Generative Anthropology – A New Way of Thinking?

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For over two decades I have maintained that generative anthropology is a *new way of thinking* that constitutes a qualitative change from traditional philosophical/metaphysical thought. I distinguish between a *way of thinking* and a *personal doctrine* of the kind elaborated by those whom Foucault called (no doubt with a touch of envy) “masters of discursivity,” namely, Marx and Freud. A Marxist is one dependent on Marx’s model of human action, his *anthropology*, just as a Freudian is dependent on Freud’s anthropology. And it is curious indeed that although many in both camps are proud to claim that they have revised the doctrines of their master, it is inconceivable that any such revision could transform either doctrine into a new, more fundamental anthropology.

The source of this impossibility lies in the fact that the anthropologies of Marx and Freud are derived, or more precisely, *retrodicted* from the specific foci, respectively economic and psychological, of their analyses of the modern world. Freud’s scene in *Totem and Taboo* of the murder of the father who has monopolized the women of the horde is an a posteriori justification of the Oedipus complex rather than a parsimonious hypothesis of human origin. There is no analogous Marxian scene of origin; for Marx the source of the human is *labor*, that is, interaction with objects, rather than the scenic interaction with other humans that gives rise to language.

Marx’s and Freud’s anthropologies provide means for interpreting cultural and religious phenomena and ultimately all the events of human history; the quantity and quality of the works they have inspired bear witness to their productivity. Yet, however persuasive may be the idea that production-relations are the motor of history or that the human psyche is determined by a complex of metapsychological forces, neither of these theories explain the emergence of the specifically human ability to create symbolic signs or *representations*. Marx, Freud, and their disciples emit propositions about the human-in-general without explaining how we came to acquire the faculty that allows us to emit these propositions. Thus, despite their

pretensions of getting to the *thing itself*, both fall within the boundaries of the mode of thought, first elaborated by Plato, that has since come to be called, after the title of one of Aristotle's treatises, *metaphysics*.

Since the Enlightenment, thinkers have sought to escape from the self-referentiality of metaphysics, or what Nietzsche called the *prison-house of language*. For Voltaire, "metaphysics" referred to religious thought. Marx's philosophers who have thought about the world rather than change it were metaphysicians in all but name. For Derrida, all post-Platonic thought is metaphysical, including his own, whose virtue lies not in claiming to inhabit a utopian space outside metaphysics but in a resolute marginality just inside its borders.

From the standpoint of the originary hypothesis, metaphysics may be simply defined as the way of thinking that takes for granted the existence of the propositions or declarative sentences found in mature language while ignoring their necessary derivation from an originary ostensive language. By this criterion, Derrida's critique of metaphysics, more subtle than that of his predecessors, is more unabashedly metaphysical. Derrida is even less concerned than Marx or Freud with the anthropogenetic interface between the prelinguistic and the linguistic, the *origin of language*. That the notion of *différance* can be understood as in effect a concept of originary anthropology is a tribute to Derrida's anthropological intuition, not to his philosophical intention.

What differentiates thinking based on the originary hypothesis not only from classical metaphysical thought but from its marginal modern excrescences is that it puts the human capacity for exchanging representations at its minimal core. The simple fact that GA is able to situate the metaphysics of the Western philosophical tradition within a minimal ontology of linguistic utterance-forms, elementary and complex, suggests that attempts to distinguish thinking the world from changing the world or the conscious from the unconscious can and should be rethought in the light of the originary hypothesis. The ostensive and even the imperative hold little interest for linguists and not much more for scholars of language origin because they convey no information about the world: they fail to provide a context-free linguistic model for the knowledge the love of which constitutes philosophy. For the sake of this epistemological objectivity, metaphysics denies the specifically anthropological nature of human self-knowledge and refuses to account for its specifically human provenance. Language is understood as a faculty proper to rational beings whose logically necessary emergence from a prerational state is irrelevant to their rationality.

I am not suggesting that GA "transcends" metaphysics, as though any theory could avoid being expressed in declarative sentences that provide a mapping of the world

in language. GA is a new way of thinking because for the first time it draws a clear line of filiation between metaphysical or propositional thought and its originary basis in *ostension*, without which thought and language would not exist. In the course of his career, the emblematic analytic philosopher Wittgenstein turned away from the *Tractatus'* declaratives/propositions *that are the case* to the imperative-dominated "language games" of the *Philosophical Investigations*. GA not only takes the final step by returning to the most primitive utterance form, the ostensive, but it presents a plausible scenario for this form's emergence from a prelinguistic state.

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But even if my claim be granted that GA is more radically parsimonious than previous modes of thought, the value of a way of thinking is ultimately determined not by its minimality or its radicalism but by its ability to mobilize individuals to learn, extend, and modify its original paradigms in order to explore different facets of human reality. However significant may be the discovery/invention of the originary hypothesis as a minimal point of departure for the human, as human beings *en situation* we are necessarily concerned with humanity in its historical specificity, and our choice of an anthropology is dictated by its applicability to our specific circumstances, however generously considered.

What I hope will be the first of many GATEs offers a privileged occasion to reflect on some of the research that GA has stimulated. GATE was the first GA conference that was not organized by myself, just as Adam Katz' newly appeared *The Originary Hypothesis* is the first book devoted to GA that was not written by myself. These developments reflect the potential fecundity of the originary hypothesis as a paradigm for the humanities and social sciences. The papers delivered at the conference that engaged with this paradigm inspire further reflection on the domains in which attempts to extend the originary hypothesis may prove most fruitful.

This special issue of *Anthropoetics* contains five of these papers, which explore widely different subject-matters. Although a number of my students have made important contributions to GA, and although several of them spoke at the conference, I find it both curious and heartening that none of the five contributors to this issue has ever sat in my classroom.

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Andrew Bartlett's paper deals with what may well be the most sensitive touchstone of GA: how to speak of the foundational religious belief in God while avoiding both reductionism and apologetics. It would be difficult to imagine a more persuasive demonstration than Andrew's of the power of the anthropological idea of God to

bridge the gap between believers and unbelievers.

As Andrew points out in the course of his analysis, the very purpose of originary thinking is to discover and explore the common ground we all share as human beings. This can be an act of love, an attempt to promote human brotherhood and understanding, but only within the framework of an anthropology that imposes the lightest possible burden on one who is willing to entertain its founding hypothesis.

Andrew persuasively establishes that the atheist cannot mock belief in God as an irrational absurdity but must accept the meaningfulness of the idea of God as the origin of meaning itself. The believer, for his part, must consent to bracket the specificity of his belief in order to reach universal agreement that, whatever other powers and actions may be attributed to God, his being-for-humanity is indispensable. Until God can be *represented*, a feat only humans can accomplish, his existence remains unattested. But rather than citing Andrew's text with approval, it is more useful here to consider the next, yet more difficult step.

Let us suppose that a group of believers and atheists are willing to join in accepting the "anthropological idea of God." No believer is likely to consider this minimal belief sufficient, whereas the atheists, who have barely accepted to tolerate it, will not brook any further extension. The one thing an atheist should be able to admit is that in the absence of all historical religious particularity, there is no epistemological difference between atheism and deism.

The next step, then, beyond the minimal point on which all agree, would be to understand the separate religious traditions, including atheism, as long-term *experiments* in constructing the form of the sacred most conducive to maintaining a successful society. For example, in *Science and Faith*, I compared what seemed to me the fundamental revelations of Judaism and Christianity with respect to the understanding they convey of how we are to relate to each other through the mediation of the sacred as discovered in the originary event.

Today the West is faced with a violent challenge from radical Islam. I have no illusions that this challenge can be met through anthropological analysis alone; but those who think that intellectual engagement is useless are equally naïve. It is not to denigrate Islam to note that it was born as a resentful reaction of the outsiders of Mediterranean Christianity. Its success demonstrated the power of a democratic monotheism that denies as neither Judaism nor Christianity could nor would the significance of *past history* within its religious community. Jewish firstness and Christian lateness are inscribed in their sacred history; Islam celebrates the temporal emergence of the *uncreated* Koran as a new beginning of history.

The anthropological idea of God as the non-mortal signified of the first sign is not

indifferent to the particularities of the three Abrahamic religions. Hebrew firstness and the scandalous and dangerous notion of the “chosen people” are as necessary to the discovery of human unity under one god as firstness on the originary scene. The Christian distillation of God’s suffering people into the person of his single Servant and only Son reveals the identity of the human scene of representation with the divine that makes possible the universalization of the covenant. From the Jewish standpoint, the worship of Jesus that affirms the identity of our scene with God’s is idolatrous; for the Christian, without this guarantee, the historical particularity of God’s action and the universality of his rule cannot be reconciled. Hebrew firstness can only be justified on a universal scale by Christ’s prior firstness.

Islam’s absolute rejection of historical firstness reveals the impossibility of reconciling without resentment humanity’s essential historicity and its moral equality. All three of these revelations are constitutive of the human as we know it; what we can expect to learn from history is not which one will drive out the others, but what form the creatively unstable equilibrium of the three, along with the other world religions, will assume at a given moment.

The special bitterness of modern Islam comes from modernity’s scandalous revelation that outsider status, which was a source of enormous strength in the traditional society of the Middle Ages, no longer suffices as a guarantee of superior cultural and military power. The rejection of firstness that worked so well in the seventh century now risks becoming merely destructive. The technological superiority of the West is above all an *anthropological* superiority, one that was only inchoate before the rise of the modern market system. Whence the asymmetrical nature of our battle with Islamic radicals, who remain rooted in the traditional world; 9/11, radical Islam’s greatest victory, was a parasitic operation that used modernity against itself.

The superior productivity in every sense of modern market society depends on its recognition, however reluctantly and hesitantly, of the legitimacy of firstness. If one would succeed in the market, one must compete for first place. Although Islam has resisted reconciling itself to this principle, to have faith in humanity’s survivability is to believe that the market system’s incompatibility with Islam’s egalitarian universalism is attitudinal rather than theological. Thus we must understand the submission to the center that lies at the core of its faith ultimately as facilitating human interaction in the modern world, perhaps by helping to integrate the traditional moral virtues into a market culture that still sees itself in rebellion against them. In this regard it is instructive to observe how easily the Buddhist tradition, which teaches us to master rather than censor our desires, has been able to adapt to the market system. Where the revelations of the Abrahamic religions reinforce the mimetic power of the sacred center, the focus of “Eastern” religion is

on the achievement of a perfect peripherality. In this decentralized system, the contrast between the deferred “Maussian” exchange of traditional societies and the transactions of the marketplace is relatively unimportant; the weakening of the center that Islam finds so scandalous has already taken place.

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Adam Katz begins by pointing out a certain ambiguity in one of my attempts to distinguish the sacred from the significant, concluding that my real point is simply that the significant is a minimal form of the sacred. I think what I wrote in “Frère Jacques” (*Chronicle* 340) is closer to Adam’s conception: as understood by the old deconstructionist, the use of language that defines us as human depends on a minimum of faith. And given that signifying remains an act of faith, we need not share Adam’s fear that in an omnicentric utopia, GA itself might be reduced to a personal esthetic expression—that of the Bronx Romantic?—and become just another localized center. Every personal esthetic claims a degree of anthropological truth-value as an expression of human possibility, and a minimal anthropology has a maximal truth-value. What would be, indeed, a GA life-style? The very difficulty of answering this question should allay Adam’s fears. The minimal anthropology is the one that can least become a self-as-artwork; its ideas are maximally insulated from esthetization.

Adam’s chiasmus of the material sign pointing to the immaterial object and the immaterial sign designating the material object anthropologizes Hjelmslev’s distinction between the form and substance of signifier and signified, which he calls “expression” and “content.” The signifier as a material *activity* substitutes for appetitive action toward the object, allowing the idea or signified of the object to emerge, whereas the immaterial signifier, the *idea* of the aborted gesture, by preserving the imperishable idea of the object, renders the material object accessible. In opposition to Saussurian linguistics, which, by conceptualizing both signifier and signified as pure mental forms, inaugurates the structuralist centerlessness that anticipates postmodernism, Adam reminds us here of the necessity—and the persistence—of the originary interface between sign and reality.

I find the heart of Adam’s complex essay to be the parallel it draws between religious and secular modes of transcendence, both of which he qualifies as sacred, in contrast to the profane desires and resentments of those tempted by lastness to sacrifice the social order to their mimetic and material satisfaction. Adam defines Enlightenment secularism not simply as the rejection of the liturgical in favor of reason, but as the substitution of the martyrdom of the rationalist-scientist for that of Christ. Thus he audaciously chooses the Rousseauian scene in which the self is substituted for the martyred God rather than the self-generating collective model of

the *social contract* as the characteristic scene of the Enlightenment, which he paradoxically qualifies as “anti-scenic.” Rousseau found room within the Enlightenment’s still-narrow humanism to cultivate the anti-social individual’s ability to mold the scene around himself. In counterpoint to this, Rousseau redefined the social contract as the foundation of a compact political community bound by a general will that precludes political debate. That this apparent exclusion of the independent self is really a negative version of the central victim-self of the *Rêveries* has been borne out all too well by the inevitable embodiment of the politics of *la volonté générale* in such figures as Il Duce, Der Führer, or Dear Leader. To this flawed model, Adam opposes the political Hebraism of the founding fathers and their Dutch and English precursors, whose modern reinvention of Christianity sought not to invert the scene of Christian martyrdom but to render it unnecessary.

Adam’s theorizing seeks to come to terms with today’s political situation, in which the market system’s extraordinary success continues to provoke the rage of the *last*. His solution to the perpetuation of resentment is to affirm what he calls “articulations of hallowed sites,” by which he refers not merely to the institutions of liberal democracy—the free market and constitutional government—but to the individual beneficiaries of the secular sacred, each of whom is understood as a distinctive array of signs. The renewal of faith in these sites, which Adam calls *evangelicism*, is the appropriate response to anti-Western, anti-Semitic victimary movements. The upshot of this renewed faith is to accelerate the reproduction of the originary event through the concentration of desire on a center which is then revealed to be shareable among those who contended for it. This is an ultimately optimistic model of the market, understood as a continual production of meanings that draw the *last* into itself.

If I demur at any point in Adam’s brilliant exercise in originary thinking, it is that to admit that the omnicentric utopia is really a hierarchical competition among totalizers is to concede that some will not be able to resist the attraction of the Rousseauian role of the martyr whose unique suffering defines a unique center. The man of resentment will reemerge as fast as we “recuperate” him. What makes the current crisis so venomous and potentially dangerous is the persistence, within an increasingly integrated modernity, of a traditional world harboring recent memories of colonial humiliation. A tenet of the democratic faith I believe we share is that integration into a global community of liberal democracies will in the long run diminish the virulence of this collective resentment even if it can never fully integrate its Rousseauian impulse to violent disaffection.

Stepping back from this conclusion, however, what is most significant in the present context is that the minimalist abstractions of the originary scene provide Adam with an effective framework for an essay that moves seamlessly between semiotics and

politics. Because they derive from a scene both minimal and hypothetically historical, the fundamental notions of GA are equally at home with the most historically specific phenomena and the broadest generalities.

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With Ian Dennis' analysis of Byron's literary and social persona we touch on the cultural era of the "romantic lie" of metaphysical desire. Ian expertly peels apart Byron's multi-layered ironies as elements of a marketing strategy; as he puts it, Byron "gets to be Byron," while we learn from his unmasking of the game of desire to recognize cant and scorn it, sharing his awareness of the fragility of his own centrality in what Doug Collins once designated with the pregnant phrase *pre-humiliation*. But in contrast with the pathetic abjection to which our modern celebrities insistently submit themselves, Byron's self-irony incites us to brotherhood rather than compensatory pity. Whatever his real-world situation, the authorial Byron of *Don Juan* is profoundly happy; he shares with his readers the joy of one who is no longer the dupe of mimetic desire, but who, unlike Girard's chosen novelists, has achieved his *vérité romanesque within* the world.

This accession to worldly wisdom was only possible, however, for the first generation of romantics, who had learned the mimetic nature of desire through their naïve experience of it as the expression of their true selves. In contrast, for Byron's disciples, such as the second-generation French romantic Alfred de Musset, Byronic wisdom without experience made the naïve experience of desire impossible, yet without quenching the need for it. To actually carry out this disaffection with desire would be the historical role of the generation steeped in the disillusion of 1848, whose acclimation to the mimetic aspect of desire made them the first generation of *consumers*.

The newly autonomous market system, by legitimizing the individual pursuit of happiness in an increasingly deritualized context, becomes a laboratory for the mass production of the local sacred of the modern self. However distant the originary event may be from the human comedy of early bourgeois society, the relevance of the originary hypothesis to the history of modern desire becomes ever clearer. Byron's eminently successful strategy for maintaining himself in the esthetic center cannot be dismissed as a cynical manipulation of desire; its success depends on the provision of *value*. The mimetic theory of desire lacks the means to assess the contribution to our common self-understanding of the romantic esthetic that Byron so skillfully manipulated. The market system cannot operate without figures of transcendent negation, such as Girard finds at the end of the "true" novels he discusses, but life in market society cannot be reduced to the simple paradigm of desire and renunciation. On the contrary, the very success of novels

that follow this model demonstrates that they offer us intellectual and spiritual relief from the reality of seemingly unending transactional exchange. The novels teach us about mimetic desire and caution us against its excesses, but like all high art, they reconcile us at the same time to its necessity.

The special charm of *Don Juan* is that, while it tells a story of sorts, it is *not* novelistic; its scenes are mediated by the lyric voice of the poet whose self-conscious irony reflects a decision not to hide his freedom behind a spurious tragic logic. This was a lesson learned by Musset as well; but where the Frenchman's most profound revelation is the paradox that freedom can be imitated at best as "caprice," *Don Juan*'s rejection of the romantic lie of its author's melodramatic works offers the reader the happy transaction that Ian describes, or perhaps one happier still. Byron gets to be Byron, to be sure. But whereas the unfinished state of his poem reflects that of his life, our disappointment at his hero's interrupted career is tempered by our awareness that, however the final encounter in Canto 16 might have ended, it would have been Byron's triumph rather than Juan's that we would have savored. Byron's shortened life translates as our loss of a finite quantity of pleasure; his own finitude is, generously, not bequeathed to his readers.

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Peter Koper's defense of the rationalism of Greek tragedy against Girard's (and Sandor Goodhart's) analysis of tragedy as rationalized scapegoating makes its argument for GA only implicitly. Girardian analysis of ancient as opposed to modern literature does not distinguish between the lie of popular art, which satisfies audience resentment through wish-fulfillment and scapegoating, and the truth of high art, which forces us to identify with our victims. For Girard, the whole Oedipus story is a myth, by which he means an excuse for sacrifice. Killing your father and sleeping with your mother are ritual accusations, and the fact that Oedipus comes to believe them demonstrates only their mimetic power, not their truth. Goodhart's observation that the hypothesis of "Laius' many murderers" is raised in the play but never disproved permits us to view Sophocles as himself aware of the merely agonistic nature of the accusations against Oedipus, yet unable to fully reveal and deconstruct the tragic sacrifice, a feat possible only within the Judeo-Christian tradition.

For Peter, the key to the *Oedipus'* historical significance is precisely the element that Girard considers an agonistic charade: the protagonist's reasoning process. Everyone sees the irony when the man whose reasoning power discovered humanity in the riddle of the Sphinx is led by this same power to discover his own guilt. But for Peter this process points to a new, post-ritual means of deferring violence: the rational assessment of responsibility. That Oedipus himself turns out

to be the criminal he is seeking is less important than the fact that his search is conducted in rational rather than ritual terms. Rather than arbitrarily choosing a sacrificial victim among the bearers of victimary traits, Oedipus reveals the murderer through a logical process. Peter associates this use of logic with literacy, pointing out that Athens was the first broadly literate society. One need not agree that only literate people can engage in logical reasoning—a position refuted in Lévi-Strauss' *La pensée sauvage* (1962) and already in Durkheim's *La classification primitive* (1903)—to accept the weaker proposition that literacy was prerequisite to the institutionalization of the reasoning process in the law courts. The birth of this institution is represented in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, which Peter analyzes as consecrating the triumph of Athena's rational discourse over the ritual vengeance embodied in the Furies, transformed at the conclusion of the trial scene into the "well-disposed" Eumenides. The interpretation of the *Oresteia* as a whole and the *Eumenides* in particular as a celebration of the Athenian judicial system is not a new idea. But this idea acquires new anthropological depth when Peter presents Athens' greatest gift to human civilization, the substitution of argument before a third party for agonistic combat, as an advance in the *deferral of violence*.

The link between the originary hypothesis and Peter's post-Girardian confidence in rationality remains implicit. Girard's emphasis on the mechanical nature of the emissary murder, the logic of which could be revealed only by supernatural means, makes language irrelevant. Although in other contexts Girard affirms that the institution of legal as opposed to ritual procedures for determining guilt is the key step in the emergence of civilization, in his analyses of Greek tragedy, the rational is no more than a mask for the irrational. In the final analysis, Girard appears to view the rationality of the judicial system as a new and better way of deferring violence but not as the reflection of a superior anthropological understanding. Peter, recognizing the limitations of this position, describes Girard's scapegoat mechanism as a product of prior representations and thereby of the originary event.

My only caveat is that, because Peter does not develop the implications of this subordination, he never makes the connection between logical reasoning as a substitute for sacrifice and human representation as such. Thus when he comes to explain the emergence in Athens of rational deliberation as a substitute for the ritual *agon*, he attributes it to the *neurological* effects of literacy, when it is a passage not from irrationality to logic but from one logic to another.

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I am willing to entertain Chris Morrissey's claim that Thomistic metaphysics is not unambiguously guilty of the unexamined hypostasis of linguistic signs that we find in philosophical or Platonic metaphysics. Under this condition, although Chris

considers GA to be in error, his assertion that the originary hypothesis is compatible with the theological conception of God as distinct from mere Being is a welcome sign of acceptance, if not of full adhesion.

Chris's assertion that before the Fall, God was consciously known on the originary scene as the real, actual source of human scenic community can be considered parsimonious only from a perspective that takes God as the necessary ground of all being. Yet, as Chris's text attests, it remains possible for GA to enter into dialogue with this theological discourse. I believe our dialogue would be clearer without the Heideggerian metaphors of light, clearing, and the like, which conflate the openness of Sartre's *néant* with something like Max Müller's image of nascent man in confrontation with the sun—without Müller's interest in the emergence of language. To talk about Being in abstraction from language that alone can *represent* Being is precisely what GA allows us to avoid.

The key to Chris's distinction between anthropology and theology is independent of all this *Sturm und Drang*; it is the distinction he invites us to make between God as source or ground of Being and Being itself. GA in Chris's view is tempted by the "nominalist" refusal to recognize any God distinct from Being, a kind of Spinozist idol-worship. If Being is what is given to us on the scene of representation, then we cannot legitimately conceive it in the absence of its giver. God is not only not *a* being, he is not Being either. What distinguishes one who claims that God creates man from one who claims that man creates God is that, whereas the atheist need not concern himself with the source of the Being that language makes accessible to him, the believer affirms the dependence of Being on a source that offers it to him yet withdraws itself, even in the Edenic state where humans walked and talked with God.

In distinguishing between Being and its source I see no need to abandon GA's minimalism. In Chris's Edenic moment of reciprocal exchange of the sign prior to the *sparagmos*, the minimal core of what he interprets as our consciousness of God is the awareness that our free choice of the sign to designate the center is not a human granting of significance but its *acknowledgment*. To designate as significant is not to choose what is to be taken as significant. My aborted gesture is predicated on my recognition that the object is not accessible to appropriation precisely because it inspires so powerful a desire to appropriate it. To the extent that this moment is in equilibrium, that is, before the awareness of peace and harmony will have led to the relaxation of inter-human tensions and the consequent transition to the sparagmos, it is because conflict within the group has been averted by originary resentment of the object.

My love for my fellow man is mediated through my resentment of the center. But

God is an inaccessible Other toward whom resentment is indistinguishable from love. This is the substance of Paul's revelation on the road to Damascus: you persecute/hate me, therefore you worship/love me. Chris's Edenic moment of renunciation and signification does not require a clearer consciousness than the "fallen" moment of sparagmatic destruction and appetitive satisfaction. It is only with the disappearance of the object that the sign itself can be understood to possess a meaning independent of the ostensive scene in which it originated, or in proto-theological terms, that the sacred being can be understood as a mere representative of the sacredness that inheres in the being, or Being, of the scenic center.

This formulation remains, as it were, Spinozistic: it cannot distinguish between Being and its source, because this distinction cannot be formulated in pre-propositional language. It is only when one comes to construct a propositional world-model that one can make the distinction between sacred Being as what is interdicted (but also permitted) and the source of that Being, which interdicts (but also permits). Hebrew monotheism first reveals an explicit consciousness of this distinction in the revelation in Exodus 3 of God's name as a declarative sentence (I am that/what I am), not a word that the worshiper can use imperatively to call on the divinity. The Hebrews were the first to understand the analogy between the declarative proposition and the idea of God as the ground or source of Being rather than Being itself. In contrast, the conflation of Being and its source is the basis for pagan idolatry, which, as the prophets all remind us, was by no means abolished with the advent of Hebrew state power.

The Being of the originary center is surely not *that animal there*, which after the sparagmos is no more. What distinction can be made between this particular center and divine centrality as the source of all centers? In Chris's world, this problem does not arise, but this is because his argument belongs to dogmatic theology rather than minimal anthropology. Even if I fervently believe in God's status as the ground of Being prior to even the possibility of material existence, the principle of parsimony does not require me to postulate a similar awareness in the discoverers/inventors of language.

As Chris's title makes clear, it all comes down to a matter of *sin*. As perpetrators of the sparagmos, we are cut off from the knowledge of God that we were vouchsafed in the first moment of the scene. Because we have been expelled from Eden, we must be redeemed before we can experience the giver directly in the givenness of his world. The anthropological kernel of this assertion is that, in contrast with the pre-representational force involved in acts of appropriation at every level of the animal kingdom, the sparagmos is the first act of true, human *violence*. The sinfulness of the sparagmos lies not in any harm visited on our fellow man but in

that perpetrated on the central object as an effect of our originary resentment. In tearing the object to pieces, we seek to obliterate the Being that held us in thrall: *brûlez ce que vous avez adoré*. The epistemic value of this sinful experience complements that of the “virtuous” originary use of the sign. For the deferral inaugurated by the sign has its limits. If the sunlit clearing that Chris describes suggests that one can bask forever in the light of interhuman reciprocity mediated by the center, the ensuing sparagmos reminds us, among other things, that after as before the originary revelation we have the same need to satisfy our worldly appetites, which, however mimetically enhanced, correspond ultimately to real needs.

After the creative experience of the sign, the destructive one of the sparagmos teaches us that more work is needed. This has been the systole and diastole of our interaction with the world ever since. From an originary perspective, our human limitations may be seen either as those of the divinity we have created or of our ability as his creatures to profit from his generosity. The *same* sacred presides over all our adventures and misadventures, minimally defined as the permanently existing possibility of the deferral of violence.

The idea of the coevality of the human and the sacred can be developed beyond the originary moment. God may be seen as guiding man to salvation in time, or to an apocalypse that will end time. Complementarily, we can understand our own creation of God as evolving over time; Jack Miles (in his days at UC Press, the inventor of the term *generative anthropology*) has achieved renown by narrating God’s “biography.” To remain faithful to its minimalist credo, GA must eschew the exclusivity of either of these affirmations, while preserving the common heritage of both: what the course of history teaches us both about ourselves and about the ground of being that makes ourselves possible. In the series of events, practical and theoretical, in which this knowledge emerges, I believe that among the most significant is the birth of the new way of thinking we call generative anthropology.