A Dialogue on the Middle East and Other Subjects

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Editorial Note: This text was composed in September-October 2001 as an interview intended for publication in the Arabic-language webzine *Maaber* (www.maaber.com). In part because it clarifies my position on matters that have preoccupied us since September 11, I requested Mr. Abdulhamid's permission to publish it in *Anthropoetics*. Taking advantage of what the French call *l'esprit de l'escalier,* I have appended some additional material in [brackets]. – EG

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EG – Before beginning, I would like to commend you for your courage and perseverance in keeping a West-Middle East dialogue going at this difficult time, which is precisely when such dialogue is the most necessary.

AA – For the benefit of your Arabic readers who are, for the majority, quite new to the concepts of Originary Thinking and Generative Anthropology, please give us brief definitions of these terms.

EG – The term "Generative Anthropology" (GA) was suggested to me by my publisher; I had wanted to use "genetic anthropology" (translating the French word *génétique*) but in English this would refer to genetics. Thus the term implies no relationship with Chomsky's "generative grammar." The central idea of GA is that language, and human culture in general, insofar as it falls under the general category of "representation" or the use of signs, emerges as a collective, "scenic" means of deferring the violence occasioned by mimetic desire. Perhaps the simplest characterization of humanity is that it is the species that has more to fear from its own members than its natural environment, including predators, starvation, and everything else. (The terrorist attack on New York provoked someone to remark that this was harder to bear than a natural disaster because "you know they *wanted* to kill you.")

GA begins with René Girard's model of human desire as *mimetic* or imitative; each person's desire is incited and reinforced by the desire of others. As a positive force, mimetic desire helps us to acquire new values and learn new behaviors. But it also has a negative side: since we all imitate each other's desire, we all tend to become rival contenders for the same object. As our ancestors became more human, they became correspondingly more mimetic, with the result that the potential violence of their rivalry became too great to be controlled by animal modes of communication. I hypothesize that the first use of representation arose as a means to prevent, or, as I prefer to say, adopting a term of Jacques Derrida, to *defer* this mimetic violence. A capsule formulation of the fundamental hypothesis of GA (which I call the "originary hypothesis") is that the human is uniquely characterized by *the deferral of violence through representation*. In a scenic configuration, with the participants on the periphery of a circle and an object of desire (say, a source of food) at the center, each wishes to appropriate the object for himself, but, as each fears the others, his gesture of appropriation is cut off from its object and transformed into the first sign. Thus the linguistic sign may be considered an "aborted gesture of appropriation." The sign as a re-presentation of the object can be shared by all participants, and each communicates through it to all the others that he has renounced his attempt to possess the object. At the same time, this concentration of all signs–of all *significance*–on the central object is the originary model of the sacred. Thus one may consider the first sign the *name-of-God*.

All cultural activities remain scenic, even when the scene is internalized in the individual imagination. GA is a way of thinking about human culture that derives its fundamental categories from the originary scene. For example, the principle of reciprocity is fundamental to most conceptions of morality, in particular, to Kant's famous "categorical imperative." But where does this principle come from? GA's answer: from the reciprocal exchange of signs in the originary scene. Each emits the sign and at the same time is aware of the others' equivalent action. Since we all possess language, we are all potential interlocutors. The inequalities that generate resentment–an important concept in GA–may all be understood as exclusions from dialogue.

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A few years ago I began to use the term *originary thinking* as a synonym for GA in order to make clearer that Generative Anthropology is not a branch of the academic discipline practiced in Anthropology departments. GA is a way of thinking about the human. As such, it does not have a specific research program of its own–something that makes more difficult its acceptance in our university system–but it can help clarify the fundamental presuppositions of all disciplines, including Anthropology, that deal with human culture.

AA – In one of your *Chronicles*, you described Western Civilization as “the most successful of human enterprises.” A recent point made in the debates of the GAlist raises the issue of applicability of the basic concepts of GA, such as minimality, to other cultures. Before we go any further, then, it might be important to wonder: *how W*estern *is GA really, despite its universalist aspirations and claims?*

If I understand your question, you are asking, “Isn’t GA really (just) a Western mode of thought?” Certainly GA was developed in the West, and it owes a great deal to the vision of (Judeo-)Christianity, or the (Judeo-)Christian vision, of René Girard. This in itself says nothing about its universal applicability, any more than it would for a hypothesis in physics or biology. But a theory of culture is of necessity itself an element of culture; and because human beings naturally resent exclusion from dialogue, it is impossible simply to propound a universal anthropology without reflecting on its origins in a particular culture.

I don’t think it is chauvinistic to point to the success of the Western mode of “liberal democracy” in creating for its members both prosperity and (relative) political freedom. I can’t prove that these are the highest human values, but the number of people who seek to emigrate to Western-style nations seems proof enough, as it was in the days of the Berlin Wall. Who would not prefer better health care, a longer life expectancy, and more options in every domain of human activity from work to food to leisure?

If one seeks to understand what it is that has permitted this superior effectiveness, one is led to compare the forms of organization in different social groups. The modern market system arose in the Christian world, and even beyond Max Weber’s well-known association of capitalism with the “Protestant ethic,” it owes something to the Christian vision of the Kingdom of God as the mutual recognition of individual souls. I think one can make the case that “consumer society” is motivated by a worldly form of this very vision: each individual’s unique pattern of consumption makes him a recognizable model for all the others.

But, however important it may be to explain the origin of the market system, this is a backward-looking quest, whereas the point of any research is to improve things in the future. It seems to me that today’s global marketplace is no longer adequately described as “Western civilization.” To the extent that it can be viewed as such by those who feel excluded from it, it has not yet fulfilled the essential task of any social organization, local, regional, or global, which is to defer violence. Nor will this task be accomplished, as some superficial critics suggest, through the elimination of all cultural differences for the benefit of MacDonald’s and Coca Cola. Globalization has given us Chinese jazz, French rap, and California-Thai restaurants. The essential thing is to increase the global exchange system’s degrees of freedom–and this

means helping less advanced societies to benefit from participation in it.

To those who cite the resentment of the enemies of the global market as proof of its fundamental inadequacy, I can only say that, although a great deal of divergence is possible concerning the way in which the world order will evolve, the very nihilism of recent attacks on this order, from the farce of the mindless rioting at WTO meetings to the tragedy of suicidal mass annihilation, demonstrates that there is no real alternative. Forgetting their moral horrors, atavistic regimes like that of the Taliban cannot even feed their people. For the world as a whole to follow their path, it would have to lose nine tenths of its population. [It is nevertheless imprecise to call the al Qaeda terrorists *nihilistic.* Although their religious motivation makes them indifferent to the annihilation of the world, it provides the ground for a "medieval" Islamic utopia, all the more powerful in that its realization on earth is not indispensable.]

But your question has a theoretical as well as a practical point: does GA's principle of "minimality" not in fact exclude the values of non-Western cultures? I do not think so. The claim that all human culture is dominated by the problems posed by mimetic desire could perhaps only have been formulated in the West during the postwar or postmodern era. But the evidence for this claim in every culture is overwhelming. I don't think it's a Western prejudice to believe that people are all basically the same, that only their forms of organization differ, and that, over the course of history, some of these forms prove more effective than others and tend to replace them. Certainly I have never seen any evidence to the contrary.

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AA – What are the mechanisms of "exclusion" at work here in your opinion, I mean with regards to the global marketplace? How much of it do you think is *intentional* due to greed or some form of superiority complex vis-à-vis other cultures? Is the idea of "the virtue of selfishness," advocated by Ayn Rand among others, manifesting itself here, be it consciously or unconsciously?

EG – The "virtue of selfishness" as the motor of market society goes back at least to Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees; or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1714). Others, in contrast, have cited the mutual trust that is essential to the operation of the market system. Rather than emphasize either trait, I would simply insist on the notion of minimal constraint; people are both good and bad, selfish and generous, but the optimal exchange system is one that permits individual interests to interact with each other as freely as possible, as opposed to systems where the distribution-system is centrally controlled.

I don't think the difficulties of integrating the less-advanced economies into the

global market should be seen from the perspective of “exclusion”; this is a victimary term, and, as you know, I think that in the post-millennial era the persecutor-victim model is increasingly less useful. Indeed, rather than seeing international relations as the zero-sum game of “imperialism” in which the resentment of the poor countries is taken as a sign of their exploitation by the wealthy ones–not that this never happens–this resentment is better understood as reflecting their lack of presence in, and profit from, the marketplace. Rather than depending on, say, African nations for their profits, the advanced economies today scarcely know that Africa exists.

There is no simple formula for successfully integrating all economies into the global market. Neither coercion nor charity are very effective. But the current outpouring of resentment, however horrible its mode of expression, should be understood as a sign that this integration is indeed taking place, and that, barring world catastrophe, those who prefer medieval society to globalization are reacting against the inevitable.

AA – With the collapse of the Soviet Union and what has been described as the downfall of communism (though one can hardly tell considering the continuing proliferation of communist parties and ideologues out there), the notion of free market economics now dominates the scene. You seem to be quite a “believer” in this system; how much of a “believer” are you? What would you have to say about programs such as Affirmative Action meant to somehow establish a system of checks and balances within the overall system of free market economy for the purpose of controlling resentment?

EG – I think that it has been shown that socialism as a system–in contrast with “social democracy”–does not really exist, that its alternative status to “capitalism” was a sham. This does not of course preclude the success of the experiments in mixed economy that we see in countries like China or Singapore. But I find it hard to believe that Chinese “communism” can survive as more than a vestigial justification for the political oligarchy, or that this oligarchy itself will not evolve at some point–as I believe it is already doing–into a more democratic system.

As for being a “believer” in the market, I believe that all social forms are best understood as modes of exchange, and that the best form is the one that generates the greatest number of degrees of freedom. The lesson of the past century is that, like it or not, there is no real alternative to the market system because no other conceivable social order can be “wiser” in allowing for a greater contribution of the members of the society to its decision-making process. The market is an agency whose outputs all can influence but no one can forestall or dominate. Any system that purports to improve life by repressing the market must involve confiscatory

economic policies backed by a tyrannical political structure, and such policies cannot succeed even in the economic domain. This does not mean we should leave all decisions to the market. In the liberal-democratic polity, a *political* exchange-system oversees and regulates the economic system; mature market economies provide, among other things, a “safety net” for people unable to compete in the marketplace.

As for Affirmative Action and social policy in general, I would state my position on two levels: a general one of political theory, and a more personal one of political preference. On the general level, I would say that the debate on Affirmative Action as it has taken place in the US, despite all the hypocrisy and self-serving claims of victimage–notably on the part of privileged white women who have been by far the most successful beneficiaries of these policies–is nevertheless exemplary of the messy yet, no doubt, maximally fair way such things are decided in a democracy. On this level, I think it is a fine thing that we have both a Left and a Right, Democrats as well as Republicans, supporters and opponents of Affirmative Action.

On the level of personal political opinion, while I can understand that long years of discrimination call out for some remedy, I believe that any policy favoring one social group over another is best implemented indirectly. Racial quotas enforced by means of differential admission criteria (such that a Black or Hispanic with score X is admitted and a White or Asian rejected) may have positive effects, but they are ultimately demeaning to the groups they are intended to serve. I observed more racial tension on campus during the Affirmative Action era than there had been twenty years earlier. As an example of “good” affirmative action, I would cite a recent initiative of the University of California to sponsor high-school graduates normally not admittable as first-year students for two years at community (two-year) colleges, with the assurance that, if they perform satisfactorily, they will be admitted to the University in their third year. This allows the University to monitor and encourage the education of “minority” students without selecting them at the expense of others. [Unfortunately, implementation of this policy has been postponed for budgetary reasons.]

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[**Digression: The Persistence of Politics:** The conjunction of this article with Adam Katz’s in this issue, which gently takes me to task for neglecting the political, makes this an appropriate moment for me to revisit the relationship of political to economic exchange.

In the originary scene, substitution of the exchange of (reproducible) signs for that

of the (irreplaceable) central referent is, like the multiplication of loaves and fishes, a “miracle” that defers violence. This act of representation permits the inauguration of a human economy through the attribution of “equal” portions of the central object, and, subsequently, the birth of genuine economic production, which takes place in “private” but whose value will be tested on the public scene of representation, the originary market. The long-term outcome of this process of deferral and confirmation is the dissemination of sacred centrality into the myriad desire-objects of the modern consumer economy, such that, as a general rule, no single object holds a sufficient sacred charge to motivate violence.

A similar diffusion of sacrality may be said to take place in the political sphere. Once the creation of surplus-producing agricultural economies makes it possible to acquire the political power of the sacred center by usurping its (ritual) redistributive functions, the scarcity of such power makes it a perennial object of conflict, but this conflict is nevertheless restrained in principle by the dependency of political power on the exchange of representations between sovereign and citizen. As society has evolved, this exchange has become progressively more democratic and interactive.

I have sometimes given the impression that I view politics in liberal democracy as merely a safety valve for the resentment generated in the economic sphere. But the very existence of this sphere is predicated on a prior acceptance of political authority. Economic exchange depends on social peace, not just negatively, but as its *raison d’être*, the source of all the cultural meanings that make it more than pillage or extortion.

In contrast to Marxism’s insistence on the primacy of the economic, originary thinking implies that history is driven by the evolution of its dominant modes of social organization, which is to say, its *political* forms. This view is, notably, implicit in my characterization of the postmodern era by the widespread adoption, in reaction to the Holocaust, of an ethical epistemology that understands asymmetrical political structures as victimary and therefore as untenable. Yet this characterization conceals an eschatological temptation: to affirm that now, in the post-postmodern or post-millennial age when, arguably, all significant political asymmetries have been eliminated, the appropriate model for human relations has become economic rather than political, so that complaints of injustice can henceforth be replaced by negotiations from a standpoint of formal equality. I admit to having succumbed at times to this temptation.

Any affirmation of the end of politics is itself unavoidably political. Just as socialism’s “from each according to his abilities . . .” fails to abolish politics because the “abilities” (and “needs”) of each can be determined only by an all-powerful central authority, so political authority alone can impose a negotiatory (economic)

model on parties who complain of (political) injustice. Nor can the transcendence of the political be achieved by “bracketing” or deferring the moral status of such complaints, since this bracketing is itself precisely the substance of the (political) paradigm-shift from the political to the economic.

The minimalist position that the “wisdom of the market” should decide in the political as well as in the economic sphere logically implies that it is itself subject to the wisdom of the political marketplace. Acting out paradoxes of this sort leads to the infinite regression of “mimetic crisis,” which human culture came into existence to avoid. Our lucid acceptance of this paradox does not, appearances to the contrary, signal the end of (political) history. What it suggests is rather that the political debate will be defined, with increasing sharpness, by the opposition between an all-inclusive global system for the exchange of goods and representations and an unstable margin constantly seeking new tactics for contesting this system “from without.”

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This margin can by (self-)definition be dealt with only politically. In its most dangerous mode, it forces itself on our consciousness, as it has done recently, through a victimary claim so extreme that it goes beyond victimage. If I am ready to blow myself up along with everyone else, I no longer need “white guilt” to make you realize that participation in the “all-inclusive” exchange system is a political act for which, on occasion, one may be held responsible.

However we may be tempted to explain it in terms of psychology, even of psychopathology, the marginal stance is a defiantly political one that precludes any final, “rational” decision as to the optimum rules of the economic game. We may denounce *ad infinitum* the *mensonge romantique* (romantic lie) of the victimary attitude, but this attitude, we discover, endlessly renews itself, because, in our very ontology, we are *all* “outside” the economic exchange system, whether we happily participate in it or prefer to remain apocalyptically apart as its victim and divinity. Of the consequences of this post-millennial revelation, we can as yet draw only the most crucial: henceforth, the politico-economic game, whatever its rules, *cannot be played violently*, lest it endanger the entire human experiment of deferring violence through representation. This is an eschatology that “we,” as minimally rational human beings, can all agree on, and confidently impose with all necessary force on its would-be falsifiers.

Adam Katz also raises a more fundamental question, that of the politics of originary thinking itself. *D’où parlez-vous* (from where do you speak?) when presenting the originary hypothesis? What is the politics of the hypothesizer’s theoretical /

spectatorial position outside the scene? This is not an issue I can deal with here at any length. I think it can be approached from *within* the scene by reference to the tension between center and periphery. The "moral model" of perfect reciprocity among the participants on the periphery of the scene can never be completely realized because it depends on their non-reciprocal difference from the "sacred" center. Which is why we have consumer society (and terrorism) rather than the Kingdom of God. To minimize the political stance of the originary hypothesizer is to ensure the compatibility of his model with the maximal number of different possibilities for valorizing–or ignoring–the constitutive difference between center and periphery, possibilities that correspond to real and potential forms of political organization. This minimization is homologous in the political sphere with that of the difference between God creating man and man creating God in the religious sphere. Which is not to say that this statement of principle solves, or can ever solve, the problem of *its own*"politics."]

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AA – To go back to a point you made above, can we understand from your response that language (as the linguistic sign or the act of representation), and with it the whole of human culture, emerged as a result of an act, namely: "the aborted gesture of appropriation," that sought to counter-balance the tendency to engage in appropriation at any cost and, thus, to help ensure the survival of the group? In other words, wouldn't language itself here appear as some sort of an affirmative action program meant to contain resentment and thus defer the violence that could result from a "mindless" continuation of mimetic appropriation?

EG – Yes, language bears with it an implicit moral model of reciprocal exchange that we all share. Animal societies are governed by pecking-order hierarchies; the originary scene of human language begins with a *universal* renunciation of the central object that becomes sacred to everyone, including the "alpha animal." Primitive hunter-gatherer human societies are egalitarian; the sacred stands above any individual, and all are equal with respect to the fundamental configuration of the scene of representation. Human inequality only emerges from this originary equality when wealth begins to be accumulated and the sacred center becomes a locus of redistribution that a "big man" can appropriate.

Thus I think you are right to see "affirmative action" as implicit in human language. Affirmative action is motivated by the "white guilt" that the originary reciprocity that defines the human has been violated, that others are being excluded from the social dialogue. The whole postwar era has been dominated by the confrontation of the resentment of the excluded with the guilt aroused by their exclusion.

AA – You hinted, in one of your early *Chronicles*, at the demise of liberalism; does that make you a conservative from the point of view of American politics?

EG – My critique of socialism is not that it's inferior to "capitalism" but that the concept itself has no coherent meaning. I am almost tempted to say the same thing about what Americans call "liberalism." (As I'm sure you know, in France a "liberal" is someone Americans would call a neo-conservative, even a libertarian, someone who "believes" in the market.) The word has almost entirely disappeared from our national political vocabulary. I recall Michael Dukakis' embarrassment in 1988 at being asked if he considered himself a liberal; I doubt if Al Gore ever used the word in last year's campaign. To the extent that this term has become associated with a particular moment in post-war American politics, that of Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society," when it was believed that we could eradicate poverty and related ills simply by handing out money to the poor through the welfare system, liberalism died with the adoption of welfare reform a few years ago.

But, as I said in answer to the previous question, on the level of political theory, although there need not be communists in a democratic society, there must be liberals, relatively speaking. There must be a debate about what kind of safety net is necessary, about how to balance productive efficiency with the concerns of the consuming public, including long-term concerns such as the environment. The American electorate has never been inclined to close off the liberal-conservative debate, even if its terms must occasionally change. As a result of one such change, we may consider post-war liberalism to be dead, but now there are "neo-liberals" to carry on.

In the *Chronicle* you allude to, I was implicitly referring to *academic* liberalism, which corresponds roughly to the ideology of a European "Green" party. My point was that today's liberals condemn all existing social forms in the name of equality, yet deny that their resentment of inequality, which extends vicariously to animals and even to plants and rocks, is the product of a uniquely human experience–one for which the originary hypothesis offers a generative model. This denial leads to unfortunate concepts like "animal rights." We punish those who abuse animals, just as we punish someone who despoils a monument. Does this mean the monument has "rights"?

As I believe I also said in that *Chronicle*, in the current vocabulary of American politics, I am rather a neo-conservative than a conservative. A conservative is less someone who thinks he should put his faith in the dynamic of the exchange-system than someone who puts his faith in God, or, in any case, in "tradition." I find this

“paleo-conservatism” incompatible with, or at least, uncongenial to, GA’s minimalistic presuppositions about the human.

AA – How would you appraise someone like Noam Chomsky and his “neo-Anarchist” colleagues?

EG – What little I know about Chomsky’s politics gives me no desire to know more. Chomsky is very nearly a Holocaust denier; he burns with resentment for every victimage in the world but that of his own people. His political writings, from what I have seen of them, are litanies of accusations of immorality and greed directed against those in power, particularly in the United States. At best, such criticism can bring scandals to light; it is incompatible with any kind of political theory. “Anarchism” is just another word for a personal nihilism protected–and in cases like Chomsky’s, richly rewarded–by the very order one affects to despise. Were I an anarchist, I would feel myself obliged to reject the benefits of such an order. Diogenes lived in a barrel; I doubt if Chomsky does.

AA – From what I read of Chomsky, he seems more a revisionist than a denier. He throws some doubts on the scale of the Holocaust, and criticizes the way it was used as “a propaganda tool.” What do you have to say about this, considering that he is not the only Jewish scholar of late to raise these issues?

EG – I believe I said “very nearly” a denier. No, Chomsky doesn’t deny the Holocaust, nor (for example) the massacres of Pol Pot, but whenever one talks about the Jews who died, he complains that we have forgotten the Gypsies, and when one talks about the massacres in Cambodia, he reproaches us for forgetting those in East Timor. Here is a quote about September 11: “The terrorist attacks were major atrocities. In scale they may not reach the level of many others, for example, Clinton’s bombing of the Sudan with no credible pretext, destroying half its pharmaceutical supplies and killing unknown numbers of people (no one knows, because the US blocked an inquiry at the UN and no one cares to pursue it).” In other words, by deploring an atrocity against a group Chomsky dislikes (and the US, far more than the Jews, is the central object of his hatred), one is complicit through silence in what is presented as a worse atrocity–even if the ill-advised bombing of the Sudan factory was done on credible if erroneous information in response to a terrorist act (the bombing of two US embassies), and deliberately staged at night in order to *avoid* killing “unknown numbers of people.” I fully agree with David Horowitz’ assessment in “The Sick Mind of Noam Chomsky” (Salon.com; September 26, 2001) that Chomsky is “a pathological ayatollah of anti-American hate.”

Here is a less polemical quote, from Pierre Vidal-Naquet, “On Faurisson and Chomsky” in *Assassins of Memory* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1992): “To be

sure, it is not the case that Chomsky's theses in any way approximate those of the neo-Nazis. But why does he find so much energy and even tenderness in defending those who have become the publishers and defenders of the neo-Nazis, and so much rage against those who allow themselves to fight them? That is the simple question I shall raise. When logic has no other end than self-defence, it goes mad."

AA – As for Anarchists, yes, you're quite right, they are indeed using the very "system" they criticize. But how else are they supposed to operate? Working from outside the system turns them into outlaws, and perhaps even terrorists, while living in barrels will only serve to marginalize them and undermine their ability to communicate their ideas.

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EG – My reference to barrels was facetious. But if "anarchists" like Chomsky are not only tolerated but lionized by the academic world and the intellectual community in the United States and Europe, that strikes me as a demonstration that they are in no way dangerous to the system, but serve as outlets for resentment, somewhat like stand-up comedians. It's a familiar aspect of the market system since the Romantic era that those who stridently oppose the *bourgeoisie* are very much a part of it. My real criticism of "anarchists" is not that they don't live in barrels, but that they propose no alternative to the system that shelters them. Rather than lonely voices of sanity, they are simply part of the background noise of the market system. The recent protests at WTO meetings and the "peace rallies" after the recent events transmit no positive political views. Marxism may be fundamentally flawed, but it is a coherent political philosophy. "Anarchism" is not–unless you are referring (and I don't think you are) to libertarians à la Ayn Rand, who are at the antipodes of Chomsky, and whose views I find almost as irrelevant.

AA – GA, in many ways, is based on the works of French anthropologist René Girard, but the latter has proven too Christian for the tastes of many of his colleagues, including perhaps you. Still, one has to ask, how Christian is GA, if it is Christian at all?

EG – Abstracting from the question of belief, one can consider Christianity, at least as Girard presents it, as an anthropology. This is the substance of Girard's most recent book, which is, not coincidentally, perhaps the one most impregnated with Christian vocabulary: *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair*. Girard's conception of Christianity is that it alone fully reveals the "scapegoat mechanism" that is the principle of all earlier, sacrificial, religions and that remains present in "sacrificial Christianity" that fails to adhere to the implications of its founding revelation.

I have no difficulty with the notion that, in comparison with other religions,

Christianity has a firmer grasp of the ideal of reciprocal morality and is consequently sharper in its critique of sacrificial practices. But the difference between a religion and a minimal anthropology is nowhere made clearer: Christianity can only commemorate the historical locus of its founding revelation by attributing to the source of this revelation a unique sacred status. However ingeniously we "anthropologize" this attribution–by generalizing it to all human beings, by finding parallels to the Trinity in the individual mind, by demonstrating the identity between the victim of sacrifice and the divinity of sacrifice–it remains bound to a particular historical experience and a particular person, and is consequently not fully generalizable. Christianity is a "universal" religion, but no religion can become the global religion. This is a translation into religious terms of my remarks about Western civilization above.

Hence, despite my admiration for Christianity, I do not consider GA a Christian way of thinking. I would go further; I don't consider Girard's anthropology "Christian" either. His steadfast affirmation that all his ideas are already present in the New Testament is something he no doubt believes, and it is certainly more reassuring–and less resentment-generating–than the claim to have discovered it all himself, but it is no truer than if I were to claim that all the ideas of Generative Anthropology were already present in the originary scene. They are all *derived* from it, and filiations can be traced, but they could not have been made explicit at the time, any more than the authors of the Gospels could have formulated the theory of mimetic desire, let alone the originary hypothesis. I see this making-explicit as a continuing process that began with the first sign and continues throughout history. For Girard–and he is not without self-contradiction on this point–all "sacrificial" religions disguise the truth, and Christianity, partially anticipated by Hebrew religion, reveals it. All is then revealed, but the revelation must be renewed, and that is Girard's function. I don't think this is the appropriate way to understand human history. *All* history is revelation, not just one being's miraculous appearance.

AA – You have stated quite clearly in many of your writings that GA is meant to *replace* religion as a way of thought with regards to human origins. Can you clarify that more? Can you clarify more the relationship (potential, real) between GA and religion?

EG – It would be utopian, not to say megalomaniacal, to claim that GA or any other way of thinking could replace religion. To use an oxymoron, which is a genuine paradox, GA may be considered a *minimal religion*–provided we take into account that religion is not a minimalist form of representation. In effect, what we do when we "minimalize" religion into GA is reduce the institutional sacred to its minimal form, which is *language*. For example, the minimal core of God's immortality is the immortality of the sign, whose relation to its meaning does not live and die in

worldly time. In minimal terms, God is the subsistent center of the scene of representation, that is, the Being that by “eternally” guaranteeing the meaning of the sign as *langue* permits our communicative use of it in *parole*. In the same vein, the individual soul’s immortality is that of its possessor’s “story.” In Homer’s day, the poet who told your story was considered to have made you immortal. Proust’s great novel about recovering “lost time” is meant to serve a similar function.

But I have no illusion that this kind of reduction can replace religion. I would define the “religious experience” as precisely the feeling that one can extrapolate from the mere formal persistence of meaning to a force that impinges on the world. And the essential function of this force is to preserve us from violence. There are “no atheists in the foxholes” because, in times of danger, we rely on God to defer violence in the same way as the representation of the sacred deferred violence in the originary scene.

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I have every sympathy with those who pray to God as the ultimate interlocutor in moments of crisis. If there is a minimal God who guarantees the permanence of language and of the scene on which it appears, then who can know the limits of this guaranteeing Being’s capacity to defer violence? But, by a paradox characteristic of representation in general, once you have defined God in this way, you cannot “believe” in his power beyond that of the representations that he is said to guarantee. God is always conceived as prior to and independent of our representations of him. Minimally, God is coeval with humanity; as an object of knowledge, he is unknown before the emergence of human representation. Yet this representation could not have come into being had it not designated a presence prior to its emergence. The sacred is not something I *invent*; I can only *discover* it. Yet it had never manifested itself before that moment. To the extent that one can bound one’s spiritual life by the understanding of this paradox, and only to that extent, one can substitute GA for religion.

AA – Is Jesus, from the point of view of GA and regardless of sacrality considerations, a figure of love or resentment? Or did he make a transition from one to the other as his “mission” proceeded?

EG – The “historical Jesus” being pretty much a chimera, we have only the Jesus of the Gospels, who is presented as free from all resentment. When Jesus gets angry, which is pretty often, this is not resentment but a lesson to us not to tolerate evil. (Those who think it is Christian to blame ourselves for the recent terrorism should reread these passages.) Nor is there anything in the Gospels that supports the idea of a spiritual “transition” on Jesus’ part, except perhaps from optimism to

pessimism concerning the reception of his mission. We may of course speculate that the "historical Jesus" was a Jewish patriot or "zealot," as one theory has it. If we compare Jesus with predecessors like the Maccabees, one can see a progression from resentment to love, from violence to the renunciation of violence–but also from political effectiveness to political quietism. It's a good story, maybe a plausible one; it's just not the one told in the Gospels.

This is not to say that formulas like "the last will be the first" do not presuppose resentment. But the resentment is deferred beyond death; we are asked to renounce acting on it. And it is never presented as Jesus' resentment.

AA – What about a figure such as Muhammad; do you know enough about his life and career to formulate an opinion from the point of view of GA?

EG – My picture of Muhammad is fragmentary, to say the least. I think of him as a latecomer to the monotheistic tradition who founds a religion for its *outsiders*. Whereas the Hebrews of Exodus *leave* the world of the archaic empires, Islam attracts those who are *left out* of early Christian (and Jewish) civilization. Its enormous presence today in the so-called third world reflects this vocation.

Christianity conquered the empire from within; Islam attacks it from without. Unlike Jesus, Muhammad was a warrior as well as a prophet. Where Jesus, in the Hebrew prophetic tradition, denounced worldly power [all the better to obtain it, Nietzsche might say], Muhammad sought such power. This does not make one "better" than the other, but it leads to important differences in the social orders associated with the two religions. However absolute the power of Christian monarchs, there was always a distinction between the private world of reciprocal morality, which evolves into what comes to be called "civil society" and eventually into the market system, and the institutions of central political power. In Islam, where the prophet is both conqueror and law-giver, there is no such distinction. This makes the relationship of Islamic countries with the global market-system, and with democratic politics, particularly problematic. Islam has often, I think unfortunately, been a means of resisting the *embourgeoisement* without which civil society and democracy cannot flourish.

AA – What would say about the use of victimary rhetoric in East-West relations?

EG – I assume that by "East-West" you are referring to the relations between industrialized nations and those less developed, most of which were formerly either colonies or political dependencies of the "West." I would say *grosso modo* that rhetoric, any rhetoric, is useful as long as it allows new participants to enter the dialogue, but that it becomes harmful when these new participants continue to use it and thereby shut off dialogue. Like stock market booms, inflationary periods of

victimary rhetoric tend to last a little too long. In the post-colonial world, the persistence of the persecutor-victim model has greatly delayed the integration of many economies into the world market system. Compare South Korea with Zimbabwe or Algeria. Victimary rhetoric incites resentment to express itself as violence rather than recycling it into the exchange-system.

I read an interview the other day with a Pakistani admirer of Bin Laden. When asked why he hates the United States, he cited, among other things, the bombing of Iraq. For this man, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, not to speak of the violence its government has wreaked on its own citizens, is discounted as secondary conflict *within* his world, as opposed to the violence of the *external* persecutor-victim relation. Thus in the Gulf War, rather than defending Kuwait–and Saudi Arabia–we were persecuting Iraq.

9

AA – How about the use of victimary rhetoric in the Arab-Israeli struggle? What sorts of light can GA shed on this whole issue, in your opinion?

EG – This is, as you know, the touchiest of issues. As a Jewish American whose son was brought up in Israel, I cannot claim neutrality. Jews are no strangers to victimary rhetoric. In my view, the postwar / postmodern era that saw the end of colonialism and racial discrimination in the USA and even South Africa, as well as the enforcement of the rights of women, religious minorities, the handicapped, homosexuals, and so on, begins with the Holocaust and the legitimacy it granted to victimary rhetoric. Here was a case where there was no need to "see both sides": the Nazis were persecutors and the Jews were victims. This model could then be applied to all other overtly unequal relationships.

This being said, what strikes me most in the rhetoric of both sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict is that, whereas many Israelis, at least until recently, have openly sympathized with the Palestinians and considered their grievances legitimate or at any rate understandable, I have never heard from any Palestinian spokesman any sign of similar sympathy for the Israelis. When Sadat came to Jerusalem, there was truly a moment of mutual sympathy that led to a durable peace treaty–and, unfortunately, to Sadat's assassination. I doubt that Arafat is capable of such a gesture, either personally or politically. The Palestinians present themselves as victims of absolute injustice. If they kill Israelis, however brutally or arbitrarily, they are simply responding to persecution. But if Israeli soldiers kill a Palestinian even when they are being shot at, they are persecutors and the Palestinians are victims, martyrs. Here you have a clear case where victimary rhetoric prevents dialogue: if Israel is by its mere existence a persecutor and the Palestinian community its

victim, no conversation is possible. Many people had hoped that the Oslo peace process would lead beyond this mindset, but the new Intifada proved them wrong. I think that even now a good deal of the distrust on the Israeli side would be dissipated rather quickly if the Palestinians showed some signs of reciprocity.

Conversely, from what I understand, the great flaw in Barak's approach was that, however generous his concessions, he never treated the Palestinian negotiators as equal partners in dialogue, thereby confirming their victimary apprehensions. I hope that, despite the scenes of hateful celebration, the recent events will lead both sides to welcome the resumption of negotiations, as seems, very tentatively, to be occurring.

AA – Well, I guess due to our particular backgrounds none of us can actually claim neutrality when dealing with the issue of the Arab-Israeli struggle. Nonetheless, our mutual commitment to the use of language to defer violence already creates a bond between us that I am sure would help us forge ahead with this dialogue regardless of the touchiness of the issue involved. Having said this, let me respond to couple of points you made in your answer to this question.

- Can the Palestinians realistically be expected to sympathize or show any sign of reciprocity with the Israelis where there is nothing yet created on the ground that can give them any sense of closure? Sympathy seems to be the prerogative of the strong.

EG – I understand your point here. But the whole idea of the Oslo process was that real negotiations, that is, between *symmetrical* partners, were possible. This has subsequently proved illusory.

Let me put the discussion on a more general level. As a reader of my *Chronicles*, you are aware that I have been trying to construct an ethic for our "post-millennial" or post-victimary era. Our problem is that the political mechanisms of liberal-democratic society are effective only between relative equals, yet the victimary approach to asymmetrical relations that worked in the past is no longer viable. In other words, we have to understand resentment and attempt to allay it, but we cannot accept it as a source of truth.

The application of this formula to the Israeli-Palestinian situation is that, indeed, the Israelis must maintain their sympathy for the Palestinians, but they cannot simply accept the Palestinians' vision of reality and the demands that flow from it. Palestinians customarily describe Israel in the most violently hostile terms. Here is the beginning of a recent, typical, article in the *Palestine Times*: "It all began more than 52 years ago when Arab nations sold Palestine to marauding Jews from Europe and America who came to the land of Milk and Honey to pillage, plunder and

massacre the native inhabitants." Even Israeli "revisionists" critical of Zionist policy toward the Palestinians cannot engage in dialogue with this kind of language.

10

No doubt it is too much for Israel to expect sympathy from the Palestinians, but we can hope for a gradual diminution of resentment. Unfortunately, having Sharon on one side and the terrorists on the other is not conducive to this process. But I do not think we should see failure as inevitable, or as irrevocable. Had Barak been more diplomatic, had Arafat been more statesmanlike, it seems to me that there was a real chance for peace. Such a chance, we must believe, will come again. Arafat has certainly been *sounding* pretty statesmanlike lately. [This was written before the recent (December-January) Palestinian promises and attempts to crack down on terrorism. At the very least, the change in tone reflects the delegitimation of political violence since September 11, which, hopefully, can provide some common ground for both Israeli and Palestinian negotiators.]

- Palestinians are in many ways doing everything the Zionists did to create their state. Their violence is neither unusual nor unique. Some would argue that it is even more "justified," since they are seeking to liberate *part* of their original homeland, most Palestinians having already accepted the right of Israel to exist. Can we blame the Palestinians for being as prone to violence as any other people in the same circumstances? I mean, personally, I do condemn violence, and I am not one of those people who condone suicide bombings for any reason. But the circumstances of the struggle, and the way the world is responding to it, are such that the Palestinians seem to be encouraged indeed to think of themselves and, hence, act as ultimate victims.

EG – *Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner,* and one can well understand the Palestinians' frustration. But terrorism makes negotiation impossible. Whatever its crimes, Jewish terrorism before the creation of the Israeli state was limited and purposeful; it focused on discouraging the British so that they would get out, which they did. What is the focus of Palestinian terrorism? It is a mode of revenge rather than a political act. And its result is to harden Israeli positions. Sharon wouldn't be in power without the Intifada, and he wouldn't be occupying Bethlehem as I write if one of his ministers hadn't been assassinated. The only possible rational context for Palestinian terrorism is a campaign to drive the Jews out of the Middle East altogether–a desire often expressed in Arab countries, as you know.

- You said: "if Israel is by its mere existence a persecutor and the Palestinian community its victim, no conversation is possible." But then, the Palestinians were *indeed victimized* by the creation of the State of Israel with hundreds of

thousands of them getting thrown out of their homes (Barak himself, it is said, came very close to admitting that, without endorsing the right of return, of course). Thus, they were victimized in the ultimate sense because there is no undoing the injustice that fell upon them.

For a long time this is what the Palestinians have been unprepared to accept, but with the Oslo Accord, they proved that they have finally come to terms with that. What went wrong after that?

Let me be more clear. You refer to the assassination of Rabin in a *Chronicle* that came out at that time; do you think Rabin would have been able to deliver peace? As such, is the problem with the peace process related to the leaders involved? Or are we faced here with a typical Girardian situation where the people on both sides are dictating the course of action to the leaders and demanding the right *sparagmos*. If so, how can this situation be handled?

EG – No doubt the Palestinians suffered in 1948, but you can't forget that the Arab countries invaded Israel at the outset and that history would have been very different had they accepted the original partition agreement. And of course you are aware that Israel only took over the West Bank after another invasion in 1967, and that Jordan subsequently refused to take it back.

But I don't think we should be discussing the subject on this level, where each side can cite its arguments. The fundamental problem is that, in the eyes of the Arab world, certainly until recently, and I think still today in most quarters, Israel simply has no right to exist. The Oslo accords (which followed peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan and some lessening of international tension) seemed to reflect a change in this attitude. But here I return to my earlier point: if Israel has a right to exist, and the Palestinians have a right to a state, then, however disparate their power, they must be able to negotiate in symmetry. Which is to say that some signs of mutual sympathy are necessary. I'm not sure if Rabin and Arafat shaking hands was quite enough, but it was a first step.

11

I understand the Palestinians' desire for a "right of return," if only as an acknowledgement of their symmetry with their interlocutors. Perhaps there is a way of finessing that issue. Clearly Israel can't just give back its land, most of which has been greatly transformed, to those who occupied it before 1948. Nor is it very clear what a returnee would do with his property in a country utterly unlike the one he

left. Perhaps some kind of compensation would be satisfactory; perhaps even the right of Israeli citizenship, although one must understand Israel's fear of no longer being a–the only–"Jewish state." Or perhaps, as I heard at the time of the negotiations, all the Palestinians desired was an acknowledgement of their right *in abstracto*. Yet I can't help thinking, considering the extent of Barak's offer, that the real reason it was not accepted was not that Israel had rejected the "right of return," but that, when push came to shove, the Palestinian leadership–not to speak of the Palestinian "street"–just could not bring themselves to accept the legitimate existence of Israel.

I don't know if Rabin would have been able to bring peace, but if, as I believe, there *was* a real chance of peace, perhaps just a little thing like that handshake on the White House lawn, coupled with Rabin's great prestige in Israel, might have made the difference. I also believe that Arafat had genuine respect for Rabin and would have been far more willing to take a chance on him than on Barak, who, as I understand, never reached out to him personally.

Now we'll just have to wait for the latest cycle to play itself out. Perhaps if the US is successful in destroying the al Qaeda network (which remains to be seen), the glamour and apparent usefulness of terrorism and "martyrdom" will diminish even in "the land of milk and honey." After all, the IRA has begun disarming; the Berlin wall fell; apartheid was ended. One should never despair.

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AA – How legitimate, in your opinion, is the feminist criticism of GA and the works of Girard as being too "masculine?" How would you respond to this criticism?

EG – There have also been attempts at Girardian feminism. Since Girard is "for the victim," his thought has sometimes been appropriated by practitioners of victimary thinking. This being said, and putting aside the rhetorical aspects of the feminist critique, I think the point of legitimate debate is whether culture, including language, functions primarily to defer violence or whether it is an artifact of humanity's unique family structure, a domain in which women may be considered to have taken the lead. The evident facts that women's bodies, including both primary and secondary sexual characteristics, have been modified by evolution far more than men's, and that sexual attraction was and continues to be the driving force in this process–whose adaptive function is clearly to secure masculine support for our helpless, large-brained infants–might seem to imply some linkage between our sexual uniqueness and that other distinctive human trait which is representation.

By one account (written by a man, incidentally), the first intentional signs were

ochre markings used by women to simulate menstrual blood in order to attract males. But such speculations have not persuaded me to abandon the fundamental principle that culture exists primarily, because critically, to defer violence. There is really no society, except perhaps our own, in which women have an equal part in social decisions, particularly those concerning the sacred. Either women are deemed unclean and kept away from sacred rites, or they are considered sacred and placed at the center of these rites–two variants of the same general configuration. If women had been the originators of signs and therefore of culture, how could they have "lost control" of it? No doubt there have been throughout history fluctuations in the relative power of men and women, but the notion that men at some point "usurped" a once-maternal power is just a resentful myth.

It is not simply because men are physically stronger than women that culture has always been dominated by males, but because culture functions primarily to defer violence and violence is a male prerogative–and a male danger. A society that sends its women into battle is not going to survive through very many generations. That doesn't make women "inferior" to men; on the contrary, their lives are generally held more precious than men's. I can imagine a feminist of the future who, on reading that in the Titanic disaster most of the women were saved while most of the men drowned, alleges this as proof that in 1912 women held more political power than men.

12

AA – In one of your early *Chronicles*, you rejected the hypothesis that language and representation were indeed invented by mothers seeking to communicate with their infant children. The essence of your objection seems to have been that the intimacy of the mother-child relation would have stood as an obstacle in the face of disseminating any system of communication that developed between the two.

A potential counter-argument here could be that intimacy at the time did not require privacy. The mother-child relation, no matter how intimate, was not quite private, as such mimesis could have taken over and the system could have easily spread to the community.

The real point here is this: why insist that representation was strictly invented in order to defer violence? Why can't we speculate that language had evolved through some other system, but its *potential* for deferring violence was only "discovered" at a certain mimetic crisis?

EG – My answer to the previous question can be applied here. As you see quite clearly, the real question is whether language and culture emerged in order to defer violence or whether this deferral is merely a collateral function.

The point of the originary hypothesis is to account not so much for the superiority of human language over that of our ape cousins as for its different mode of operation, through symbols as opposed to “indexical” signals. Human is to ape language more or less as the Keplerian is to the Ptolemaic planetary system: both can enunciate certain basic facts, but the latter, in contrast to the former, cannot be extended to other data without an exponential increase in complexity. Apes can no doubt communicate all sorts of things in their languages. But a language of conventional signs, even if at the start it doesn’t communicate very much information, has an essentially unbounded capacity for such communication, whereas animal signal systems do not. What must be explained is why we adopted a *potentially* more effective system at a moment when it *did not* convey more information.

The originary hypothesis explains exactly how the linguistic sign differs from the signal: it is not part of an action to appropriate its referent, but a gesture of renunciation of this referent, incarnating a general interdiction that could only have arisen as a means to defer conflict. Girard presents a good deal of evidence in *La violence et le sacré* in support of the hypothesis that all rites are sacrificial and that sacrifice is a means of channeling and dispelling violence. Why should language, which is a minimal rite, have a different origin?

As for the mother-child relationship, when mothers teach their children to speak today, they don’t invent a private or semi-private language, they teach them a simplified version of the language they speak with other adults. Language is a reciprocal exchange and the mother initiates her child into language so that he can learn to take part in this exchange. How could such an exchange have originated in the context of a fundamentally *unequal* relationship? Barring some radical reformulation, the idea of mother-child language origin seems to me a feminist pipe-dream rather than a serious hypothesis.

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AA – In one of your recent *Chronicles* you raise the issue of vulnerability and the possibility of relapse as a counter-argument to Francis Fukuyama’s thesis expounded in *The End of History and the Last Man*. But Mr. Fukuyama himself has repeatedly asserted that he does not discount the possibility of relapse.

What he seems to be suggesting is this: in a society that, for one reason or another, failed to achieve liberal democracy, or where there occurred a relapse, aspirations will still lead the people, sooner or later, towards the fulfillment, or at least, the envisioning of liberal democracy as the system that could not be improved upon. This means that the discovery of liberal democracy marks the ideological end of history.

In Mr. Fukuyama's own words in his introduction to the '93 paperback edition of his book: "While some present-day countries might fail to achieve stable liberal democracy, and others might lapse back into other, more primitive forms of rule like theocracy or military dictatorships, the *ideal* of liberal democracy could not be improved upon."

By arguing against Fukuyama, are you, by any chance, suggesting that the liberal democratic system *can* be improved upon? Or are you simply trying to keep the option open so as to safeguard the idea of liberal democracy from becoming a "dogma"? Or is there some other explanation?

13

EG – I think some of the *Chronicles* I have written recently make my position clearer. I admire Fukuyama's clarity and forcefulness and have often referred to him in my columns. But there is a contradiction between unilaterally declaring the end of history and describing this "end" as a political mode that is incompatible with any such declaration.

Fukuyama, following Kojève's Hegelian fundamentalism, doesn't seem to see the difficulty of applying Hegel's "absolute idealism" to an open-ended human temporality that continually generates new knowledge and options. The nation-state is not the final incarnation of the *Weltgeist*. Marx, at least, thought of the Hegelian "end of history" as the beginning of a new, creative world of freedom. Fukuyama, in contrast, in the only silly passage in his brilliantly prescient 1989 article, evokes the wistful sadness of seeing history come to an end and the boredom of living "after history," when just the opposite should be the case. Forgetting for the moment about Bin Laden, the integration of all of humanity into the global economy would not result in a stagnant utopia but in ever more creative and unpredictable forms of interaction on every level.

But we *cannot* forget about Bin Laden. As I said in my *Chronicles* in answer to some remarks of your own, even if al Qaeda doesn't have right now the ability to destroy the global market system, we can't just assume that next time this will still be the case. We must respect our adversaries enough to acknowledge the coherence of their world view. The "medieval" society they prefer–with or without Islamic law–is exactly what they would bring about if they did succeed in destroying modern civilization. This gives their destructive actions a consistency that was not the case for either right- or left-wing "socialism" (recalling that Nazi is short for "National-Socialist"). These doctrines, however cruel, claimed that, once the eggs were broken, the omelet would be superior to anything eaten before, in both the moral *and* the material sense: the International Soviet or the Thousand-Year Reich would

be not only morally superior but more economically productive than bourgeois society. (In the Depression, such claims had a certain credibility.) The terrorists make no such promises of material prosperity.

Fukuyama is certainly right that their ideology does not express any really new ideas. But suppose they won; suppose our civilization were destroyed. Would it really be useful to say that we were still really at the end of history, but that the Idea just met with some temporary setbacks on its way to incarnation? I think that, even in the narrow sense in which Fukuyama uses the term, the "end of history" requires, at the very least, a consensus of all states or state-like entities. One can argue that McVeighs will always be possible within liberal democracies (I have made this case in an article called "Originary Democracy and the Critique of Pure Fairness," in *The Democratic Experience and Political Violence,* ed. David Rapoport and Leonard Weinberg, London: Frank Cass, 2001, 308-24), but al Qaeda is a problem for the Idea itself. It's all well and good to talk about liberal democracy and globalization, but if large parts of the less developed world can't be integrated into the global system fast enough to prevent events like September 11, then some changes must be made, the Idea must be tweaked.

To speak more concretely: at a minimum, as life in the US demonstrates more clearly each day, "liberal democracy" must install a much more powerful and pervasive security apparatus. And this, in turn, will necessarily restrict the liberties in which the Idea of liberal democracy consists. Liberal democracy is successful because it is maximally adaptable. But one can't simply dismiss every possible adaptation as epiphenomenal by claiming that it's already implicit in the Idea of liberal democracy. This is closed, apocalyptic thinking, like Girard's claim that Christ has already revealed the whole of anthropological truth. For Girard too, life in post-history is boring.

One more point. The "end of history" is homologous with the end of war. WWII was the last total war that civilization, and perhaps humanity itself, could survive. War between the most advanced states having always been the motor of political history, the impossibility of war brings history to an end. Throughout the Cold War, as its name implies, the possibility of war seemed to be not abolished but indefinitely suspended, so that the "two world systems" were expected to remain face to face indefinitely into the future. The end of the Cold War then appeared to put an end to the very Idea of war. But now we are waging a new, "asymmetrical" kind of war. And all of a sudden we realize that our side is vulnerable–that if we don't do things right, we could lose. If even this time of uncertainty and tension doesn't qualify as "history" in the eyes of our faithful Hegelian, then we'll just have to imitate Marx and stand him back on his feet.

AA – You have touched in your responses on the September 11 terrorist attacks, but let us here address this issue in a more direct manner. In your *Chronicle* referred to above you introduce the concept of the "Talibanization" of the world. What exactly do you mean by that? Do you buy into the notion that this attack represents in some way a "clash of civilizations?"

EG – I've tried to answer this question in my most recent *Chronicles*. No, I agree with you (and Fukuyama) that there is no "clash of civilizations"; the conflict or "dialectic" is taking place *within* global society. But the conflict is with an "internal other" not satisfactorily conceptualizable in Hegelian terms. Resentment is not a Hegelian category; even in the master-slave dialectic, the slave isn't resentful, he just learns while the master vegetates, and eventually, as Kojève puts it, he becomes a freed slave, a *bourgeois*.

What I meant by "Talibanization" is certainly not that the Taliban would take over the world. But if the terrorists and their friends, this time or the next, can put together enough weaponry to destroy the fabric of global civilization, the keepers of the order that would emerge in the ensuing "state of nature" would be gangs of armed men, the most stable and powerful of which would probably follow a rigid, transcendentally imposed ideology like that of the Taliban. As Durkheim observed, the core function of religion is ensuring social cohesion; secular society requires a much higher level of organization than religious society.

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AA – Finally, and by way of ending this second part of the interview, let me revisit the issue of the Holocaust, if only by way of registering a personal sentiment.

It is rather unfortunate that many Arabs choose to ignore this issue. I can understand the reasons behind this attitude, namely the way the Israelis and their supporters use this issue on occasions to make the world turn a blind eye to developments in the Occupied Territories.

Still, I think the issue is much too significant in the course of human history to be so ignored or, worse, to be considered as some sort of political fraud, as some conspiratorialists imply at times. On the other hand, I really fail to understand why so many people in Europe and the States seem to be so obsessed with not revising the numbers involved here. Would the tragedy be any less significant had its victims been one million rather than six? It is the *nature* of the tragedy and not only its *scale* that is significant here.

Here is one example where one people were singled out for destruction not because of any real fault of their own, but because of the internal logic of the Nazi movement and Nazi society. The reasons which the Zionist fathers give to explain the persecution of the Jews in Europe, namely their perceived isolationist tendencies and what seemed like archaic particularities, could explain (but never justify) discrimination, an ugly tendency in itself. But they could never explain something like persecution, pogroms, or a holocaust. Never. These things could never be explained by any alleged "fault" of the victims, or their way of life.

As such, I totally agree with you when you say that, in this case, there is no need to "see both sides."

EG – This is a good place for me to express my admiration for your concern for dialogue, on this as on a whole range of issues. First, a couple of details. No doubt it is impossible to determine the number of Jews killed in the Holocaust within ten or a hundred. I have seen low estimates of somewhere around five million. But there is a point at which, as Engels might have said, quantity turns into quality. Killing one million would no doubt be bad enough, but when the consensus of historians, both Jewish and non-Jewish, has settled on the figure of six million, reducing it to one million cannot but cast doubt on the basic thesis. If all these people have been exaggerating by a factor of six, then, perhaps, beyond the usual wartime brutality, nothing really happened at all. Maybe, as the revisionists say, there never were any gas chambers; the prisoners just died of overwork and disease. I won't go any farther along that path.

I'm not sure what you mean by the "Zionist fathers"' explanation of the persecution of the Jews. No doubt assimilated Jews like Herzl displayed a certain impatience with the "*shtetl* Jew" and his archaic ways, but the obsession with the "Jewish question" beginning in the mid-nineteenth century requires a more organic explanation. After all, if these backward tendencies were the problem, there would be no need for Zionism; one could just modernize, as most Jews have done in the US. Zionism reflects a deep despair (born in part from Herzl's experience of French anti-Semitism during the Dreyfus affair) that the Jews would ever be accepted within Christian society.

The "Jewish question" fascinates me for many reasons. One is that few people, even few Jews, really understand modern anti-Semitism–the one thing that Tim McVeigh and Bin Laden have in common. Anti-Semitism is not garden-variety racism. We should certainly accord Gypsies, homosexuals, the mentally ill, not to speak of millions of Russians, a place in our memorials of the Holocaust. But, numbers aside, in how many speeches, in how many political tracts, did the Nazis refer to these other groups? Anti-Semitism was their constant obsession, the very core of their

political doctrine. I have several times had occasion to refer in my *Chronicles* to the American neo-Nazi novel *The Turner Diaries*–most recently because, at the climax of the story, the protagonist flies a nuclear-armed airplane into the Pentagon. This novel portrays the triumph of the White race over a United States run entirely by Jews, for whom Blacks and others serve as henchmen: the Jews punish disobedient Whites by handing their wives over to Blacks to rape. The Jews are vermin, but they are also the secret masters of market society, as the infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*–still reprinted, unfortunately, in the Arab world–makes clear. Given the association of Jews with the market, it should not surprise us that the first modern anti-Semites were men of the left: Alphonse Toussenel, the author of the first major work of French anti-Semitism (*Les juifs, rois de l'époque*, 1844), was a socialist, a disciple of Fourier.

15

The Holocaust–the greatest of human horrors, as even Chomsky affirms–was focused on the Jews. It provided the archetype for the victimary epistemology that was so spectacularly successful in the postwar era. Jew is to Nazi as: colonial to colonizer, Southern or South African Black to White, woman to man, homosexual to straight, handicapped to "normally abled" . . . This process, like affirmative action, has scarcely benefited the Jews, who have gone from sub-human to Honky in a generation. The only compensation the Jews received for the Holocaust, aside from some inadequate and still largely unpaid reparations, was Israel. The British finally gave their blessing, the Soviet Union its recognition, Germany a good deal of financial assistance–and, of course, the United States its backing and continued support. During its first decades, Israel was seen (outside the Arab world) as a courageous little country fighting against huge odds. But since 1967, or at least since the Yom Kippur war in 1973, when Israel's military superiority became incontestable, anti-Zionism has become the new rallying cry for the enemies of global market society–Chomsky being, once more, a usefully caricatural example.

Thus, all question of blame or responsibility aside, the Jews once again find themselves at the center of the historical dialectic. It is far from fantastic to speculate that, without Israel, there would be not only no al Qaeda, but no fundamental friction between Islam and the West; perhaps the Arab countries would even have evolved into democracies, or in any case into more vigorous economies . . .

Some might see this revival of the "Jewish question" as just a historical accident, but it seems inherent in the mimetic ambiguity of the notion of the Jews as the "chosen" people. The Jews are in a very real sense the first *nation*, the first people who define themselves by something other than a territory. Whence their survival in

a stateless condition for so long. Yet, again in contrast to the Gypsies, the religion they created to ensure their survival (or vice-versa) is at the core of all Western or "Abrahamic" religion. However many Jews have converted to either Christianity or Islam, the persistence of Judaism makes it impossible for either of its more successful rivals to declare itself the "end of history" in the religious sphere.

Over the past century and a half it has become increasingly clear that, however absurd it may appear to Enlightenment rationalism, the stigma of sacrificial election borne by the Jews is the central sore point of Western history. The "end of history" has to do with the Jews in a quite literal sense. Christians identified "the conversion of the Jews" with the end of this world and the coming of God's kingdom. The Marxists wanted to void the "Jewish question" by abolishing religion altogether and treating the Jews as a "nationality"–Stalin's increasingly vicious anti-Semitism after WWII reflects his frustration with the failure of this policy. And for the Nazis, of course, the extermination of the Jews was the key event that would move society into "post-history."

These eschatological visions are defunct. Fukuyama's is not, but it requires correction. If we take Marx's association of the Jews with capitalism not as an anti-Semitic slur but as the Hegelian assimilation of a people to an Idea, then we may interpret Fukuyama's thesis as saying that history is over, not because the Jews have been eliminated, but because they have univocally triumphed: globalism even more than liberal democracy is "Jewish" in its disregard for national boundaries and its insistence on the circulation of capital. But to put Fukuyama's thesis in these terms is only another way of displaying its inadequacy. The end of history cannot be defined by either the annihilation or the triumph of any people.

Today the "Jewish question" is concentrated in Palestine. The Palestinians did not exist as a people before the founding of the state of Israel; they were simply the Arabs living in a particular area in the Middle East, one that had been incorporated into Trans-Jordan (as it used to be called) but that could just as well have become part of Syria. The very idea of a Palestinian nation, as you suggest above, emerged in mimetic opposition to Israeli statehood. I do not mean to say that it is for that reason spurious or inauthentic. In a very real sense, all nationalism takes the Jews as its model. This was quite clear in the case of Germany, as a number of Jewish-German thinkers pointed out before 1933: the Germans, always the odd men out in Western Europe, fancied themselves the "chosen people" of the Aryan race.

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Israel is perceived by most Moslems as a source of rage and humiliation. Jewish exceptionalism is realized there in the most scandalous possible way, by the

implantation of a Western-type society in one of the central holy places of the Umma. History's answer to those such as Toynbee who thought that, with the founding of their own state, the Jews would become an ethnic group like every other, is that Israel merely amplifies the scandal of the "chosen people" to state level, obliging the Jews to affirm for the sake of their very survival the sense of superiority to other groups that they had always been accused of secretly harboring.

History would be easier without Israel, but it is only with Israel that it can achieve closure. One of Barak's proposals that I hope will one day be renewed is the agreement to share control of Jerusalem. It is certainly true that Jerusalem, whatever its significance for Moslems, is the only city sacred to the Jews; no one is asking for joint control of Mecca or Medina. But, precisely for that reason, the peaceful sharing of power in Jerusalem would be the sign of a genuine peace, even the beginning of friendship between Israelis and Palestinians, and thus between Jews and Moslems. In biblical (or Koranic) terms, this would be the reconciliation of Isaac and Ishmael, the legitimate heir and the outcast. By sharing Jerusalem, the Jews would symbolically share the "chosenness" that has made them the objects of millennial resentment with an Arab nation that is in a very real sense Israel's own creation. However unrealistic it may sound at the moment, I think it is only through the benign example of the oldest nation serving as godfather to the newest that the phase of history dominated by war will end.

As things are going at present, this peace and friendship may be a long time in coming. Meanwhile, by way of making a beginning in the realm of ideas, I am grateful for this opportunity to converse in peace and friendship with you.