

Women

Jesus

&

Rock 'n' Roll

**Taking René Girard's Mimetic Theory to
a Dialogue between the Christian Story and Popular Culture**

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(mimetic margins)

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1 THE ANGLE FROM WHICH THE INTERPRETIVE SPOTLIGHTS SHINE: MIMETIC THEORY

1.1 HUMAN BEINGS AS CRISIS MANAGERS

We all have to deal with crisis situations. A crisis happens when we are challenged to renew or change the order of things as we know it. Therefore it is always a threat, big or small, to the systems that bring stability to our lives. A crisis is a time to make decisions in order to preserve a given system of stability or to create a new one. As such it is not just an event which forces us to adjust to its course, but also an opportunity to imagine other ways of being in the world. A crisis is violent when it is primarily experienced as an assault on our personal integrity and our socially defined identity. On the other hand, a crisis might contain the promise of a better protected personal integrity and an enhanced social identity when it is experienced as an assault on systems of stability that actually suppress us. In short, the crisis situations that befall us and subvert the world as we know it are experienced either as a curse or a blessing, either as doom or chance.



Confronted with crisis situations, every human being is able to ask three clusters of questions, one scientific and two philosophical. Let's see what the crisis manager named human might think about...

1.1.1 SCIENTIFIC QUESTIONS:

How can a crisis situation be explained? What are its causes and consequences? How do we, people, deal with it and what explains our behavior?

To use a business analogy:

How do people behave within the company and what problems arise out of this behavior?

1.1.2 A FIRST SET OF PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS (MEANING):

Where do we want to go from here, confronted with this crisis? What is the ultimate goal of what we are trying to do? What are we hoping for?

To use the business analogy:

What does this company stand for? What goals does it hope to accomplish?

1.1.3 A SECOND SET OF PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS (ETHICS):

How should we behave ourselves if we want to accomplish our goal, dealing with this crisis? Should we deal with the crisis situation like we normally do, or should we change our behavior?

To use the business analogy:

How should people behave within the company in order to accomplish its goals?

Once the two sets of philosophical questions are answered, science of course functions as a means to make the fulfillment possible of thought-through goals which transcend (and therefore guide) the merely scientific endeavor.

1.2 REFRAMING EXISTENTIAL QUESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF MIMETIC THEORY

1.2.1 CONSIDERING 'CRISIS MANAGEMENT' QUESTIONS

As long as we are alive and well as human beings, we are mimetically connected to each other. It is because of our mimetic (i.e. imitative) ability that we are social creatures. Mimetic theory, as it was initially developed by René Girard, tries to understand and explain the possibilities and pitfalls of human social behavior by studying its mimetic interactions. It attempts to answer the three clusters of questions, identified previously, concerning 'crisis management' as the *condition humaine*.

1.2.2 SCIENTIFIC QUESTIONS:

How do crisis situations in human life arise out of mimetic interactions? How are these mimetic interactions influenced by conditions of the natural environment? Or, on the other hand, how do mimetic interactions construct patterns of human behavior that influence the natural environment in negative or positive ways? How do we normally deal with crisis situations arising out of mimetic interactions?

1.2.3 PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS (MEANING):

What goals are desirable for human life, considering the mimetic nature of human beings? What are we trying to accomplish by studying mimetic interactions?

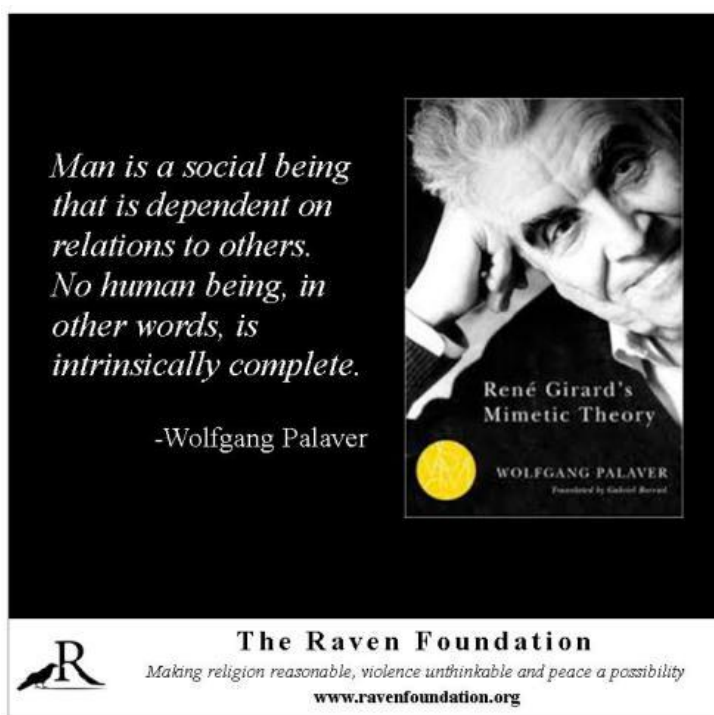
1.2.4 PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS (ETHICS):

How should we behave if we want to accomplish our goals? Should we deal with crisis situations, arising out of mimetic interactions, like we normally do – like our ancestors did, for instance? Should we accept certain morals (of which the origins can be scientifically explained)? Or should we try to change our behavior?

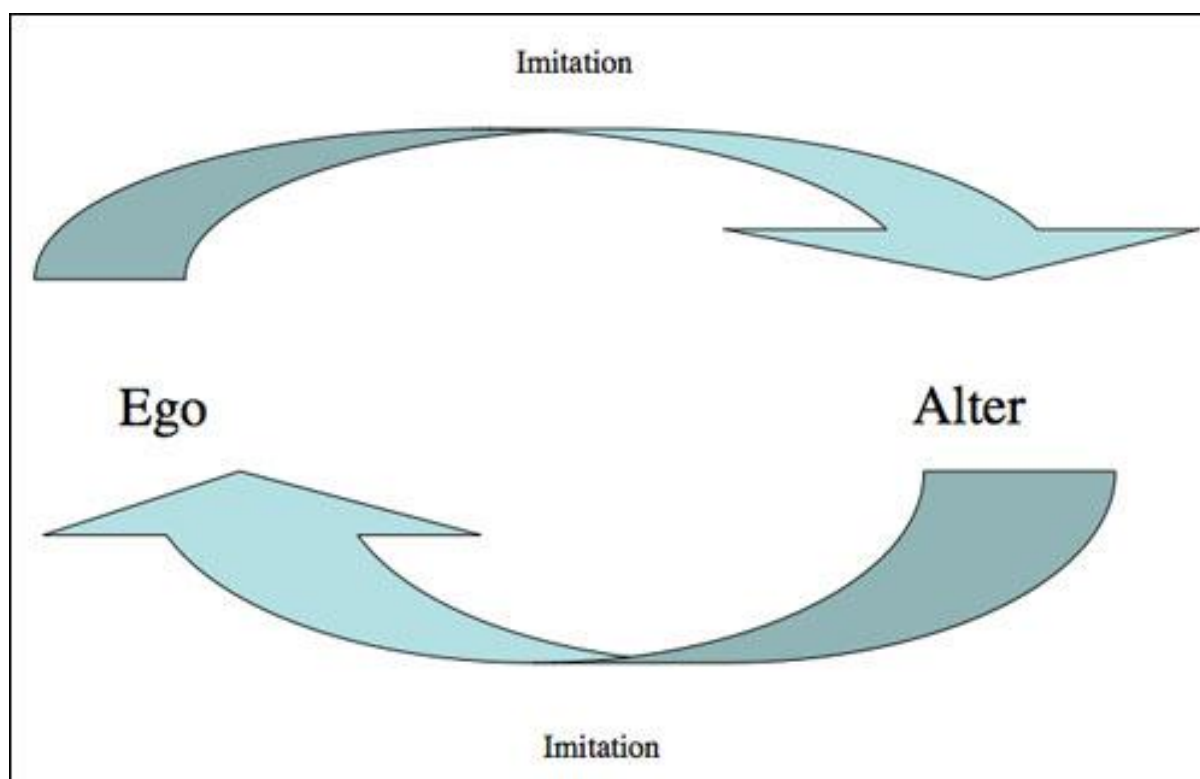
1.3 OUTLINE FOR A COURSE USING MIMETIC THEORY

1.3.1 MIMESIS AND EMPATHY

Any course using mimetic theory starts with a simple observation: the way we think about ourselves and the way we develop a sense of identity is always mediated by our social environment. And that which makes something like a social environment possible precisely is our – indeed mimetic – ability to put ourselves in each other's shoes.



Neuroscientists have discovered that so-called mirror neurons in our brains play a very important role in this regard. These brain cells allow us to *imitate* others. They allow us to *pretend* that we're someone else and to take another person's point of view. And this allows us to *imagine* what others are experiencing, thinking, expecting or even desiring. In short, our *mimetic* ability is the *conditio sine qua non* to empathize and bond with others, and to develop a sense of self.



Of course our imaginative projections about others can be wrong. That's why we, rather unwittingly, constantly look for the confirmation of mutually established social expectations. The question 'Am I doing this right?' seems to be the ever present subtext to our behavior. It really structures the interaction between ourselves and others. As it happens though, the recognition we get from one social group might be of more importance to us than that of another. We might empathize more with the members of the San Francisco symphony orchestra we're part of than with the homeless of that same city. Or we might feel so close to our favorite football team that we become really hostile to its adversaries.

So our ability to empathize with others turns out to be a two-edged sword. It connects us *with* and disconnects us *from* others at the same time. It can connect us to the members of a group we want to be part of *against* a common enemy. Even more so, it can stir rivalry between members of the same group or the same social environment. That might be surprising, but on second view it will turn out to be quite logical. Our mimetic ability allows us to take other people as *models* for our behavior. It allows us to learn from them in all sorts of ways, but it also plays a significant role in structuring our desires and ambitions. For instance, there's more than one twelve year old soccer player walking around with a shirt of Lionel Messi or some other soccer idol, secretly dreaming of being the next soccer sensation.

1.3.2 MIMESIS AND RIVALRY – THE PROBLEM OF MIMETIC DESIRE

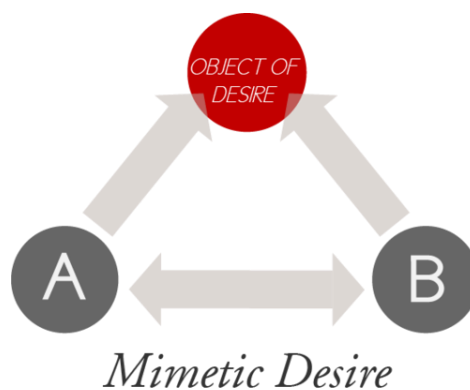
There seems to be no harm in identifying with someone you admire and take as an inspiration for your own desires and ambitions in life. At first glance, that is. As long as the model you imitate belongs to quite another world than your own, as long as there is a significant distance between yourself and your model – in space, in time, or both –, chances of a conflictual relationship with the model are reduced. On the other hand, when that distance is no longer experienced, things might turn ugly, both for yourself and your model. As a twelve year old forward in a soccer team, it's fairly easy to admire Lionel Messi, but it might be a hell of a lot harder to appreciate the talents of the new teammate who comes in and takes your spot. Identifying yourself as being the forward (or even 'the Messi of the team') immediately complicates your relationship with this newcomer, as he arouses the desire for your former status and the recognition it is supposed to bring. You might, for instance, try to get rid of the new guy by locking him out. Good coaches, though, know how to deal with these types of situations, even strengthening their team in the process. When two or more forwards imitate and thereby reinforce each other's desire to be the best player on their position, it indeed can make them all better players in a consequently better team.



Good coaches and managers are able to use *mimetic rivalry* in constructive ways, allowing their employees to recognize and respect that 'the best has won'. However, all management efforts aside, mimetic rivalry remains a tricky thing. It is literally rivalry based on the imitation of desires for certain material and/or immaterial objects (e.g. a trophy, some sort of social recognition or status, power within a company, wealth, etc.).

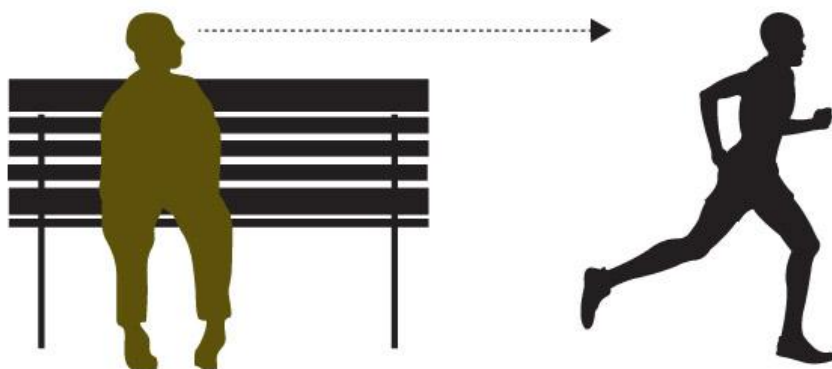


Human desire is, beyond instinctive needs and wants, highly mimetic (i.e. based on imitation). True, we're all born with certain physical needs (for food, water, oxygen, etc.). But no one is born with the desire to become, say, a culinary chef. That is a socially (and therefore mimetically) mediated ambition that gets different cultural expressions. Mimetic desire and mimetically mediated ambition can easily lead to frustrations and destructive conflicts between people who take each other as model.



When two or more people, consciously or more often rather unwittingly, imitate each other's desire, they become each other's annoying obstacle when they cannot or do not want to share the object of their desire. In short, they become antagonists because of *mimetic desire*. Paradoxically, it is because people are close to each other and can imagine what it is like to be in the other's shoes, that they can become each other's archrivals in the context of a mutually shared desire. As said, our mimetic ability connects and disconnects.

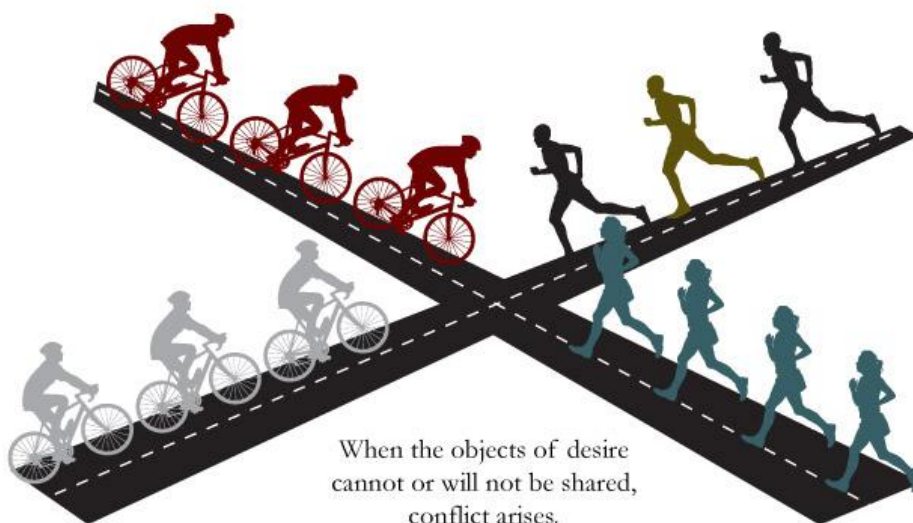
MIMETIC DESIRE



Human beings learn everything, including our desires, through imitation.
Our individual and cultural identities are formed in relationship to others.



Imitated desires lead to bonds of friendship and love...



When the objects of desire
cannot or will not be shared,
conflict arises.



Visit our blogs at the ravenfoundation.org and join the conversation on Mimetic Theory.

1.3.3 THE SCAPEGOAT MECHANISM AS RESPONSE TO MIMETIC CRISES

The mimetic building blocks of our psychosocial fabric are at once responsible for the preservation and disintegration of that very same fabric. One of the well-tryed means to restore a social order that is in crisis because of escalating mimetic rivalry, is the so-called *scapegoat mechanism*. This restoration again rests on mimetic processes. Let's turn to the example of the soccer team once more. When a team loses time and again, that's normally no favorable factor for the group atmosphere. Teammates start blaming each other for bad results, maybe even sabotaging each other. There also might be ill-will towards the coach by players who feel they're not given enough opportunities to play matches. And when the coach becomes part of the rivalry and frustrations within the team, that's usually the end of his career there. As more players imitate the ill-will of some teammates towards their coach, the latter becomes the one held responsible for all the major problems within the team, and he'll be fired by the board in the end. Instead of recognizing the mimetic origins of social disorder, people tend to blame one outsider or a group of outsiders. This scenario is well-known. Coaches indeed often function as convenient scapegoats, unjustly blamed for a crisis they're not or only partly responsible for. Like other scapegoats they're interpreted in a twofold manner by the group they're expelled from: perceived as the main *cause* of the tensions, divisions and disorder within the group, and experienced as the main *cure* while being *sacrificed* (expelled, or worse) to restore unity and order within that same group. Scapegoats are at once villain and hero, monster and savior, hated and loved, unwanted and wanted, scorned yet needed. Think, for example, of dictatorial regimes who blame all their domestic problems on foreign enemies. As long as a dictator can unite his citizens against some outside enemy, he can at least prevent them from uniting against himself and remain in the saddle. This means that he cannot completely destroy the enemy he publicly loathes. Dictators need the periodic sacrifice of their scapegoat in order to preserve the social fabric on a very large scale, but human beings in general tend to use the scapegoat mechanism on a day-to-day basis, albeit often in smaller ways.



WE FEEL THE OFFICE SCAPEGOAT IS A
KEY COMPONENT OF TEAM-BUILDING,
AND YOU'RE A GREAT FIT FOR THE JOB.

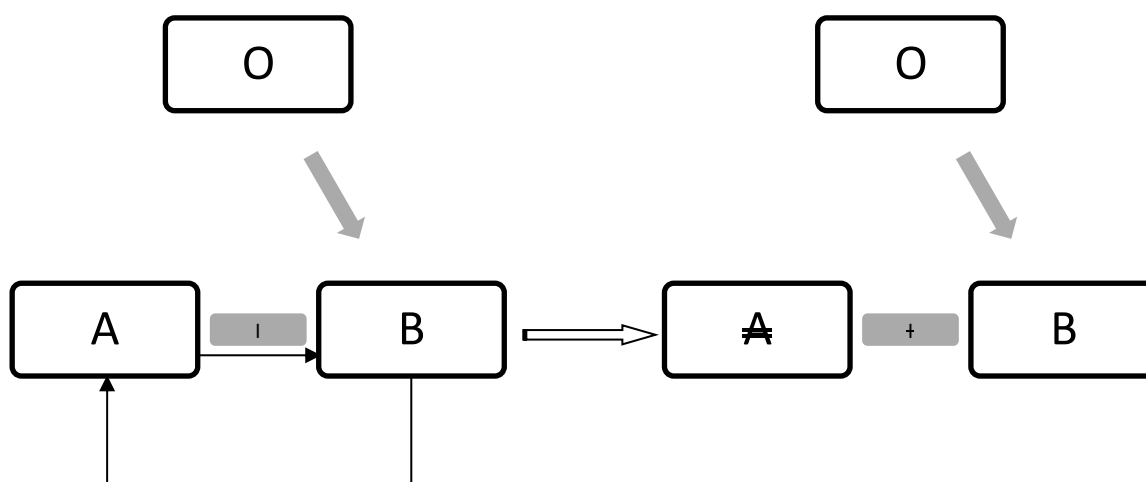
1.4 GOALS OF THIS COURSE

Because of the widespread presence of the scapegoat mechanism and the sacrifices that go along with it in the preservation of social order and peace, it is a real challenge to imagine other ways of building human communities. The question is how to create communities where differences between people don't lead to escalating rivalries that tend to leave no difference at all – except for the violently established difference between a group and its scapegoat or sacrificial victim, and the hierarchical differences within the group itself. In other words, are there ways to create a social order and peace that leaves room for non-violent, creative conflicts that originate in the irreducible yet fascinating differences between ourselves and other human beings?

The goal of this course is, first, to become more aware of the psychological and social mechanisms this introduction already briefly touched upon. Among others, it will present three ways by which mimetic connections between ourselves and other human beings might become mentally and/or physically violent and destructive. Some stories, old and new and from different media, will function as mirrors that reveal some of those important aspects of who we are as human beings. It will allow participants to analyze actual events and to reflect upon their own life. For those interested, extracurricular background information is given, including some scientific and philosophical material. Secondly, this course invites participants to actively grow into a way of being that prospers non-sacrificial peace and a way of life that is giving and joyous. The Judeo-Christian heritage, especially, will prove to be very inspiring in this regard.

2 THREE TYPES OF THE SCAPEGOAT MECHANISM

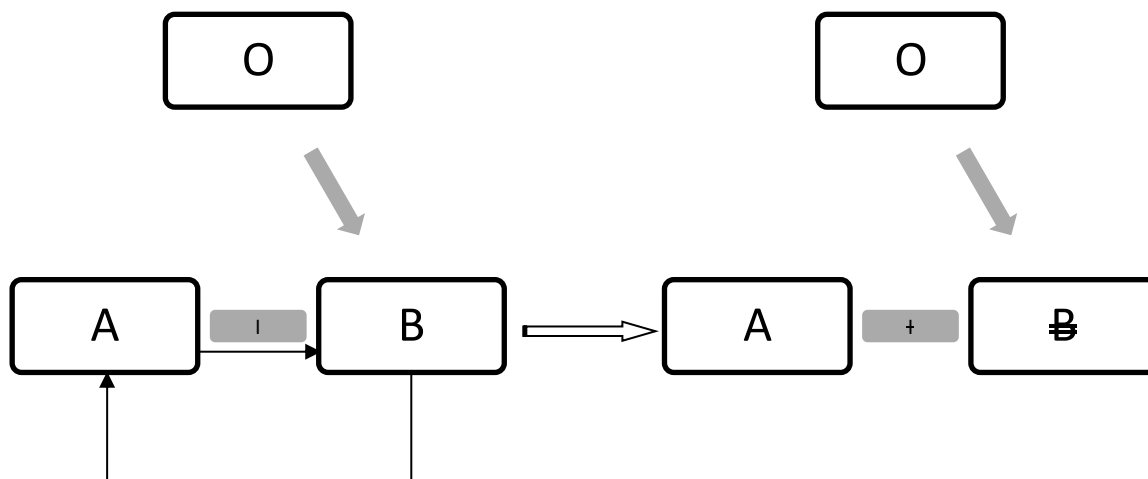
2.1 SCAPEGOAT MECHANISM – TYPE 1 (SMT1): AUTO-AGGRESSION



- Because of mimetic (i.e. imitative) ability, a person A is able to imagine being a person B (to *imitate* the other is to *pretend* that you are the other).
Note: 'person' could refer to an individual or a collective entity.
- Person A compares himself or herself with person B (sign for comparing: |).
- Person B seems to have something that A seems to lack, namely recognition by O (signified by the thick downward arrow).
- Because A compares with B, recognition by O becomes A's object of desire (this dynamic is signified by the thin arrows).
- If A does not obtain the object of desire, envious tendencies and frustrations arise.
Frustrations might become so big that A can no longer stand the difference with B – this is a crisis situation.
- One way for A to avoid confrontation with the difference is to annihilate him/herself (sign for annihilation of A: \bar{A} – sign for erasing confrontation with difference: $\bar{+}$).

In short, mimetically ignited *love* – *eros* – for the imagined situation of the other leads to *hate* towards one's own life and the life of the other (or, which is the same, love for a so-called acceptable *self-image*) – a *crisis* of identity and social order. Person A tries to resolve the crisis that arises out of a comparison with person B by sacrificing him/herself – *thanatos*! Instead of dealing with the true source of tensions and frustrations, namely the actual comparison, A becomes hostile towards his or her own situation and is no longer capable of living with it. A's own life becomes the main stumbling block to A (apart from B's life). Therefore, the scapegoat whose sacrifice seems necessary to release or resolve the crisis in A's life can be A itself, in acts of auto-aggression (violence towards oneself). Auto-aggression is a first type of scapegoat mechanism that tries to create a peaceful situation after a confrontation with an inter- and intrapersonal and social crisis resulting from mimetic interaction. As an act of violence, it is an inconsistent attempt to contain violence. Note: A's desire for recognition runs parallel to A's desire to obtain B's position.

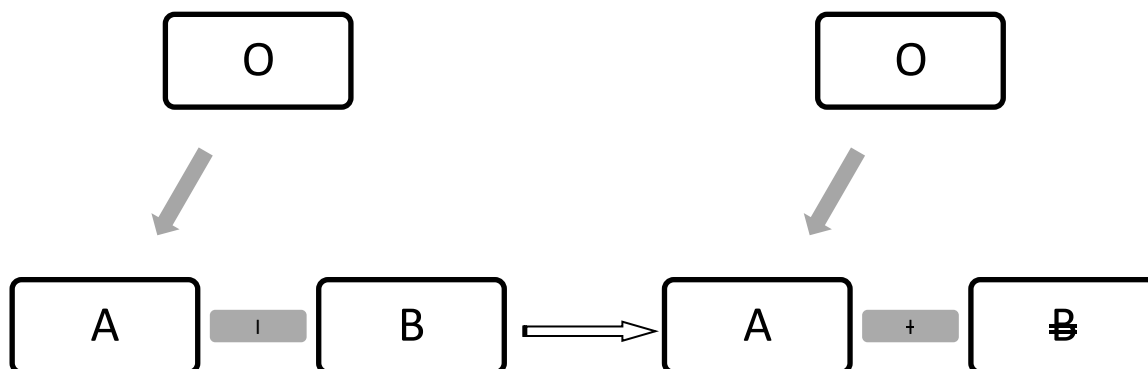
2.2 SCAPEGOAT MECHANISM – TYPE 2 (SMT2): HETERO-AGGRESSION



- Because of mimetic (i.e. imitative) ability, a person A is able to imagine being a person B (to *imitate* the other is to *pretend* that you are the other).
– Note: 'person' could refer to an individual or a collective entity.
- Person A compares himself or herself with person B (sign for comparing: |).
- Person B seems to have something that A seems to lack, namely recognition by O (signified by the thick downward arrow).
- Because A compares with B, recognition by O becomes A's object of desire (this dynamic is signified by the thin arrows).
- If A does not obtain the object of desire, envious tendencies and frustrations arise. Frustrations might become so big that A can no longer stand the difference with B
– this is a crisis situation.
- One way for A to avoid confrontation with the difference is to annihilate the other, B (sign for annihilation of B: ~~B~~ – sign for erasing confrontation with difference: †).

In short, mimetically ignited *love – eros* – for the imagined situation of the other leads to *hate* towards one's own life and the life of the other – a *crisis* of identity and social order. Person A tries to resolve the crisis that arises out of a comparison with person B by sacrificing B – *thanatos*! Instead of dealing with the true source of tensions and frustrations, namely the actual comparison, A becomes hostile towards B's situation and is no longer capable of living with it. B's life becomes the main stumbling block to A (apart from A's own life). Therefore, the scapegoat whose sacrifice seems necessary to release or resolve the crisis in A's life can be B, in acts of hetero-aggression (violence towards others). Hetero-aggression is a second type of scapegoat mechanism that tries to create a peaceful situation after a social crisis. As an act of violence, it is an inconsistent attempt to contain violence. Note: A's desire for recognition runs parallel to A's desire to obtain B's position.

2.3 SCAPEGOAT MECHANISM – TYPE 3 (SMT3): RESENTMENT OR SHAME



- Because of mimetic (i.e. imitative) ability, a person A is able to imagine being a person B (to *imitate* the other is to *pretend* that you are the other).
– Note: 'person' could refer to an individual or a collective entity.
- Person A compares himself or herself with person B (sign for comparing: |).
- Person A seems to have something that B seems to lack, namely recognition by O (signified by the thick downward arrow).
- Simultaneously, by comparing him/herself with B, A's desire for B's position is instigated.
- If A does not obtain this new object of desire, envious tendencies and frustrations arise.
Frustrations might become so big that A can no longer stand the difference with B
– this is a crisis situation.
- One way for A to avoid confrontation with the difference is to annihilate the other, B (sign for annihilation of B: ~~B~~ – sign for erasing confrontation with difference: †).

RESSENTIMENT In short, mimetically ignited *love – eros* – for the imagined situation of the other leads to *hate* towards one's own life and the life of the other (or, which is the same, love for a so-called acceptable self-*image*) – a *crisis* of identity and social order. Person A tries to resolve the crisis that arises out of a comparison with person B by sacrificing B – *thanatos*! Instead of dealing with the true source of tensions and frustrations, namely the actual comparison, A becomes hostile towards B's situation and is no longer capable of living with it. B's life becomes the main stumbling block to A (apart from A's own life). Therefore, the scapegoat whose sacrifice seems necessary to release or resolve the crisis in A's life can be B, in acts of hetero-aggression. As an act of violence, this sacrifice is an inconsistent attempt to contain violence. This third type of scapegoat mechanism arises out of resentment – a dynamic that could be characterized as a clash between a desire for recognition and a desire for what a seemingly contemptible other possesses. A is secretly jealous of B's situation but dares not create something similar for fear of being cast out by the social environment whose recognition A has mimetically learned to desire. Another possibility is that A simply cannot obtain B's situation. Therefore A turns B into someone who is despicable and whose situation is undesirable.

SHAME Instead of being jealous of B's situation, A might also be primarily guided by the fear of becoming a social outcast if A associates with B. A will have the tendency to sacrifice B in order to protect a socially acceptable self-*image*. This sacrifice shows itself in mental or physical acts of hetero-aggression. In short, A will deny affiliation with B at all costs, primarily because A has learned to be ashamed of this affiliation.

Note, in both instances: A's desire for recognition clashes with A's affiliation with B.

3 EMINEM READS THE BIBLE

The story of Cain and Abel (in the book of Genesis) is compared to the story of Stan (by Eminem) to illustrate types 1 and 2 of the scapegoat mechanism. Cain and Abel is an example of the second type of scapegoat mechanism, namely hetero-aggression. Stan is an example of the first type of scapegoat mechanism, namely auto-aggression.



In short, what the following comparison is all about: mimetically ignited love – *eros* – for the imagined situation of the other leads to hate towards one's own life and the life of the other (or, which is the same, love for a so-called acceptable self-image) – a crisis of identity and social order. Person A (CAIN or STAN) tries to resolve the crisis that arises out of a comparison with person B (ABEL or SLIM) by sacrificing the other or by sacrificing him/herself – *thanatos*!

Cain and Abel

Genesis 4:1-16 (English Standard Version – ESV)

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, 'I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.' And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.'

Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' He said, 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?' And the LORD said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.' Cain said to the LORD, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.' Then the LORD said to him, 'Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.' And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Stan
(Eminem)

[Chorus: Dido]

'My tea's gone cold I'm wondering why I...
got out of bed at all...
The morning rain clouds up my window
and I can't see at all...
And even if I could it'd all be grey,
but your picture on my wall...
It reminds me, that it's not so bad,
it's not so bad...'

[Eminem as 'Stan', 1st verse]

'Dear Slim,
I wrote but you still ain't callin'.
I left my cell, my pager
and my home phone at the bottom...
I sent two letters back in autumn,
you must not-a got 'em...
There probably was a problem
at the post office or somethin'.
Sometimes I scribble addresses too sloppy
when I jot 'em,
but anyways... fuck it, what's been up?
Man, how's your daughter?
My girlfriend's pregnant too,
I'm 'bout to be a father...
If I have a daughter, guess what I'ma call her?
I'ma name her Bonnie...
I read about your Uncle Ronnie too, I'm sorry.
I had a friend kill himself over some bitch
who didn't want him...
I know you probably hear this every day,
but I'm your biggest fan.
I even got the underground shit
that you did with Skam,
I got a room full of your posters
and your pictures man,
I like the shit you did with Rawkus too,
that shit was fat...
Anyways, I hope you get this man,
hit me back, just to chat,
truly yours, your biggest fan,
this is Stan...'

[Chorus: Dido]

[Eminem as 'Stan', 2nd verse]

'Dear Slim,
you still ain't called or wrote,
I hope you have a chance...
I ain't mad
– I just think it's FUCKED UP
you don't answer fans...
If you didn't wanna talk to me outside your concert
you didn't have to,
but you coulda signed an autograph for Matthew,
that's my little brother man,
he's only six years old...
We waited in the blistering cold for you, for four
hours and you just said: 'No.'
That's pretty shitty man
– you're like his fuckin' idol...
He wants to be just like you man,
he likes you more than I do...
I ain't that mad though,
I just don't like bein' lied to...
Remember when we met in Denver?
You said if I'd write you
you would write back...
See, I'm just like you in a way...
I never knew my father neither,
he used to always cheat on my mom
and beat her...
I can relate to what you're saying in your songs
so when I have a shitty day, I drift away
and put 'em on,
'cause I don't really got shit else
so that shit helps when I'm depressed...
I even got a tattoo of your name across the chest.
Sometimes I even cut myself
to see how much it bleeds,
it's like adrenaline
– the pain is such a sudden rush for me...
See, everything you say is real
and I respect you 'cause you tell it.
My girlfriend's jealous 'cause I talk about you 24/7.
But she don't know you like I know you, Slim,
no one does,
she don't know what it was like
for people like us growin' up...
You gotta call me man,
I'll be the biggest fan you'll ever lose
Sincerely yours,
Stan
P.S. We should be together too...'

[Chorus: Dido]

[Eminem as 'Stan', 3^d verse]

'Dear Mister
 'I'm Too Good To Call Or Write My Fans',
 this'll be the last package I ever send your ass.
 It's been six months and still no word
 – I don't deserve it?
 I know you got my last two letters,
 I wrote the addresses on 'em perfect.
 So this is my cassette I'm sending you,
 I hope you hear it.
 I'm in the car right now,
 I'm doing 90 on the freeway.
 Hey Slim, I drank a fifth of vodka,
 you dare me to drive?
 You know the song by Phil Collins
 'In the Air of the Night'?
 About that guy who coulda saved
 that other guy from drowning, but didn't,
 then Phil saw it all, then at a show he found him?
 That's kinda how this is,
 you coulda rescued me from drowning...
 Now it's too late...
 I'm on a 1000 downers now, I'm drowsy...
 And all I wanted was a lousy letter or a call...
 I hope you know I ripped ALL of your pictures
 off the wall...
 I love you Slim, we coulda been together,
 think about it...
 You ruined it now...
 I hope you can't sleep and you dream about it
 and when you dream I hope you can't sleep
 and you SCREAM about it.
 I hope your conscience EATS AT YOU
 and you can't BREATHE without me...
 See, Slim, [screaming]
 Shut up bitch! I'm tryin' to talk!
 Hey Slim, that's my girlfriend
 screamin' in the trunk
 but I didn't slit her throat,
 I just tied her up...
 See, I ain't like you 'cause if she suffocates
 she'll suffer more and then she'll die too...
 Well, gotta go, I'm almost at the bridge now...
 Oh shit, I forgot,
 How 'm I supposed to send this shit out?'

[Chorus: Dido]

[Eminem, 4th verse]

'Dear Stan,
 I meant to write you sooner
 but I just been busy...
 You said your girlfriend's pregnant now,
 how far along is she?
 Look, I'm really flattered
 you would call your daughter that
 and here's an autograph for your brother,
 I wrote it on the Starter cap...
 I'm sorry I didn't see you at the show,
 I musta missed you...
 Don't think I did that shit intentionally
 just to diss you...
 But what's this shit you said
 about you like to cut your wrists too?
 I say that shit just clownin', dog,
 c'mon, how fucked up is you?
 You got some issues Stan,
 I think you need some counseling
 to help your ass from bouncing off the walls when
 you get down some...
 And what's this shit about us
 meant to be together?
 That type of shit'll make me
 not want us to meet each other...
 I really think you and your girlfriend
 need each other
 or maybe you just need to treat her better...
 I hope you get to read this letter...
 I just hope it reaches you in time
 before you hurt yourself...
 I think that you'll be doin' just fine
 if you relax a little...
 I'm glad I inspire you, but Stan,
 why are you so mad?
 Try to understand that I do want you as a fan,
 I just don't want you to do some crazy shit.
 I seen this one shit on the news
 a couple weeks ago that made me sick.
 Some dude was drunk
 and drove his car over a bridge
 and had his girlfriend in the trunk
 and she was pregnant with his kid,
 and in the car they found a tape,
 but they didn't say who it was to...
 Come to think about it,
 his name was...
 it was you... Damn!'



Cain and Abel**Stan and Slim**

IDENTIFICATION (THROUGH MIMESIS)

Cain and Abel develop similar activities:

In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions.

Stan and Slim have similar experiences:

'See I'm just like you in a way... I never knew my father neither - he used to always cheat on my mom and beat her. I can relate to what you're saying in your songs...'

ANGER BECAUSE OF A – FELT, THOUGH NOT NECESSARILY REAL – LACK OF RECOGNITION

Cain becomes angry because Abel gets attention from the Lord while he himself doesn't seem to get any attention at all:

And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

Stan becomes angry because Slim does get recognition from his fans – Stan being one of them – while Stan seems to find no recognition at all:

'Dear Mister-I'm-Too-Good-To-Call-Or-Write-My-Fans, this'll be the last package I ever send your ass! It's been six months and still no word - I don't deserve it?'

RECOGNITION NONETHELESS FOR THE PERSON WHO FEELS UNRECOGNIZED

The Lord worries about Cain:

The LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?'

Slim worries about Stan:

'... why are you so mad?'

A WARNING FOR THE POSSIBLE EVIL CONSEQUENCES OF FRUSTRATION,
ANGER AND STUBBORN PRIDE

The Lord advises Cain to do well:

'If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you...'

Slim advises Stan to calm down and to do well:

'I really think you and your girlfriend need each other or maybe you just need to treat her better. [...] I think that you'll be doin' just fine if you relax a little...'

A FINAL WARNING

'... but you must rule over it...'

'I just don't want you to do some crazy shit.'

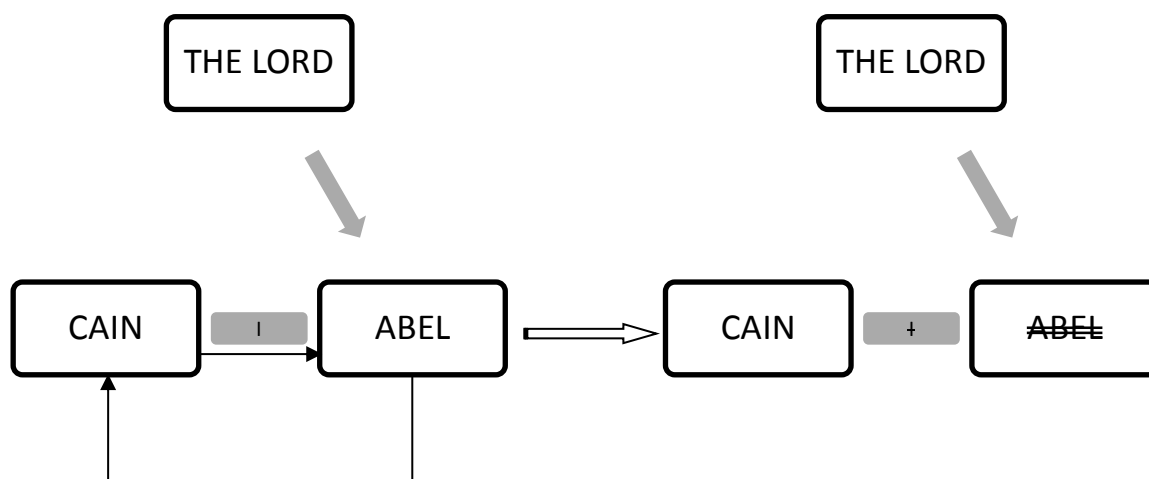
WARNING GOES IN VAIN – MURDER ON A DESOLATE PLACE

Cain kills Abel:

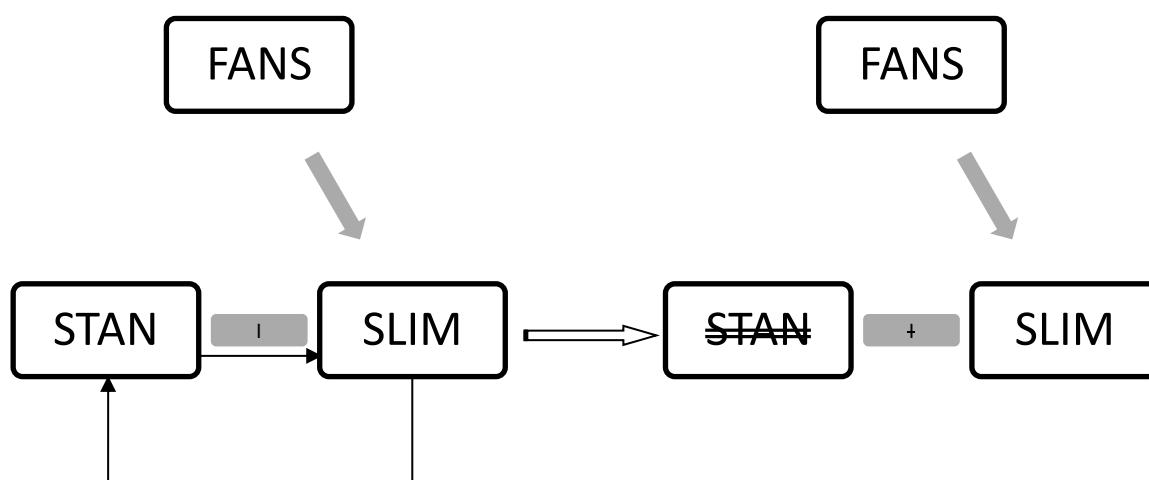
Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

Stan kills himself and his pregnant girlfriend:

'Some dude was drunk and drove his car over a bridge and had his girlfriend in the trunk, and she was pregnant with his kid...'

SCAPEGOAT MECHANISM – TYPE 2 (SMT2): HETERO-AGGRESSION

SCAPEGOAT MECHANISM – TYPE 1 (SMT1): AUTO-AGGRESSION



In short, mimetically ignited love – *eros* – for the imagined situation of the other leads to hate towards one's own life and the life of the other (or, which is the same, love for a so-called acceptable self-image) – a crisis of identity and social order.

Person A (CAIN or STAN) tries to resolve the crisis that arises out of a comparison with person B (ABEL or SLIM) by sacrificing the other or by sacrificing him/herself – *thanatos*!

4 SCAPEGOATING IN AMERICAN BEAUTY (SAM MENDES, 1999)



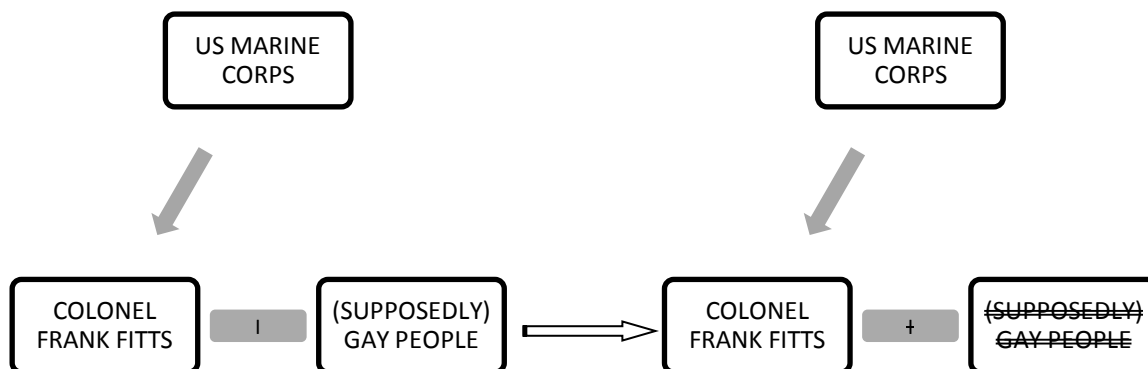
Alan Ball, who wrote the story, said the following about the main theme of the movie:

'I think I was writing about ... how it's becoming harder and harder to live an authentic life when we live in a world that seems to focus on appearance ... For all the differences between now and the [1950s], in a lot of ways this is just as oppressively conformist a time ... You see so many people who strive to live the unauthentic life and then they get there and they wonder why they're not happy ... I didn't realize it when I sat down to write [American Beauty], but these ideas are important to me.'

– Alan Ball in Chumo II, Peter N. (January 2000). 'American Beauty: An Interview with Alan Ball'. *Creative Screenwriting Magazine* (Los Angeles: Creative Screenwriters Group) 7 (1): 26–35 (p.32).

The character of 'Colonel Frank Fitts, US Marine Corps' certainly is one poignant example of someone who is 'keeping up appearances' at a very high price. His situation can be summarized as follows:

SCAPEGOAT MECHANISM – TYPE 3 (SMT3): RESENTMENT



Throughout the film it becomes clear that Frank Fitts is secretly gay and that he is jealous of gay people who 'came out of the closet'. He dares not reveal himself as a homosexual, though, for fear of being cast out by the social environment whose recognition he has mimetically learned to desire. Frank Fitts always presents himself as 'Colonel Frank Fitts, US Marine Corps' and apparently this self-concept considers homosexuality as 'something to be ashamed of'. He can't stand being around openly gay people, like his two neighbors Jim and Jim, because they awaken his hidden homosexual desires. Frank Fitts resents and hates what he actually desires. When he thinks that his son Ricky is in a gay relationship with his neighbor Lester Burnham, he threatens to throw him out of the house and to banish him forever. ***Frank Fitts constantly justifies his acts of terror by making his victims responsible for the violence they have to endure. He constantly applies some sort of scapegoat mechanism, his victims 'should be ashamed!' They should feel guilty about something they actually shouldn't feel guilty about...***

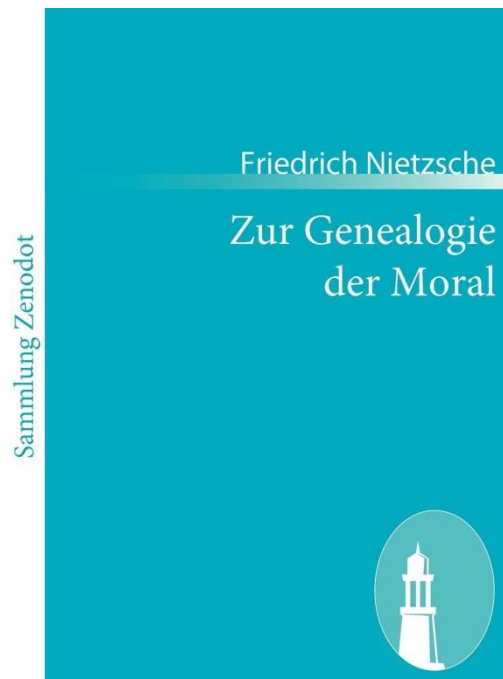
Frank Fitts is willing to do anything to protect his socially mediated (self-)image. His scapegoating of openly gay people helps him to be somewhat *at peace* with his own life, although he is a bitter man. Finally, he reveals himself as a homosexual to his neighbor Lester Burnham, whom he wrongfully considers gay. Frank tries to kiss Lester, but Lester turns him down. Afraid of what might happen, Frank ends up murdering Lester in order to prevent the loss of his so-called acceptable (self-)image. In other words, the *sacrifice* of Lester – in no ways responsible for what happened to Frank, hence a *scapegoat* – seems necessary for Frank to fulfill his desire for recognition. In still other words, *eros* – a mimetically ignited love for some image or social status – leads to *thanatos* (death) to put an end to some identity *crisis*.

**BE SURE TO WATCH THE EXCERPTS FROM *AMERICAN BEAUTY* WITH ADDITIONAL NOTES TO SEE
HOW THE DIFFERENT CHARACTERS DEAL WITH
'THE LOSS OF APPEARANCES'**

(<https://erikbuys.wordpress.com/2013/09/30/scapegoating-in-american-beauty/>)

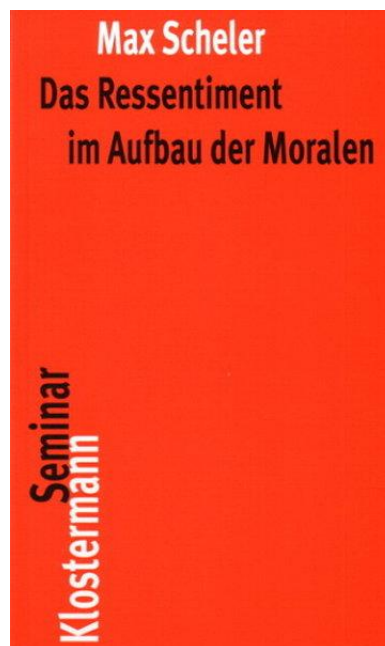
4.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION: PHILOSOPHY ON RESENTIMENT

In the world of philosophy there are two German names that automatically pop up regarding the discussion on *ressentiment*, namely Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Max Scheler (1874-1928).



Friedrich Nietzsche discussed *ressentiment* primarily in his work *Zur Genealogie der Moral*. In Nietzsche's view, the Jewish-Christian foundation of morality grew out of the weaker men's pride when these were confronted with a noble and aristocratic ruling group of stronger men. The weaker men, the *slaves*, reject the morals of the stronger men, the *masters*. The slave denies being envious of the master and develops a sense of superiority by claiming that the values the master lives by are not desirable at all. According to Nietzsche, Jewish-Christian slave morality triumphs over the master morality of Greco-Roman Antiquity when people start feeling guilty and ashamed about belonging to the group of masters. This is the ultimate *revenge* of the slaves for not being able to aspire to the same values as the masters. The slaves convince themselves and the masters that the slave morality (the inverse of the master morality) is the desirable model of life, and that the master morality is contemptible.

Max Scheler criticized Nietzsche on these issues in his work *Ressentiment*. According to Scheler, Nietzsche's account of *ressentiment* is very convincing, but he is wrong to consider it as the main source of Judeo-Christian tradition.



This is not the place to discuss Scheler's critique on Nietzsche. Regarding a further reflection on the film *American Beauty* and other examples of resentment, it is useful to merely focus on the characterization of resentment by Nietzsche and Scheler. In an article entitled *Ressentiment and Rationality* for the online philosophical and anthropological magazine *Paideia*, Elizabeth Murray Morelli summarizes as follows:

'Drawing on Nietzsche's and Scheler's accounts of resentment, we can sum up its internal structure. It is a cycle with the following constitutive elements: an original sense of self-worth; the apprehension of and desire for certain values; the frustration of one's desire for those values; a sense of impotence to achieve those values; a sense of the unfairness or injustice of not being able to attain them; anger, resentment, hatred towards the bearer of those values, and often a desire to seek revenge; the devaluation of the originally sought values; repression of the desire for the devalued values and of negative affects such as hatred, envy, desire for revenge; a feeling of superiority over those who seek and possess the now devalued values; and a confirmed sense of self-worth. Resentment is a cycle inasmuch as it recurs. The person of resentment relives the desires and feelings which constitute the condition even as these affects are repressed. The cycle of resentment, significantly, begins and ends with a sense of self-worth.'

Applied to the character Frank Fitts in the film *American Beauty*, resentment is directed at the life of homosexual couples. The cycle of resentment then can be specified as follows: Frank Fitts gains

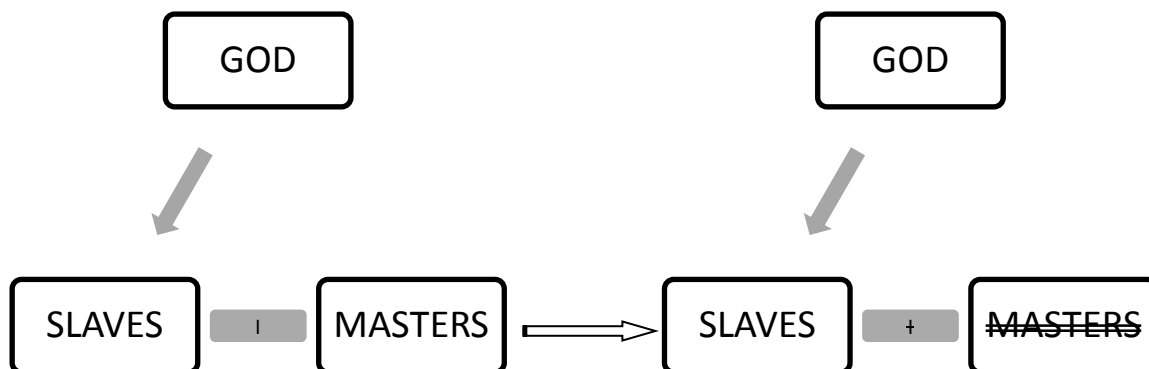
his sense of self-worth by the social recognition he gets from the US Marine Corps (hence he presents himself continuously as 'Colonel Frank Fitts, US Marine Corps'); he realizes that he actually desires certain relationships, namely homosexual relationships; he gets frustrated because he cannot fulfill this desire because of fear of losing his social recognition; he develops a sense of injustice: it's not fair that certain people would enjoy a life as homosexuals and he seeks revenge for this injustice; he devaluates the originally desired life as a homosexual; finally he despises homosexuals in general and is convinced that they should feel ashamed; thus Frank Fitts develops a feeling of superiority over those who possess a life as homosexual couple, and this confirms his sense of self-worth.

From the point of view of René Girard's mimetic theory, two important observations can be made: Ressentiment, as the result of envy, relies on mimesis and mimetic desire.

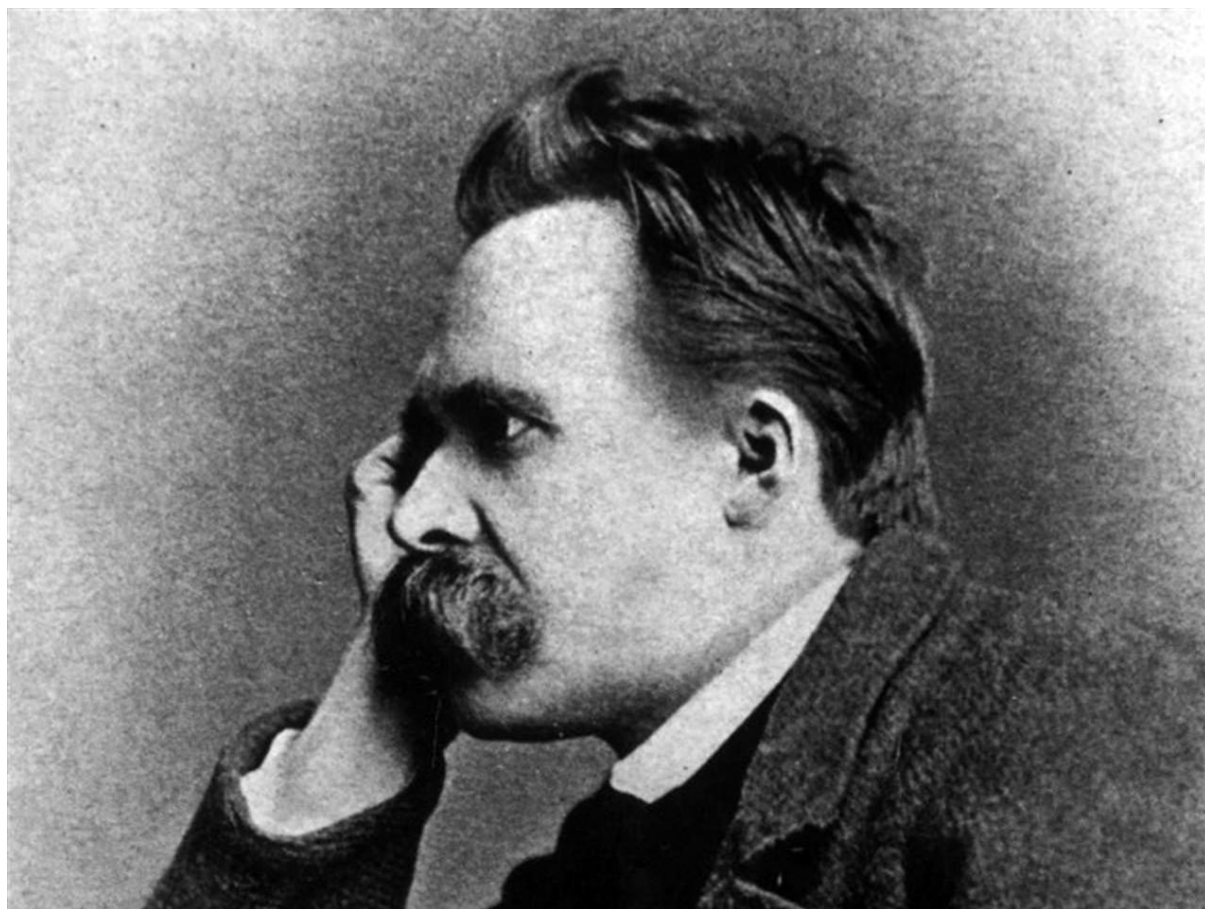
When a mimetically ignited desire cannot be fulfilled, the resentful person justifies mental or physical violence towards a model who possesses what the resentful person secretly desires – this is a form of scapegoating. Hence, according to Cuong Nguyen in an article for the online philosophical journal *Prometheus* (October 19, 2008), *'Ressentiment is a reassignment of the pain that accompanies a sense of one's own inferiority/failure onto an external scapegoat. The ego creates the illusion of an enemy, a cause that can be 'blamed' for one's own inferiority/failure. Thus, one was thwarted not by a failure in oneself, but rather by an external 'evil'. This issuing of 'blame' leads one to desire revenge, or at least believe in the possibility of revenge.'*

The structure of Nietzsche's discourse is obvious. It immediately allows for a critique of his idea that Judeo-Christian tradition is heir to a 'slave morality' and that it is a 'child of resentment':

SCAPEGOAT MECHANISM – TYPE 3 (SMT3): RESENTMENT
NIETZSCHE'S SLAVE MORALITY



If Nietzsche would be right, then the Bible would support people who are guided by envy or resentment – in other words, 'Cain'. Clearly this is not the case.



4.2 REAL LIFE CASES OF RESENTMENT

4.2.1 PSYCHOLOGY & MEDIA – SIMILAR TO FRANK FITTS' STORY

Well-known evangelical pastor Ted Haggard became the center of a scandal in 2006 when a certain Mike Jones, a homosexual prostitute, claimed that he had had a three-year sexual relationship with Haggard. Later on, Haggard admitted to sexual contact with Jones and other men. Haggard had always preached against homosexuality and to this day considers it sinful and problematic. He is still married to his wife.



Pop singer Ricky Martin came out as a gay man back in 2010. However, the star has admitted he used to struggle with his sexuality. He even bullied gay men whilst growing up in Puerto Rico. *'I look back now and realize I would bully people who I knew were gay,'* Martin told the September/October 2013 edition of GQ Australia. *'I had internalized homophobia. To realize that was confronting to me. I wanted to get away from that.'*



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(THESE MEN DID)

NICE CANS
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MANAGER OR LEADER
WHICH ONE ARE YOU?

THE GREATER GOODIES
THE AFL CHAMPION SPEAKS OUT

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4.2.2 HISTORY – RESENTIMENT AND RACISM IN NAZI GERMANY

It can be argued that Adolf Hitler developed an attitude of resentment towards the Jewish people and that he nourished this attitude to a national German scale. One can say that Hitler distanced himself from the qualities he would hate about himself by projecting those qualities on 'the Jews'. He considered them to be 'totally different' from him and other German or, more broadly, 'Aryan' people. By hating and scapegoating the Jews for having so-called loathsome qualities, Hitler established a sense of self-worth. It was his way to get revenge for not being confirmed as the man he desired to be. It was his way to get even with the ones he secretly envied but learned to despise. Here's what Hitler writes in *Mein Kampf* on the so-called radical difference between his 'objects of study' ('the Jews') and 'the Germans':

'Yet I could no longer very well doubt that the objects of my study were not Germans of a special religion, but a people in themselves; for since I had begun to concern myself with this question and to take cognizance of the Jews, Vienna appeared to me in a different light than before. Wherever I went, I began to see Jews, and the more I saw, the more sharply they became distinguished in my eyes from the rest of humanity. Particularly the Inner City and the districts north of the Danube Canal swarmed with a people which even outwardly had lost all resemblance to Germans.'

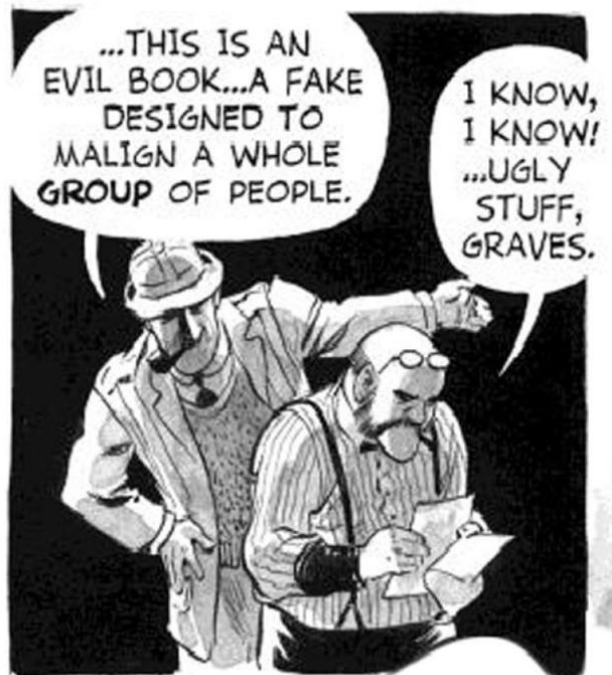
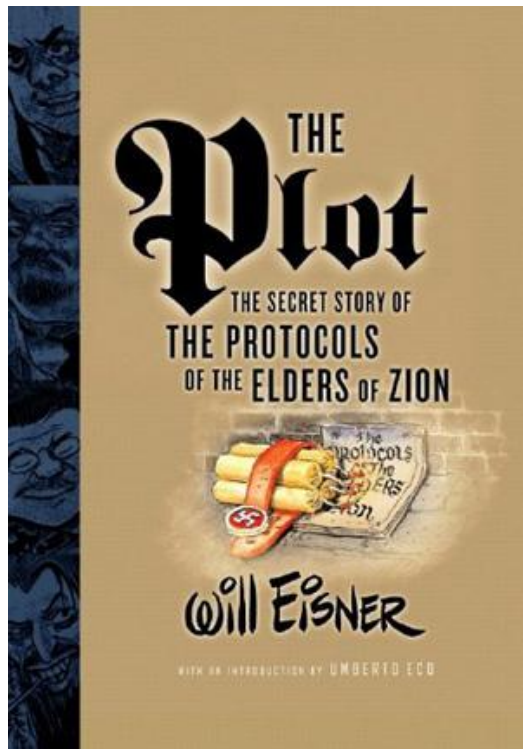


For once, Hitler considered himself to be a talented artist and painter, whose work was not recognized by the main artistic forces of his time. It is known that he was not accepted at the prestigious Vienna Academy of Fine Arts. In his autobiographical work *Mein Kampf*, it becomes clear that he identifies Jewish art as an inferior but nevertheless dominant cultural expression, which supposedly prevents 'real artists and real art' to come to the fore. This becomes just one source of his resentment towards the Jews. Here's what Hitler writes in *Mein Kampf* on the influence of Jews on artistic life:

'I now began to examine carefully the names of all the creators of unclean products in public artistic life. The result was less and less favorable for my previous attitude toward the Jews. Regardless how my sentiment might resist my reason was forced to draw its conclusions. The fact that nine tenths of all literary filth, artistic trash, and theatrical idiocy can be set to the account of a people, constituting hardly one hundredth of all the country's inhabitants, could simply not be tanked away; it was the plain truth.'

Hitler allegedly was not always too confident of his own health and appearance. He wanted to be filmed or photographed from certain angles in order to 'look good.' Again in *Mein Kampf*, he projects his doubts and fears and his sense of inferiority onto 'the Jewish people' in order to create a sense of superiority:

'The cleanliness of this people, moral and otherwise, I must say, is a point in itself. By their very exterior you could tell that these were no lovers of water, and, to your distress, you often knew it with your eyes closed. Later I often grew sick to my stomach from the smell of these caftan-wearers. Added to this, there was their unclean dress and their generally unheroic appearance.'



Apart from Hitler's particular psychological biography, Germany and Europe in general were susceptible to anti-Judaism and anti-Jewish feelings. The 1929 stock market crash marked the beginning of a worldwide economic depression. The image of Jews as rich merchants and money-grubbers who could not be trusted is but one of many negative images concerning Jews with a long history in Europe. Rich and intellectually refined Jews were envied and resented, especially during the difficult economic times of the 1930s. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, an anti-Jewish hoax claiming to describe a Jewish plan for world domination, completed the anti-Jewish European paranoia. Thus the Jews once again became Europe's scapegoats. In Hitler's universe, the sacrifice of the Jews was considered necessary to free the world from its crisis and to establish a new peace and order. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, first published in Russia in 1903, were used by the Nazis as part of their justification of the Holocaust. It would be interesting to explore the history of this document by reading *The Plot: The Secret Story of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a masterpiece by Will Eisner, the 'father' of graphic novels.

4.2.3 POLITICS, SOCIOLOGY & RELIGION – RESENTIMENT AND SEXISM

Hans van Scharen, Belgian journalist, comes across a clear example of what Nietzsche and Scheler would describe as resentment in Pakistan. Writing about his experiences in Peshawar [capital of the area formerly known as North-West Frontier Province], van Scharen reports (translation by E. Buys):

'You can see the influence of fundamentalist Islamic parties in the streets of Peshawar. Even innocent commercials for tea are smirched by grey paint to cover the female face of a depicted couple. By June 2003, the Sharia was accepted as the highest law and is often interpreted strictly, although not (yet) as ruthless as the Taliban would have it. The Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (United Council of Action) proposed a bill to prohibit the depiction of women in advertising. Sami ul-Haq, leader of an important Madrassa, claims that this is done 'merely out of respect.' 'If you depict women naked, you kill their honor and the honor of their families. That is totally unacceptable. Women are precious, like rare flowers, and you should treat them accordingly.' Naked? Even tea commercials are already offensive, apparently. Our guide sneers, 'Well, it's them fundamentalist bearded men demanding burqas who secretly watch videos of lascivious female dancers, and those men are highly fascinated by what they see. Ul-Haq's brother teaches here, at the Islamic University, and like his brother he has the reputation of being a womanizer.' [...]' – Taken from *Knack* magazine, November 29th, 2006, *De comeback van de Taliban*, p.99-100, by Hans van Scharen.

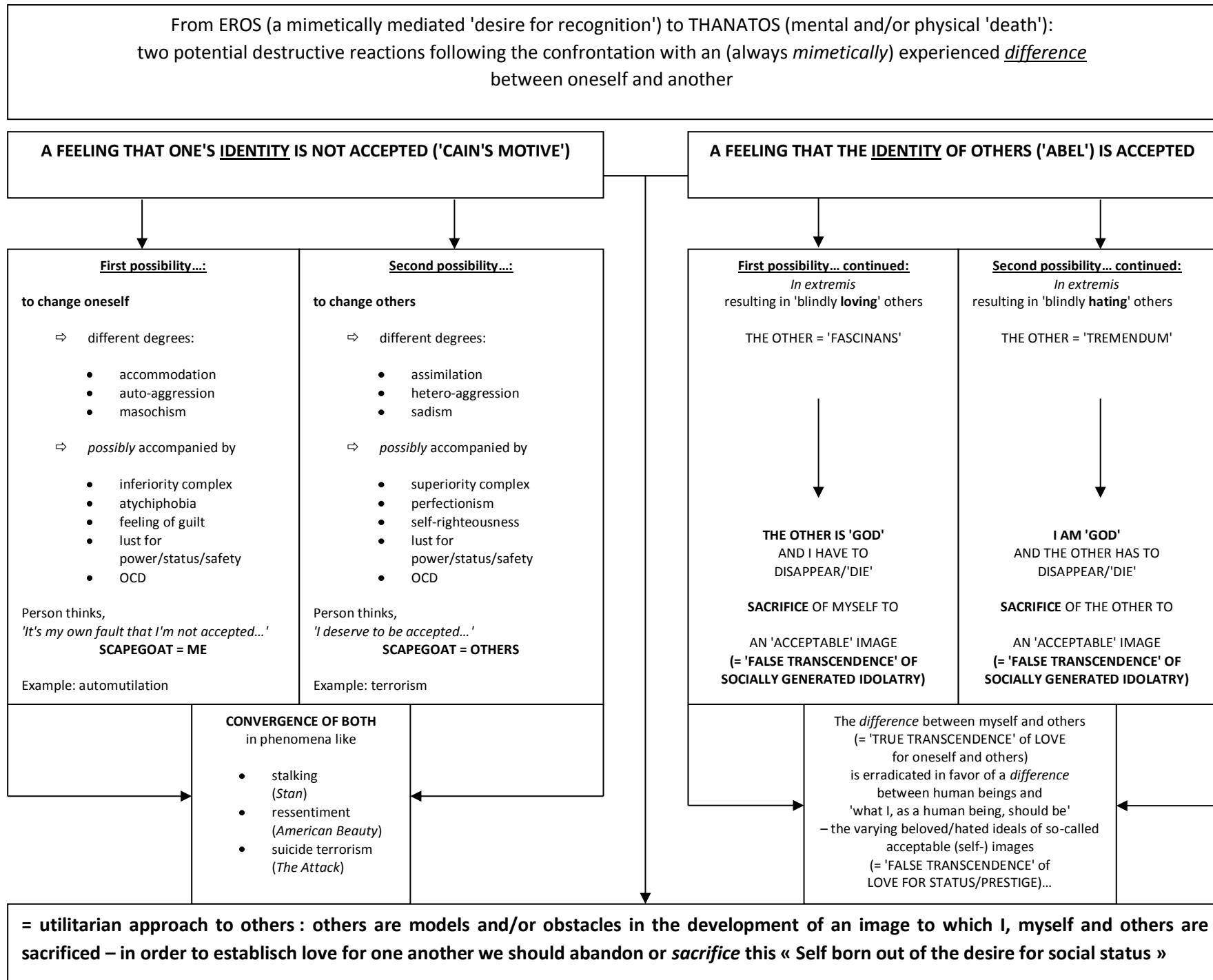


The next page consists of a diagram showing how *love for a socially mediated image* – in the context of this course this is called *eros* – leads to *mental and/or physical 'death'* – *thanatos* – in acts of auto- and/or hetero-aggression. This dynamic is placed within a broader psychological and sociological context. Hence a certain kind of terminology.

Apart from this, the dynamic 'from eros to thanatos' is also placed against its alternative, namely a dynamic of 'the gift of Love for oneself which makes possible Love for others' – *agape*. From a theological Judeo-Christian perspective, agape prevents people from giving in to idolatry...

For more information, see:

<https://erikbuys.wordpress.com/2014/08/10/achever-the-social-sciences/>



5 THE GRACE OF PROSTITUTES

'... the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.'

What a disturbing figure. Jesus openly declares that tax collectors and prostitutes – quintessential sinners – are entering the kingdom of God ahead of the chief priests and the elders of the people of Israel. Go figure.

The chief priests and the elders think highly of themselves. They get recognition from the common people. Or so they think. They have a religious and social status worthy even of some recognition from 'the One' Himself. Or so they presume. In comes Jesus. He basically tells them they are high on some grand illusion. He tells them *what's real*. And he knows that they know what's real, deep down inside. Let's have a closer look at how Jesus proclaims the truth.

Matthew 21:28-32

Jesus said, 'What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.'

'Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.'

'Which of the two did what his father wanted?'

'The first,' they answered.

Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.'

As he often does, Jesus tells a story to get his point across. This time it's about a father and two sons. Basically, the second son is a hypocrite and the first son falls victim to the hypocrisy of his brother.

Of course the father will think that the second son is the one who worked in the vineyard and appreciate him for it, while it's his other son who did all the work. In other words, the second son will get the recognition that should actually be given to the first son.

Apart from the story of Cain and Abel, there's another Old Testament story about two brothers that resonates throughout this parable of Jesus, namely the Genesis story of Jacob who deceitfully takes a blessing from his father Isaac. This particular blessing was normally reserved for his brother Esau, the firstborn. In the Genesis story (Genesis 27:1-46), Jacob ('he grasps the heel', a Hebrew idiom for 'he takes advantage of' or 'he deceives') is the one who gets protection. As is known, Jacob later becomes 'Israel', ancestor of the Jewish people.

By referring to the story of its ancestor Jacob, Jesus implicitly criticizes how Israel tends to build its identity and structure its society. Jesus criticizes social systems that rely on the exclusion of others through rivalry and hypocrisy. This criticism is at once general and personal. Jesus suggests in his parable that the chief priests and the elders are like the second son. In other words, he tells them that they are hypocrites! He also implies that the tax collectors and prostitutes are like the first son; they fall victim to the hypocrisy of the chief priests and the elders.

Of course the elders and chief priests deal with the tax collectors, but to protect their image they will deny any affiliation with 'those collaborators of the Roman Empire who take money from their fellow Jews, in the process also fraudulently, *deceitfully* enriching themselves...' The reality of the situation is not that black and white though. It is no surprise that some of the chief priests and elders turn out to be as corrupt (or even more) as the tax collectors themselves. ***There is low life in high places.*** [AUDIO SONG TIP: *Low Life in High Places* by Thunder].

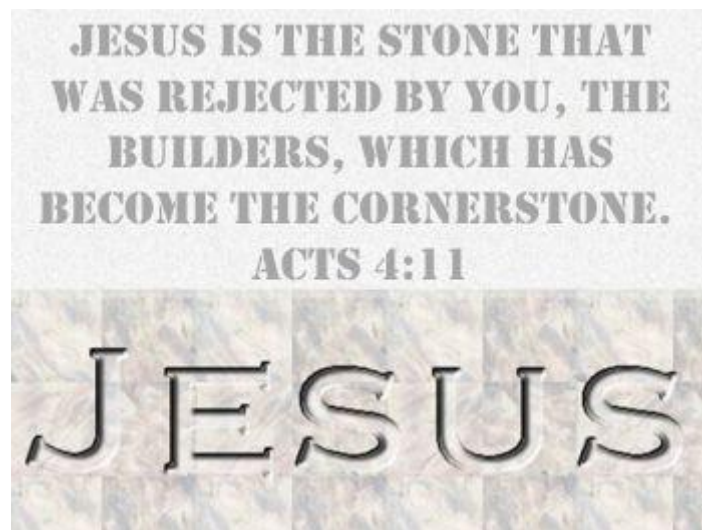


As for the prostitutes, Jesus suggests that they too suffer from hypocrisy. Indeed, when they meet a client in public, their client will deny any affiliation with them. Their client, be it a chief priest or an elder or someone else, might say 'I don't know the woman!', and protect his reputation among the common people. And the prostitute, well, she has no choice but to forgive the hypocrisy of her clients beforehand. It's part of the game she is forced to play. Otherwise she would lose all her clients. ***She plays forgiveness.*** [AUDIO SONG TIP: *When You Were Young* by *The Killers*].

Now we might understand a little better why Jesus claims that the tax collectors and prostitutes are 'closer to the kingdom of God' and to the righteousness proclaimed by John the Baptist. They experience firsthand how mechanisms of social exclusion allow societies to structure themselves. They understand the injustice of many social systems. They know that acting against that injustice has to do with taking sides with the outcasts. To repent thus means to acknowledge that you yourself are part of a social game that's played at the expense of others and to do something about it. It means 'losing a life that is directed at a socially acceptable image/status/reputation/power' for the sake of 'the excluded other', the consequence being that you 'gain your life' (as you no longer *idolatrously* lose yourself to an image).

Jesus himself always takes sides with the excluded others, and deeply understands the hidden truth behind our socially mediated identities. That's why he says, after yet another parable (of the tenants) in the same chapter of Matthew's Gospel:

'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.' (**Matthew 21:42**).



Because he is willing to take the position of the social outcast, Jesus is right when he proclaims the paradox of the Gospel (**Matthew 16:25-26**):

'For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?'

Jesus lives out (of) the Love of 'the One' who is 'Other than human' and therefore his identity and self-concept is not dependent on the socially mediated idolatries of this world. His self-respect is not dependent on the respect he gains from other people and therefore he is able to stand up for the outcasts in society.

Of course, when you *imitate* Jesus and take sides with the socially excluded, there are two possibilities: or other people will show mercy, or they will sacrifice you as well. Jesus is willing to run this risk because the love for his neighbor is stronger than the fear of becoming a victim himself. He refuses to sacrifice himself to a socially acceptable self-image at the expense of others. He is in no ways a masochist. Jesus believes that his Father – Love – 'desires *mercy, not sacrifice*' (**Matthew 9:13**). That's why he indeed can save others but cannot save himself when he is arrested and crucified (**Matthew 27:39-41**). If he would start a civil war others would be sacrificed because of him, and he thus would no longer obey to the call of Love.

As we know, Peter at first does not imitate Jesus. Peter succumbs to the fear of becoming a social outcast when Jesus is arrested (see below, excerpts from Matthew 26). He denies any affiliation with Jesus because he fears becoming a victim himself. If, on the other hand, he would have taken sides with Jesus, he would have chosen for himself more fully (as he would not have chosen for his image or reputation).

However, like the clients of the prostitutes might say 'I don't know the woman (the prostitute)!' to protect their reputation, Peter says 'I don't know the man (Jesus)' to protect his position in society. Peter wants to secure himself.

At the same time, like the prostitutes forgive the hypocrisy of their clients, Jesus forgives Peter's hypocrisy beforehand. But unlike the prostitutes, Jesus does have the choice not to forgive Peter, which makes his actual forgiveness more fully an act of grace.

Nevertheless, Matthew makes clear that the grace of Jesus indeed has to do with the grace of 'prostitutes'. The Evangelist deliberately constructs a genealogy of Jesus (in the first chapter of his Gospel) wherein he mentions four Old Testament women who had a questionable reputation. Tamar and Rahab are known as prostitutes, Ruth is a seductress and Bathsheba, 'Uriah's wife', is known as an adulteress...

Maybe one of the first steps towards the righteousness of 'the kingdom of Love' has to do with the acknowledgment that our identities exist by receiving grace from those we tend to despise... To realize this might imply the tears that begin to wash our sins away, tears of true *metanoia*... as we follow in Peter's footsteps.

Matthew 26:31-35

Then Jesus told them, 'This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.'

Peter replied, 'Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.'

'Truly I tell you,' Jesus answered, 'this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.'

But Peter declared, 'Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.' And all the other disciples said the same.

Matthew 26:69-75

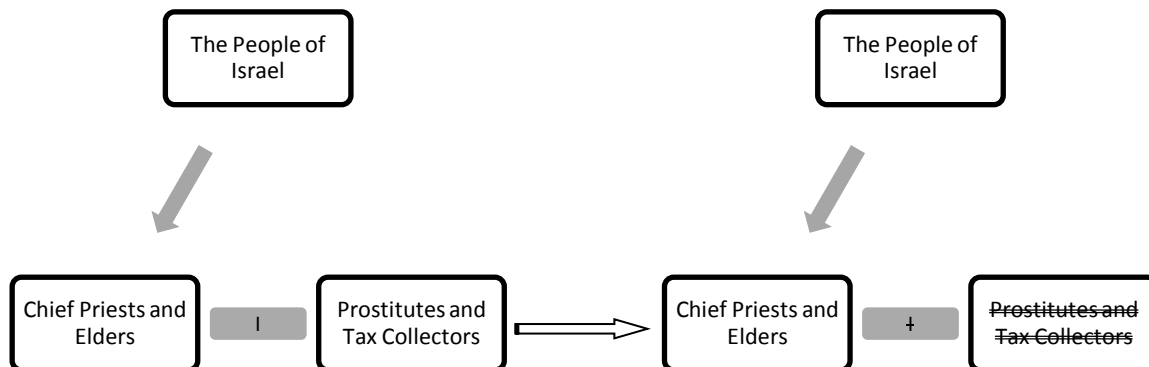
Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. 'You also were with Jesus of Galilee,' she said. But he denied it before them all. 'I don't know what you're talking about,' he said.

Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, 'This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.' He denied it again, with an oath: 'I don't know the man!' After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, 'Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away.' Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, 'I don't know the man!'

Immediately a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: 'Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly.



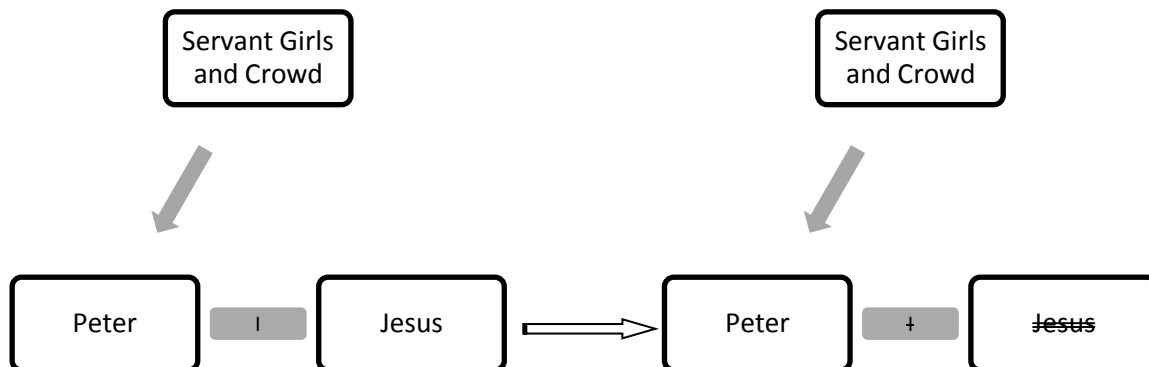
SCAPEGOAT MECHANISM – TYPE 3 (SMT3): SHAME



The chief priests and elders are guided by the fear of becoming a social outcast if they associate with the tax collectors and prostitutes. They have the tendency to *sacrifice* the tax collectors and prostitutes in order to protect a socially acceptable (*mimetically* mediated) self-image. This sacrifice shows itself in mental or physical acts of hetero-aggression. In short, the chief priests and elders deny affiliation with the tax collectors and prostitutes at all costs, primarily because they have learned to be ashamed of this affiliation. The tax collectors and prostitutes are victims of the chief priests' and elders' hypocrisy.

The chief priests' and elders' desire for recognition clashes with their (eventual) affiliation with the tax collectors and prostitutes.

SCAPEGOAT MECHANISM – TYPE 3 (SMT3): SHAME



Peter is guided by the fear of becoming a social outcast if he associates with Jesus. He has the tendency to *sacrifice* Jesus in order to protect a socially acceptable (*mimetically* mediated) self-image. This sacrifice shows itself in mental or physical acts of hetero-aggression. In short, Peter denies affiliation with Jesus at all costs, because he has learned to be ashamed of this affiliation. Peter is afraid of having to suffer as well. That's why he doesn't stand up for his friend. So Jesus is also the victim of Peter's hypocrisy.

Peter's desire for recognition clashes with his affiliation with Jesus.

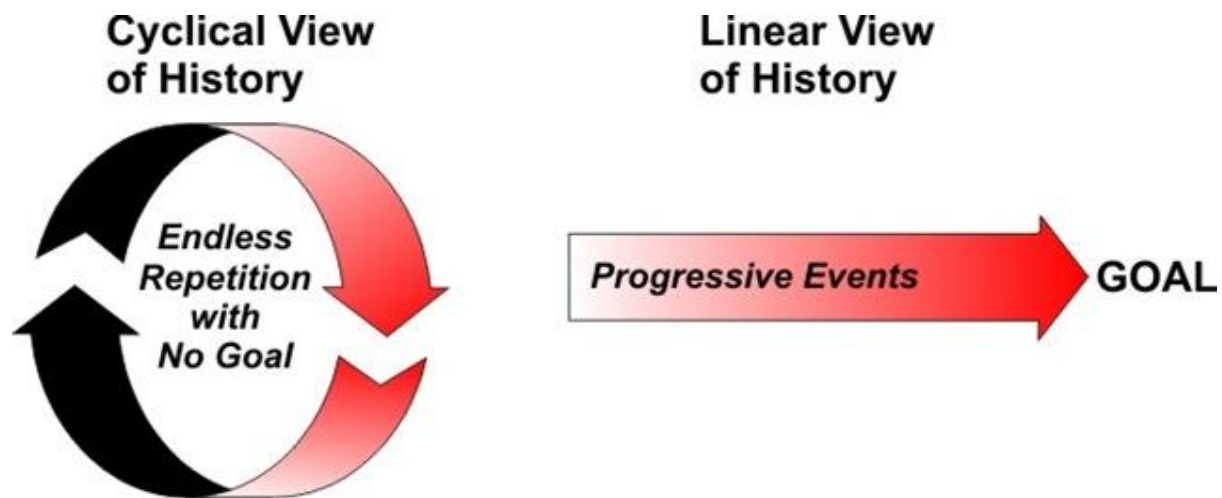
6 PLEASANTVILLE (GARY ROSS, 1998) AND BIBLICAL FEMINISM

Pleasantville (Gary Ross, 1998) is a movie about the twins David and Jennifer who miraculously end up in David's favorite TV-show, Pleasantville, and become Bud and Mary Sue Parker. At first everything is, also literally, very black and white in their new world. Life is very predictable, every citizen has a clearly defined role, even the roads are like the daily routine: they go in a circle. There's nothing outside the enclosed 1950's world order of small town Pleasantville.



Bit by bit, however, things start to change with the arrival of David/Bud and Jennifer/Mary Sue. Some people divert from their normal activities and turn from black, grey and white into technicolor. Bill Johnson, for instance, Bud's boss at the soda shop where he is working, discovers his creativity and artistic freedom as a painter. Other citizens become avid readers, studying books and using their minds to gain wisdom and imagine things 'outside of Pleasantville'. In the end, the road doesn't go in a circle anymore but 'keeps going'. This means that life is no longer predictable, the future is open-ended, and individuals get more chances, as well as responsibilities, to work out their own project in life. In other words, the people in Pleasantville abandon the cyclical worldview that was aimed at preserving an order installed by 'higher powers'. In yet other words, they move from the ancient mythical view of time as circular to a Jewish and Christian 'linear' view of time: instead of leading a

life according to the so-called scenario of 'the powers that be', people are liberated to write their own history.



Thomas Cahill wrote a very interesting book on this shift, *The Gifts of the Jews – How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels*. From the cover: *'The Gifts of the Jews reveals the critical change that made western civilization possible. Within the matrix of ancient religions and philosophies, life was seen as part of an endless cycle of birth and death; time was like a wheel, spinning ceaselessly. Yet somehow, the ancient Jews began to see time differently. For them, time had a beginning and an end; it was a narrative, whose triumphant conclusion would come in the future. From this insight came a new conception of men and women as individuals with unique destinies—a conception that would inform the Declaration of Independence—and our hopeful belief in progress and the sense that tomorrow can be better than today.'*

On the other hand, a sense of stability and certainty seems forever lost with the arrival of the linear view of history. No wonder, then, that the anxious community in Pleasantville at first tries to suppress the newly found creativity and individual liberties: books are burned, rock 'n' roll music is forbidden, painters are not allowed to use colors besides black, white and grey, '(techni)colored' people are separated from the others and sexuality, in particular female sexuality, is considered inappropriate. Well-known measures throughout the history of mankind...





Indeed, the women especially begin to question the *status quo* of the patriarchal society in Pleasantville. Following the example of Mary Sue (a powerful 'mimetic model'), girls invite their boyfriends into the garden of Lover's Lane to explore their sexuality. Bud also imitates his sister, as he takes Margaret on a date to Lover's Lane...

There, Bud is offered an apple by his girlfriend. Afterwards he is reproached for eating it by the *deus ex machina* of the movie, a mysterious TV repairman, who yells at him that he doesn't deserve 'to live in this paradise'. This all too obvious reference to the Biblical story of the Garden of Eden in the book of Genesis raises questions about whether or not Judeo-Christian tradition supports oppressive patriarchal social structures. The story of the Fall from Eden eventually blames the woman, Eve, for being the first to succumb to an inappropriate desire, causing her man Adam to sin and resulting in them both being banned from the Garden. The obvious message of the story concerning women seems clear: like her Greek counterpart Pandora, Eve and her female boldness means trouble. So far for the Jewish critique of archetypal mythic structures, so it seems...

René Girard helps us understand why women are depicted as troublemakers and how they, more specifically (sexually) emancipated women, become scapegoats, unjustly held responsible for all kinds of evil in the world. The sexist reasoning often goes something like this. Emancipated women are no longer dependent on their husbands. This means that they can more easily divorce them. Divorces potentially trouble the mind of children and youngsters, who might lose the security of a 'home'. Hence juvenile delinquency could increase as young people get together in gangs to create a

sense of self-worth and identity. Thus the stability of society as a whole is threatened by women who refuse to remain faithful to the man they're married off to. Moreover, sexually independent women can stir rivalry and violence between men, which once again destabilizes the internal cohesion of a community. Indeed, sex (eros) might lead to death (thanatos).

To avoid these potential troubles patriarchal societies have the tendency to suppress the freedom of women. This means women have to pay for the potential rivalry between men and the potential lack of responsibility of other members of the society. Instead of taking responsibility for their rivalrous and even violent desires and instead of taking control of them, patriarchal men blame women for their own behavior. And instead of taking more responsibility as a parent, patriarchal men also blame women if their offspring ends up on the wrong track... Peace and order in society, according to the patriarchal system, can only be obtained by keeping women in check. In other words, women and their freedom are violently sacrificed in order to establish 'peace and quiet'.

As said, the Genesis story of the Garden and the Fall (the third chapter of the book) seems to support this view and seems to legitimize the sacrificial structure of the patriarchal society. More specifically, the story seems to consider (female) sexuality taboo. Eve invites Adam 'to eat from the fruits' of the 'Tree of Knowledge' in a 'Garden Paradise'. In ancient Middle Eastern Cultures gardens are symbolical of sexuality and female sexuality in particular. The Song of Songs for instance, one of the smallest books of the Bible, gives voice to a young woman in a dialogue with her beloved man. At some point she invites her lover to 'come into her garden and taste its choice fruits'. Talk of sending a clear message... Moreover, 'knowing' often has a sexual meaning or erotic tone in Hebrew. 'To know someone' has to do with 'intimate wisdom', with 'gaining insight' by 'penetrating into' something. So eating from the 'Tree of Knowledge' and discovering, afterwards, that you are 'naked' adds to the interpretation of the story as containing a taboo on sexuality and the female lust for 'knowledge'. No wonder then, again, that the citizens of Pleasantville fear women who 'go to the library', 'think' and take the initiative to go to Lover's Lane... Women shouldn't become too smart, as 'shrewd' women are hard to control, and the third chapter of Genesis seems yet one other sexist story that gets this message across.

A strange thing happens, however, when Genesis chapter three is compared to the already mentioned Song of Songs. At a certain moment, the young woman of the Song complains about the patriarchal society and its taboos. She went looking for her lover but the 'watchmen of the city' violently punished her for having an intimate relationship with a man outside her family or outside

the ritualized context of marriage. Thereon she eventually sighs (Song of Songs 8:1): *'If only you were to me like a brother, who was nursed at my mother's breasts! Then, if I found you outside, I would kiss you, and no one would despise me.'* So the Song of Songs lets the victim of patriarchal violence speak out and act against the regular patriarchal order. A comparison between Eve in Genesis and the young woman in the Song of Songs might shed new light on how to interpret the emancipation of women in the story of Pleasantville from a Biblical point of view. Here it is:

GENESIS 3

❖ The desire of a woman (Eve):

to become one with someone else (GOD)

= to invite a man (Adam) to eat fruit from
the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:6)

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.



Scene from *Pleasantville*: Margaret offering an apple in Lover's Lane – Bud eats...

SONG OF SONGS

❖ The desire of a woman:

to become one with someone else (her lover)

= to invite a man to get to know her and to eat from
(her) garden fruits (Song of Songs 4:16 & 8:2)

Awake, north wind, and come, south wind! Blow on my garden, that its fragrance may spread everywhere. Let my beloved come into his garden and taste its choice fruits.



Scene from *Pleasantville*: Bud and Margaret in the garden of Lover's Lane...

❖ Reaction against a CRISIS OF ORDER:

GOD places

'cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard...'
(Genesis 3:24)

After the Lord God drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.



In *Pleasantville*, Bill Johnson receives a book – 'The World of Art' – from Bud and this 'Expulsion from the Garden of Eden' by Masaccio is the first painting he sees.

❖ Reaction against a CRISIS OF ORDER:

THE PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY places

'the watchmen of the walls' who beat the woman, 'take her cloak'
(Song of Songs 5:7)

The watchmen found me as they made their rounds in the city. They beat me, they bruised me; they took away my cloak, those watchmen of the walls!



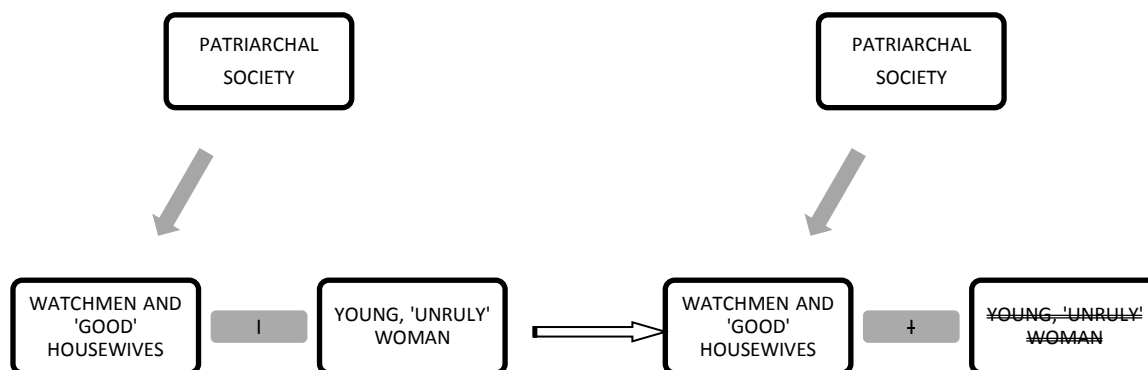
Scene from *Pleasantville*: Betty, the 'colored adulteress', is harassed by Whitey and his companions, who keep a close watch on what happens in the city...

The question from this comparison is whether the God of the Genesis story is on the side of the watchmen who are supporting the patriarchal society and who harass (sexually) emancipated women. At first glance, it seems that this is the case. However, the Song of Songs does allow the victim of patriarchal violence to speak out against this kind of discrimination.

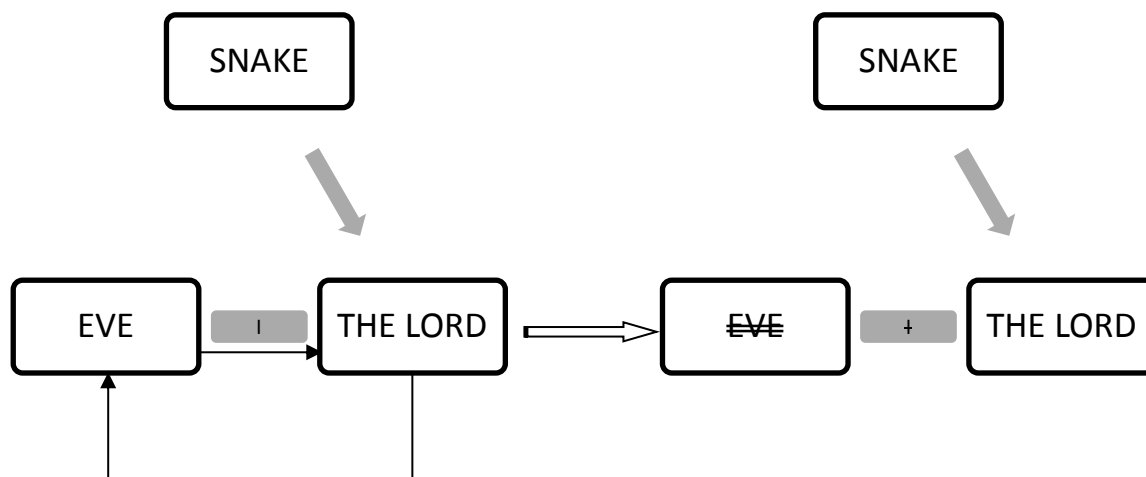
In order to get a fuller understanding of what is actually condemned by the Genesis story, the broader context of the book of Genesis is needed. Read in the broader context of Genesis and the story that immediately follows (Cain and Abel), Eve is not condemned because she is a woman, but because she cannot respect the difference between herself and someone else ('the Lord God') – just like Cain cannot respect the difference between himself and someone else ('Abel'). Both stories condemn an anxious type of envy and even resentment! In the case of the confrontation between the young woman and her harassers in the Song of Songs, it is clear that the harassers are led by envy, resentment and fear. From the particular Biblical point of view, developed from the broader context in Genesis, they're the ones whose acts are to be condemned. They fear the emancipation of women because this might mean that women no longer automatically obey the men they're married off to – which is very frightening for patriarchal men's status and sense of self-worth. Most probably their wives too resent the emancipated woman, as they secretly envy the life she leads but dare not abandon their own situation for fear of being punished.

It's time for a diagram or two...

SCAPEGOAT MECHANISM – TYPE 3 (SMT3): RESENTMENT
THE SONG OF SONGS



SCAPEGOAT MECHANISM – TYPE 1 (SMT1): AUTO-AGGRESSION
THE STORY ABOUT EVE



The Gospels show how Jesus of Nazareth also takes sides with the woman as a potential victim of patriarchal violence. More specifically in John 8:1-11, when he is confronted with a woman caught in adultery. It might be good to take a fresh look at this well-known text:

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?' They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, 'Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She replied, 'No one, sir.' Then Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more.'

Jesus prevents the establishment of an order based on sacrifice by making people reflect on their own desires and trespasses, as they might be similar to those of the adulterous woman. Jesus believes God desires 'mercy, not sacrifice' (Matthew 9:13).



It is telling that Jesus approaches the woman, who already committed adultery, mildly while he firmly condemns men who merely think of adultery (Matthew 5:27-30):

'You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.'

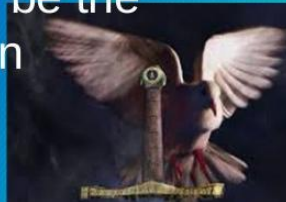
It's his hyperbolic verbal way of compensating for the double standard in patriarchal societies, where adulterous men are often all too easily justified as 'victims' of 'evil, seductive women' (who are all too easily condemned by the patriarchal system). Apart from this, there are other 'feminist' traits in the behavior of Jesus. The situation between Jesus, the crowd and the adulterous woman as it is told in the Gospel of John contains a subtle clue for a subversive, anti-patriarchal reading of the third chapter in Genesis (John 8:3): *'The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle.'* Indeed, the woman is said to stand 'in the middle'. Compare this to Genesis 3:3, as Eve responds to the snake: 'God told us, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden. You must not even touch it, or you will die.'" In other words, Jesus wants to prevent the crowd from 'touching' what 'stands in the middle' just like the God figure in the Genesis story wants to prevent Adam and Eve from eating from the tree 'in the middle of the garden'. In both situations, the acts of 'touching what's in the middle' imply that people are led by envy, resentment and lust for prestige, that they are unable to respect 'the other', and that they want to erase the differences between themselves and the other (by killing themselves or the other).

In consonance with Genesis, Jesus calls out for love of one's neighbor and a refusal of the sacrifice of the other to establish a 'peace'. That's why he says (Matthew 10:34-36): *'Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'* The 'sword' Jesus talks about is not the sword of 'violence' (indeed, in Matthew 26:52 Jesus, upon being arrested, clearly warns against violence, when he demands one of his companions who tries to defend him: *'Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.'*). It is reminiscent of the sword at

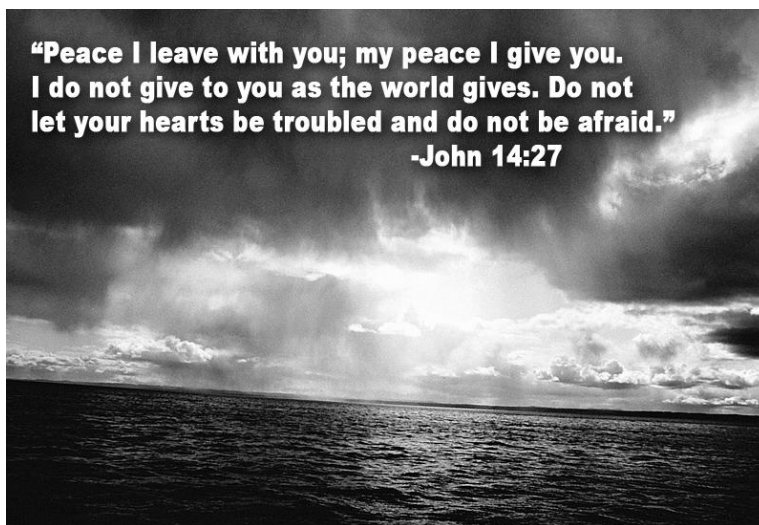
the end of the Genesis story about the Fall: *The Lord God placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and the flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.* This sword is a symbol of a Love (Agape!) that creates and preserves differences between people – differences of 'color' and personality that is, not of 'hierarchy'. Moreover, it is no coincidence, biblically speaking, that the sword of Love is 'flaming' (Song of Songs 8, 6): *The flames of love are flames of fire, a blaze that comes from the Lord.*

Matthew 10:34-36

[Jesus said,] “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword... A man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.”



**“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”
-John 14:27**



Jesus time and again questions a peace, order and unity based on the expulsion of a common enemy (a 'scapegoat') and on dictatorial, oppressive leadership (often of a 'patriarch'). He tells people, '*Love your enemies*' (Matthew 5:44), which causes conflicts within the groups people belong to but once again prevents people from establishing a community at the expense of certain 'enemy victims'. That's why he can say that his kingdom – his way of organizing society – is, most of the time, '*not of this world*' (John 18:36). And that's why he can also say:

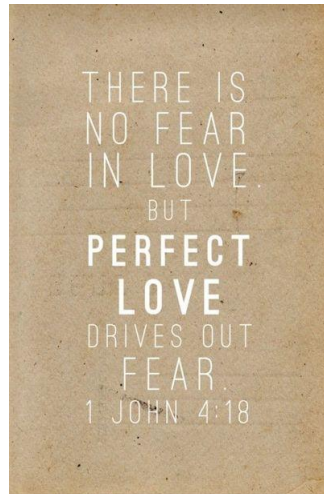
'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.'

In short, Jesus as a Jew, in consonance with the Scriptures of the Jewish people, wants to establish a peace that allows for non-violent conflicts between people (as people dare to show their 'true colors' and thus might clash with each other), while he refuses to establish a violent 'easy' peace based on sacrifice (the 'Pax Romana').

In *Pleasantville*, Bud prevents the community of condemning his mother Betty. She committed adultery, leaving her husband George for Bill Johnson, the owner of the soda shop. Bill painted a portrait of a naked Betty on the front window of his shop, after which an agitated and scandalized crowd 'stoned' it. Like Jesus confronted with a crowd and a woman caught in adultery, Bud prevents further violence. He enables people to discover that they're not so different from Betty and other 'coloreds' – which, paradoxically, allows them to respect Betty's and the others' own 'color' and choices in life.

Of course, life doesn't become much easier if we're trying to respect one another, protesting against 'easy sacrifices' of vulnerable victims. Society does become more complex, the future more open and uncertain, but also more interesting, fertile and creative. It certainly is a challenge to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, to allow for relationships that are based on a Love born from freedom, and not based on a fear for punishment or a desire to be rewarded and compensated. But hey, it's better to have an emancipated woman love her man than to have a bitter, scared 'slave' stick to her husband, isn't it? In the words of 1 John 4:18:

'There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.'



More information on sexism, resentment, etcetera from a Girardian point of view:

<https://erikbuys.wordpress.com/2015/01/18/mythical-thinking-after-911/>

<https://erikbuys.wordpress.com/2014/02/17/a-womans-uncanny-valley/>

<https://erikbuys.wordpress.com/2012/08/13/temptresses/>

<https://erikbuys.wordpress.com/2012/10/15/that-is-not-the-question/>

For a general video-introduction to mimetic theory, watch:

<https://erikbuys.wordpress.com/2011/03/12/an-introduction-to-mimetic-theory/>