[111] Ibid., 158.

Vattimo is of the opinion that to discuss the relation between religion and art is to think of the destiny of art in relation to secularization.[113] The roots of the idea of art as secularized religion lie in the work *Aeltestes Systemprogramm des Deutschen Idealismus*, a collaboration between Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin.[114] The work's focus is on freedom and liberty. The programme announced is "the advent of the kingdom of freedom that will be realized only on the basis of a 'sensible religion,' understood as the 'monotheism of the heart, the polytheism of the imagination and of art,' and the 'mythology of reason.'"[115] For Vattimo, this book resonates with the hermeneutic character of the Age of the Spirit that we find in Joachim of Fiore's work. The 'religion of the senses' that is proposed by Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin is the ideal configuration of an art conceived explicitly as secularized religion. We are speaking of religion as poetic mythology, which is more than capable of dealing with the subject matter and the task that once belonged to the traditional expression of religion. Religious experience is approached through myth, poetry, and other forms. Certainly, for Vattimo, that this transformation, or secularization, of religion corresponds to the aesthetization of our everyday lives. He takes Nietzsche's observation that "the era of art as works of art is finished" and challenges the idea that the artwork is something that is bought and sold.[116] This raises the question of

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[112] Ibid.

[113] Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation*, 62.

[114] See ibid., 62.

[115] Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 33.

what is art today? "The practice of art in our world tends to shatter the limits of art as a specific phenomenon."[117] Our everyday lives are in fact increasingly aestheticized. Merchandising and advertising, for example, are omnipresent. The result of the aesthetization of everyday life is, for Vattimo, the blurring of the lines between reality and imagination. "All the work of media information, television, newspapers, is a way of mixing more and more imagination, interpretation and facts."[118] This is the way in which the aesthetic will carry on developing as the process of secularization continues. Vattimo views the shift in art from something that is specialized and value based to something that permeates ordinary, everyday life in the same light as secularization. "I would try to locate this event within the process of transformation, secularization, and the return to the religious in a different form."[119] Secularization, for Vattimo, is, after all, a process of transformation. Art itself has been transformed. "When one tries to grasp the meaning of aesthetic experience in its specificity, one is referred back again to a sphere that resists definition otherwise than in terms of the experience of religion and of myth."[120] Contemporary art now permeates our public spaces, be they museums, public squares, and so on. It is part of our community and our everyday life. This transformation itself is part and parcel of the weakening of

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116 Vattimo, 'The Secularization of Progress,' 160. Vattimo turns to Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* as an example of a challenge to the idea of the value of the artwork. The original is lost, but consisted of a standard urinal. *Fountain* is considered to be a 'readymade', which is an ordinary object taken, interpreted, and displayed as a work of art. Its reception proved to be controversial. Duchamp originally submitted it to the Society of Independent Artists, who rejected it on the grounds of indecency and because they refused to accept that such an object could be considered art. Duchamp was one of the founders of the Society. It may, in part, be seen as an attempt by Duchamp to test the reception of new conceptions of art.

117 Vattimo, 'The Secularization of Progress,' 160.

118 Ibid.

119 Ibid., 161.

120 Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation*, 66.

Being. Certainly, the end of metaphysics offers us the opportunity to examine how we view religion, as it is the rebirth of the sacred in all its various forms.[121] There is no longer one single, shared horizon, but rather a plurality of experiences, be they religious or artistic in nature. In this transformation of art and the aesthetic experience, religion could find itself on a new path, one that is more 'aesthetic,' more in accordance with Joachim of Fiore's Age of the Spirit, and with the *Aeltestes Systemprogramm des Deutschen Idealismus*.[122]

6.2.2 The Eschatological Character of Art

For Vattimo, art has an eschatological character. This character of the artwork lies in its openness to the future. "Eschatology is the constitutive openness of the work to the future."[123] This openness to the future is explored in Vattimo's reading of Heidegger's setting-into-work-of truth. Here, the work of art must function in the sense that it has some effect or has the potential to bring about something new. If this is not the case, then the work is only a potential artwork. The artwork opens up a world that is, at once, both true and new. This occurs when we allow ourselves to step out of the everyday and into the light of what the work discloses. When we allow ourselves to move into what the work discloses, we open ourselves up to a new order and to new relationships. Christian eschatology, too, involves a temporal openness to

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[121] Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, trans. Luca D'Isanto (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 23

[122] See Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation*, 74.

[123] Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 121.

future possibilities. In doing so, it retains its strong relationship with the past and its connection to the present. This is equally so for the artwork.

> Every beginning of art is thus an irruption within being of a new and emergent world. This world, along with the poetry that founds it, is historical, endowing the ground with everything it will call future people to preserve; it is the origin both of art and of a community's historical existence.[124]

Not only does the artwork open up a world, but it brings together a community, preserving and consolidating an entire culture. The artwork unites a community by bringing it together through a shared project, which gives people a common heritage that determines the present and the future. Eschatology has consequences for history, precisely because of its emphasis on the future. Christian eschatology incudes a concern with and a hope for this world. As we cannot live apart from the world, its future cannot be ignored. We have a responsibility towards the world from which we cannot disengage.

Vattimo maintains that it is easier to understand the eschatological character of the artwork if it is examined through the lens of language. Specifically, he takes our relationship to the Bible as an example. The model of the Western traditions' relationship to the Bible is marked by a hermeneutic of the various senses in reading the text: with the literal, the allegorical, the moral, and the anagogical. These senses provide a richness to the living reading of Scripture. The allegorical sense refers to the deeper meaning that is hidden behind the surface of the text. The use of allegorical interpretation was employed in mythology, for example, in order to uncover what the text concealed. The underlying idea is that writers often wrote one thing but meant another, as we saw in René Girard's reading of mythology. The written word is often

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[124] Joshua Reeves and Ethan Stoneman, "Heidegger and the Aesthetics of Rhetoric," 148.

a symbol of a deeper reality and the allegorical interpretation of Scripture enables us to find a more profound understanding of events. The moral sense is concerned with the moral lessons that can be drawn from the Scripture reading. In this way Scripture acts as a guide to how we ought to live as Christians. The anagogical sense looks towards the future. Through this lens, with the Church on earth as a sign of the heavenly Jerusalem, we look to our destiny as we journey through life. For Vattimo, in the case of art, reductive criticism removes the anagogical sense. Once the anagogical sense is separated from the allegorical, we are left with a purely intraworldly reference. "Every technique of reading that is grounded on the exhibition of reference, on demythification and explanation, is always a form of intraworldly allegory."[125] Without the anagogical, all we are left with is the continuum of history, which, for the Fathers, was an empty concept once the eschatological perspective was denied.[126] History without the possibility of salvation is devoid of meaning.

Reductive criticism deprives the artwork of any meaning beyond the heightening of experience. In the case of art, eschatology is the constitutive openness of the work to the future, in the light of which all intraworldly references acquire their meaning.[127] It is necessary to see the artwork as an event, one that acts as an announcement of a truth that cannot be exhausted and closed in on itself. Rather than requiring a definitive explanation, the artwork calls for a response. "[It is] an appeal that demands an answer rather than an explanation."[128] This is evident if we consider the work of art on the plane of language. In the case of the language of the Bible, to

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[125] Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 121.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid.

the degree that it is prophetic, it does not give an explanation of a preconstituted world, but, rather, as the Word of God, calls for a response to a world that it has created. In much the same way, for Vattimo, the eschatological character of the artwork is dependent on the artwork's founding a world and a language.[129] To engage with the prophetic character of the work of art is to do so through language as the world is given to us through language. "The historical epochs are determinate openings of Being, original ways in which beings are arranged within the light that man—Dasein—projects, their event is above all linguistic."[130] In other words, a world is born through language as it is how we give order and meaning to the world. Language creates reality for us, disclosing and revealing it to us. In more theological terms, this is particularly evident in the case of the sacraments. When we use expressions such as I promise, I love you, I forgive you, reality is constituted and opened up. The sacraments are endowed with form and reality through the word.[131] Through language, the invisible, the past, and the absent are made present. It is our historicity that makes it possible for us to be shaken out of the present moment and liberated into the breadth of our possibilities as our historicity is marked by remembrance, making present, and expectation that is expressed through language.

For Vattimo, encountering an artwork is much the same as encountering a person. This is because the world is, essentially, a system of meanings into which we are thrown. The artwork founds a world as it too founds a new system of meanings. When we encounter a person, or an artwork, we meet a new perspective on life.

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[129] Ibid.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Heinrich Fries, *Fundamental Theology*, trans. Robert J. Daly (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

Neither are set into the world exactly as it is, but, instead, represent a new worldview. We engage with both the person and the artwork linguistically. Vattimo considers that this is the primary mode through which we can enjoy the work. "Discourse becomes the fundamental way in which the work of art can be encountered and enjoyed, and all the other acts constituting an approach are merely preparatory."[132] The works' performance, which is the way of living the work in its concrete physical nature, is simply the preliminary condition for discourse with the work.[133] The performance, or manifestation, depends on the medium through which the work is made present. Should the work be a painting, for example, it will be visualized. When we engage in dialogue with the work, we inhabit the world that the work has opened up for us. The artwork, then, can be read in an analogy with reading the Bible; it can be read even as prophecy, given that it is a point of departure, and is not one of arrival.[134] As such, we have to ask not what it means or what it refers to or what reality it should be referred to in order to be explained. Instead, we ought to attend to the philosophical, moral, and existential meaning of the artwork itself. As the artwork is a point of departure, there is, then, a gap to be bridged between the work and the viewer. Interpretation functions as the bridge that spans this gap. It acts as a mediator between the world of the work and the world of the interpreter. While engaging in dialogue we listen and respond, but, chiefly, we also interpret and mediate. Through this mediation and interpretation the work comes to light, but always in terms of the interpreter's own world. Interpretation is a linguistic event and, therefore, is based on

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[132] Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 53.

[133] Ibid.

[134] See ibid., 55.

a shared communality of language between speaker and listener.[135] The object of interpretation and the interpretative process are both linguistic events. They are placed inside the horizon of language. "The linguistic horizon is that within which the singular historical events (persons, things, works) offer themselves to understanding."[136]

At the core of Christianity is an existential encounter with the person of Jesus. This is essentially a historical and personal experience. The essence of religion is, in fact, lived experience and it ceases to exist in the abstract. Given that religion is a matter for those who profess it, it can be approached only from within the arena of personal experience.[137] Such an exploration takes place within the horizon of language, given that this is the way in which we encounter and make sense of the world. We are called to engage in dialogue as our encounter with Jesus is the fruit of a dialogue that takes place between God and humanity. The starting point for this dialogue is none other than our lived experience given that through it, as Christians, we try to formulate a way in which to live out our religious faith in the world. There is not one, singular form of Christian faith that is experienced and lived out in the world, but many realizations of the same faith. This lends a certain vitality to the future, which retains an openness to the divine that allows it to enter the rhythms of

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[135] See ibid., 148.

[136] Ibid., 149.

[137] Certainly, for Vattimo, religion is centred around lived experience. "When I say that I believe in God the Creator, I say that I believe in the God of the Holy Scriptures that is the *sum* of a quantity of elements of which I live" (quando dico che credo ne Dio Creatore, dico che credo nel Dio della Sacra Scrittura che è la summa di una quantità di elementi di cui vivo. Gianni Vattimo and Carmelo Dotolo, *Dio: la possibilità buono,* edited by Giovanni Giorgio [Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino Editore. 2009], 28. He likens it to the experience of poetry. "Like poetry, prayer is also a celebration of what it speaks about, and it means to put myself in a closer relationship with that constitutes me" (come la poesia, anche le preghiera è una celebrazione di ciò di cui parla, e significa mettersi in rapport più esplicito con ciò che me costituisce. Ibid.)

the past, the present, and the future. Given the emphasis on dialogue and lived experience in Christianity, Vattimo underlines the importance of hermeneutics to the Western religious tradition. Interpretation, after all, allows for reflection on the lived experience.

The dialogue that takes place between God and humankind is revelation, centred in the incarnation. Revelation is a dialogical encounter with the Word of God. Jesus became a part of human history through the incarnation, so that we are called on to act in the image of God in our relationships, whether with each other or with the world around us. There is no singular anthropology that sums up our culture, society, politics, etc. As we grow and change because of technological advancements, we require a renewed anthropology to reflect this change. Anthropology, based on lived experience, takes into account our societies and cultures as they grow and change. There is no 'one size fits all' type of anthropology that sums up who we are in the world. Even the Bible reflects this diversity. It was written over the course of many years, reflecting different attitudes, politics, economics, and so on, during the ages. Our self-understanding is never something fixed and static, but rather must change and expand to encompass our own growth and development throughout history. For Vattimo, the incarnation is the embodiment of this. Revelation is both an ongoing history and salvation.[138] He believes that the history of salvation and the history of interpretation are deeply connected. Thus, he argues that Jesus' relationship with the Old Testament is based on interpretations.

> He presents himself as the authentic interpretation of prophecies, even though before leaving his disciples he promises to send them the Spirit of Truth upon them, which will continue to teach, and thereby to continue on the history of salvation by reinterpreting Jesus' own doctrines as well.[139]

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[138] Vattimo, *Belief*., 48.

[139] Ibid., 49.

For Vattimo, salvation unfolds in history through interpretation. Kenosis is more fully realized in salvation thanks to this relationship between salvation and interpretation.[140] Indeed, from a Christian perspective, being open both to interpretation and to reflection on our own pre-understandings is an openness to the saving reality of God.

6.2.3 Interruption and Response

While we may speak of art in eschatological terms, which lies in the artworks' openness to the future, it is important, for Vattimo, to establish that this is not something that is peaceful or harmonious.[141] The setting-into-work-of-truth interrupts and disturbs our everyday reality. Vattimo draws on the work of Heidegger and Walter Benjamin in order to explore the disruption that results of the opening up of a world. "The power of disorientation (Heidegger, not only Benjamin, speaks of *shock* as the effect of the work) is contained in the birth of an alternative opening, even in that "innocent" realm of art."[142] Both Heidegger and Benjamin have their own understanding of *Stoss* or shock. For Heidegger, the *Stoss* is the shock produced by the work of art. This is not a shock in the sense of wonder or amazement elicited by the work, but, rather, the fact that there actually is a work of art is what produces the shock.[143] It is the shock of encountering a new world, or having the familiar and the

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[140] Ibid.

[141] Gianni Vattimo, *Of Reality*, trans. Robert T. Valgenti. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, 203. Originally published as *Della realtà* (Milan: Garzanti, 2012).

[142] Ibid. Emphasis original.

[143] See Gianni Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 68.

everyday made strange. It is the opening up of a world in the work of art that produces this shock; we are used to encountering the world as already given. Here, the work reveals a world. "It opens a new world and shows it to us in the moment of its disclosure."[144] This opening up of a world calls into question our own position in the world, as it makes the familiar seem strange and puts our accustomed world into crisis. "This is precisely the *Stoss* (shock) of the artwork: in encountering a great artwork, the world I was accustomed to seeing becomes strange, is put into crisis in its totality, because the work proposes a new general reorganization of the world, a new historical epoch."[145] The *Stoss* is produced by the setting into work of truth in which the artwork opens up a world that is, at the same time, both true and new. "The work opens a new 'epoch' of being as an originary event, which cannot be reduced to what it already was, and it grounds a new order of relationships within beings, a true and actually new world."[146] *Stoss* is, for Vattimo, the only way to describe this encounter with the artwork that leads us to view the ordinary as strange and unfamiliar. In his exploration of the disruption of the setting-into-work-of-truth, Vattimo turns to Walter Benjamin, specifically his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."[147] This essay examines art's essence in the technological age. While the genuineness of art cannot be reproduced by technology the original artwork does not retain full authority over its reproductions. There are two reasons for this. First, copies have their own autonomy and independence from

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[144] Ibid., 69.

[145] Ibid., 70.

[146] Ibid., 152.

[147] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," trans. J.A. Underwood (London: Penguin Books, 2008).

the original work of art. Here, Benjamin uses photography as an example. "It [photography] is able to bring out aspects of the original that can be accessed only by the lens."[148] Secondly, the copies can be placed in positions that the original cannot attain. Yet, even though the existence of the original artwork is unaffected by the reproduction, it still suffers a loss in value. The genuineness of the work is affected.

> The genuineness of a thing is the quintessence of everything about it since its creation that can be handed down, from its material duration to the historical witness that it bears. The latter (material duration and historical witness) being grounded in the former (the thing's genuineness), what happens in the reproduction, where the former has been removed from human perception, is that the latter also starts to wobble.[149]

Benjamin uses the term 'aura' to describe the genuineness of the original. The aura denotes the originality of the experience that cannot be reproduced. Mass production affects tradition, liquidizing it; "*it substitutes for its unique incidence a multiplicity of incidences. And in allowing the reproduction to come closer to whatever situation the person apprehending it is in, it actualizes what is reproduced.*"[150] Reproduction changes the way in which art gives itself in the present epoch.[151] For the Torinese, shock appears to work in the opposite way to technical reproduction. "In the age of reproduction both the great art of the past and new media products reproducible from their inception, such as cinema, tend to become common consumer objects."[152] Vattimo sees here a change in the work's values; Benjamin saw, as a by-product of

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[148] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 6.

[149] Ibid., 7.

[150] Ibid. Emphasis original.

[151] Gianni Vattimo, trans. David Webb, *The Transparent Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 46.

[152] Ibid., 48.

mechanical reproduction, the replacement of the cult value of a work with the exhibition value. "Cult value was rooted in art's origins in religious/magical ritual, where the unique presence manifested in the aura of the work of art."[153] The exhibition value emerges with the increasing portability of the work of art. "Exhibition value involved the gradually changing function of the work of art as it became portable and (later) duplicable—thus, the passage from the fixed fresco of the Renaissance to the mobile 'public presentability' of the easel paintings."[154] This, for Vattimo, is the equivalent of saying that the artworks 'aesthetic significance' rests solely in how it is appreciated in terms of formal perfection.[155] Shock changes this form of appreciation, making the experience of the artwork more akin to the *Stoss* of the setting-into-work that Heidegger describes. In Benjamin's work, the shock is a particular attribute of the cinema. Indeed, Benjamin points out that the Dadaists considered a work of art as a bullet striking the viewer. "The cinema too is made up of projectiles, of projections: as soon as an image is formed, it is replaced by another to which the spectator's eye and mind must readapt."[156] Benjamin sees in film the presentation of the dangers that humankind encounters in modernity. Film is "the art form that corresponds to the heightened state of mortal peril that modern man must face."[157] It is this mortality that we face in the work of art that connects us to the

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[153] Christopher Phillips, "The Judgment Seat of Photography," in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989), 16.

[154] Ibid.

[155] Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, 48.

[156] Ibid., 49.

[157] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 49. See also Diego Malquori, "On the Crisis of Modernity. A Reading from the Perspective of Art," *Pensamiento* 73, no. 277 (2017): 903-922.

shock (Benjamin) or *Stoss* (Heidegger). For Heidegger, the *Stoss* of art is concerned with death as the experience of mortality. Existence is defined by death in the sense that we are marked by mortality. "In the mode of dwelling mortals are able to initiate their own nature, that is become mortals through their acceptance and recognition of death."[158] Death is always an outstanding possibility of existence.[159] Indeed, for Heidegger, the fact that the work is there rather than not, gives rise to the *Stoss*, in the sense of a suspension of our familiarity with the world.[160]

Disorientation is a feature common of *Stoss* or shock. It is, for Heidegger, "Dasein's failure to understand its own being in everyday life."[161] For Benjamin, disorientation arises from "encounters with the deeply ambiguous world of things."[162] He uses the example of an apartment to illustrate this understanding of disorientation, which can be seen in the spatial dimensions. He takes a nineteenth century apartment as a case, decorated in an Oriental style, which on the one hand is a safe place, a fortress, but which on the other harbours an ambiguity. "It [the apartment] is always also elsewhere, conjouring a metaphysical orient where exoticism blurs and conceals the mundaneness of the real surroundings."[163] This combination of fortress and escapism has an impact on the inhabitant. "[The inhabitant] is at once trapped and

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[158] R. Raj Singh, *Heidegger, World, and Death* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2013), 134.

[159] Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, 50.

[160] Ibid.

[161] Taylor Carman, "Heidegger's Concept of Presence," *Inquiry* 38, no. 4. (December 1995): 445. Carman notes that this disorientation leads Dasein to a faulty interpretation of itself (see Carman, "Heidegger's Concept of Presence", 445).

[162] Michael Jennings, "Walter Benjamin and the European Avant-Garde," in *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin.,* ed David S. Ferris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 26.

[163] Ibid., 27.

eternally escaping, subject to a spatial disorientation which robs his existence of solidity and authenticity."[164] Vattimo maintains, however, that disorientation is the very purpose of the aesthetic experience: "aesthetic experience is *directed towards keeping the disorientation alive*."[165] Equally for Heidegger the disorientation in the work of art serves as a foundation to the new.

> The work is a foundation only insofar as it produces an ongoing disorientation that can never be recuperated in a final *Geborgenheit*. The work of art is never serene, never 'beautiful' in the sense of a perfect harmony between inside and outside, essence and existence, etc.[166]

The aesthetic experience that characterizes the work of art is no longer that of security and harmony, but responds to the precarious structure of existence in general. The *shock* characteristic of new forms of reproducible art in the contemporary expression of Heidegger's *Stoss* that is constitutive of the experience of art. "The shock characteristic of new forms of reproducible art is simply the expression in our own world of Heidegger's *Stoss*, the . . . disorientation constitutive of the experience of art."[167] Shock is the way in which aesthetic experience presents itself in late modernity.[168]

While earlier appreciation of art treated the artwork as the faithful representation of an objective truth, this view is increasingly obsolete. It is, for Vattimo, enmeshed in a metaphysics that is incapable of expressing the lived reality

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[164] Ibid.

[165] Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, 51. Vattimo uses the example of a movie to illustrate this point. In the cinema we would lose the experience of the film if we were to see one single, still frame.

[166] Ibid., 53. Here, Vattimo speaks of *Geborgenheit* in terms of security, safety, but also in terms of orientation, or reorientation.

[167] Ibid., 54.

[168] Ibid., 58.

of existence. Art, rather, reflects the cultural and societal currents without adhering to a foundation, or truth, that might subject the artist to an exterior power.[169] "The task of art is not to represent the truth of the world but, rather, to take a stance in the name of a project of transformation."[170] Vattimo draws on the work of the artist Alfredo Jaar in order to develop this particular line of thinking.[171] Jaar's *The Rwanda Project* is a series consisting of twenty-one pieces of representation, that took six years to complete. For several reasons, the artist found it to be a difficult project. One of the main reasons for this difficulty is connected to the idea of the artwork as a representation of the truth of what happened. Having followed the genocide in the newspapers and shocked with how little media coverage it received, he went to Africa. There, he spent time photographing the situation, speaking to survivors and "gathering evidence" of what had happened.[172] On his return home to New York, he realized that most of the images that he had gathered were unusable. This is so as, he believed that they would not draw a reaction from most people. The pictures he had taken were too horrific. The reason why can be explained by Roland Barthes' short essay 'Shock-Photos' can help explain why this is so.[173] The issue is the politics of the image, the very way in which the image is organised that erodes its power. "As we look at them (the images), we are in each case dispossessed of our judgement: someone has shuddered for us, reflected for us, judged for us; the photographer has

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[169] Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 102.

[170] Ibid.

[171] See Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*.

[172] "'The Rwanda Project.'" Art21. Accessed January 2, 2020. https://art21.org/read/alfredo-jaar-the-rwanda-project/.

[173] Roland Barthes, "Shock Photos" in *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

left us nothing-except a simple right of intellectual acquiescence."[174] Images act in much the same way as Girard's reading of myth signifies an obfuscation of the violence that takes place as part of the scapegoat mechanism. The politics of the image shroud the reality in that the action has already taken place and we are not implicated. Our own complicity is concealed and these images do compel us not to action, but to acceptance. This posed a challenge for Jaar. He attempted to reduce the scale of the tragedy, despite the vast number of victims, in order to make it more accessible to us. This is the focus of the work *Rwanda Rwanda*. This piece consists of a white background with 'Rwanda' written repeatedly in bold black text. It is designed as a public intervention piece, with 100 prints installed in various locations such as car parks, bus stops, and so on. For Jaar, if you do not understand the story behind the piece, the text, rather than being a visual articulation of that story, simply becomes just another image.[175] In a further attempt to get his audience to identify with one particular story, Jaar created *The Silence of Nduwayezu*. This piece is formed of one million slides, placed in a dark space, which are heaped on the surface of a light table. While light can represent hope or liberation, in Jaar's piece it represents horror. The slides are copies of a single, photograph; a close up of Nduwayezu's eyes. These are the sad eyes of a child that has seen both parents slaughtered with a machete. Jaar's piece encourages the audience to lean in, to look at Nduwayezu's eyes in close proximity. These eyes are those of a child that have witnessed first-hand a genocide that we did not want to witness. After his parents' death, Nduwayezu stayed silent for approximately four weeks. In using this photograph, Jaar created a piece that refers

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[174] Barthes, "Shock Photos", 71.

[175] "'The Rwanda Project.'" Art21. Accessed January 2, 2020. https://art21.org/read/alfredo-jaar-the-rwanda-project/.

to the silence of the international community. It is a silence that allowed the events of the Rwandan genocide to take place. For Jaar, part of the complexity of *The Rwanda Project* was to talk about violence without using photographs of violence. In 'Shock-Photos,' Barthes refers to an exhibition of photographs depicting violent events in Guatemala. The photos of these events cannot touch the viewer as the horror is too deliberate and over-constructed. There is no room left for the viewer to either condemn or commiserate.[176] Jaar believed that there must be a way in which we can discuss suffering without making victims suffer again, while all the time respecting their dignity. Certainly, for Vattimo, "Jaar put on stage the very meaning of photography as a way of informing and awakening public consciousness."[177] While this is the purpose of the project, Jaar does not intend his photographs or artworks to be a literal representation of reality. Rather, these images are aimed at disturbing our everyday reality. They are messages that call for a response and for a practical intervention. The happening of truth disturbs and moves us out of our everyday reality. "The encounter with the work of art is like an encounter with someone whose view of the world is a challenge to our own interpretation."[178] We are called to respond to this challenge. The encounter grasps a moment of the past and charges it with an eschatological present.[179] In this sense the artwork is a point of departure, calling us to take its moral and existential meaning seriously. For Vattimo, the task

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[176] See Jean-Michel Rabaté, "Introduction", in *Writing the Image After Roland Barthes*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 1-16.

[177] Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 164.

[178] Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, 50.

[179] Vattimo, *Of Reality*, 192.

of art is to take a stance in the name of a project of transformation.[180] We need, then, to begin to take this seriously, recognizing our own responsibility in creating opportunities for a more meaningful future, while acknowledging the our debt to the past.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter explored the role that aesthetics plays in Vattimo's thought, focusing on the relationship between religion, art, and hermeneutics in the light of the end of metaphysics. Given his emphasis on lived experience, this relationship can be understood in terms of the secularization of art, which it reflects a process of transformation. The chapter examined this process and how it emphasizes the hermeneutic character of both art and religion. For Vattimo, not only does art have a hermeneutic character, but it also has a prophetic one. This required an exploration of the eschatological quality of art. Indeed, it is necessary to look at the artwork as an event, as something that cannot be exhausted and closed in on itself. Rather, it calls for a response as opposed to a definitive explanation. There is an openness to the future that is inherent in art, which Vattimo likens to prophecy. This is not something peaceful or harmonious, but, rather, something that disturbs us and unsettles everyday reality. We saw that, for Vattimo, the artwork does not act as a definitive truth or literal representation of reality, but, rather, is a message that calls for a response. This was explored through *The Rwanda Project*, the work of the artist, Alfredo Jaar.

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[180] Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 162.

Conclusion

The primary goal of this dissertation was to consider how one might access faith, for Vattimo, in contemporary culture. His work invites us to discuss the very possibility of a way of coming to faith in a post-metaphysical age. In order to better examine this question, it was necessary to appreciate the influence that Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Girard have had on his work, as he very much understands Christianity in terms of their contributions, particularly with regard to plurality and interpretation. Certainly, Vattimo's understanding of faith in contemporary culture is a synthesis of his particular philosophical, political, and religious beliefs. His project invites a reconsideration of metaphysics and its relationship to the Christian faith. Indeed, by recognizing that Christianity has been marked by the metaphysical tradition, Vattimo's work offers the opportunity to re-examine our approach to faith in light of the dissolution of this tradition. In Part One of this dissertation, I focused on the importance of his reading of Nietzsche's and Heidegger's thought as this remains the central axis of his thinking. By reading Heidegger through a Nietzschean lens, Vattimo developed his particular understanding of nihilism. Nietzsche's death of God and Heidegger's discussion of the end of metaphysics are drawn together to achieve a certain dismantling of a traditional, overarching framework that was marked by authoritarianism. Vattimo's own experiences in the political landscape of the 1960s to 1980s during the *Anni di piombo* are, in part, responsible for this particular reading. What he originally held as the revolutionary idea in Nietzsche's work, namely the *Übermensch*, was at odds with his political experiences during the *Anni di piombo*. He became conscious that the political transformation promised during this time was one that was still marked by a certain authoritarianism. He realised that, from a Nietzschean perspective, it is simply not possible to replace one foundation with

another. With regard to Heidegger, the view of history as the history of metaphysics and the forgetting of Being is central to Vattimo's work. Metaphysics establishes a foundational framework, bringing into being ultimate truths against which we order and frame our very reality. Vattimo ultimately opts to follow this line of thinking, embracing the idea that we do not have an objective worldview; it is, rather, always coloured by our history, culture, background, and so on. In the postmodern age, we are always dealing with interpretations rather than with ultimate truths. The Italian philosopher recognizes that, traditionally, Christianity has operated mostly from within a metaphysical landscape. The German philosophers' work provides Vattimo with the opportunity and the means to consider Christianity in a light that is more reflective of the current times with its emphasis on hermeneutics.

While Nietzsche's and Heidegger's work may be said to be the cornerstones of Vattimo's thinking, René Girard, too, has been influential. Part Two of the thesis examined Girard's impact on Vattimo's thought, particularly in the further development of the Italian philosopher's weak thought (*il pensiero debole*). This section focused on Girard's investigation of human interrelations, in his mimetic theory. While mimetic theory primarily concentrated on the violence arising from mimetic desire, it connected, in addition, religion, culture, and violence. It does so through Girard's exploration of the centrality of violence for primitive religions and the means by which this violence is dealt with in society. Crucially, in terms of Vattimo's later development, the French anthropologist stresses the fundamental difference between the Gospels and traditional mythic accounts, which seek to cover up the outbreaks of violence in a community. We saw that the Gospels exposed the truth of what exactly happens when an outbreak occurs, and, in this way, can be read and understood as a process of desacralization. Going beyond Girard, Vattimo views

these same dynamics in what he termed weak thinking. Girard's work offered a further foundation on which to develop the reflection on violence in conjunction with social justice, politics, and religion. Vattimo views metaphysics as an expression of an authoritarianism that he equates with violence. Thus, violence may be understood not only in terms of the physical but also of the philosophical. A belief or ideology that is held to be an ultimate truth or foundation effectively silences those who do not share in that same belief-system. It leaves no room for disagreement or discussion as it demands adherence to one particular ideology. While Girard's reading of Christianity is one that sees it as putting an end to sacrificial violence, this alone is not sufficient for Vattimo. He focuses on the idea of desacralization not only in terms of a moving away from sacrificial-based religions but also from authoritarian belief-systems.

While recognizing the limitations, or failings, of metaphysics, and consequently of those institutions that built on any such framework, Vattimo offers an appraisal of Christianity that considers what it might be like in a post-metaphysical age. The form of faith that might correspond to such a situation, while certainly different, is not one that is devoid of all content or significance. He is careful to acknowledge the cultural and historical significance of Christianity, recognizing that this is a Western heritage that is still meaningful. Regardless of the dissolution of metaphysics, it is not something that we can dismiss; it has indelibly marked and shaped our culture and can continue to do so. We can no longer, however, return to the Christianity that we once knew, but we can re-present it in a way that more authentically corresponds to the current situation. In his particular understanding, Vattimo is keen to maintain what he considers to be the central tenets of Christianity. Indeed, we saw in this section of the dissertation the centrality and importance of the

incarnation to this understanding of Christianity. He emphasizes the weakening that is inherent to kenosis, as found in Philippians 2:7. This well-known passage points to the self-abasement, or emptying, of God, by which he lowered himself and took on human form. We saw that it acts as a crucial link between the philosophical and the religious in Vattimo's work. This kenotic act of weakening signifies the death of the God of which Nietzsche spoke and the birth of the non-violent, non-absolute God of the post-metaphysical age. Vattimo acknowledges the significance of kenosis, too, on a personal level, claiming that, by linking philosophy and Christian religious thought, it allows him to connect with his own religious origins, lending him a sense of continuity and a coherence.

The incarnation is not the only way in which Vattimo maintains a connection with what he considers to be the central tenets of Christianity. In Part Two of the dissertation, we examined also the place of *caritas* in Vattimo's work. *Caritas*, or charity, as the love of humankind that permeates Christ's teachings, is at the heart of the New Testament. While acting as a constraint, or limit, on interpretation, it invites us to think about the sharedness of our social spaces, our relationships, and of our world. Vattimo balances the philosophical and the religious in his understanding of *caritas*. It offers a pathway for Christianity to move beyond a belief-system rooted in the metaphysical toward one that is more focused on the core message of the New Testament: love. In addition to drawing on the incarnation, kenosis, and caritas, the Italian philosopher draws on the thought of the mystic, Joachim of Fiore. Appropriating the mystic's Trinitarian division of time, Vattimo sees us entering the third age, marked by the Spirit, which is characterized by freedom and openness. He connects this with his own reading of the incarnation as a process of weakening, underlining the ongoing and hermeneutical nature of salvation history. The Scriptures

themselves are a mediated tradition, handed down to us through various generations and traditions, requiring interpretation and, therefore, are not static and unchangeable. While Vattimo's work demonstrates a departure from the established metaphysics that was traditionally associated with Christianity, he retains what he considers to be the teachings and influences at its core. It is a reading that opens up a multitude of possibilities for the future of Christianity outside of any established metaphysical framework.

The final section of the dissertation, Part Three, set out to examine the form that access to faith might take in contemporary culture, in the wake of the dissolution of metaphysics. Vattimo does not attempt to establish his own thinking as a replacement for a prior foundation. Rather, his thought offers the opportunity to engage in new explorations and considerations of faith. Here, in this section, I examined the connection between philosophy and religion as expressed through myth. There is an emphasis on the need for a new understanding of myth that does not rely on a foundational metaphysics. For the same reason, the relationship between religion and secularization must be re-examined. In teasing out what a new understanding of the relationship between religion and secularization might entail, I focused on Vattimo's understanding of aesthetics. I discussed the role that the artwork plays as an opening up to the religious dimension of life and acting as one of the possible avenues of access to faith in contemporary culture. This discussion raises questions that are of particular concern in the current time, such as the use of sacred and secular space with regard to the ways in which we encounter works of art. An example here might be the possible recovery of the liturgical and cultural value of art as a collective celebration of our beliefs. It underlines the growing awareness that faith is reflective of our practices on a local and community level. There is, in Vattimo's work, a

recognition of the eschatological and prophetic character of art itself, perceiving art as a message or form of communication that calls on us to respond.

In this dissertation, then, I set out to explore the question of how might we come to faith in contemporary culture from the perspective of Gianni Vattimo. To begin with, the thesis explored what Vattimo claims to be the current cultural climate, namely that, for many, we are in a post-metaphysical age. The discourse surrounding Vattimo's consideration of Nietzsche's nihilism and Heidegger's ontological difference underlined that, now, we are always dealing with interpretations rather than definitive truths. This distinct cultural climate framed the discussion and emphasized the difficulties of coming to faith in postmodernity. In recognizing that the Christian tradition itself has been marked by metaphysics, the argument follows that there is a need for a new relationship with religion. Rather, we require one that is not reliant on a foundational metaphysics. This research suggests that, in re-examining our relationship with religion in such a way, there is no dismissal of the cultural and historical significance of Christianity. There is, instead, a careful acknowledgement that this is a Western heritage that is still meaningful. It is one, however, that this dissertation argues may be re-presented in a way that more authentically responds to the present situation. I set out to show that, while Vattimo's work demonstrates a departure from the more classical metaphysics associated with Christianity, he retains what he considers to be its central tenets. Indeed, the dissertation stresses the centrality and importance of the incarnation to this particular understanding of Christianity. The dissertation, then, shows that framework is not to be confused with content. Many practices that act as a point of access for faith, while departing from a more classical framework are not, necessarily, devoid of all religious content. This was underlined, for example, in the discussion of art in terms of an

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opening up to the religious dimension of life. It also considered the eschatological and prophetic character of art itself, recognizing art as a message or form of communication that calls on us to respond. Overall, the research suggests that Vattimo's work offers a pathway for a renewed engagement with the religious tradition. This is, of course, simply one of many possible avenues left open to us for coming to faith in postmodernity. There is, nonetheless, a deep attentiveness in Vattimo's work to the different ways in which we are drawn to God and it expresses the hope that faith itself continues to be a possibility in terms of human existence.

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