

Daniele Bertini. Hate-speech in Girard's reading of the *Book of Job*<sup>1</sup>.

Dedicated to Arya Lune Bokilo Bertini  
and her parents, Euloge Deltraz Bokilo and Matilde Bertini:  
may they teach her never be a persecutor neither stand in the persecutors' side,  
and may life preserve her from ever becoming a victim.

## Introductory remarks

According to René Girard, all religious traditions - and so every tradition-originate from a communitarian violence towards a randomly chosen individual. Tradition, for him, signifies a course of social history which emerges from a primordial source and develops in relation to such source.

The main building blocks of his theory are threefold:

- a) mimetic desire;
- b) the scapegoating mechanism;
- c) the establishment of myths and rituals by delusive memories of the violence towards the scapegoat.

Girard provides a number of construals of the theory across different disciplines, by relying on evidence and debates from psychoanalysis, sociology, literary criticism, philosophical anthropology, philosophy of religion, bible criticism, and more. However, each of these versions of the theory develop the same simple proposal, albeit in different cognitive fields.

The skeletal story can be told as follows.

Humans are moved by desires, and desires are constrained by imitation. To put the issue more succinctly, the mimetism of desire causes the desire of a few individuals to spread throughout the group (this is the block (a) of the theory).

The natural outcome of this process, according to Girard, is envy and rivalry. Envy and rivalry generate hostility and social conflict. At this point, the group is internally fragmented by a potentially destructive force. The resolution of this frightening situation consists in individuating a scapegoat and killing him. There are no compelling reasons to explain why one individual or another is chosen to play this role. It is completely a random affair. In any

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case, the violence that kills the scapegoat is a collective doing and, as a consequence, peace is restored within the group (here is (b) block).

The murder of the scapegoat deeply affects all of the participants in the violence. On the one hand, persecutors satisfy their mimetic desire for revenge. On the other hand, social reconciliation is enjoyed as a direct effect of the scapegoat's death. As a result, the scapegoating event is then preserved by a collective memory, one that is ill-formed. It is a delusive account of the event. Nevertheless, it leads to a ritualization whose main purpose is to exorcise the renewal of conflict originated by social rivalry and envy. If the scapegoat were to have resisted the violence, he or she would likely have been identified with a hostile divinity. On the contrary, when the victim accepts his or her fate, the scapegoat will progressively become deified. Cultures, then, are established by the ritual and symbolic repetition of crowd violence in communitarian memories, which determine what meaningfully matters to a peculiar group (this is the last block of the theory, namely, block (c)).

It is plainly evident that the theory is ambitious: Girard's purpose is to identify and understand in detail the universal mechanism explaining how the semantic value of myths is originally established, and, subsequently, cultures and local histories are generated. It is not surprising that his theory attracted criticism from all sides (Frear 1992). To begin with, it is easy to see that the theory states too much (even if some myths match the theory's analysis, there are many other myths which cannot be reconciled with the theory on pain of a counterintuitive interpretation; e.g., myths grounding the divine powers over the mundane realm into the victorious fight against a hostile animal - see narratives of Indra defeating Vritra; myths telling a primordial war between two kinds of Gods - see narratives of the Asir-Vanir war within Norse mythology); that it is affected by the constitutive indeterminacy of its meaning and wide range of application (i.e., there is no clear methodology used in referring to evidence and employing arguments from different cognitive fields); that it is unfalsifiable (i.e., it is not clear which counterexample would be successful, given that any myth which apparently does not fit with the theory could be interpreted as a socially veiled construct which has covered the primordial violence from which it originates).

It is not my intention to address any of these difficulties (primarily because literature by scholars who specialize on this issue abounds). Rather, in what follows, I will be concerned with a technical approach to Girard's characterization of the communicative process which leads to the individuation of the scapegoat. In my view, this perspective provides an interpretive framework

which is able to do justice to some basic insights of Girard's theory. Further, it clearly highlights which issues need to be resolved, and suggests which directions could be followed. Girard's comment on the *Book of Job* (Girard 1987, from here on JVP) offers a privileged testing ground for the theory because it focuses explicitly on how rhetorical devices by which persecutors persuade all the members of their community to use violence to Job works.

The remainder of my paper is divided into four sections. In the second section, I will address a conceptual view of the theory by making explicit its principles and their inferential relations. In the third section, I will explain how philosophers of language address slurs and hate-speech. Particularly, I will apply such materials to Girard's assumption that the three friends' discourses to Job are instances of hate-speech. My purpose is to defend the use of a presuppositional account of derogatory epithets in the philosophy of religion, and to argue for the legitimacy of reading a number of religious statements which cement a social group into a "we" in opposition to an individual who is individuated as an instance of a "not-we" as slurs. In the fourth section, I will argue that, if Girard is right in thinking that speech-hate and the use of slurs are means for the identification of a scapegoat within a group, then Girard's theory needs to be adjusted in order to accommodate some obvious difficulties. Finally, in the fifth section, I will sum up my conclusions and then provide a few suggestions for defending the theory.

### **A conceptual analysis of Girard's view**

I will begin by translating Girard's skeletal story into a core theory about the violent origin of all traditions. This core theory may be named in different manners. My preference goes to the *victimage mechanism* view (VM). My point of departure is to lay down some definitions which help understanding how the three blocks of Girard's skeletal story are related.

Mimetic desire requires that individuals who enjoy it belong to the same group. The notion of *belonging to the same group* can be spelled out in terms of the conjunction of the relations of *sharing an environment with ... (S)*, *possessing the same conceptual tools as ... (P)*, and *being collaborating with ... (C)*. According to common usage, the notation  $R(x,y)$  stands for *relation R holds between x and y*. Then,  $x$  and  $y$  belong to the same group if:

$\text{Belonging} =_{\text{def}} \text{For any } x \text{ and } y, S(x,y) \ \& \ P(x,y) \ \& \ C(x,y).$

Now, suppose that  $x$  has a desire  $P$ ,  $y$  has a desire  $Q$ , ...,  $z$  has a desire  $Z$ .  $P(x)$  is an abbreviation for  $x$  desires  $P$ ,  $Q(x)$  is an abbreviation for  $y$  desires  $Q$ , and  $Z(z)$  is an abbreviation for  $z$  desires  $Z$ . This suffices for defining mimetic desire:

Mimetic desire $_{\text{def}}$  For any  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$ , if  $x$ ,  $y$ ,  $z$  belong to  $G$ , then  $W(x)$ ,  $W(y)$ ,  $W(z)$ , where  $W$  is a desire of one of the individuals belonging to  $G$ .

It is important to Girard that there are no clear intrinsic reasons for why  $W$  becomes the desire of all the members of  $G$ . It cannot be assumed that some desires are more objectively attractive than others. Rather, it is a matter of chance that a desire prevails. The mechanism of imitation determines that a desire will become universal within the group, but cannot explain which desire will be on the target of the mimetic choices of the members of the group (Antonelli 2010). Therefore:

By-chance group desire $_{\text{def}}$  For any  $x$  and  $y$ , if  $P(x)$  and  $Q(y)$  at time  $t_0$ , and  $P(x)$  and  $P(y)$  at time  $t_1$ , there is no other reason for  $Q(y)$  changing into  $P(y)$ , except the imitation of  $P(x)$  by  $y$ .

At this point, given that the resources for satisfying a desire are limited within groups:

Rivalry $_{\text{def}}$  For any  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$  belonging to  $G$ , if a mimetic desire prevails within  $G$ , a conflict among  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$  arises.

The distinctive feature of Girard's theory consists in that rivalry does not result in a destructive war among individuals because any individual's envy unifies with other individuals' envy into a collective desire of doing violence towards a member of  $G$ . Such a member is the scapegoat, and the crowd violence which puts an end to rivalry within  $G$  is the scapegoating sacrifice:

Scapegoating $_{\text{def}}$  For any  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$  belonging to  $G$  and experiencing rivalry, a by-chance group desire causes the individuation of one between  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$  as the target of a destructive violence done by the others.

Suppose  $x$  is individuated as a scapegoat by  $y$  and  $z$ , and, accordingly, killed by them. The remaining members of  $G$  will experience this as a relief from the

desire to have P which generated the intra-group conflict. As a consequence, peace substitutes violent hostility. The confused mixture of feelings related to such an event generates a delusive memory of the events concerning scapegoating:

Delusive memory<sub>=def</sub> For any y and z who killed x as a scapegoat, y and z will form incorrect remembering of their violence.

Such delusive memories are the content of the ritualization of scapegoating. In order to prevent hostility from emerging again within G, members of the group will arrive at establishing a symbolic repetition of the original crowd violence. Therefore:

Ritualization<sub>=def</sub> For any x, y and z belonging to a group G, x, y and z will perform symbolic experiences translating the original crowd violence from which G arose into a collective and codified action.

Finally, when x is killed by members of their group, x can undergo such a killing by accepting passively their fate or reacting actively against it. This provides how to spell out the process of divinization:

Divinization<sub>=def</sub> For any y and z belonging to G, there existed an x killed as a scapegoat by preceding members of G, such that if x accepted passively their fate, x is ritually changed into a benign deity, otherwise x is understood as acting under the influence of hostile gods.

Evidently, (a), (b), and (c) are logically independent. A desire can grow by imitation within a group without generating scapegoating or divinization phenomena. For example, close male friends may be all attracted by the same woman and individuate her as their erotic dream without falling into violent practices within their group nor transforming her into a deity. Further, divinization may concern natural objects to which crowd violence towards a scapegoat seems unrelated (e.g., worships of astral objects in most mythological systems). Finally, scapegoating may be a strategy for unifying a group wherein social tensions are not destructive at all, do not depend on mimetic desires and do not result into a divinization process (e.g., the homophobia and transphobia characterizing conservative ideologies in democratic societies di-

scriminate homosexual and transgender individuals even in non-competitive contexts).

This being the case, VM should be represented as a conjunction of (a), (b), and (c). Nonetheless, Girard seems to think that there is some form of implicature between mimetic desire and scapegoating, and also scapegoating and divinization. Particularly, a tradition emerges from the necessary generation of scapegoating, that is, from a mimetic desire *and* the establishment of a divinization process of the scapegoat. Therefore, the VM view requires some principles for warranting that (b) involves (a), and (c) follows from (b).

In order to see how these principles may be stated, let us take a look at the way the above definitions characterize (a), (b), and (c).

Block (a) is specified by belonging, mimetic desire and by-chance group desire. Evidently belonging and by-chance group desire are the conditions for the social spreading of a mimetic desire. The former is necessary for making it possible that humans can focus on what others desire. The latter is the milestone of the theory: imitation precedes desires because no intrinsic value can be ascribed to what one wants except that others want this too (Girard 2003). Let  $x, y, z$  be individuals of the group  $G$ . It results that:

1. For any  $x, y, z$ ,  $P(x) \ \& \ P(y) \ \& \ P(z)$  are due to mimetic desire if  $[S(x,y,z) \ \& \ P(x,y,z) \ \& \ C(x,y,z)] \ \& \ P$  is the outcome of by-chance group desire.

Now, block (b). Scapegoating is an answer to rivalry:

2. For any  $x, y, z$ , belonging to  $G$  and experiencing a mimetic desire, if  $x, y$ , and  $z$  stand in a rivalry relation, one among  $x, y$ , and  $z$  will be chosen as a scapegoat and then killed by others.

Finally, block (c). How myths and cultures develop their understanding of meaningful representations of reality depends on either what is condemned in the scapegoat, in case it is divinized into a hostile god, or what is admired in their sacrifice, in case it is divinized into a benign deity. That is, the attribution of a semantic value to mythical propositions is performed in terms of the actual content of the delusive memory of scapegoating. Therefore, divinization involves ritualization, and ritualization involves delusive memory:

3. For any  $y$  and  $z$  belonging to  $G$ , wherein there existed an  $x$  killed as a scapegoat by preceding members of  $G$ ,  $x$  is assumed as a divine entity if a sym-

bolic representation of the murder of the scapegoat is available and such representation relies upon a delusive memory.

The main intuition characterizing VM is that the transition from (1) to (2) is necessary. If a group originated a tradition, the group passed through a crowd violence towards a scapegoat. This means that the mimetic desire must always be somewhat satisfied: there is a non suppressible relation between enjoying a desire and searching for an answer to it. David Berman provides anecdotal evidence that various form of deferred desires always return (Berman 2009). It is reasonable to assume that desires related to the construal of cognitive, social and psychological identity are stronger than others, in other words, that mimetic desire cannot be bracketed. VM accepts then a principle of satisfaction concerning desire:

Desire satisfaction= $\text{def}$  For any  $x, y, z$ , belonging to  $G$  and experiencing a mimetic desire,  $x, y$ , and  $z$  must satisfy their desire

However, desire satisfaction is not enough for warranting the transition from (1) to (2). Evidently, (2) is a strategy for resolving a conflict which is generated by the principle, but cannot account for why restoration of peace should undergo a violent communitarian event. A further principle is then required. Call this exorcism by revenge:

Exorcism= $\text{def}$  For any  $x, y, z$ , belonging to  $G$  and experiencing a mimetic desire  $P$ , if rivalry cannot make possible the satisfaction of  $P$ ,  $x, y$ , and  $z$  will chose by chance one among them as the target of a violence which satisfies obliquely their unanswered desire.

At this point, the transition from (1) to (2) runs as follows:

- i. (1),
- ii. (desire satisfaction),
- iii. (exorcism),
- iv. if (1) & (desire satisfaction) & (exorcism), then (2),
- v. (2).

Such as for the claim that (2) follows from (1), VM assumes a similar statement that the occurrence of a divinization practice for the generation of a tradition is a necessary requirement. What relation does necessity stand in? Focus must be placed on how peace replaces rivalry. While any violent joint action may create a diversion from a competitive desire, enduring effects may be occasioned by the exceptionality of the violent event. It may be that the target or the course of actions actualize a similar exceptional feature. The crucial point is, however, that exceptionality should be acknowledged as such. If so, the relevance of the content and kind of violence for the relief from the social anger of anyone towards others, is to be found in the degree of awareness that the violence itself creates the removal of tensions within the group. The intuition is that scapegoating is the source of divinization only if scapegoating is acknowledged as the result of an intentional group action which the persecutors perform together.

A very quick look at a few evidence from evolutionary sciences concerning predatory behaviors of chimpanzees may offer some suggestions for the development of this intuition. It is widely assumed that chimpanzees exhibit hunting behaviors which differ across populations (Boesch & Boesch, 1989; Hobaiter & others, 2017) and are motivated by a number of diverse purposes (Newton-Fisher 2015). While predation is an obvious means to access food, predated by chimpanzees does not seem to depend on the necessity to achieve resources, being more concerned with the obtaining of social goals (Mitani & Watts, 2001). This means that chimpanzees are not obligate carnivores. They associate indeed in clusters of hunters mostly for in-group dynamics related to alliances and ranking relations: preys are commonly shared as gift for achieving social recognition. Particularly, chimpanzees hunting involves collaboration and joint agency among the members of a population (Samuni & others, 2018; contrary evidence in Tomasello 2016).

All things considered, the enjoyment of a violent and unnecessary action by groups of chimpanzees causes an increase of social bonds among participants (i.e, enhancement of friendship and alliances and a new assessment of ranking relations among individuals who share preys) and provides them with the satisfaction of socially induced desires (i.e, meat acquires the status of a gift to be rewarded, despite it is not a primary food resource).

Now, humans collaborate in a pervasive and intentional manner to such a degree that a qualitative behavioral difference between great apes and human beings is an obvious matter of fact. Nonetheless, such a difference is instantiated within similar patterns of behavior, due to evolutionary common ance-



stry. Particularly, it is reasonable to assume that humans differ from chimpanzees in enjoying violent group actions by reason of their ability to develop group intentionality based on mutual acknowledgment of reciprocal intentions. That is to say, the motivation of violent group agency in both chimpanzees and humans answers in-group relational pushes which, in turn, cause unity of belonging and uniformity of appetites, but humans actualize actions with a supplement of control, namely, intentionally.

This being the case, the grammar of ritualization should be based on how group intentionality shapes the content of scapegoating related events. Intentionality puts on focus the awareness of a goal-directed action. When individuals act together against the scapegoat, they rely on evident features which the scapegoat possesses. Such features are assumed as evidence for that the scapegoat deserves to be killed for mandatory reasons, and the accomplishment of this duty is the means to restore group peace. Therefore, it is reasonable to hypothesize (within a Girardian framework) that what transforms a crowd violence satisfying social goals into the source of a tradition is the degree of awareness towards the presumed normative consequences of the scapegoating. The more the group benefited from its violence, the more the understanding of such violence as a right or normative answer to the destructive feature of the scapegoat is favored. Necessary transition from (2) to (3) then requires a principle for the normative reading of collective delusive memories:

Focus on normativity<sub>=def</sub> For any  $x, y, z$ , belonging to  $G$  and participating in a crowd violence toward a scapegoat, the more conflict is replaced into peace within  $G$  as a result of a focused attention on the killing event and normative understanding of it, the more memories of the event will be delusive and will favor the accommodation of scapegoating into a ritualization and divinization of related events.

It turns out that:

- i. (2),
- ii. (focus on normativity),
- iii. (2) overcomes the threshold degree in (focus on normativity) for accommodating scapegoating into a myth (call this *filling up*),
- iv. If (2) & (focus on normativity) and (filling up), then (3).
- v. (3).

Summing up, VM can be characterized as an account of how desire satisfaction and revenge activated by a mimetic desire cause scapegoating, and scapegoating is transformed into a myth generating a tradition by focus on normativity.

### **Derogatory epithets as means for individuating scapegoats and discriminating against them**

Girard's comment on the *Book of Job* consists in a detailed defense of the claim that, contrary to the outcomes of traditional exegesis, the text is not a consolatory treatise on the mystery of evil; rather, it is a transcript of a public trial against a once celebrated influential man named Job. The outcome of the trial is that Job's persecutors persuade the members of their community to commit group violence against him. Later editors of the text added the prologue and all necessary interpolations in order to mitigate the evidence that the matter at issue was a trial. More specifically, they aimed at conforming the existent narrative with the delusive memories arose from scapegoating (from here on I will refer to Girard's claim as *the persecuting reading of Job*, P for short). If P is sound, the *Book of Job* turns out to be an outstanding source for understanding how the scapegoating mechanism works. Girard also argues for some theological consequences following from the interpretation. However, I do not address them, nor will I investigate any further than what the comment advances in support of the theory I have just outlined, namely, VM.

Furthermore, it is not my intention to evaluate whether P is correct, nor to advance objections. There is indeed room to develop the argument by introducing a framework for dealing with how the alleged derogatory discourses against Job make their way into the community. That is to say, further constructive efforts on P are required before evaluating his conclusions. For this reason, my research plan is purely explorative: I will assume Girard's perspective, and I will inquire into what a technical approach to hate-speech suggests in order to enhance his proposal and highlight his conceptual commitments.

The main reason for sustaining P is that the three friends constantly charge Job with following *the ancient trail of the wicked men* (JVP, 14-18, 22). Far from providing any real consolation, their discourses may be read as attacking Job on behalf of the omnipresent assumption that he must have committed crimes against God, given that, apparently without reason, he lost all his wealth,

social acknowledgment, and power. That is, Job's actual condition is an alleged sign of God's hostility toward him. Girard's efforts are here focused on giving a systematic reading of the presumed consolatory discourses by the three friends in line with the open attack to Job's wrongdoings subsequently advanced by Elihu. For example, Eliphaz's suggestion that Job's life resembles a well-known pattern, namely, the life of the tyrant, plays a fundamental role in Girard's argument because it relates the crimes of the wicked to the arbitrary exercise of power by unjust politicians (this is exactly what Elihu claims). It is such an exercise of power which makes Job deserving the horrible and violent punishment alluded by Elihu. Things have always gone this way with arrogant powerful men: they are raised to a mundane glory at first, but they will be destroyed violently by God at last (JVP 14, 22).

According to P, the main characters of the text are individuals coming from the same upper social context of Job. They are moved by envy towards Job's high political and social status (JVP 51). Particularly, they are bothered by his undisputed prestige within the community. What they are doing through their discourses, then, is trying to persuade the remaining members of the community that Job must be killed, and that all people should take part in the violence as a service offered to remove evil from their society (JVP 52-59): the conflicts generated by mimetic desire within the upper class spread into the community (by mimesis, again) and induce the group to commit violence towards a scapegoat, namely, Job.

The motivation of Girard's reading calls attention to two features of the strategy by the opposers to Job. First, they make significant use of traditional assumptions: they depict Job according to the common standards applied to evil men who made terrible sins against God. Second, they are never sympathetic towards Job's psychological, moral, and bodily sufferings. As a result, they continually rely on the attribution of derogatory epithets to Job: he is the *enemy of God*, the *accursed one*, the *wretch*, and the *wicked man*.

Since such use seems to involve intentional references to a rhetorical device, namely, hate speech through using slurs, it makes sense to assess this use in view of a few technical considerations about pejorative language. My claim is that accusers employ *enemy of God*, *accursed one*, *wretch*, and *wicked man* as slurs in order to promote active discrimination against him. Moreover, by characterizing such terms' features as in line with slurs, it is possible to introduce a simple and plausible account of how the persecutors' attack on Job causes public discrimination. Accordingly, either defending P can be disentangled from the assumption of a deeply exotic theory like mimetic desire is,

or, alternatively, a non-exotic theory for the spreading of envy can be proposed and used for explaining how mimetic desire transfers from upper classes to the whole of community.

Slurs are derogatory terms which offensively target a class. Typically, they address overtly discriminated groups because of sexual orientation (*faggot*, *dyke*), gender identity (*tranny*), ethnic origins (*chink*, *wop*, *boche*), or religious belonging (*kike*). However, they can concern almost any aberrant behavior or feature. For example, members of a school may offend a classmate who has obtained high level grades with the offensive *swot*; fat people may be teased by using terms as *fatso*; policemen are pejoratively termed *screw* or *pigs*. Some scholars distinguish between derogatory epithets which attack an individual as a member of a class to be discriminated against (this is properly the case of slurs) and those which attack an individual for their peculiar features. According to this distinction *swot* and *fatso* should not be classified as slurs. Nonetheless, the distinction between insulting an individual because of their being an exemplar of a discriminated class and offending an individual because of their peculiar feature is not so sharp as some scholars claim (Jeshion 2013).

Actually, terms such as *swot*, *fatso*, and others may be used to name an individual independently of derogatory attitudes towards all diligent or fat people. However, employing them for individuating a group and assuming that all diligent or fat people have similar behaviors to be condemned is a standard use. The crucial point is to distinguish between the insulting power of a term for an individual and how individuals adhering to the same class of the insulted one feel offended by the use of the very term (Ashwell 2016, Nunberg 2018).

This suggests that slurs are to be characterized by way of their referential and evaluative features. Almost all slurs have neutral counterparts which individuate the same target without being derogatory. Suppose that  $P_s$  is a slur targeting offensively class  $P$  and  $P_n$  is its non insulting corresponding terms for  $P$ . Saying that  $x$  is  $P_s$  is evidently different from saying that  $x$  is  $P_n$  in that while the former attributes to  $x$  the offensive qualifying feature referred by  $P_s$ , the latter does not attributes it to them, simply describing them as an instance of  $P_n$ . To provide an example, consider what happens when  $P_s$  stands for *faggot* and  $P_n$  stands for *gay man*. If I says that *John is a faggot*, at best I evidently mean to say that *John is a gay man and John deserves to be teased because being a gay man involves something ridiculous*. However, in a worse case, my statement is to be spelled out as the conjunction of *John is a gay man and John deserves to be reproached because being a gay man is a bad fact*. All considered, neutral coun-

terparts of slurs are completely referential and are used descriptively to individuate a group. On the contrary, slurs contain a negative evaluation about the targeted class, and they insult someone by discriminating against the class that they belong to at the same time.

The distinctive feature of slurs is that they do not apparently answer ordinary truth-conditional semantics. The derogatory character survives any quantification, connective, or modal operation on content (Hess forthcoming). Suppose I say that *John is not a faggot*, or that I deduce from some premises that *John must not be a faggot* or that *John cannot be a faggot*. According to a truth-conditional semantics, negation and modal operators change the truth-value of a statement by reason of how the content of the proposition is handled by negation and modal operators themselves (the same holds for the way quantifiers act on a sentence). Nonetheless, a sentence containing a slur does not change its truth-value in conformity with how quantifiers, connectives or modal operators act upon it: slurs resist any such operation and yet still insult the targeted class. It is not important if I negate that *John is a faggot*, or if I conclude from some premises that *he must not be* or *he cannot be one*. In any case, I continue to offend all gay men by assuming that there is a class of *faggots* and such a class identify with that of *gay men*. Preliminary quantitative research seems to attest that the derogatory power of slurs remains indeed embedded across conditionals and modal operators, and is testified in negation by reason of its metalinguistic reading (e.g., empirical reports of sentences like *John is not a faggot* show that they are not evaluated offensive like the positive instance, because they are interpreted as *John is not a faggot, he is a gay man in fact*, namely, negating the proposition does not concern whether John is a faggot or not, but states that there does not exist a class of faggots, Panzeri & Carrus 2017).

As a consequence, the fundamental issue about slurs concerns their semantic behavior. How does the insulting feature of sentences containing slurs resist the use of quantifiers, connectives and modal operators? There are three competing views: the semantic approach, the social approach and the pragmatic approach. The semantic approach holds that slurs are never descriptive; they do not convey any information about the world. That is, the meaning of slurs is merely a prescription of discriminating against the targeted class. Although such a view does justice to the evaluation feature of slurs in terms of irremovable derogatory effects, it seems unable to grasp that offensiveness survives negations and conditionals. Strictly speaking, it cannot provide a sound account of the fact that slurs and their neutral counterparts behave dif-

ferently under negations and conditionals (Cepollaro 2015). The social approach characterizes slurs as taboos in relation to sets of possible utterances. Grossly speaking, any society regulate what can and cannot be said of someone by prohibiting the use of some terms. The main intuition supporting such an approach is that neutral counterparts of slurs are able to express argumentative practices against their target without being insulting. It is a matter of fact that individuals may direct non insulting criticism to groups by reason of the features they involve (although such non insulting criticisms possibly still sound like an offense to any member of the targeted class). Reactions to such criticism affect the social dynamics of language use, by promoting taboos towards slurs and changing their status in relation to how much a term is perceived as offensive. For example, neutral terms for religious belonging as *Roman Catholic* were once thought of as slurs: while they become now accepted, taboos have been imposed on their slurring counterparts (*papist*). However, the social approach is defeated by the impossibility to account persuasively for how a term initially becomes a slur and why a taboo is raised over it (i.e., the use of neutral counterparts seems involving that it is possible to discriminate against minorities, all that is required is that discrimination be rationally sustained by polished language and argumentative practices, even if the content of such practices is as crazy as possible; consequently, it can be asked, why should any taboos be erected towards slurs?). Finally, the pragmatic approach, the most popular of which is the presuppositional account, is the claim that slurs should be analyzed by both their referential and evaluative character. When I say that *John is a faggot*, my sentence expresses two propositions: that John belongs to the targeted class, that is, he is a gay man, and that the targeted class should be discriminated against because of that homosexuality is always wrong. According to such a view, quantifiers, connectives and modal operators leaves the offensive character of slurs untouched because they act on the referential side, but have no effect on the (offensively) evaluative one. That is to say, the nature of the derogatory power which slurs actualize relies on the evaluative presupposes conveyed by the use of a slur. Each approach vindicates peculiar intuitions which account for some features of slurs. Consequently, it can be a winning strategy to pursue a complex and rich analysis which balances all the different motivations and employs different pieces of theory for accounting for simultaneous (apparently) differing characters. Empirical evidence suggests that such a theoretically refined model may have some merits (Technau 2016). However, I will favor the presuppositional account here on account that: it provides a convincing explanation

for embedding; it makes good sense of how discriminatory practices against the targeted groups are socially pursued; it is based on the social sharing of offensive assumptions, which reveal to be crucial for understanding religious hate speech. I am not claiming that the presuppositional account is universally the better strategy at disposal. I simply assume that it is so within a religious context, especially, an ancient mythology sources context (I will provide a few lines of argument in support in a while).

The interesting thing about the presuppositional account is that it provides an attractive analysis of how the use of slurs promotes active discriminations against a group or resistance to their very use. Bianca Cepollaro draws three main ways of characterizing reaction to the use of slurs (Cepollaro 2017): endorsement; complicity and propaganda; rejection. According to the first modality, the audience of a sentence wherein a slur occurs shares the offensive presupposition with the speaker. In a such a case, using slurs does not have the function of simply uttering discriminatory claims; rather, it strengthens the identity of the audience, by giving all individuals a group identity which binds them into a we-group on the ground of a common discrimination against another group (a non we-group). Sharing discriminatory assumptions mitigates differences within the group and puts the focus on individuals' constitutive relationship to other members. The second form occurs when the speaker does not know if their offensive assumption is shared with the audience previous to the utterance. Before the use of a slur, the speaker and audience do not constitute an explicit discriminatory context, because it is not clear whether the speaker and their audience actually share a given discriminatory assumption. However, the speaker utters a sentence containing a slur, and none of the audience turns out to be interested in rejecting the offensive presupposition it entails. That is, the presupposition is silently and universally assumed by the audience. Accordingly, the speaker and the audience transform into a group which comes to explicitly share the presupposition, and shows to support the discriminatory views of the speaker. The outcome is that a putatively neutral social context changes into a discriminatory we-group against some other non we-group. Finally, rejection. Suppose that within a situation similar to the one promoting complicity and propaganda someone opposes the speaker after the utterance of the slurring sentence. In this context, there is no slippery road arriving at a commonality of discriminatory assumptions from an unanswered presupposition. Nonetheless, the rejection scenario presents a relational behavior which is cognitively and socially expensive (Cepollaro 2017, pp. 59-61). It involves that someone contends the

very use of slurs by stopping the conversation: rejecting the presupposition is a matter of avoiding any dialogue which starts by denigrating others for their being members of a discriminated group. If this occurs, argumentative collaboration ends, and this is not obviously a beneficial outcome. As a consequence, slurs show themselves to be dangerous instruments in the hands of persecutors: they initiate conflict if opposed; they promote complicity in derogatory practices if not opposed by reason of avoiding a conflict.

In light of this discussion, come back to P. To begin with, I will observe that slurs are familiar items in religious discourse. To mention just a paradigmatic case, consider how Jesus violently reproached *Pharisees* in Mt 23.13. The reason for his contention was that he thought that the Pharisaic law system contradicted the spirit of the tradition, and promoted behavioral codes contrary to God's will. When he referred to them, he called them *hypocrites*. Due to the cultural influence of the Christian movement, the meaning of *Pharisee* has slowly drifted to *hypocrite*. Today, given the term's dense value of disdainful reproach, saying that someone is a Pharisee is a non refined manner of attacking them (i.e., competent users of language understand *Pharisee* as more negatively evaluative than *hypocrite*). Obviously, an adherent to Pharisaic Judaism may feel strongly offended by this use of the word, which behaves plainly as a derogatory epithet to their perspective.

The semantic account deals with *Pharisee* by claiming that it cannot say anything about the world, *Pharisee* being used as a slur. However, this assumption clashes with the evidence that *Pharisee* is also a plainly referential term. When used like an insult, it targets an actual class and presumes that such a class should be discriminated against. That is, the semantic view cannot make justice to the fact that religious slurs as *Pharisee* actually refer to a class: a *pharisee* can categorize their identity by labelling by the term. What a member of a discriminated class certainly rejects, then, is not the use of the label, but the presupposition that the targeted class should be discriminated against for its being it as such (consider as evidence for my claim that discriminated classes sometime adopt the slur directed against them as a mark of proud self-identification; e.g., *nigger*). This is typical of terms like *Pagan*, *Mohammedan*, *Russellite*, *Jew* and any other labeling of religious traditions or denominations: when these terms are used by fundamentalist sectarians (and even conservative nationalists), the distance between slurs and their neutral counterparts vanishes, and the neutral counterpart takes the place of the slur by becoming a slur itself. Naturally, the referential feature of the term cannot be bracketed in



the derogatory use: there is a memory in the word which makes the referential feature overlap with the derogatory one.

The social account is tackled by difficulties too. The most evident consists in that there is no sharp distinction between the slurring and the referential use of terms as *Pharisee*, and, accordingly, there are not clear methods for establishing when the slurring use should promote the imposition of a taboo. That is to say, the social account cannot explain how taboos should affect the derogatory use of a term which is simultaneously employed non derogatorily within a pluralist social setting (e.g., the term *Jew* is sometimes used as a slur; nonetheless, Jews identify themselves by using the term, and any proposal to reform such use by the reference to neutral counterparts as *Israelite* may sound equally derogatory).

Finally, the pragmatic account. Objections of the previous kind leave the view untouched, because the different uses of terms by a community (that is, both referential and evaluative uses) can be explained in terms of the different presuppositions which the members of different groups endorse.

Now, I shift to motivate why *enemy of God*, *accursed one*, *wretch*, and *wicked man* are slurs. According to my claim, the accusers of Job intentionally use these terms as slurs. The idea is that they mean to activate a public reproach of Job by individuating him as a member of a class to be discriminated against *qua* its being as such. To this end, directing slurs at him points at making explicit a sum of presuppositions assumed by the audience which provide reasons to violently attack him, at least in their eyes. If they are successful in making people think that the use of *enemy of God*, *accursed one*, *wretch*, and *wicked man* is appropriate to Job, Job is then recognized by the community as a scapegoat to be eliminated, and no further inquiry is required to destroy him.

Let us then take a closer look at the claim. In my presuppositional account of slurs (I will limit my exemplification to the term *enemy of God* for reasons of simplicity, the same holding for other ones previously referred to), when someone says that *x* is an *enemy of God* in the context of the community of Job, the individual intends to qualify *x* as a member of a class to be discriminated against by reasons of his/her existence alone. The term individuating the target class (i.e., *enemy of God*) is interpreted by a derogatory presupposition directed to the class itself.

It may be objected that this is not exactly how it works. For example, it may be that the accusers' use of the term is purely referential, and accordingly, it sounds neutral and non derogatory. A descriptive reading of the term could

be expressed by construing it as *whoever acts as Job does commits crimes against God, and, accordingly, deserves punishment*. In support of this, it can be argued that it is no easy task to see which presupposition, by way of focusing on a plainly evident feature, individuates Job as a member of a group to be discriminated on account of such feature.

This claim is not convincing, however. Some have indeed a tendency to distinguish between what an individual behaviorally actualizes in terms of his/her intentions and what he/she actually achieves. Following such a disposition, no exterior sign in Job's fate seems an observable feature according to which he can be legitimately categorized belongs to Job's community. On the contrary, a common ground in any conservative form of religiosity (as those of the accusers is, JVP, 52-53; 62) is the assumption that successes and failures in life are necessary consequences of morally good or wrong individual nature (JVP, 77-80; call this postulate *necessary origination of luck from character*, LC for short). Bad luck is an exterior sign that something is not morally good at all about the individual experiencing it. Now, at the beginning of the narrative, Job was a very powerful man. He was loved by everyone, he was rich and healthy, and had a strong and enviable family. Things have drastically changed without any evident reason, and, during the dialogue with the three so-called friends, he is depicted as a miserable infirm who constantly complains and who is avoided by everyone in the community. Consequently, if LC is assumed, Job has a plainly detectable exterior feature which allows him to be categorized into a class to be discriminated against.

It is worth noting that the *Book of Job*, as most of the contemporary biblical literature devoted to the problem of evil, is, in a substantive sense, a critical reaction to the assumption of LC. The fact that holy men may be objects of unmotivated violent actions and experience unhappy lives is obviously evidence against LC, and should be addressed. The widespread existence of literature concerning how to fix the issue testifies that the necessitarian postulate was actually a common ground for people living in the times of Job (Simian-Yofre 2005). As a consequence, *that Job had to be a horrible man affected by his wrongdoings* was certainly a shared assumption among his persecutors. Bad luck turns out to be a qualifying sign of a peculiar class of individuals, namely, *bad men*. Slurs targeting such class are the ones employed by Job's accusers. In conformity with this, *enemy of God, accursed one, wretch, and wicked man* should be read as follows: x is a bad man, namely, he is a man experiencing an evil luck (1), and it is required that x should be discriminated against because of their bad luck (2). The former proposition expresses the referential

character of the slurs against Job, the latter is the presupposition containing the derogatory content promoting persecution.

Girard calls attention to another reason for considering the assumption of LC a common ground: Job himself sometimes speaks the language of his accusers, and seems to endorse LC (JVP, 126-132). Accordingly, what appears particularly pitiful in Job's complaints is that, given his assent to the necessitarian postulate, he suspects that he has committed some crimes but he cannot understand what crimes he might have committed or when he might have committed them. Girard writes that he "reaches the point where he doubts his own innocence" (JVP, 128). However, the difference between Job and his persecutors should be traced back to their different use of the rhetorical devices available within their common tradition. Both accept LC, but, while his accusers make it explicit by an outrageous language which offensively employs dense terms, Job quietly inquires about what he could be guilty of, given the assumption of LC. This means that Job disentangles the evaluative presupposition conveyed by the slurs against him, by researching whether the presupposition is sound. On the contrary, the persecutors intentionally use their slurs for discriminating against Job.

If the attack on Job consists in a significant use of hate speeches by slurring terms, the presuppositional account makes available a story about the spread of discrimination. Girard thinks that the process leading from the envy of Job felt by his peers to the other members of the community is a long trajectory (JVP, 52). Nonetheless, P provides only disjointed hints about how this trajectory may have developed. Following the presuppositional account, the process can be characterized as follows. At first resentment spreads among the upper class. This stage provides a good example of the scenario of endorsement. Friends of Job come to constitute a cluster of intimate individuals who defer their own internal conflicts by uniting against Job. Their use of slurs binds them into a group which identifies itself by opposing the class of individuals to which Job actually belongs. Subsequently, individuals from the upper class begin to direct slurs towards Job in public situations. It may be imagined that on such occasions people react differently. LC is a common ground for all. However, the matter at issue is whether Job exhibits the relevant *bad luck* for being embodied in the class targeted by *enemy of God*, *accursed one*, *wretch*, and *wicked man*. When the accusers name Job in those ways, they certainly do not find resistance. As is evident, rejection in the use of a slur is cognitively and socially expensive in every situation. In a society undergoing enduring social conflicts as that of the *Book of Job* is (many passages

of the *Book* depict a context wherein different parties, groups, and individuals physically fight each other), rejecting a received perspective may turn out to be additionally costly. Where conflicts occur, assuming strongly critical attitudes towards consensus requires a high degree of bravery and an in-depth willingness to fight. It seems plausible, therefore, that, even if someone had disagreed with insulting Job, they would have remained silent. Since no one rejects the use of slurs against Job, the complicity and propaganda scenario characterize later stages of the community's reaction to the attack on Job. In this way, LC becomes a mean for actualizing an active discrimination against him.

For this reason, the trial has the fate of changing into a slaughter. The use of slurs helps us to see why. While Job investigates the evaluative feature of the slurs directed against him, the community progressively feels complicity, propaganda, and endorsement by identifying itself against Job. There are two opposed modalities for the assessment of Job's alleged sins: a methodical analysis *versus* hate speech. It seems natural that when the majority pursues the latter, individuals who attracts criticism does not have it easy: a totalitarian violence motivated by futile reasons bursts onto the scene.

### **Discussion of VM in light of P**

The *Book of Job* provides a paradigmatic case study for VM. According to P, it is a testimony of the scapegoating related events both from the viewpoint of the persecutors and the victim. Differently from ordinary myths, delusive memories are kept together with the dissonant and rebellious voice of the scapegoat refusing to accept the viewpoint of the remaining community: Job denounces the arbitrariness of the violences he undergoes (JVP, 35, 38-40). As a consequence, P is of crucial importance because, if it sounds, it provides fundamental evidence in support of VM. Now, interpreting P by the framework of the presuppositional account of slurs highlights a few points which may help to ground and develop VM in a way that secures the theory against traditional criticisms.

A number of related issues concern the format of the definitions of the main concepts of VM. Almost all include a universal quantification. This move is required by Girard's insistence that unanimity is the clearest feature of mythology: myths are the outcome of a monolithic process, the result of which is that no individual escapes the mimetism of desires (JVP, 51) and is able to break the univocal community's perspective (JVP, 111-112). Mimetism is a tool

for explaining how such uniformity is possible, and unanimity against the scapegoat is the mark attesting that the crowd violence will put an end to social conflicts within the community. However, universality is a difficult requirement to meet, and involves various genres of difficulties. First, it pursues a costly and possibly blind strategy by reducing the plurality of motives for social agency and the complex occurrence of in-groups dynamics to a single homogeneous frame. Such a strategy is costly because it unnecessarily multiplies the net of concepts in order to account for the matter at issue; and it is blind because it is insensitive to the real pushes which shape group agency. Second, Girard's focus on uniformity and unanimity exposes VM to easy refutation: it suffices to provide a case which does not fit the characterization of the definitions, and the game is over (e.g., myths reluctant to be reduced to the scapegoat mechanism may not follow the logic of mimesis, nor present a situation of unanimity within its content; further, myths involving fights among opposing parties break the law of unanimity: for example, the war between Titans and Gods shows cases of doxastic disagreement within both parties, and individuals' desertion, as well). Third, it makes the unconvincing claim that the persecutors are "completely representative" of all individuals belonging to the community: uniformity involves that all univocally think the same (JVP, 62). Such a view is hardly able to accommodate features of religious beliefs like anecdotalness, ambiguity, and vagueness (Bertini 2018, Bertini 2020a, Bertini 2020b, Bertini 2020c).

Universal quantification is not necessary, however, because uniformity is not an irrevocable notion. Actually, the appearance of unanimity may be accounted for in a way which does not presume assumptions which are difficult to defend. That is to say, the spreading of a shared feeling of doing violence to Job can be easily explained in terms of the communitarian hate speech. More precisely, it is the systematic use of slurs conveying LC to persuade the community that killing Job is necessary to restore peace: crowd violence originates there. In this situation, unanimity is what is to be expected. According to Cepollaro's rejection scenario, indeed, deniers of the use of slurs against Job are determined to give up their public role as opposers. A live-and-let-live strategy seems on point. They do not intend to fight. As such, motivations for rejecting the use of slurs do not occupy any dialogical space. The fact is not that there is unanimity: rather, that if dissenters do not publicly charge persecutors, their doxastic options disappear.

Further difficulties for VM come from the transition from (1) to (2). Girard's ground belief is that social events are mostly a matter of the relationship bet-

ween persecutors and victims (JVP, 120-123). In order to argue that conflicts within groups promote arbitrary and unmotivated reasons for discriminating randomly against someone, Girard thinks that the mimetism of by-chance group desires is required. In actuality, if a few desires were to escape the qualification of mimetism, there would be room to hold that desires belong to two different sets, namely, mimetic desires and non mimetic desires. The former would always depend on contingent facts and motives, for example *belonging to the same group* or *desiring something because I realize that others desire it*. On the contrary, the latter would rely on intrinsic features, for example *being natural* or *having strong reasons for preferring something*. Consequently, while mimetic desires would be completely a matter of chance (this justifies their shaping by by-chance group desire), non mimetic desires would appear determined by non random motives. In case a conflict arose among instances of the two sets, it would be difficult to qualify this as a by-chance event characterized by unanimity. If I had a pretension to the naturalness or rationality of my desires, I would not probably have the intention of dismissing them in face of their contrariety to the desires by other individuals, given that they would experience them only by a process of social induction which is generated by close contact with one another. As a consequence, I could rationally argue that my desire are better grounded than those of others, and deserve a deeper degree of satisfaction.

To the purpose of avoiding that a similar situation may provide objections to the ground belief about persecution and victimism, Girard's strategy consists in denying that desires can be categorized in terms of a dualist taxonomy. Naturally, this move seems implausible enough. First, even if all desires would be mimetic, it does not follow that they will be all by chance (as it is stipulated by clause (1)). Like all primates, humans are driven by imitative behaviors on account of evolutionary pushes (Farmer, Ciaunica, & de C. Hamilton, 2018). Empirical findings seem supportive in that imitation is not led by randomness, but is governed by a selective focus on learning from others. That is, contrary to Girard's construal of imitation, imitation may be directed by selective intentionality: we do not imitate whatever we see in others; rather, we choose what is relevant to our ends at a given time (Gellen & Buttelmann 2017). Second, even if all desires are mimetic and random, the assumption of (exorcism), which is necessary to warrant the transition from (1) to (2), appears problematic. For, on the one hand, desires may not raise issues of satisfaction. As a consequence, it may be the case that an individual enjoying a desire may be able to reject it, and, accordingly, cut off the reasons for

conflict. For example, in the rejection scenario, people endorsing a live-and-let-live strategy suppress their desire to oppose an illegitimate use of slurs. While, on the other, it is hard to see how (exorcism) can give an answer to desires' satisfaction. Suppose that John and Paul are two colleagues. John wants to have sex with Paul's wife (because in conformity with the logic of mimetism, they live side by side, and Paul desires to have sex with his wife). Such a situation generates conflicts among them: John tries to destroy his desire, but he cannot actually do it and, as a consequence, his behaviors begin to be shaped by anxieties, and this affects their relationships by arising tensions. Now, both of them strongly dislike Teddy, a further colleague. After the crisis between John and Paul, they join one with the other to bully Teddy at work. John and Paul feel a genuine relief from their mutual anxieties by making Teddy's job life a living hell. Their complicity is restored. However, it does not seem to be the case that the situation should remove Paul's desire to have sex with John's wife. What happened is simply that Paul's desire was temporarily deferred. At the first occasion, Paul's desire to have sexual intercourse with John's wife might return if, for example, if he saw Paul passionately kissing her.

Now, mimetism and exorcism by way of revenge are ingredients for the assumption of an implicature relation between (a) and (b). I think that a construction of VM in terms of the conjunction of (a), (b), and (c) is preferable because it is in line with the evidence that the three blocks are logically independent. Nonetheless, the Girardian who wants to defend the implicature relation can give up the problematic assumption of (1) and (exorcism) and replace them with the assumption of a presuppositional account of slurs as a mean to explain the emergence of a scapegoating event within the community.

This leads me to the last block of difficulties for VM. These difficulties concern the role played by (focus on normativity) in managing the transition from (2) to (3). Girard probably assumes explicitly this principle. According to him, things go as follows (JVP, 81-85). Once the scapegoat is killed, the community establishes a ritual consisting in the symbolic repetition of the murder. Myths are the intellectual counterpart of the performance of ritual: they are the understandings of the semantic content which gives form to the delusive memories of the event. This means that rituals give rise to a performative tradition consisting in a narrative about how the scapegoat's crimes broke the sacred order of society and, in this way, generated way the necessity to destroy the origin of these detours. As a consequence, the emergence of mea-

ning by means of the repetition of the ritual is the basic fact grounding any communitarian understanding of life, religion, government (JVP, 97). What distinguishes occasional crowd lynching from the communitarian murder is exactly the symbolic repetition that establishes the normative contents by means of which evaluating the world. Such repetition puts focus on the normative constraints of what matters. As earlier, Girard's explicit attention is on unanimity. Mythological traditions rely on the univocal perspective of the persecutors.

However, if (focus on normativity) is declined in terms of unanimity, things resist Girard's analysis. Most polytheist religions do not show the uniformity assumed by VM. Consider the mythology connected to the War of Troy. Divine characters commonly adhere to opposing parties. Moreover, oppositions often turn out in open hostility and conflict. Some gods help the Greek army, others the Trojan one. In the end, the Greeks win the war. Nonetheless, the motivations of both the winners and losers are equally represented and argued for in the mythological narrative. As such, both positions survive the past: the doxastic spectrum transmits the testimonies of all the characters acting in the whole process. This outcome cannot be expected, given the way Girard understands (focus on normativity).

A possible defense of unanimity can be spelled out by distinguishing between mythologies and religions. While the former originate in traditions in which the only viewpoint admitted is the persecutors', the latter are characterized by dualism: religions give testimony to the victims' revolt against their persecutors. As a consequence, religions provide simultaneous access to both the persecutory events (in the mythological portion of their Revelation texts) and the victims' crying out against them (in the authentically religious portion). Such a view is a generalization of Girard's approach to Judaism and Christianity (JVP, 151-153). Although Girard assumes that only the Judeo-Christian tradition is actually successful in demythicizing its mythological past, a Girardian non-confessional framework may be developed in order to argue that all religions work this way. According to such a hypothesis, religions may arise from mythologies when a sum of mythological narratives (about scapegoating) are collected together in a plurality of revelation texts. Once this happens, opposing viewpoints on semantic content related to the peculiarities of different myths are blended together into a single conceptual system of representations. Possibly, such a conflation is a consequence of migratory movements and wars between neighboring populations. At the end, the different groups unite into one social entity. Their original mythological



materials are preserved together. However, since losers are defeated by winners, their myths acquire a new role: they became the voice of a victimized people. Therefore, the history of each religion may be accounted for as a transition from the unanimity of their ancient sources to the pluralist viewpoint of their mature stages.

Tempting as it seems, such a strategy turns out to be very weak. In actuality, the crucial point is that a similar process involves a self-aware measure of reflection about the integration of myths under a common interpretive context. It is a matter of fact that the establishment of canonical texts is a posteriori and historical event - this is the case for every religion: someone works on a plurality of religious narrative and disentangles the valid from the unsound ones. Two relevant things follow. First, myths change meaning over time. This means that they are newly created by different interpretations. The conclusion is that, even if a myth originated from a scapegoating, subsequent interpretations break the connection with the original material and generate a new system of meaningfulness which does not depend on the original scapegoating. This being the case, VM is defeated. Second, (focus on normativity) cannot have the unanimity feature which Girard attributes to it. The interpretive processes arriving at the formation of a religion are indeed long historical trajectories. When canonizers list at last what is a Revelation text and what is not, they are heirs to a tradition of debates on normative issues related to the meaningfulness of myths. Many positions are developed along the way. Accordingly, myths come to testify to a plurality of alternative doxastic options about meaning (each of which become unrelated to the presumed scapegoating at a certain point of history). Again, unanimity vanishes, and VM turns out to be unwarranted in the transition from (2) to (3) (at least if (focus on normativity) is spelled out in a Girardian fashion).

The presuppositional account of slurs comes to VM's aid. It can be assumed that (focus on normativity) actually plays a basic role without falling into Girard's characterization of it. The idea is that different stages of the interpretive history of a myth may be associated with how the several scenarios related to the use of slurs overlap at different times. A degree approach seems useful here. The more a myth conveys an univocal viewpoint, the higher the degrees of endorsement flowing into complicity and propaganda are at its origin. As shown, rejection is never lacking: it is obscured by the "live-and-let-live" doxastic modality. It is then reasonable to postulate that, when unanimity is an evident feature of a myth, the degree of rejection is low. Accordingly, those who deny the use of slurs reject any possible action related to explicit argu-

mentation of their perspective. Nonetheless, rejection attitudes may become more substantive among deniers. Since this is the case, a doxastic conflict appears. Some will react to the deniers' claim by endorsement which subsequently flows into complicity and propaganda. The more a rejection scenario generates endorsement among implicit deniers, the more two parties divide the doxastic spectrum. In this way, a plurality of perspectives enters the semantic content of the myth. There is indeed a focus on normativity in the transition from myth-generating-events to the establishment of myths, although such a focus is not governed by unanimity but by the exercise of growing degrees of rejection of the discriminations against the victims of crowd violence.

### **Concluding remarks**

Above, I argued that, if Girard is right in assuming P, the presuppositional account of slurs helps us to see how the hate speech employed by Job's persecutors fuels the community attitude toward him that pushes the crowd to kill him as a scapegoat. A further outcome is that the same account is able to provide a simple explanation of the trajectory departing from discriminatory communitarian events and arriving at the construal of semantic normativity without introducing exotic doctrines which are difficult to defend.

My suggestion is to use a few of Girard's ideas for developing an account of a peculiar kind of myths, namely, those related to the discriminatory practices of the majority social group against minority ones and isolated victims. Some may ask whether a theory renouncing the unanimity of perspective in mythology, mimetic desire, exorcism by revenge, and univocal focus on normativity is still a variety of Girardism. The answer is possibly negative. However, I cannot see how making a regimented use of apparently fruitful ideas by combining them with a complex and theoretically grounded and empirically informed understanding of desires, social conflicts, and doxastic oppositions within communities should be pursued under the dogmatic constraints of the school originated by who first stated those very ideas.

In any case, this is not the only advantage of reading P in terms of the presuppositional account of slurs. In addition, strong Girardians may rely on it for promoting an understanding of universality, mimesis and victimization. That is, they can sustain all the problematic notions expressing VM by construing them as results of the doxastic conflict raised by hate speech. The advantage is that such a strategy preserves all the qualifying features of VM (al-

though they appear difficult to defend) while providing a justification for them by a reasons-supported theory.

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