

Political and Social Sciences Department

Founding Moments of Western Moral Experience

Christian Spiritual Discernment
Between Hebrew Law and Modern Emotivism

KNUT MITTENDORFER

SPS No. 98/3

EUI WORKING PAPERS



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EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

WP 320
EUR



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Printed in Italy in September 1998
European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I - 50016 San Domenico (FI)
Italy

Founding Moments of Western Moral Experience

Christian spiritual discernment between Hebrew Law and modern emotivism

by Knut Mittendorfer (European University Institute, Florence)

It is a commonplace that modernity is prefigured by Christianity. However, what this assertion precisely means with respect to moral experience is a quite unexplored question of reflexive historical sociology. One of the few rough sketches at hand is still Friedrich Nietzsche's thesis that the essence of the Christian moral experience is a culmination and refinement of the uniquely Jewish inversion of all natural morality.¹ According to Nietzsche, a unique ressentiment and a sense of pity is at the core of the Bible tradition and accounts for the alleged glorification of the weak, the tame, the humble and the sick, which had been brandished as 'bad' in all other cultures. This inversion of the natural moral distinctions, he claims, has killed the life instincts and stands behind Western nihilism. Strangely enough, none of the great reflexive historical sociologists such as Michel Foucault, Max Weber or Eric Voegelin has studied in any detail the specificity of the original, founding moral experience of early Christianity. Although they cover world history, from the axial age to the present, the study of the first two centuries of Christian spirituality is conspicuous by its very absence. Sudden death and perhaps a lack of detachment impeded Weber² and Foucault³ from writing a volume on early Christianity in their respective projects; Voegelin ran into theoretical difficulties when he came to write the projected volume in his own series of *Order and History* - and abandoned the plan. And even if they had succeeded in writing their studies the emphasis - as far as one can judge from their manuscripts - would have lain on later centuries.⁴

¹ F.Nietzsche (1992[1887]), *Zur Genealogie der Moral. Eine Streitschrift*. Goldmann, §§6-10.

² Weber's third volume of sociology of religion concludes with a discussion of the Pharisees. Cf. M.Weber (1988[1921]), *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie III*. Tübingen: J.C.B.Mohr, pp.401ff. It would have been particularly interesting to see how Weber conceived of the change of the prophetic-ethical tension in Christianity. There are some scattered remarks about Christian pneuma (p.441), but this is insufficient to reconstruct Weber.

³ Foucault had planned for his series on the history of sexuality a book with the title 'Les Aveux de la Chair' which was supposed to treat 'la formation de la doctrine et de la pastorale de la chair.' (M.Foucault (1984), *L'usage des plaisirs*. Paris: Gallimard, p.18) Some scholars influenced by Foucault have tried to do this - e.g. S.Maasen (1998), *Genealogie der Unmoral. Zur Therapeutisierung sexueller Selbst*. Frankfurt: suhrkamp.

⁴ However, Voegelin's work include two analysis of the Gospels and Paul, each of the length of a chapter. E.Voegelin (1974), "The Pauline Vision of the Resurrected", chap.5 of: *The Ecomenic Age. Order and History. Vol.IV*. Baton Rouge: Lousiana State University; idem, "The Gospel and Culture", in: P.Emberley/B.Cooper (eds.), *Faith and Political Philosophy. The Correspondence Between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934-1964*. University Park: Pensylvania State University, pp.139-176. In general, Voegelin considers God's turning to man genuinely new. The Christian God turns to man, his love precedes man's longing for him. A personal relation of love opens up, which was utterly inconceivable for Greek philosophers. According to Voegelin,

In general, the impact of Christian monasticism and its ascetic techniques on modern moral experience has been recognised by reflexive historical sociology; the continuity between confessional practice and therapeutic assistance has been extensively studied, and so on. However, the New Testament itself is a kind of taboo text: the genealogy of Western morality is rarely ever narrated from the source: the spiritual eruption in Jesus and the apostles.

In the following, therefore, I propose to re-examine the history of Western subjectivity from the point of view of the differentiated moral experience reached in the New Testament. By moral experience I mean, roughly, the existential tension between good and evil, the continuous rebalancing of life-conduct according to standards of action. From a clear and detailed analysis of the major innovations and limitations of the epochal New Testament differentiation I will work my way back to the present. To some extent I will rely on René Girard's theory of violence which identifies the revelation of victimisation in sacrifice as the major Christian innovation. However, Girard reduces moral experience to a once-and-for-all renunciation of violence. Against this I will recover from the New Testament a moral deliberation 'equivalent' to Aristotelian *phronesis*. I try to show that the precariousness and fragility of the Christian moral experience and deliberation, deprived of the intoxicating and cathartic experiences of sacrifice and deprived of the assurance of a divine law-code, makes it liable to deterioration and transpositions. I will point out some of these relapses and transformations. In doing this, I hope to contribute not only to a genealogy of modern moral experience but also to a change of perspective regarding the ethical mode of existence. In particular, I will dismantle the wide-spread assumption that in all ethical modes of existence the individual has no great problems of interpretation once he has made his initial choice of principles; ethical life, in today's view, is dull, unfree, and uncomplicated.

Finally, I hope to shed light on the possibilities to overcome the fragmentary nature of contemporary moral philosophy, which I provisionally sketch in the following terms. One recurrent element in contemporary moral philosophical debate is the effort to arrive at definite, rationally justified abstract rules. These rules are supposed to express practical reason and are designated to draw the line between good and evil, justice and injustice. This persistent search for general or universalisable principles is best exemplified by the normative philosophies of John Rawls and especially Jürgen Habermas. Secondly, the invocation of tradition as an external standard and an enabling condition is a recurrent theme. Particularistic institutions

Paul's 'metastatic' expectation of the second coming of Christ is very problematic. Paul overstressed the disappearance of *phthora*, of perishing, in the transfiguration of faith.

endow the individual with the moral resources for the discernment of the good life. Communitarians such as Michael Sandel and Alasdair MacIntyre are the most salient representatives of this strand. Beyond this classical moral tension between contract vs. status, society vs. community, modern enlightenment vs. tradition, deontology vs. teleology, there reappears the idea, sometimes stretched to a zealously enacted fantasy, that genuine freedom emerges only on the margin of institutionalised life, where life and thought are in continuous flux. Liberty is sensed in the cruelty of immorality or in the formless moments of liminality, i.e. beyond good and evil. Nietzsche's Dionysian dissolution of the *principii individuationis* and aesthetised, immoral world-affirmation are prefigurations of the current discourses situated beyond good and evil.

I argue that the irresolvable threefold aporias of universal laws vs. tradition vs. situational freedom is due to the eruption and subsequent obliteration of Christian revelation. In Paul, the moral codex of the juridicised Judaist law sinks into the background. This eclipse of nomism, „the end of law in Christ“, paves the way for a hazardous existence which is sustained by the mutual loving identification with Christ. The ethical standard is God's will which is obeyed out of love rather than because of threats of eternal punishment. Good is everything which leads to the enactment of God's will, evil everything which distracts from this. The radical distancing from nomism calls for a discernment of good and evil on the spot, as it were. Charismatic impulses are fundamental in this type of moral deliberation.

The new liberty, which is at the maximum distance from the heteronomy of a life subjected to a juridicised law, be it divine or secular, is difficult to maintain. This precariousness of the Pauline differentiation of moral experience is prone to relapse into more amorphous forms of moral experience and to fuse with alien traditions which obliterate the historically unique differentiation.

Some of these relapses, transpositions and inflections will be described in this paper. First, I describe the emergence of the monarchical bishop in the 2nd century which solved the problem of authoritative interpretation of charismatic impulses and the Bible tradition in general. Secondly, I trace the massive return of nomism, which was initiated by the reception of the Roman law and accelerated by the switch of the penance regime from Seven Sins to the Decalogue in 15th/16th century and the demise of casuistry in mid-17th century. Thirdly, I describe the systematic expulsion of charismatic impulses from moral deliberation which was effectuated by the English-Anglican reaction against enthusiasm in 17th century and changed in

various ways the religious sensibilities and attitudes of the new social order. After the expulsion of the Holy Spirit from moral deliberation, criticism against nomism *qua* legality could only be articulated as a frontal attack against morality as such. Finally, I take account of the decline of the notion of strong evil from popular moral experience after 1800 due to the monetisation of human relations and activities.

This story complements and subtly subverts MacIntyre's claim that contemporary emotivism and the fragmentary nature of contemporary moral philosophy are results from the miscarried Enlightenment project of justifying morality.⁵ I stress the dynamics and the liability to deterioration which are inherent in the Christian differentiation. The Enlightenment project could only become thinkable, desirable and promising because of a series of prior changes of Western moral experience.

I. From Jewish Law to Paul's Beyond the Law

To understand the innovation of New Testament moral experience, one must have a fairly clear picture of the environment in which Jesus and Paul were preaching. The novelty is better seen on the foil of the preceding Hebrew tradition. I propose three approaches to bring out this novelty: the construction of group identity in opposition to the 'other', a contrastive exposition of moral experience, and a social anthropological account of the Christian breakthrough, respectively.

1.1.1. The attack on the identity markers of Pharisaism

The Pharisee obeys to the will of God by way of following rigorously the prescriptions of the books of Moses and the compilation of juridicised cases, the *halachah*. The Torah spells out unambiguously the difference of good and evil; it contains the will of God. Far from venturing a petty legalism of empty laws, the Pharisee feels deeply embedded in a covenantal relation with God. E.P.Sanders describes in his widely applauded book *Paul and Palestine*

⁵ A.MacIntyre (1985), *After Virtue. A study in moral theory*. 2nd edition. London: Duckworth, „What I am going to suggest is that the key episodes in the social history which transformed, fragmented and, if my extreme view is correct, largely displaced morality - and so created the possibility of the emotivist self with its characteristic form of relationship and modes of utterance - were episodes in the history of philosophy“, p.37. The decisive philosophical episode in this respect was the „Enlightenment Project of Justifying Morality“, which had to fail (chap.5), with fatal consequences (chap.6).

Judaism Pharisaic religiosity as a „covenantal nomism“ which bases the justification of the law on God's promises and obligations of the covenant:

„(1) God has chosen Israel and (2) given the law. The law implies both (3) God's promise to maintain the election and (4) the requirement to obey. (5) God rewards obedience and punishes transgression. (6) The law provides for means of atonement, and atonement results in (7) maintenance or re-establishment of the covenantal relationship. (8) All those who are maintained in the covenant by obedience, atonement and God's mercy belong to the group which will be saved.“⁶

However, Palestine Jews at the time of Jesus and Paul lived in a period of crisis, which imputed serious constraints on the flexibility and originality of the interpretation of the Torah. The specifically Jewish laws governing table-fellowship, food, the Sabbath and circumcision preserved the Pharisees' identity, their sense of election and hope for salvation. The challenge of these laws was consequently understood as a whole-sale rejection of the Torah, a threat to identity, and an abandonment of God.⁷

One problematic implication of the entire received view of „covenantal nomism“ was that God's grace was limited to the people of Israel at the exclusion of the Gentiles. This perspective impeded successful missionary work among the Gentiles. It is no wonder that Paul tried vehemently to tear down the barriers to God's mercy and to enable the Gentiles to enter a new covenant. With J.D.G.Dunn one may describe Paul's situation in the following terms:

„The theological rationale opposed by Paul was straightforward and firmly rooted in the scriptures: Israel was the elect nation; the covenant promises were given to the descendants of Jacob; forgiveness and atonement were provided for the people of God through the law of Moses. Therefore to be a beneficiary of God's righteousness, the saving acts covenanted to his people, it was necessary to be a member of that covenant people. That meant, in the first place, circumcision - the terms of the covenant with Abraham left no room for dispute about that (Gen.17.9-14).“⁸

The New Testament is particularly harsh, even sarcastic, on those Jewish laws which serve specifically as *identity markers* rather than being conducive to salvation. For instance, in Mark 2.1-3.6, Jesus is presented as being in constant confrontation with the Pharisees on issues

⁶ Sanders (1977), p.422.

⁷ Cf. for the entire discussion of law, nomism and New Testament K.Kertelge (ed., 1986), *Das Gesetz im Neuen Testament. Quaestiones Disputatae*, vol.108. Freiburg i.B., Herder.

⁸ James D.G.Dunn (1984), „Mark 2.1-3.6: A Bridge between Jesus and Paul on the Question of the Law“, *New Testament Studies*, vol.30, pp.395-415, p.396.

of table-community with „sinners“, fasting, and „work“ on Sabbath. Mark 7:15 lets the Lord say, „There is nothing outside a man which by entering into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him.“⁹ It is not relevant for my purposes if the historical Jesus (who was a Jew) really provoked these narrated episodes. The important fact is that these laws have provoked debates between Jewish Christians and converted Gentiles and caused tensions in mixed communities. These strives are also reflected in Paul's letters where the discussion of food laws, Sabbath rest, and circumcision loom large (cf. Gal.2:11-14; 4:10; Rom.14:1-6) And the outcome of these quarrels was that Paul won out in abrogating these rules.

1.1.2. Two types of moral experience: *Scrupulousness vs. Hazarded Existence*

However, the Jesus-movement was more than merely a Jewish sect which tried to construct its identity in more or less aggressive dissent from Jerusalem.¹⁰ Rather, the abrogation of these Jewish identity markers is also driven by Paul's totally new type of moral experience which was in every respect antithetical to the Pharisees. In Paul Ricoeur's penetrating reading, the Pharisees were „the purest representatives of an irreducible type of moral experience, in whom every man can recognize one of the fundamental possibilities.“¹¹ The Pharisees extended the scope of the Torah to all sectors of life. Where the written Torah is mute, a creative and faithful interpretation is needed, which gradually becomes fixed as a *halachah* and sustains this ethics of detail. This work of casuistry becomes binding for the whole community and is transmitted in schools. The genius for jurisprudence replaces the fire of the prophets. One characteristic of the ensuing type of moral experience is the „thoroughgoing heteronomy“.¹² The individual will asserts itself by abdicating completely any freedom of personal interpretation; obedience to the externally interpreted law is willed unconditionally. This joyous abandonment of the will is apparent in passages of Psalms such as 19:7-10 and 119:14.47. The second characteristic of the Pharisaic moral experience is an immense scrupulousness. The Pharisee wants to be exact in his dependence on the interpreted

⁹ Cf. H. Räisänen (1982), „Jesus and the Food Laws: Reflections on Mark 7.15“. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, vol.16, pp.79-100. Räisänen contests the broad consensus among NT scholars that Mk 7:15 belongs to the „bedrock of those *ipsissima verba*“. His reason is that on this common assumption it is difficult to account for the subsequent church history. For instance, why did Paul or the other evangelists never use it?

¹⁰ For more literature on this construction of group identity in opposition to the Jews see J. Neusner/E.S. Frerichs (1985), „*To see Ourselves as Others see Us*“. *Christians, Jews, „Others“ in Late Antiquity*. Chico (Calif.): Scholars Press, esp. S. Freyne, „Vilifying the Other and Defining the Self: Matthew's and John's Anti-Jewish Polemic in Focus“, p.117-142.

¹¹ Ricoeur (1967), p.122.

¹² Ricoeur (1967), p.123.

Torah. The old Hebrew dialectic between the finite demands of the Pentateuch and the unlimited, infinite ethical demand of prophecy is transposed into a permanent movement of carrying casuistry to ever more domains, of ritualising ever more sectors of life¹³, and of maintaining supportable the separation of the just men from the wicked by an unprecedented missionary zeal. Finally, Pharisaism combines the two notions of merit and reward in a particular way. „In an ethical vision of the world like that of the Pharisees, where *to do* the will of God is greater than anything else, it is a blessing to have the Law and, with it, opportunities for obedience (*mitzvot*) and the possibility of acquiring merit.“¹⁴

The fundamental limitation of this type of moral experience is that it confines the God-man relation to a relation of instruction. The first question is whether the relation of a will that commands to a will that obeys exhausts the dialogical situation. The second question is if the hypocrisy which may emerge from the combination of merit and reward and which has been the major accusation levelled against Pharisees in the Gospels (e.g. Matt.23), reveals a kind of deeper contradiction of this enterprise. I will identify the Christian innovation with respect to these two questions.

Paul's major claim in Romans 7 is that the law itself, as seen by the Pharisees, is a source of sin. He sees in the indefinite atomisation and juridicisation of the law a new dimension of sin, namely the „will to save oneself by satisfying the law - what Paul calls 'justice of the law' or 'justice that comes by the law'“. ¹⁵ Moreover, by carrying the unlimited demand of prophecy into the finite, juridicised regulations of life, the fulfilment of the law becomes impossible, and those who do not admit this appear as hypocrites who boast themselves with law. The scrupulous will is enlightened enough to recognise the truth and goodness of the radical demands, but too weak to fulfil it. The constant confrontation with prohibitions incites passions, provokes a lust for transgression, and causes permanent internal struggle to obey. The result is a feeling of guilt which shuts in consciousness without any hope of exit. Paul calls this experience of self-enclosed guilt 'death'. The transformation of the experience of death, which is normally conceived of as an event of the future ahead of the individual, into an event of the past, makes sense only by virtue of Paul's experience of having been resurrected by and with Christ. The encounter with Christ renews the dialogical situation with God and thereby transforms radically the type of moral experience.

¹³ Cf. Ricoeur (1967), p.135.

¹⁴ Ricoeur (1967), p.129-30.

¹⁵ Ricoeur (1967), p.141.

The passage to the new regime is a „sort of inversion through excess“.¹⁶ In a first movement, Jesus further radicalises the ethical demands to such an extent that the law-like character of the relation with God disappears. In a second movement, after the physical death of Jesus, the „curse of the law“ (Gal.3:13) is wiped out through „life in Christ“. „Christ is the end of the law“ (Rom.10:4). The radicalised ethical demands become supportable by an abundance of grace (Rom 5:20) which effectuates a mutual loving identification with the resurrected Christ - the so-called 'life in Christ'. Paul sees the Christian beyond the law, beyond any pre-judicised, atomised regulations of life, but not beyond good and evil. „For freedom Christ has set us free.“ (Gal.5:1) Precisely because the yoke of slavery, the law, has been abrogated, the fundamental ethical demands can be really fulfilled. The only general rule is the exhortation to love the neighbour (plesion) through Jesus Christ. (cf. Gal. 5:14;6:2).

From this Pauline perspective, the will of God has not been exhaustively communicated by the prior Hebrew law. It included prohibitions about objects and actions which are ethically neutral and imposed an pedagogical discipline which is neither anymore necessary nor willed by God - because it precludes proper participation in Christ and intimate discernment of God's will. The New Testament also sharpens one characteristic already present in the Hebrew tradition: the motivation to obey the will of God is love of God rather than fear of damnation; especially John stresses the prior love of God which was inconceivable for Greek philosophers.¹⁷

From this angle, *the fundamental innovation of the New Testament consists in the radical switch from a thoroughly heteronomous regime to „a hazarded existence“*¹⁸ in which *prima facie* „everything is acceptable“ (1Cor.6) and strict ethical expectations persist. Thereby guilt is left behind. The fulfilment of God's will is now mediated by the mutual identification with Christ, which makes the individual righteous; 'life in Christ' sanctifies life and endows the capacity for discernment of good and evil without recourse to a heteronomous subjection to an atomised law. It is faith in Christ and life in Christ which „justify“, i.e. which bring man's inclinations into accord with God's will. In this sense Paul can speak of the „glorious liberty of the children of God“ and St. Augustine can summarise: „love and do what you will.“

¹⁶ Ricoeur (1967), p.149.

¹⁷ Cf. my paper „The bumpy road to the Christian subject“ where I try to show that the fulfilment of ethical demands is a by-product of love of God and mutual identification with Christ. This point is important because in 16th discussions of obedience the threat of damnation, of hell, moved in the foreground.

¹⁸ Ricoeur (1967), p.128.

Such a form of liberty is enormously difficult to maintain, especially on the level of community where questions about the line between good and evil, the meaning of sanctification and the characteristics of Christ's mode of being, which they - in principle - agree to imitate, are likely to remain in dispute. Actions which some hold to be unholy may appear to others as utterly permissible, or even required. However, any attempt to institutionally regulate conduct with substantial rules or the teaching of pre-judicised cases risks a return to the regime of guilt, nomism and heteronomy. One major Christian innovation thus holds the seeds of self-destruction in itself, which already spring up in some of Paul's communities. In Gal 5:13, for instance, the saint fights against disciples who equate liberty with self-indulgence and thus push Paul's 'beyond the law' into an immoral 'beyond good and evil'.

Christian freedom does not unfold in a void but rather it is deeply committed to a God who is believed to have revealed himself and his will in the course of history. Orientation for conduct and for the discernment of good and evil may be drawn from past revelations, which are interpreted from the new stand point of presumed ultimate differentiation. The New Testament introduces two techniques to this effect. First, Paul applies a sort of *ex-post* casuistry when fellow Christians conduct themselves in a way which he considers to be reputable, according to his recapitulation of tradition in Christ. (e.g. 1Cor.5) Secondly, Paul and the Gospels stress the importance of personal spiritual discernment which allows for an alignment with God's will without subjection to a fixed law with all its self-defeating characteristics. In this spiritual discernment the notion of charisma plays a vital role. In the following, I suggest to situate the Christian differentiation and abrogation of the law in a broader social anthropological analysis and then to return to the notions of spiritual discernment and charisma.

1.2. The anthropology of René Girard: The End of Sacrifice

From the perspective of anthropology, the Christian innovation consists in the desacralization of religion. The desacralisation brought about by Christianity has been widely noticed.¹⁹ However, it is the achievement of René Girard's path-breaking anthropological

¹⁹ For general overviews of the process of desacralisation and sanctification see F.Bourdeau (1974), „Fin du sacré? Sainteté du profane?“, *Forma Gregis*, vol.26 (1), pp.2-94; J.Ponthot (1980), „L'expression du sacré dans

studies to unravel the connection between sacrifice, religion and social cohesion, and to reveal the distinctiveness of the Christian revelation in this respect.²⁰

In most succinct terms, Girard's thesis is that the pre-Christian mode of securing social cohesion consisted in the application of a victimisation processes which was misapprehended by the involved agents. At the foundation of all non-evangelical cultures stands the slaughtering of an individual, or a group of individuals, on whom the aggression of the population is concentrated and discharged. Aggression, triggered by the rivalry about objects, spreads contagiously through society. One decisive murder arrests the contagion and grounds order around the slain individual. As far as archaic societies are concerned, this foundational murder is not directly visible but can be glanced from myths which tell the story of an evil man who is accused of having thrown society in disorder and was subsequently killed so that order grows from the corpse of the alleged evil-doer. The victim is sacralised. The two phenomenological components of the sacred, the *tremendum fascinosum* described by Rudolf Otto, refer to these two successive moments of the victimisation process, the terror of disorder and the miracle of restored order. In most societies, continuous aggressive victimisation was transposed into a framework of prohibitions and rituals of sacrifice. Prohibitions have the function to prevent a relapse into the dissolution of order and contagious violence. The rites of sacrifice are a memorisation and substitutive re-enactment of the original founding murder.

By contrast to myths of all other religions, Girard claims, the Bible tradition²¹ which culminates in the Christian revelation narrates victimisation from the point of view of the victim and not from the point of view of the lynchers. Thereby the arbitrariness and innocence of the victim is revealed, which undermines the effectiveness of the order-restoring function of victimisation. Mechanisms of social cohesion are fundamentally different after this Christian insight; any society affected by the exposure of the arbitrariness of the victim must sooner or later develop other forms of assuring social cohesion and/or deliberately hide the arbitrariness of violence.²² In this sense, Nietzsche's thesis that there is something subversive and genuinely

le Nouveau Testament" in: J.Ries (ed.), *L'expression du sacré dans les Grandes Religions*, vol.III. Louvain-La-Neuve: Centre D'histoire des Religions, pp.289-327.

²⁰ For his theory of sacrifice and the surrogate victim see R.Girard (1977[1972]), *Violence and the Sacred*. Trans.P.Gregory. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University. Girard presented his interpretation of Christian revelation for the first time in R.Girard (1975), „Les Malédictiones contre les Pharisiens et la révélation évangélique“, *Bulletin Du Centre Protestant d'études*, vol.27 (3), pp.5-29; this was extended in R.Girard (1978), *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*. Recherche avec J.M.Oughourlian et G.Lefort. Paris: Grasset.

²¹ For an account of Old Testament perspectives on violence see N.Lohfink (1983, ed.), *Gewalt und Gewaltlosigkeit im Alten Testament*. Freiburg: Herder.

²² This change is gradual. Victimisation as such persisted after Christ, even within the Christian world. However, the order-restoring force has been weakened; the status of the victim has changed. „Les persécuteurs

new about the Bible tradition, is corroborated, even though the innovative force is seen elsewhere.

Jesus' revelation of the scapegoating mechanism and of the nature of sacrifice had three immediate implications which marked the difference between Jewish religion and Christian faith: the end of sacrifice, the transformation of the ambiguous sacred into the unambiguously holy, and the purification of the set of prohibitions from all arbitrary outgrowth.

(1) The revelation that sacrifice is not demanded by the transcendent God but is rather grounded in a projection and misapprehension of human violence dismantles the basis of sacrificial rites. The historical demise of sacrifice was a gradual process. In the beginning of the story of Israel there was a jealous god, Yahweh, who competed with foreign gods, the baal, for attention and fidelity. Pagan sacrificial sites become consecrated to Yahweh. (Ex 20:24, 1s9:12) Isaiah called for the concentration of all sacrificial rites in one unique temple (Isa.6). Later prophets, such as Hosea and Ezekiel (Ez.11:22), gave priority to the holiness of the heart over sacrificial rituals „[f]or I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings.“ (Hos.6:8).

Finally, the Jesus of John 4 declares that the genuine encounter with God is to be sought in prayer and not in the sacrificial sites of Jerusalem and of the Samaritans. In Matthew's and Mark's rendition of the temple revolt (Matt.21:12-17; Mark 11:17), Jesus picks out a partial phrase from Isaiah, „for my house shall be called a house of prayer [for all people]“ (Isa.56:7), at the deliberate expense of the foregoing sentence about the acceptance of burnt-offerings. René Girard's and Raymund Schwager's interpretations, taking note of several other sayings of Jesus, suggest that Jesus intended to lance an outright challenge of the sacrificial system, which must have been unacceptable to any other Jew of his time.²³ Whatever the intentions of the historical Jesus may have been²⁴, fact is that *the Christians discarded the Jewish sacrificial ritual, at a time when the rest of the Mediterranean world, pagan and Hebrew, was fully committed to sacrifice; Roman law even included human sacrifices.*

médiévaux et modernes n'adorent pas leurs victimes, ils les haïssent seulement.“ (R.Girard (1982), *Le Bouc Emissaire*. Paris: Grasset, p.58)

²³ R.Schwager (1994 [1991]), *Dem Netz des Jägers entronnen. Wie Jesus sein Leben verstand*. Freiburg i.B., Herder, esp. Pp.129-31.

²⁴ Cf.E.P.Sanders (1985), *Jesus and Judaism*. London, SCM Press Ltd, p.67ff and chap.2. Sanders opposes the view that Jesus was against sacrifice itself. He thinks that Matt.5:23-4 and Acts 2:46 would become inexplicable.

(2) Ideal-typically, the revelation of the scapegoating mechanism leads to a purification of the notion of the sacred. All violent attributes, now deciphered as human projections of their own violence, are peeled off until only the holiness of the Godhead remains. The authors of the New Testament followed this logic to a remarkable extent. Already before Jesus, Job had questioned the validity of imputing suffering to the vengeance of an offended God. Job defies his „friends“ assertion that his sudden misfortune reveals a deeper layer of evil in himself of which he is not aware.²⁵ In the New Testament, Jesus criticises his disciples' conviction that illness (e.g. John 9) or sudden death in accidents (e.g. Luke 13:1-5) is connected to any kind of divine punishment.²⁶ To Paul (Rom.1:18-31), the wrath of God is nothing other than the full exposure to the dynamics of violence and confusion unleashed by man himself.²⁷ Finally, John can announce: „God is love“.

Historically speaking, the ideas of vengeance proved to be so deeply rooted in the mentality of the people that even Christians themselves misunderstood the meaning of the revelation. Ricoeur notes two experiential aspects which may account for the persistence of the idea of vengeance.²⁸ First, vengeance conceals the belief that in the act of avenging something is not only destroyed but „order - whatever order it may be - is restored.“ Secondly, the automatism of the sanction, the belief in the ineluctable punishment of defilement or transgression, is a first sketch of causality which is not easily replaced by a desacralised understanding of causality. In Christian theology, the theme of divine wrath was either allegorically interpreted, for instance as an educational deceit for the stupid masses, or transformed into the language of just punishment. The allegorical interpretation led to sterility and arbitrariness. The language of just punishment legitimised all sorts of crusades, inquisitions and pogroms in which Christians acted as self-appointed executioners of God's judgement.²⁹

(3) The basic function of prohibitions is the prophylactic curtailment of appropriative mimesis which is prone to unleash an unstoppable dynamic of violence. „They maintain a sort

²⁵ Cf. R.Girard (1985), *La Route antique des Hommes Pervers*. Paris: Grasset.

²⁶ In the first case, Jesus heals a man who has been blind from birth. His disciples and the Pharisean community oscillate between attributing this defect to prior sinful acts either of the patient's parents or the patient himself. In the second case the disciples take the death of a couple of people in the collapse of a building as a clear instance of divine punishment. For a discussion see F.Bourdeau (1974), pp.31-3.

²⁷ Cf. Schwager (1996[1989]), *Jesus im Heilsdrama. Entwurf einer biblischen Erlösungslehre*. 2nd edition. Innsbruck: Tyrolia, pp.209-10. For a discussion of other NT authors see M.Corbin, „L'idole et la Peur“, Christus (Paris), vol.29, 1982, around 414.)

²⁸ Ricoeur (1967), pp.30-32, p.43.

²⁹ Cf. R.Schwager (1988[1985]), „The Theology of the Wrath of God“, in: P.Dumouchel (ed.), *Violence and Truth. On the Work of Rene Girard*. London: Athlone Press, pp.44-52.

of sanctuary at the heart of the community, an area where that minimum of nonviolence essential to the survival of the children and the community's cultural heritage [...] is jealously preserved."³⁰ Subsuming prohibitions and the surrogate victim under the heading of religion, Girard states: „There is no society without religion because without religion society cannot exist.“³¹ At the same time, Girard notes that in all primitive societies prohibitions comprise interdictions which are utterly arbitrary from the point of view of their basic function. The functional arbitrariness is due to their historical vicinity to the event of generative violence but must not be confused with cognitive unsystematicity. As Mary Douglas has shown, rules of taboo are usually of one piece, pertaining to one distinct system unique to each tribe. Rules of taboo are metaphors of one major guiding idea, which in the case of the Hebrew taboos is the notion of the sacredness of God. Some sorts of animals, such as the camel and the hare, are taboo because their features fall outside a class - they do not fulfil completely the description of the perfectly clean animal that has 'divided hoofs and is cloven-footed and chews the cud' (Lev.11:3); their classificatory obstinacy resembles the crooked and twisted machinations of the wicked man.³²

Following Girard's general logic, desacralisation purifies prohibitions from their functionally arbitrary outgrowths and ideal-typically cuts them down to the functionally necessary rest. In fact, it has been shown above that the Christian clarification abolishes food laws and Sabbath rules which have no bearing on the management of violence. It strikes me, however, that neither Girard nor the theologians influenced by him ever raise, to the best of my knowledge, the two crucial questions. From the secular point of view: What prohibitions survive desacralisation, i.e. which ones are the necessary, or functionally „true“? Girard argues that the specificity of modern society consists in the gradual and silent but radical effacement

³⁰ Girard (1977), p.221.

³¹ Girard (1977), p.221.

³² In her comment on Leviticus Douglas says: „To be holy is to be whole, to be one; holiness [Douglas does not distinguish between the sacred and the holy - K.M.] is unity, integrity, perfection of the individual and of the kind. The dietary rules merely develop the metaphor of holiness on the same lines.“ (p.54) „Those species are unclean which are imperfect members of their class, or whose class itself confounds the general scheme of the world.“ (p.55) „If the proposed interpretation of the forbidden animals is correct, the dietary laws would have been like signs which at every turn inspired meditation on the oneness, purity and completeness of God. By rules of avoidance holiness was given a physical expression in every encounter with the animal kingdom and at every meal. Observance of the dietary rules would thus have been a meaningful part of the great liturgical act of recognition and worship which culminated in the sacrifice in the Temple.“ (Mary Douglas (1984 [1966]), *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London, Ark Paperbacks chap.3, „The Abominations of Leviticus“, p.57)

of prohibitions. Between the lines he seems to claim that this effacement goes too far, annihilating not only the arbitrary rules but even those vital for social cohesion. He sees modern societies on the brink of an apocalyptic scenario of unleashed violence but he has not provided us with a criterion to distinguish the arbitrary from the functionally true.

From the Christian point of view one can ask: What interdictions of the Hebrew Law remain for the Christian, and which ones are added, according to the interpretative logic put forward by Girard? To the first question modern society may soon give an experimental answer. To the second question, one can fortunately give a beginning of an answer by aid of textual and experiential analysis.

From the Hebrew Decalogue (Ex.20:1-21, Deut.5:1-22), the Sabbath rule is jettisoned (even though it was reintroduced in 16th century). Given Jesus's scandalous attacks on the taken-for-granted obedience to the family, the fourth commandment is at least seriously diminished in importance or strongly reinterpreted. Jesus's affirmation of the other commandments is only highly indirect.³³ In general, Jesus hesitates to pronounce any substantive general rules. Rather, he uses parables, stories taken from daily life, to convey indirectly ethical demands and expectations. In fact, his method of teaching reconciles strong ethical demands with flexibility and freedom from the law. Contemporaneous to this reluctance to affirm any universally and irrevocably valid substantial rules of conduct, Jesus concludes his mission with apocalyptic visions and the announcement of the final judgement. In Girard's analysis, the apocalyptic prospect of unprecedented violence is corroborated.³⁴ It emerges quite clearly as, firstly, a consequence of desacralisation, which takes away the effectiveness of scapegoating as a means to restore social cohesion, and secondly as result of a miscarried or insufficient sanctification of the masses, which could have secured peace without surrogate victims.

However, this macro-analysis does not illuminate the consequences for individual moral experience. According to Christian faith, the last judgement is an evaluation of the individual's ethical performance on „earth“. The judgement is expected to be just and not arbitrary, i.e. following standards and measures which are in principle accessible to the individual. The

³³ Cf. Mark (10:19) and Matthew (19:18-21). Jesus is asked by a rich man what is needed for perfection. This is a strange question in the Jewish context because it is obvious that the Torah, especially the Decalogue, spells out the necessary conditions. Therefore Jesus asks him if he had never heard about the following commandments and enumerates the second, „horizontal“, part of the Decalogue. This is only a very indirect advocacy of the Decalogue, if any at all. Jesus adds his own most important condition, namely to follow him and sell all material goods. For the invectives against family obligations and the redefinition of the 'true' family see: Mk 10:31-35; Matt.12:46-50.

³⁴ Girard (1978), *Des choses cachées*, p.276ff.

Pharisees considered God's will to be communicated exhaustively in the law. By contrast, the Christian, having seen the end of the law, is thrown into a hazarded existence in which the difference good/evil is not laid down for every moment once-and-for-all. Elementary ethical questions are not even pushed into definite directions. For instance, the entire realm of covetousness remains ambiguous in Jesus' preaching. That marriage is immensely upgraded is beyond doubt. However, what happens to the rules regarding menstruation³⁵ and the long-standing association of sexuality with defilement? Is Paul's glorification of virginity a personal fad or does it reflect a deep insight which can be anthropologically corroborated? Why does Paul waive with respect to sexual desire his general stance „that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.“ (Romans 14:14)?

In the Reformation, sexual continence and personal holiness were riven apart in a tense period of experimentation, both exegetical and practical.³⁶ Even with hindsight, these questions are not easy to answer from a strictly anthropological point of view. The analyses of Ricoeur and Girard, for instance, pull in different directions. Both agree that the association of sexuality and defilement was formed in the most archaic experiences of man, which Ricoeur calls „dread“ and Girard the „sacred“. However, in Ricoeur's sketch of the movement from dread through sin to guilt and finally justification by faith, the association of sexuality with defilement is deciphered as arbitrary.³⁷ By contrast, Girard's analysis suggests that the archaic association of sexuality with violence survives the process of differentiation. The regulations concerning marriage and incest are seen to have the function of channelling, taming and thereby legitimising violence; rivalry for sexual objects is a perennial threat to community - and therefore (functionally) evil.³⁸

³⁵ Cf. „When a woman has a discharge of blood that is her regular discharge from her body, she shall be in her impurity for seven days, and whoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening. Everything upon which she lies during her impurity shall be unclean“ and so on (Lev. 15:19f).

³⁶ Cf. L. Roper (1991), „Sexual Utopianism in the German Reformation“, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 42 (3), pp. 394-418. Roper shows that the initial period of experimentation led quickly to a strict disciplinary arrangement and strife among reformed churches.

³⁷ Ricoeur (1967), pp. 27-9. „The defilement of sexuality is a belief that is pre-ethical in character.“ (p. 28)

„[T]he inflation of the sexual is characteristic of the whole system of defilement“. (p. 28)

³⁸ Girard (1977[1972]), pp. 33-36; pp. 219-20. „Sexuality is impure because it has to do with violence.“ (p. 34) „It is a permanent source of disorder even within the most harmonious of communities.“ (p. 35) Marriage rules are sacrificial in nature. The victims are chosen from outside (external to the clan, the totem, the community, or at least to the nuclear family). „All these regulations serve to endow both sexuality and violence with the same centrifugal force. [...] The problem is always the same: violence is both the disease (inside) and the cure (outside). Violence, like sexual desire, must be forbidden wherever its presence is incompatible with communal existence.“ (p. 220)

The thrust of this section is again that the desacralised Christian is released into an existence between the poles of a fervent will for sanctification and the moral space deprived of prejudged cases. If, according to Frazer's memorable phrase, in the world of taboos „the concepts of holiness and pollution are not yet differentiated“³⁹, then in the world of desacralisation the ethical subject is compelled to discern on his own the boundary between good and evil and to differentiate the shades of the good, the better and the perfect.

Like in the previous section, the practice of spiritual, „charismatic“ discernment emerges as central to the historically new moral experience apparent in the New Testament.

II. Spiritual discernment: Charismatic impulses mediate and reconcile the constraints of tradition and the specificity of the concrete situation

II.1. Systematic: charisma in moral deliberation

The other side of the coin of evangelical liberty, freed from the burdensome pedagogy of the law, is ethical responsibility which accrues to an even stronger extend to the individual than this used to be the case since the post-exilic prophets. To act correctly in accordance with God's will, the Christian must distinguish good from evil on the spot in an operation called spiritual discernment (*diäkrisis*). This discernment of good and evil does neither develop in a void nor can it be practised without prior maturation. Rather, the belief that God has revealed himself in history (especially of Israel) restores the value of the books of Moses, of the prophets, and other pieces of the Jewish tradition. The end of the law does not imply a total rupture with the Jewish heritage. Rather, these scriptures are recapitulated in Christ, i.e. interpreted from the point of view of the end of the law in Christ. This recapitulated tradition provides the major 'prejudices', in Gadamer's sense, with which new situations are framed, compared, analysed, and phrased. An entire anthropology and cosmology is tied to it. For instance, the Platonic differences body/soul and reason/passions are alien to the Bible tradition. Hence Paul's differences flesh/spirit and *pneumatikos/psychikos* must be understood on the backdrop of the Jewish anthropology rather than in Platonic terms.

³⁹ J.G.Frazer (1913), Taboo and the Perils of the Soul. The Golden Bough. A Study in Magic and Religion. Part II. 3rd ed. London, Macmillan, p.224.

In patient prayer over the parables and the passages which present Jesus in action, the Christian develops a mentality akin to Christ (*nous Christou*, Vulgata: *sensum Christi*, cf. 1Cor.2:16), a spiritual sensitivity (*aisthetéria*, cf. *Heb.5:14*), which is a precondition for discernment of good from evil.⁴⁰ In a process of maturation, the Christian learns to see ethical problems with the eyes of Christ; he emulates Jesus' character and his emotions. (Cf. Phil.2:5ff) The objective is the renewal of the mind so that he may „discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect.“ (Romans 12:2, emphasis added) Spiritual discernment proper is reserved to the mature Christian. The following applies only to a person who has acquired a *sensum Christi*, and I bracket the important issues of Christian education.

The meditative recapitulation of tradition is a sort of 'screening operation' which helps to sort out good from evil, and better from worse. 'Screening operation' is a term of art I introduce to avoid the more specific notion of principles, which is already in the line of modern formalism; in the Christian context it would include metaphors, guiding ideas, the grand narrative of the exodus and of Christ's passion, eschatological hopes etc., which cannot be narrowed down to a firm set of principles. Most accounts of morality have such screening operations which lend orientation in both general outlook and in concrete situations. For instance, Kant's screening device is universalisation which serves the purpose of correcting, taming, regulating natural inclinations. The screening operation may lead to aporias in concrete cases when the thrust of the 'guidelines' are actualised.

At this point, similarities and differences to philosophical moral deliberation can be discussed. One major difference between 'philosophical' and Christian ethical deliberation regards the final recourse to an agency which dissolves and overcomes aporias provoked either by the application of the screening device or the novelty of the situation. There are three possible *philosophical* suggestions to react to the aporias created by formalism or screening devices in general: (1) the introduction of a third agency, e.g. Hegel's moral deliberation draws on the 'Sittlichkeit' and the 'Geist'; (2) the belief in the self-therapeutic prowess of philosophical argument suggests that aporias are merely provisional, ephemeral problems, as

⁴⁰ For a discussion of more NT passages related to this development of a *sensum Christi* see Manuel Ruiz Jurado, sj (1997[1994]), *Il Discernimento Spirituale. Teologia, storia, pratica*. Trans. from Spanish by M. Magnatti-Fasiolo. Roma: San Paolo, pp.27-43.

seems to be Habermas' position;⁴¹ (3) Ricoeur suggests that a recursive loop to selfhood itself, to the convictions for which the self attests, is the proper place of practical reason.⁴²

The non-philosophical solution propounded by the authors of the New Testament takes recourse to a third agency, namely to the Holy Spirit. The authors provide ex-post criteria to evaluate whether one's personal *sensum Christi* had correctly identified the ethical demands contained in the recapitulated tradition. Some 1500 years later, Ignatius of Loyola introduced ex-ante criteria which reconcile the moderate formalism of the screening device with situational singularities. In both 'methods' to verify personal spiritual discernment charismatic impulses, direct communications of the Holy Spirit, play the decisive role. Charismatic impulses differentiate good from evil, the acceptable from the abominable, in cases when the triad of the *sensum Christi*-meditative recapitulation-situational analysis runs into a dead-end or leaves things undecided. The Spirit sends these gifts of insight and guidance into the concrete situations in which the intellectually known ethical thrust of the recapitulated tradition does not suffice for the discernment of God's will. *Thus, the charismatic impulses complete the differentiation of good from evil.*

II.2. Historical and exegetical: charisma and its referents

This rendition of the role of charisma in the differentiation of good from evil and in one's personal orientation of action clashes with our every-day understanding of this term; an excursion into the history of semantics seems therefore indicated. Among sociologists 'charisma' is today commonly understood as an extraordinary *capacity* for revolutionary leadership. Max Weber defines charisma as a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men; the charismatic leader is treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional qualities.⁴³ In theological context, charisma counts as a capacity to enhance - in spontaneous, unregulated service - the

⁴¹ „[D]ie philosophische Ethik ... muß *therapeutisch* vorgehen und gegen die Verstellung moralischer Grundphänomäne die Selbstheilungskräfte der Reflexion aufbieten.“ (J.Habermas (1983), *Moralbewußtsein und kommunikatives Handeln*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, p.55, emphasis J.H.)

⁴² „[T]he practical wisdom we are seeking aims at reconciling Aristotle's *phronesis*, by way of Kant's *Moralität*, with Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*. Of *phronesis* we retain the fact that its horizon is the 'good life', its mediation deliberation, its actor the *phronimos*, and its place of application singular situations. [...*Sittlichkeit*] has been stripped of its pretention to marks the victory of Spirit over the contractions that it itself provokes. Reduced to modesty, *Sittlichkeit* now joins *phronesis* in moral judgment in situation. In return, because it has crossed through so many mediations and so many conflicts, the *phronesis* of moral judgment in situation is saved from any temptation of anomie. It is through public debate, friendly discussion, and shared convictions that moral judgment in situation is formed.“ (P.Ricoeur (1992), *Oneself as Another*. Trans.K.Blamely.Chicago: Univ.of ChicagoPr.,p.290) Ricoeur discusses Habermas on pp.280-287.

⁴³ Cf. Max Weber (1972[1921]), *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Tübingen: J.C.B.Mohr (Siebeck), pp.654ff.

salvation of the other. Originally, however, 'charisma' meant something quite different. It referred essentially not to a capacity, or a permanent quality, pertaining to a person but to a gift given freely by God/Holy Spirit to a person, allotted in a concrete moment for a concrete situation to enhance the Kingdom of God. It is understandable that this „native's“ „thick“ description of an event/activity causes problems for a sociology which prefers to take an agnostic stance and therefore is inclined to suspend judgement about the origin of the „gift“. However, the re-description of the event/practice of gift-giving and gift-reception into extraordinary but constant, habitual individual capacity is a category mistake. A term which originally refers to the realm of concrete action and experience is transposed into a term relevant for the description of the being, or habitus, of a person. It is true that charismatic impulses may leave traces on the individual and that there are individuals who receive such impulses more frequently or more visibly than others. Furthermore, in endowing a momentary gift the Holy Spirit, according to Christian belief, integrates and activates permanent natural talents of the person such that in empirical cases the borders between charisma and habitus may become blurred.⁴⁴ However, it is important to distinguish these aspects analytically in order to grasp the essence of spiritual discernment.

Norbert Baumert⁴⁵ has written a series of articles in which he traced the change of meaning of 'charisma' over the two millennia. Before Christianity, charisma simply was a gift, i.e. a freely and deliberately given good. Paul added the characterisation that the gift was given by God with the intention to enhance salvation. The gift is usually an (objectively) manifest content, such as a prophecy, and not the (subjective) capacity to perform something. Among the Greek Church Fathers, Origen starts to use charisma to refer to a talent (Be-gabung), although he does not per definition include it in the meaning of the term. Among the Latin Church Fathers, Tertullian leaves the term untranslated; surprisingly, this usage of a foreign language term did not lead to a theological specification of the term for a long time. In medieval theological treatises charisma becomes latinised again. The Vulgata (Latin Bible) translated 'charisma' as gratia (grace) rather than donum (gift, present) or donatio; only in 1Cor.12:31 charisma remains untranslated. Aquinas associates charisma (gratia) with hierarchically ordered services (*ministraciones*); the freely given gifts (*gratiae gratis datae*) do

⁴⁴ Cf. N.Baumert (1986), *Gaben des Geistes Jesu. Das Charismatische in der Kirche*. Graz: Styria, p.160.

⁴⁵ N.Baumert (1991), „Charisma“ - Versuch einer Sprachregelung“, *Theologie und Philosophie*, vol.66 (1), pp.21-48. N.Baumert sj. (1990), „Das Fremdwort 'Charisma' in der westlichen Theologie“, *Theologie und Philosophie*, vol.65, pp.395-415. *Idem* (1990), „Zur Begriffsgeschichte von *charisma* im griechischen Sprachraum“, *ThPh*, vol.65, 79-100. Further literature given there.

not refer to the content of a communication by the Holy Spirit but to the incapacitation to ecclesiastic services. Only from the 17th century onwards, 'charisma' is used as a technical term which designates a talent, a *capacity*, which is specifically used in the service for the salvation of the other. Thus, any events or capacities which enable a deepening of one's own personal, singular relation with God (e.g. endowment for prayer, celibacy or martyrdom) are excluded from the meaning; and charisma is not anymore the content of a communication but a capacity. However, capacities conferred upon by ecclesiastic institutions are not yet excluded. This latter exclusion had to wait two centuries more.

As late as in 19th century, charisma is set into contrast to office (German: *Amt*). Alfred Harnack and Rudolf Sohm, Weber's two major authorities,⁴⁶ distinguish the Spirit-driven charisma from a constitutionally appointed office in the sense of mere administration. Christian tradition, including the Reformers, had never understood office in this reductive, administrative sense. The important point is that only from Harnack and Sohm on, in the late 19th century, charisma is pit against „institution“, against everything traditional, permanent, grown, and rule-guided; charisma refers now exclusively to something innovative, disruptive, and immediately given, unmediated by external structures. Furthermore, charisma is increasingly understood as a naturally developed but rare capacity, and thereby the original link to God's saving action and will is finally severed.

When charisma is set against office, external structure and continuity, then charismatic intervention is by definition exempt from external evaluation; charisma, in this late 19th century understanding, erupts spontaneously, as an engine of change or as an uninstitutionalised basis for the restoration of order in times of crisis.

II.3. Charismatic impulses in the moral deliberation of Paul and Ignatius

This was not Paul's view at all. In the routinely mistranslated passage of Romans 12:3-8 charisma appears in the context of an ex-post, consequentialist ethical evaluation of action. Paul champions a measure, or criterion, of authenticity (Rom. 12:3). The grace (*charis*) of prophecy, for instance, is to be compared to the gift (*charisma*) of reliability. (cf. Rom.12:6b) If the prophecy does not hit the person, and provoke a turning around (cf. 1Cor.14:24f), then the action has failed and the Christian must ask himself if the failure is only with the hardened heart of the other or with one's own self-righteousness. Here, the gift (charisma) is a fruit of an action rather than a quality of the agent. The various types of action, such as consolation,

⁴⁶ Weber explicitly refers to Rudolf Sohm's study on early Christianity. Weber (1972[1921]), p.655.

teaching, defence, and charity, are interpreted as good, in accordance with God's will, if they are delivered with and/or followed by factual solace, simplicity, diligence and cheerfulness, respectively. (Rom.12:8) Especially solace and cheerfulness are difficult to superimpose on oneself or a situation. If these 'fruits' manifest themselves, then the Christian takes this as evidence that he has been inspired by the Holy Spirit and not carried away by self-righteousness, false reverence or other subtle perversities of devout religiosity.⁴⁷ Thus, Paul provides criteria according to which each Christian can evaluate his actions and check their concordance with divine 'Heilsordnung'.

Paul's ex-post evaluation presupposes that the agent decides for an action without hesitation. Quite often, however, the commandment of neighbourly love, the ethical resources of tradition and community, the intimate knowledge of Christ's example, and the specificity of the situation, will not suggest a self-evident course of action in the first place. Doubts about the ethical priority of alternative possible actions may besiege the Christian before intervention. Frequently the meditative recapitulation of tradition is inconclusive; the internal tensions of the tradition fully erupt in the moment when it is reappropriated for a situational judgement. However, the Christian is not pressed to make an arbitrary, fateful choice to overcome the aporia and inconclusiveness of the application of the screening device. In such cases of aporia, the Christian turns to the ex-ante prayer for the discernment of God's will. In this ex-ante discernment a charismatic impulse pushes the Christian into one definite direction and thereby communicates God's will. *The concrete distinction between good and evil, and between the perfect and the merely acceptable, which is gained in this process is not any further „justifiable“, or explicable, in discursive thought.*

If Paul, like other authors of the New Testament who take the fruits of individual performance as criteria of ethical quality, was concentrating on ex-post evaluation, Ignatius of Loyola contributed most originally to the ex-ante discernment of the spirits. Ignatius confronts in his *Spiritual Exercises* the problem of overcoming ex-ante the inconclusiveness arising from a mere situational analysis and application of the screening device.⁴⁸ How can a Christian find out, or know, that his choice conforms to the will of God? Ignatius claims that in the meditation over a choice, in the radical opening of one's soul to the service of God, God

⁴⁷ N.Baumert (1989), „Zur 'Unterscheidung der Geister'“, *Zeitschrift fuer katholische Theologie*, vol.111, pp.183-195.

⁴⁸ Cf. for the following discussion K.Rahner (1960), *Das Dynamische in der Kirche. Questiones Disputatae*, vol.5. Basel/Freiburg i.B., Herder, esp. Chap.3.

would communicate his will by „moving“ the Christian in the right direction. The core of this direct experience of God's will is characterised as „consolación sin causa precedente“ (n.330), a deep solace without any object of consolation. This sentiment draws the Christian totally into the love of the divine *majesty* (*trayéndola toda en amor de la su divina majestad*, n.330).

The experience of being drawn (Greek: *helkein*) into the divine ground is an age-old theme already present in Plato, although in the Greek context the human side of the movement, the seeking (*zetein*), is usually stressed.⁴⁹ The Christian experience of God is typically passive. God's love preceding and overwhelming the human being's search. A precondition for the experience of the direction-showing consolation and of the absorption in the divine love is prayer, and especially the arrival at what Ignatius calls 'indifference'. The consolation can only be objectless (*sin causa*) if all verbal discourses, personal judgements and hopes are set aside in favour of a total readiness to be sent wherever the Creator wants one to go. The objectless consolation is then confronted with the objects of choice, and if peace, tranquillity and cheerfulness persist or even increase in front of a particular object, then the object is marked as favoured by God's will. (cf.n.335)

The concrete, situational distinction between good and evil, or between perfect and merely acceptable, which is gained in this discernment cannot be further justified in discursive thought, it cannot be further illuminated by an intellectual argument; it cannot be looped back to the screening device - and there is no need for it. The recourse to prayer and inspiration by God (Holy Spirit)⁵⁰ arrests and finalises the ethical meditation and thereby eliminates the possibility of further antinomies.

If the particular choice-situation raises issues relevant for the local community, then the Christian will be urged to embark on the discernment of the will of God together with his fellows, which follows the same logic but is even more difficult because the communication pattern gets even more complex.⁵¹

Finally, it should be noted that Ignatius emphasises that the criterion to distinguish God's genuine impulse from some subterranean psychological upsurge is not the suddenness and

⁴⁹ Cf. E.Voegelin (1990[1978]), „Reason: The Classical Experience“, in: idem, *Anamnesis*, trans. and ed. by G.Niemeyer. Columbia, Missouri Press, pp.89-115, p.93: „There is, first, the group of symbols which express the experience of restless wondering: wondering - *thaumazein*; seeking, searching - *zetein*; search - *zetesis*; questioning - *aporein*, *diaporein*. The questioning, then, is experienced with an index of urgency. It is not a game to be played or not. The philosopher feels himself moved (*kinein*) by some unknown force to ask the questions, he feels himself drawn (*helkein*) into the search.“

⁵⁰ Ignatius does not have a fully developed trinitarian theology in his Exercises.

⁵¹ Cf. H.Büchele (1991), „Zur Suche nach dem Willen Gottes in Gemeinschaft“, *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*, vol.113, pp.244-60.

seeming arbitrariness but the effect of moving the „total“ soul and unifying all life-energy into the peaceful love. Dionysian whims are neither charismatic nor God-given. Again, the charismatic impulse does not stand in headlong conflict, or decisive contrast, to rules, institutions, habits and external structures.

II.4. Christian liberty and the problem of authority

The particular structure of the Christian moral experience can now be reconstructed. The Christian is beyond the law but not beyond good and evil. By contrast to any nomism, good and evil are not properties intrinsic to objects or actions such that certain types of objects or actions could be marked as immoral once-and-for all. The ethical appropriateness of an action is discovered in a meditation which analyses the concrete situation from the point of view of the tradition recapitulated in Christ. The meditation may remain inconclusive; aporias may open up because different strands of the tradition and eschatological hopes pull in diverse directions; the 'screening device' may fail to discriminate between several possible actions. In such a case, the Christian turns to a prayer of the discernment of God's will. Charismatic impulses support one course of action and dissolve the aporia. In this way the difference good/evil is discovered for the concrete situation; the discernment cannot be further illuminated by an intellectual argument, certainly not deductively justified. The New Testament moral experience is free from nomism, released into a hazarded existence of meeting ethical demands via the intimacy with, and 'participation' in, Christ and love of God.

At this point of the argument one can indicate the peril of relapses into nomism or excesses into charismatic madness. The Christian believes that the Holy Spirit is the author of the charismatic impulses. The Holy Spirit is an agency which operates, according to this faith, throughout entire history. An important conclusion follows. Past spiritual discernments of other fellow Christians, possibly from other centuries and kept in memory because of their particular strength of faith, have some validity for me as soon as I adopt Christian faith. Their discernments of good and evil, their judgement of the ethical appropriateness of certain actions, serve as guidelines, as way marks, for my own discernment. This is very welcome because it is generally impossible to deliberately evaluate every single action; in most activities one must take past ethical evaluations for granted; to a large extent the Christian simply takes

over the accumulated discernments stored in the habits of his particular community or the style of his time.

However, these past ethical discernments, even if they have dissipated into habits, have a very different status than the law had for the Pharisees. The law is a pre-scription; a prior settlement of moral deliberation, a complete account of good and evil given in one moment in history by one inspired person - Moses; heteronomy, in short - with all the consequences of guilt, 'death', internal revolt and endless struggle, and the temptation of hypocrisy. According to the logic of the evangelical moral experience, past discernments can never be reformulated into general, universally valid principles; the thrust of past discernments must never infringe the consideration of particulars; past discernments cannot fully outweigh the new discernment. However, the danger of a return of nomism always beckons. Christian liberty would again be subjected to a heavy yoke. Against such tendencies to nomism spiritually sensitive individuals will always stand up and call for reform. If the Christian institutional structure is incapable of accommodating a continuous *reformatio*, a continuous renovation by the Spirit, then enthusiastic groups in search of more possessive experiences will take the lead and obliterate Christian differentiation in the other extreme direction. Enthusiasts of all ages tend to misunderstand Christian moral experience as an 'anything goes'. In Romans 8:2 Paul says that faith in Christ has liberated him from sin and 'death' (i.e.guilt). Enthusiast groups of all times, from Paulinicans to the radical Puritans and antinomians, have inverted the relation between faith and sinlessness. Instead of waiting patiently until faith had gradually transformed their inclinations in accordance with God's will, they took any licentiousness and immorality of their leader as a sign of immense spiritual prowess.⁵²

The fragile balance of the New Testament moral experience is threatened from various sides. One must also recognise that this moral experience lacks any massively possessive contact with the divine. Sacrifice and orgiastic cults are entirely foreign to this moral universe. As Eric Voegelin notes in his *The New Science of Politics*:

„The more people are drawn or pressured into the Christian orbit, the greater will be the number among them who do not have the spiritual stamina for the heroic adventure of the soul that is Christianity; and the likeness of a fall from faith will increase when civilizational progress of education, literacy, and intellectual debate will bring the full seriousness of

⁵² Cf.E.Voegelin (1994), *Das Volk Gottes*. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, pp.51-2; chap.10.

Christianity to the understanding of ever more individuals."⁵³ „The very lightness of this fabric may prove too heavy a burden for men who lust for massively possessive experience."⁵⁴

So far, I have concentrated on the individual moral experience. However, Christian life is a life of community. What is the last court of appeal for spiritual discernment - conscience, church, state? This question lies not only at the heart of the division between Catholics and Protestants but it already arises in the very moment of Christian differentiation.

Due to his championing of evangelical liberty from the law, Paul refrained from issuing rulings for many issues. He explicitly left discernment to individuals and appealed to their conscience (synderesis), which for Paul is the consciousness of the ethical quality of action. Conscience is the last court of appeal; its validity is contingent on the strength of faith. Action against personal conscience is sin. (Rom. 14:23) The judgements of one person's conscience does not infringe evangelical liberty of any other person. (1 Cor 10:29) However, if the mature Christian's liberty possibly scandalises fellows of a weaker faith, then he is asked to constrain his conduct, even though he knows that the particular action, such as eating meat left over from pagan sacrifices, is ethically neutral. (1 Cor. 8:7-13)

It is striking that in the later, non-Paulinian letters of the New Testament conscience tends to be reduced to a self-critical control of the observance of *given* norms whose ethical validity is established or presumed.⁵⁵ Hebrews opposes the interiority of perfect conscience to the external observance of sacrificial rites by the Jews. (Heb.9:9) This move is understandable. The church must somehow assure unity if it wants to live up to its vocation of being the living body of Christ. Paul was under the spell of the expectation of Christ's second coming and cared less for durability.

The tension between freedom and tradition, between the peril of nomism and the danger of enthusiastic excesses, is inherent in the structure of the founding moral experience of Christianity. The way in which Christians coped with this problem changed over history but the structure of the problem remained the same as long as moral experience unfolded within Christian symbolisation.

⁵³ E.Voegelin (1987 [1952]), *The New Science of Politics. An Introduction*. Chicago, The University Press of Chicago, p.123.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.122.

⁵⁵ Cf. „Gewissen“, entry in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol.3. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, p.580.

The solution of the early church was the institution of the monarchical bishop who reserved prophecy and community-relevant discernment for himself. Later, the popes presided over the church's magisterium, the exercise of final authority in moral matters. The scope and legitimacy of the magisterium was successfully challenged in the Reformation and polarised the Christian world. The problem of the ethical screening device, the recapitulation of tradition in Christ, returned to the agenda, with massive political consequences. Authority and obedience became problematic. In this period, Ignatius stands out with his unconditional obedience to ecclesiastical authorities; from his monks he demands absolute blind submission to the point of taking black for white.⁵⁶ On the other extreme, Protestants demanded scriptural interpretation unmediated and unconstrained by any external authority. The underlying hope that free interpretation would lead to unanimous interpretations proved to be fatally naive. The ecclesiastical authority was simply replaced by another institutional authority - the state. Christopher Hill even goes so far to say: „The road runs straight from Luther to *Leviathan*“.⁵⁷

However, I will not pursue the institutional and political consequences of the particular structure of the Christian moral experience. I see my analysis as complementary to Voegelin's who was particularly interested in eschatological and millenarian derailments⁵⁸ which I will not investigate. In general, I have bracketed the eschatological side of Paul's moral experience in order to make my approach particularly sensitive to three different basic types of untuning the Christian differentiation of moral experience. First, when the accent lies on the charismatic impulse the result is an enthusiasm of people who feel themselves elected to disrupt order and ignore tradition. The burden of the distinction of good and evil rests solely on the individual illumination, unmediated by any screening device, usually resulting in licentiousness and general immorality. Secondly, the exact opposite is a relapse into nomism, which settles every ethical issue before-hand and produces all the scrupulousness and guilt identified in Pharisaic religiosity. Finally, there is the possibility to over-stress the idiosyncrasy of every situation. No counsel can be drawn from previous situations, or previous periods and epochs. Every moment

⁵⁶ „Debemos siempre tener, para en todo acertar, que lo blanco que yo veo, creer que es negro, si la Iglesia hierárquica así lo determina, creyendo que entre Cristo nuestro Señor, esposo, y la Iglesia su esposa, es el mismo espíritu que nos gobierna y rige para la salud de nuestras ánimas“. (nr. 365 of Spiritual exercises: I. Loyola (1997), *Obras de San Ignacio de Loyola*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, p.304.

⁵⁷ C. Hill (1986), „The problem of Authority“, in: idem, *The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill. Vol. 2. Religion and Politics in 17th Century England*. Brighton: The Harvester Press, pp.37-50, p.38.

⁵⁸ Cf. E. Voegelin (1952), „Gnostische Politik“, *Merkur*, vol.6 (4), pp.301-317. The theoretical framework for the study of modern Gnosticism is most clearly and most succinctly presented in Voegelin (1987), p.120-1.

appears as an isolated island, disrupted from contact with past and future. Mixtures of these types are also possible, of course.

III. Transpositions: balance lost

Of course, I cannot analyse the entire historical process in which the Christian differentiation was untuned, reshuffled and restamped beyond recognition until one arrives at contemporary emotivism. In particular, I will completely bracket the infelicitous marriage of Neoplatonism and Christian revelation among the Church Fathers, which might have been a source for the hatred against the body (which can only be conceptualised in opposition to soul, which does not exist in Hebrew anthropology). However, I will describe the relapses and transpositions of moral experience in two important periods of transition. First, I will look at the emergence of a monarchical, episcopal church institution in the second and third centuries. This is of particular sociological interest because the new understanding gained of charisma asks for an account of the decline of „charismatic“ activity alternative to Weber's pitting charisma against office. Secondly, I will approach the drastic change of religious sensibilities, attitudes and frame-works of discourse between the late 16th and the early 18th century. I will approach these periods from the view-point of the previous problematisation of moral experience; I look at them from the perspective of what I consider to be the centre of Christian moral experience rather than from the perspective of modern moral experience.

I trace the return of nomism which started with the Church's reception of Roman law in the 13th century and continued with the wide-spread use of casuistry in late 16th and 17th century. Pascal's vitriolic criticism of casuistry further limited the scope for flexibility and considerations of singular circumstances and helped to push entire Christianity further into the trend of nomism.

Contemporaneously, the consciousness of sin was altered by the switch from the paradigm of seven sins to the Decalogue. Among the Puritans, the legalistic backlash is radicalised. Calvin had already declared personal discernment, any judgement beyond the commandments, as arrogance born by pride. The English establishment reacted forcefully against currents of 'enthusiasm', a derogatory term for a very heterogeneous group of people who claimed to have, in one way or another, direct spiritual illuminations. The Newtonians popularised a so-called „rational religion“ designed to undergird the new social order. And

John Locke's epistemology included elements designed not only to curtail the revolting enthusiasts of his time but also to expel the Holy Spirit from moral deliberation. The expulsion of the Spirit cuts away the spiritual root for an ethical criticism of nomism, with two fatal consequences. First, the trend to turn nomism into legality is reinforced: morality is legality and becomes inconceivable in any other form. Secondly, any criticism of legality must take the form of an immoral attack, outside the space of good and evil. Even if the criticism of morality *qua* legality would have the aim of an ethical reform, there is no symbolism left for articulating it.

III.1. The decline of direct Spirit-inspiration in early Christianity

It is a widely acknowledged fact that directly Spirit-inspired activity has declined soon after the apostolic age. Weber's thesis of the routinisation of 'charisma' (*Amtsgnade*) and the institutionalisation of an office-administered charisma tries to account for this decline. The task is to rewrite this passage such that it is compatible with the conceptualisation of charisma developed above.⁵⁹

There are two wide-spread assumptions, or deeply entrenched beliefs, which impede the understanding of the historical process. First, there is the view that according to New Testament and/or Church doctrine, prophecy, and other gifts granted by the Spirit, were reserved to the history of Israel reaching her culmination in John the Baptist. Christian life was henceforth to be conducted on the lines requested by Christ the Lord, on the basis of the Scriptures alone. Curiously, Catholic church historians have helped to spread this view. Secondly, there is the sociological argument that the creative but mercurial force of charisma would have been absorbed into the sober but permanent structures of church offices. Protestant theologians such as Harnack have developed the view of dispensationalism according to which the canonisation of the Scriptures deleted the need of any direct inspiration. In short, the Holy Spirit had made herself redundant. Furthermore, so this standard narrative continues, even if there would still be a demand for charisma, there is simply no place for it after the establishment of a visible, institutional church. This latter point is, of course, taking for granted the antithetical conception of charisma which sees it in perennial opposition to rules, tradition and institution, a view which was already criticised above.

⁵⁹ For Weber's thesis of the routinisation of charisma see M. Weber (1980[1921]), *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, pp.661ff.

There are several recent studies which have seriously undermined the previous consensus view. I will draw on two of these contributions. I will sketch the results of David Hill's study on early Christian prophecy⁶⁰ and use James L. Ash's explanation of the factual decline, but not extinction, of inspiration by the Holy Spirit in the early church.⁶¹

There are undoubtedly several passages in the Gospels which support the narrow, typically Protestant conception of prophecy. There are eighty-eight references to the plural word „prophets“ in the New Testament, of which fifty-nine contain the definite article without another modifier. These statements refer to the clearly definable group of Old Testament prophets leading up to John the Baptist. Luke 16:16, for instance, states quite clearly that „the law and the prophets were until John.“ However, all other references are to a less consistently definable set of men who were seemingly involved in prophetic speech. David Hill has reconstructed the conception of prophecy inherent in the Revelation of John, Paul and other parts of the New Testament. „Christian prophecy is the vehicle by means of which divine judgments and directives are brought to bear upon the life of the church(es).“ “[P]rophecy, for Paul, was a vital, widely available, edifying charisma“.⁶²

Thus, prophecy was a widely practised activity. Every community was supposed to count several of them among its assembly. They were not opposed to community structures, such as liturgical ritual, nor did they speak under the suspension of ethical principles. The content of their speech was subject to debate and correction and improvement of fellow prophets. They were even endowed with a special place, or office, and thus the antithetical conception of charisma vs. church structure is exposed again as a fallacy. Nevertheless, the fact of the decline of prophecy after the early second century persists, and we must account for this fact in a different way. Even more, prophecy has declined despite veneration, continuous emphasis of its importance, and the affirmation of the church that prophecy will last until the end of the days.

Ash suggests that all these intricate facts fall into place if one considers the emergence of the monarchical episcopacy and the increasingly centralised church organisation. This raised the dilemma of the interests of a streamlined, standardised exposition of Christian faith with the plurality of views and commands gained in prophecy which, by the very essence of this activity,

⁶⁰ D.Hill (1979), *New Testament Prophecy*. London, Marshall, Morgan & Scott.

⁶¹ J.L.Ash (1976), „The Decline of ecstatic prophecy in the early church“, *Theological Studies*, vol.37, pp.227-252. However, Ash's account is marred by his antithetical view of charisma.

⁶² Hill (1979), p.85; p.140.

is not reducible to mere principles. Ash's crucial insight is that the episcopacy appropriated the office of prophecy, thereby continuing at least nominally the reception of gifts given by the Holy Spirit and nevertheless presenting a reasonably unified perspective. Non-episcopal prophets could continue their activity. However, their realm of questions in which they were authorised to differentiate good from evil was significantly reduced. There are several reasons which made it reasonable to take this policy. One of the most important of them was the fact that it was extremely difficult for local communities to decide about the authenticity of the prophets. Christianity was moving into Asia Minor and Greece, where ecstatic oracles were wide-spread and orgiastic religiosity was popular. Paul admonished the Corinthians (not the Romans or Hebrews) to yearn after genuine prophecy. The prophet, he declares, stands above the person who engages in glossolalia, the speaking of tongues. It is vital to interpret one's speech in order to become community-building. (cf. 1Cor.14:1-25) Paul prefers to speak five intelligible and reasonable words than ten thousand words stammered in tongues. (1Cor. 14:19)

And it was Asia Minor where the Montanist crisis erupted, against which the church reacted with resolute ferocity. The Montanists were taken as inauthentic, false prophets. There is disagreement among scholars as to whether Montanus and his female associates Maximilla and Priscilla were descendants from Phrygian orgiastic cults.⁶³ Whatever the truth may be, it is vital to acknowledge that the church did not exonerate the Montanists neither for their ecstatic frenzies, nor for the first-person rhetoric of Montanist „prophecy“, but because of unintelligibility. The church was keen on ruling out those who „chatter and talk nonsense“ reasserting the Pauline criterion of intelligibility. There was the real risk that orgiastic, irrational, psychotic instances of compact forms of religiosity would encroach into the Christian church and thereby destroy the balance and differentiation reached through the Gospels and Paul. The intention to prevent this from happening also may account for the fact that the appropriation of prophecy by the episcopacy started in this troubled area.

The monarchical episcopal church structure achieved two things which are of interest to the present argument:

⁶³ R.A.Knox (1950), *Enthusiasm*. London, Collins Liturgical Publications, surmises that Montanus was a convert from the Phrygian cults with ambitions to become a leader (p.29). Christine Trevett (1996), *Montanism. Gender, authority and the New Prophecy*. Cambridge, CUP, rejects this view on the basis of the following reasoning: „Had the Prophets [i.e.the three leaders of Montanism] really appeared in, or on the edge of, Christian congregations after the manner of the Galli of the Great Mother, our sources, I think, would not have been slow to make this clear.“ (p.89)

(1) It allowed a continuity of importance of the Holy Spirit and ensured that prophetic and quasi-prophetic activity did not disrupt the coherence of the community and the self-presentation of the church. Charismatic impulses continued to be recognised as important for the discernment. As far as macro-issues, choices of a broader scope, are concerned, there is just one legitimate prophet, the bishop.

(2) The realm for personal discernment is restricted for the sake of the stability of the community. However, decisions which affect a small number of people or discernments relevant for one's personal life or for fraternal criticism could be conducted on the lines taught by Paul.

The emergence of the monarchical bishop who appropriates the office of prophecy gave then rise to two different developmental paths, the Roman and the Greek. Given the drastic differences in the background of these two cultural areas, the interpretation of the meaning of „office“ created long standing disputes. In the Roman hemisphere, the ethical or spiritual quality of the bishop was regarded as unimportant, whereas it remained vital in the East.⁶⁴ There is then indeed a tendency to an institutionalisation of charisma (*Amtsgnade*) in the West, although the mechanisms at work were quite different from those insinuated by Weber(ians).⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the arrangement still allowed for some flexibility, at least until the Council of Trento. As late as 14th century, mystics such as Catherine of Siena, for instance, were able to speak prophetically without having an appropriate office. They found an audience among bishops, popes and kings who took them serious.

III.2. Experiential analysis: Anxiety of the age (14th-16th century)

Why and how, we must enquire, did the balance of moral experience explode on such a massive scale in later centuries? There are several trends, disparate movements, curious reinterpretations of old notions, drastic social-economic upheavals which all worked together to restamp moral experience beyond recognition. It is beyond the scope of this study to follow

⁶⁴ Cf. J. Martin (1997), „Zwei Alte Geschichten. Vergleichende historisch-anthropologische Betrachtungen zu Griechenland und Rom“, *Saeculum*, vol. 48 (1), pp. 1-20.

⁶⁵ For a recent Weberian account see Adam B. Seligman (1994), *Innerworldly Individualism. Charismatic Community and its Institutionalization*. New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers, chap. I „Charisma, the Church, and the Reformation“, pp. 11-45.

all these changes in any detail. I will pick out only some of the changes which seem particularly pertinent. I start with a Voegelian analysis of the experiential background of the age.

The essentially Christian uncertainty, the existential tension, and the lack of any hands-on visible demonstrations of the sacred god's magical power, continuously provoke the fall from Christian faith. This in-built instability was exacerbated by a series of social upheavals, such as the rise of the city, the escalation of the conflicts between religious and political representatives, the fissures in the feudal system, the threat of black death sweeping Europe, and the fear from a Turkish invasion. In sum, the individual was exposed to a series of new, incalculable risks. The mood of the time was quite depressive, as one can glimpse from such diverse sources as the paintings of Holbein⁶⁶ and the incisions of Duerer. An ideology of chivalry and exaltation of the hero suppressed a direct admission of fear and anxiety⁶⁷, but lamentations of the misery of this disordered era very omnipresent. The poet Eustache Deschamps captured well the spirit of the time when he moaned that „tout va de mal en pire.“⁶⁸

The psychological undercurrent significantly coloured religious attitudes and sensibilities. The ancient theme of *contemptus mundi* became accentuated in the literature of the end of 14th century. The earth seemed like an exile; the short-lived terrestrial joys were outweighed by the expectations of eternal suffering; the senses are the gates of sin.⁶⁹ The booklet *Imitation of Jesus Christ*, composed probably by Thomas Kempis in 15th century, diffused these themes among the wider public and became one of the greatest best-sellers in the history publishing. „The most profound,“ it is said there, „the most useful knowledge is the real self-knowledge and contempt for oneself.“⁷⁰

It is not surprising to find in the writings of the engineers of the Reformation a vivid description of the age's anxiety. The temptation was great to project anachronistically the age's anxiety into a general view of the condition of man. „Innumerable are the ills which beset human life, and present death in as many different forms“, Calvin writes in his *Institutes*. The house may burn, the fields be devastated, „I say nothing of poison, treachery, robbery, some of which beset us at home, others follow us abroad. Amid these perils, must not man be very

⁶⁶ Cf. J. Kristeva (1987), *Soleil Noir. Dépression et Mélancolie*. Paris: Gallimard, chap. v, „Le Christ mort, de Holbein“.

⁶⁷ Cf. J. Delumeau (1978), *La Peur en Occident. XIVe-XVIIIe siècles*. Paris: Fayard, pp. 3-5.

⁶⁸ Cf. J. Delumeau (1983), *Le péché et la peur. La culpabilisation en Occident (XIIIe-XVIIIe siècle)*. Paris: Fayard, p. 129.

⁶⁹ Cf. J. Delumeau (1983), pp. 20-26.

⁷⁰ G. Ravasi (ed. 1994[1958]), *Imitazione di Cristo*. Rizzoli: Milano, I, chap. 2, p. 27

miserable, as one who, more dead than alive, with difficulty draws an anxious and feeble breath, just as if a drawn sword were constantly suspended over his neck?"⁷¹

Calvin, trained as a civil lawyer, took a strongly pragmatic stance. He issued proposals to annihilate all doubts, fears, uncertainties and anxious questionings in a tight regiment of self-control and external repression. Calvin is very much aware of the pragmatic consequences of his ordained, strictly regulated way of life, and of the consoling power of his idea of predestination and expulsion of human free will. „Every one in his particular mode of life will, without repining, suffer its inconveniences, cares, uneasiness, and anxiety, persuaded that God has laid on the burden. This, too, will afford admirable consolation, that in following your proper calling, no work will be so mean and sordid as not to have a splendour and value in the eye of God.“⁷²

Calvin and the Puritans who received their stamp from his influence, thus, responded to the age's anxiety with a radical dissolution of the existential tension. They erected a religion which provided in various ways a certainty and ultimateness which Catholicism did not provide. In fact, Jean Delumeau⁷³ attributes the success of Protestantism to a large extent to the psychological assurance provided by the Protestant rock-bottom idea of salvation by faith alone. Personal sinfulness is no hindrance for salvation; works are only valuable after ascension to faith. Faith is the necessary and sufficient condition to avoid hell. By contrast, the Council of Trent dismissed and anathematised any idea which suggests that one's own status with respect to otherworldly salvation can be known with any assurance.⁷⁴

The Calvinistic emphasis of predestination reintroduced some of the existential tension, and Weber was certainly correct to point this out.⁷⁵ The Puritans certainly introduced a form of anxiety, or tension, unknown before, namely the worry to find out if oneself belongs to the few predestined by God for eternal life.⁷⁶ However, the evidence assembled by Delumeau seems to suggest that in practice the dilemma of predestination was attenuated, softened in sermons, outweighed by other elements of enormous assurance, such as the notion of *sola fide* the surge of religious songs, and astrology which replaced the 'magic' of Catholic saints.

⁷¹ Institutes, Book I, XVII, 10, (p.193)

⁷² Institutes, Book III, X, 6 (p.35)

⁷³ Cf. J.Delumeau (1989), *Rassurer et Protéger. Le sentiment de sécurité dans l'occident d'autrefois*. Paris: Fayard, chap.12-14.

⁷⁴ Cf.Delumeau (1989), p.452.

⁷⁵ Weber, *GARS*, I, p.114, pp.513-27.

⁷⁶ Weber, *GARS*, I, p.103.

A return to a more compact religiosity (which still feels committed to the same scriptural sources) would entail a nomism at the expense of personal discernment and charismatic impulses. The notion of „living in Christ“ would be expected to become replaced by „living under the eyes of Moses“ and by an elimination of charismatic impulses in ethical discernment. There is considerable evidence for the correctness of this theoretical expectation deduced from the conceptual apparatus and analysis of moral experience set out above. I will organise the historical reconstruction of this transformation of moral experience along three themes: the demise of casuistry, the return of the Decalogue, and the reaction against enthusiasm in seventeenth century England.

III.3. The second coming of nomism (1): the return of the Decalogue

The return to the Decalogue in 16th century must be considered a major event in the history of Western moral experience. In medieval times, the penance system was based on the catalogue of Seven Capital Sins: pride, envy, wrath, avarice, gluttony, sloth, and lechery. „[T]he Seven Sins were more a system of indicative moral planning than a code [...] The Decalogue was truly a law, in a way that the alternative system had not been.“⁷⁷ The slate of the Seven Sins was familiar to the laity; it pointed to concrete situations of daily life; it was easily communicable by impressive pictures, frescos and sounding sermons; the annual calculation of sins was much easier on the basis of this code of reference than on the basis of the alternative code, the Decalogue. At least until 1400 the general feeling was that the Seven Sins served a vital role in the cultivation of the laity's moral consciousness. However, there have been attempts to ground moral experience on a firmer scriptural basis even earlier. The list of the Seven Sins was not biblical but Greek, possibly of astrological origin. As early as 1281, the Franciscan Archbishop of Canterbury required his clergy to know and teach the Decalogue, after the Creed but before the Seven Sins.⁷⁸ Jean Gerson from University of Paris became the key intermediate figure between the medieval reliance on Seven Sins and the definite return of the Decalogue.⁷⁹ Furthermore, Gerson and St. Antony of Florence developed the notion of scruple as the affective complement to nomism. 'Scruple' originally meant something very concrete, a little stone (caillou), and came to mean „le 'petite ennui' qui

⁷⁷ John Bossy (1988). „Moral arithmetic: Seven Sins into Ten Commandments“, in: E. Leites (ed.), *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: CUP, pp.214-234, p.217. See also: J. Bossy (1985), *Christianity in the West. 1400-1700*. Oxford: Oxford UP, pp.35-42.

⁷⁸ Bossy, pp.217-8.

⁷⁹ Bossy, p.222.

blesse."⁸⁰ The Reformers' insistence on scriptural basis was merely a catalyst which caused all resistance to collapse.

Calvin's reinterpretation of the Law of Christ was significant for at least one branch of reformed Christianity and went even further in the direction of nomism. I use his major work to analyse in more detail the type of moral deliberation which came to be endorsed at this time. In his view, the novelty of the new covenant is the move from the Pharisee „most dangerous delusion“ of the sufficiency of mere external rule-abidance to additional interior conformance to the prescriptions of the law.⁸¹ For the rest, he denies any possibility of reconciliation with God. Calvin has no place for Paul's „new Adam“, reconciled in Christ. He sees man irrevocable left in the state of the „old Adam“ whom he characterises by „the boiling restlessness of the human mind, the fickleness with which it is borne hither and thither, its eagerness to hold opposites at one time in its grasp, its ambition.“⁸² As every Christian, Calvin engages in the search of „some path which may conduct us with direct and firm step to the will of God.“⁸³ However, in his scheme *a detailed discussion of the Ten Commandments alone is deemed sufficient to discern God's will.*

The Decalogue is seen as the refined version of natural law which reason, unassisted by the Revelation, is incapable of reaching. The difference to Hebrew covenantal nomism is played down. This falling back on a strict nomism was also typical of the later Puritans, as Weber very well recognised. Bailey in *Praxis pietatis*, for instance, states quite clearly that one should conduct one's life as if nobody than Moses were to govern us.⁸⁴ „By their persistent identification of natural law with the Ten Commandments“, Michael Walzer argues, „they transformed the flexible generalities of the Catholic theorists into a series of positive decrees.“⁸⁵

In this ideology, there is little space left for individual discretion. Private reflection on the mystery of God's will, personal differentiation of good from bad, is deliberately discouraged. The role of the Holy Spirit in this ethical choice process is re-conceptualised. The charismatic impulse induces the desire and even permanent disposition to fulfil God's will.⁸⁶ However, the

⁸⁰ Delumeau (1983), p.352.

⁸¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book II, viii, 7 (p.321))

⁸² *Institutes*, Book III, X, 6 (p.34)

⁸³ *Institutes*, Book II, viii, 8 (p.322)

⁸⁴ Cf. Max Weber, GARSJ, p.122, fn1.

⁸⁵ Walzer, *The Revolution*, p.36

⁸⁶ *Institutes*, Book II, ii, 26 (p.245)

content of God's will is captured fully and made explicit in the commandments which are the supreme gift of the Spirit. This is a full inversion of Paul's understanding of charisma. In Paul, the charismatic impulse communicated a content and not a disposition. According to Calvin, „we are intoxicated with a false opinion of our own discernment“.⁸⁷ Our natural discernment is utterly inadequate. There is no reason to „extol the discernment of a mind which can neither acquire wisdom by itself, nor listen to advice“.⁸⁸ The natural inclination to mistake the devil's insinuations for the will of God even persists after the illumination by the Spirit. The save strategy to avoid this, proffered by Calvin as the unique road, is to observe the commandments, externally and with full internal assent.⁸⁹ There is no possibility to discern God's will above and beyond the rigid observance of the commandments. Even the „saints“ are admonished to keep away from the arrogance of believing in the concrete, personal charismatic impulse which would refine and sharpen one's discernment of God's will beyond what is discernible from the written rules:

„Let none of us deem ourselves exempt from this necessity, for none have as yet attained to such a degree of wisdom, as that they may not, by the daily instruction of the Law, advance to a purer knowledge of the Divine will.“⁹⁰

This is the end of the personal, micro-scale Christian ethical choice process as taught by Paul (and Ignatius). The Holy Spirit is, in effect, reduced to a symbolical embellishment, a *façon de parler*.

By mid-16th century the Ten Commandments formed the core of both Catholic and Protestant moral experience. The catechism, the little Red Book of that period, spelled out the ethical demands and priorities deriving therefrom. The major characteristics of this switch of regime are the verbalisation of moral experience and the return to a strict nomism. The Decalogue characterised Christian moral behaviour as „obedience to the commands of the Divine Legislator“ and gave a primacy of „explicitly verbalized“ moral awareness over other, especially visualised forms.⁹¹

In this new regime, sin was now conceived primarily as an offence against God, or rather, a deal with the Devil. In fact, the Devil gained a prestige which he had never had before in Christian history, and which is linked to the anxiety of the age. After the Reformation, the

⁸⁷ Institutes, II, ii, 19 p.238

⁸⁸ Institutes, II, ii, 24, p.243

⁸⁹ This conclusion is reached in Book II, vii, after a long, tedious discussion of free will.

⁹⁰ Institutes, II, vii, 12 (p.309)

⁹¹ Bossy, p.229.

anxiety reached its peak. „[U]ne culture de ‘chrétienté’ se sent menacée. [...] Les dirigeants de l’église et de l’Etat se trouvent plus que jamais devant la pressante nécessité d’identifier l’ennemi. C’est évidemment Satan qui mène avec rage son dernier grand combat avant la fin du monde.“⁹²

It should be noted that this change in the moral experience must be seen in the wider context of a growing social disciplinisation (Sozialdisziplinierung), conducted by both Catholic and reformed churches, which prefigured and later complemented the state’s efforts for disciplining the masses.⁹³

III.3. The second coming of nomism (2): the demise of casuistry, the psychologisation of conscience, and universal legality

The return to nomism implied by the adoption of the decalogue as the key moral reference point was initially attenuated by the wide-spread use of casuistry.⁹⁴ The delicate role of casuistry in Paul’s differentiation of moral experience was mentioned above. The danger of a relapse into a Pharisean-like regime loomed over casuistry from the very beginning. It was not foreseeable, however, that a new form of nomism, universal legality, would finally replace casuistry.

The one hundred years between Martin Azpilcueta’s Spanish edition of his *Enchiridion Confessariorum et Poenitentium* in 1556 and Pascal’s criticism of casuistry in his *The Provincial Letters* in 1656 were the heydays of casuistry. Casuists conceived moral reasoning in terms akin to Aristotle and Aquinas; moral considerations do not allow the certainty and exactness of *episteme* (science). They advised individuals in concrete situations and refrained from abstract judgements valid for all times and places. To reconcile the singularities of the circumstances with the infinite ethical demands of the Christian God, casuistry of this period produced a new screening device, to use the term advanced above, which consisted of three

⁹² Delumeau (1978), p.389.

⁹³ Cf. W.Reinhardt (1983), „Zwang zur Konfessionalisierung? Prolegomena zu einer Theorie des konfessionellen Zeitalters“, *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung*, vol.10, pp.257-277. Referring to a latent contradiction in G.Oestreich’s and N.Elias thesis of the emergence of the modern state, Reinhardt notes: „Wie ist absolutistische ‘Sozialdisziplinierung’ möglich, wenn dem ‘Staat’ der dazu erforderliche administrative Apparat nur in unzureichendem Umfang zur Verfügung steht und überdies lokale Autonomien die unmittelbare Beeinflussung der Untertanen durch die Zentrale erschweren? Ist doch bis heute nicht klar, in welchem Umfang die Preußen von der Maßnahmenflut ihres ‘Soldatenkönig’ überhaupt erreicht wurden. Meines Erachtens füllt die Kirche diese Lücke. Sie stellt ihren Apparat zur Verfügung und ermöglicht den Konsens der Betroffenen.“ (p.276-7)

⁹⁴ For the following account I am particularly indebted to A.R.Jonsen/S.Toulmin (1988), *The Abuse of Casuistry. A History of Moral Reasoning*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

elements. First, the thesis of 'probabilism' states, in the words of Bartolomeo Medina, the inventor of this doctrine, that „if an opinion is probable, it is licit to follow it, even though the opposite opinion is more probable.“⁹⁵ As heirs of medieval thought, casuists considered all moral judgement as probable opinion. By contrast to Aquinas, who believed that moral reasoning could arrive at „probable certitude“ which definitely selects one opinion over others by virtue of its verisimilitude, in the age of scepticism the 'probable' now came to mean 'plausible' or 'possibly true'. Thus, probabilism „asserts that a person who is deliberating about whether or not he is obliged by some moral, civil, or ecclesiastical law may take advantage of any reasonable doubt whether or not the law obliges him.“⁹⁶ Secondly, probable opinions were separated into two classes: those founded on excellent arguments were called 'intrinsically probable', and those founded on authority of wise men or the church were called 'extrinsically probable'. Thirdly, the Jesuit theologian Suarez added the notion of 'practical principles' which were employed in all cases of moral doubt. For instance, one such principle made the pertinence of a law in a concrete situation conditional on its proper promulgation. These maxims guide all moral deliberation, are valid in any moral matter, and ultimately serve the purpose of resolving speculative moral doubt into practical, 'probable' certainty.

All three elements taken together equipped casuists with a powerful means to give a ready answer to one of the chief moral problems of the time: how can practical assurance be achieved in an environment of extreme diversity of opinion?

I could not ascertain whether Jesuits recommended to their clients the prayer for the discernment of God's will which was analysed above. In the studies of casuistry I have consulted the reception of a charismatic impulse is never mentioned. It could be that the Jesuits reserved the more delicate spiritual discernment for people who were reasonably familiar with the Scriptures and were sufficiently sensitive for spiritual prayers; such a deliberate restraint of charismatic impulses could have many good reasons, such as the prophylactic avoidance of millenarianism and off-beat prophecy which besieged Europe, and could serve the order's self-interest because casuistry gave them more power on their clientele than the recommendation of personal prayer for private discernment.

Be this as it may, the grandeur of casuistry consists in having preserved some flexibility in the times of rising nomism by underscoring the importance of the singularities of

⁹⁵ quoted after Jonsen/Toulmin (1988), *The Abuse of Casuistry. A History of Moral Reasoning*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p.164

⁹⁶ A.R.Jonsen/S.Toulmin (1988), p.166.

circumstance, and protecting the intrinsic opaqueness of moral reasoning from science's claims of geometric exactness. However, casuistry came in disrepute in the first half of the 17th century. The main accusations, forcefully put forward by Pascal, were moral laxity and arbitrariness of judgement. Pascal also wanted more than probable assurance: „I am not satisfied with probability. I want certainty.“ (The Provincial Letters, letter V.) His criticism and demands carried the day; casuistry never recovered from this blow. The question then is what has replaced this procedure of moral reasoning and moral experience. I will follow H.D. Kittsteiner in arguing that „[c]asuistry goes out of fashion through a change in conscience itself.“⁹⁷

According to the scholastic conceptualisation at the root of casuistry, conscience is made up of three parts, *syneidesis*, *prudentia* and *conscientia*. Synderesis refers to man's disposition to choose the good and to innate principles of natural law. These principles of natural law enter into the major premise of the practical syllogism. *Prudentia* is the actual awareness of facts and circumstances of the particular situation on which the major premise is brought to bear. *Conscientia*, finally, the act of arriving at the conclusion of the practical syllogism. Two points are important for the mapping of the change. In the scholastic-casuistic view, conscience is *never merely internal* but provided a bridge with external authorities and ethical sources; the discernment of the divine will is mediated by the opinion of wise men, church tradition and so on. Scholastic-casuistic conscience is never one-sidedly interested only in salvation or only in practical necessities. Rather, it mediates between redemption and worldly domains; the most hotly debated casuistic arguments are about cases which bespeak this bipolarity. In the course of the demise of casuistry conscience was fully internalised and one-sidedly committed to bourgeois society which this new conceptualisation helped to bring about.

The Protestant ethos tended to strengthen the emphasis of the major premise, now formulated in the form of a prohibition, and to give less weight to circumstances. Beginning from mid-17th century, a new connection between moral reasoning and feeling made casuistry obsolete. For instance, to Rousseau conscience is nothing but a source of judgements grounded in feelings; conscience becomes internalised. In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* Adam Smith similarly discards casuistry and accords to feeling and sentiment the final moral

⁹⁷ H.-D. Kittsteiner (1988), „Kant and Casuistry“, in: E. Leites (ed.), op.cit., p.187.

judgement. He accuses them of attempting, „to no purpose, to direct by precise rules what it belongs to feeling and sentiment only to judge of.“⁹⁸

With regard to casuistry, Kant restamped the mode of moral deliberation in two fundamental ways. First, he considered the idea of duty and the *feeling* of awe (*Pflichtgefühl*) the inner springs of conduct of a better *future* society. Secondly, nomism is not anymore flexible case-law but takes the form of universal legality which ignores circumstances and exceptions; the formality of the categorical imperative leaves no space for particulars. The formality is geared to assure the major institution of bourgeois society: property. In Kant's famous example of the deposit this change is most apparent.⁹⁹ Kant proposes a practical case of an impoverished family father who administers a deposit whose rightful owner has passed away. This family father is a philanthropist; the legitimate inheritors do not know about this deposit, they have no chance to find out about it, live in abundance, and are utterly immoral creatures. Is the family father allowed to absolve himself from misery by selling the deposit to a third-party? Kant answers with a resounding 'no', because it is „unrightful (unrecht), i.e. it contradicts duty.“¹⁰⁰ This idea of duty must be inculcated by education in the service of a future, morally perfected society.¹⁰¹ By contrast, the old Carolingian codex, Catholic and Lutheran casuistry still contained exceptions for cases of misery. However, this flexibility of „[c]asuistry“, concludes Kittsteiner, „is incompatible with the erection of a bourgeois society grounded in justice and morality.“¹⁰²

Already before Kant and Rousseau, John Locke has radically transformed the conceptualisation of conscience, moral argument and action, respectively.¹⁰³ In fact, he drove the psychologisation of conscience much further. First, Locke vouched a fierce voluntarism and discarded scholastic intellectualism according to which good and evil are discernible by reason. Secondly, he attacked all theories of innatism which held that man is naturally disposed

⁹⁸ A. Smith (1976), *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Ed. D.D. Raphael et al. Oxford: Clarendon, p.339. The entire last section of this book (pp.227-342) are a criticism of casuistry. „The two useful parts of moral philosophy, therefore, are Ethics and Jurisprudence: casuistry ought to be rejected altogether.“ (p.340)

⁹⁹ Cf. I. Kant (1992[1773]), *Über den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.17 (A227)

¹⁰¹ Cf. Kant (1992[1773]), (A230); the awe of duty is the secularised holy shudder (heiliger Schauer) which lifts the individual to highest moral stature.

¹⁰² Kittsteiner, p.190.

¹⁰³ For the following I mainly draw on J. Tully (1993), „Governing conduct“, in: idem, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in contexts*. Cambridge: CUP, chap.6; J.C. Bidde (1976), „Locke's Critique of Innate Principles and Toland's Deism“, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, pp.411-422; Charles Taylor (1989), *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: CUP, chap.9 & 14.

to the good; Locke replaced this view by his own vision of a malleable mind. Finally, the notions of morally good and evil are psychologised: they are reduced to feelings of pleasure and pain resulting from externally imposed rules.

Locke adopts Pascal's interpretation of probability and departs drastically from Anglican casuistry. Probability is henceforth not a estimation of an argument's capacity to discern God's will but an epistemological measure of the pleasure and pain promised by an action. In Tully's reading, „Moral judgement involved in examination is an exercise in probable reasoning; of weighing the relative pleasures and pains of possible actions“.¹⁰⁴

However, Locke was far from discarding Christian revelation. By contrast to Deists of his time, he accorded to Christianity a central place in his moral philosophy. His advocacy of a belief in heaven and hell saves him from moral relativism. In fact, heaven and hell enter in his moral judgement and probable reasoning in a fundamental way. „These pleasures and pains infinitely outweigh all others, and this for every palate“.¹⁰⁵ Locke considers the prospect of a final divine judgement as fundamental for social cohesion; the calculation of these infinite pains assures law-abiding behaviour. Commenting on a passage of Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* (2.22.70), Tully concludes: „Heaven and hell are thus the 'true foundations' of morality because they outweigh all other pleasures and pains.“¹⁰⁶

Given Locke's idea that mind is a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, familiarity with heaven and hell cannot be presupposed. Consequently, Locke advocates indoctrination and repetition to impress this fundamental type of calculation on everybody's mind.

In many ways Locke's scheme prepared the decline and weakening of the Christian distinction of good and evil in Western moral conscience. The very idea of obedience has been completely severed from Christian love and trust. The only motivation to obey is avoidance of pain, and since hell threatens maximum pain God's will is observed. The relation of man and God is seen analogical to the relation between man and the new disciplinarian institutions. God's voice as such has no worth. His sanctity as such does not provoke self-examination and fear and trembling. In this scheme, the relevance of the Christian version of the difference good/evil is uniquely contingent upon the belief in a particularly gruesome interpretation of hell. However, as soon as this belief weakens, the Christian framing of the ethical problem is replaced by hedonism *tout court*. In fact, the 17th century marked the beginning of the decline

¹⁰⁴ Tully (1993), p.220.

¹⁰⁵ Tully, p.221.

¹⁰⁶ Tully, p.222.

of hell. „It was the slightly crazy chiliasts“¹⁰⁷ such as Mrs Lead and the Petersens who commenced to publicly preach against the eternity of hell and paved the way for the wholesale abandoning of this concept. Thinkers such as Leibniz and Malbranche kept their own thoughts about the non-existence of hell to themselves - for the sake of social cohesion.

Tully notes a second route through which the ethical quest for a discernment of good and evil gradually disappeared. Locke proffered a „simplified and austere neo-stoical Christianity“ in which „Gospels, training on Sundays, and practice“ are deemed sufficient for the moral education of the masses. This „renders casuistical authorities unnecessary. The final step in this direction, which played such an enormous role in the eighteenth century, is the argument *that there is not one right answer in any moral situation*, and that therefore god rewards effort and sincerity, not sophistication.“¹⁰⁸ The assertion of casuistic probabilism that several actions may be legitimate in one single situation was caricatured and finally turned against itself.

There is a related track through which Locke prepared the collapse of Christianity in Enlightenment discourse. Despite his many radical innovations, Locke was a typical representative of the wide-spread efforts of Restoration England to rationally vindicate the content of Christian revelation. John Spurr has recently argued that „the Restoration debate on ‘rational religion’ did produce a ‘rational’ vindication of revealed religion and yet, paradoxically, also helped to undermine confidence in the rationality of Christianity.“¹⁰⁹ This verdict holds true for Locke’s contributions to this debate, too. Indeed, Locke was eager to show that faith is compatible with his epistemology. Faith is the assent given to a revelation, and he claims that faith in the Christian revelation carries an assurance beyond all doubt. However, he never presents a full argument for this position. „Locke nowhere stated precisely how reason could judge something to be divine, nor did he ever offer a systematic case for the probability that the Christian Scriptures were a divine revelation. However, he assumed that such a judgement was possible and believed that the Scriptures were, indeed, of divine origin.“¹¹⁰ By phrasing the ‘reasonableness’ of Christian faith in terms of probabilities of propositions, Locke undermined the centrality of a personal relation of trust which faith had hitherto implied. And he linked the validity of faith to the epistemology of the day.

¹⁰⁷ D.P.Walker (1964), *The Decline of Hell. Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment*. London: Routledge&Kegan Paul, p.262.

¹⁰⁸ Tully, p.233, footnotes deleted.

¹⁰⁹ J.Spurr (1988), „‘Rational Religion’ in Restoration England“, *Journal of History of Ideas*, vol.49, pp.563-585, p.584.

¹¹⁰ Bidde (1976), p.416.

III.4. Reaction against enthusiasm: Burton, Newtonians and Locke

In the previous two sections I have traced the massive return of nomism and its transposition into a legality. In the course of this process, considerations of circumstances and the recourse to charismatic impulses became indirectly and gradually excluded from moral judgement. In this section, I will study a major *direct* attack on the recourse to charismatic impulses in moral deliberation, which had a permanent impact on modern moral thought. According to recent scholarship, the reaction against enthusiasm in 17th century England „caused the elite to change some of its religious attitudes“ and „implied a subtle but profound shift towards a more secular basis of the social order.“¹¹¹ The label ‘enthusiasm’ was a derogatory term for a very heterogeneous group of people, ranging from Catholics to radical Puritans, Quakers and antinomians, to the French prophets; occasionally, Descartes and Leibniz were subsumed under this heading, too. In one way or another, enthusiasts were criticised for claiming direct divine inspiration. Indeed, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, claims G.F.Nuttal, „received a more thorough and detailed consideration from the Puritans of seventeenth-century England than it has received at any other time in Christian history.“¹¹² To avoid misunderstandings, I do not see these so-called enthusiasts as the true heirs of Pauline charisma - far from it. Pauline charisma can only be received and articulated in a state of tension between ethical demands, recapitulated tradition and eschatological expectation. By any standards, Puritan Paracletes, antinomian libertines,¹¹³ had lost the Pauline balance.

„Yet, while ‘enthusiasm’ as such may be a dubious historical entity, the reaction to it is not. Indeed, the label reflects the attitudes of its users rather than describing any group which it purports to designate.“¹¹⁴ So, rather than making a dubious case for the religious qualities of enthusiasts, I am interested in the processes which excluded *in principle* any recourse toward charismatic impulses whatsoever. This suppression of charismatic impulses occurs in a founding moment of modern thought and belongs to the taken-for-granted of current moral philosophy. Three distinct lines of attack are of interest from this broader perspective: first, the psychologisation of religious experience by Robert Burton; secondly, the Newtonians’ linkage

¹¹¹ M.Heyd (1981), „The Reaction to Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth Century: Towards an Integrative Approach“, *Journal of Modern History*, vol.53, pp.258-280, p.273, p.280.

¹¹² G.F.Nuttal (1947), *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*. Oxford: Blackwell, p.viii.

¹¹³ Cf. C.Hill (1986), „Antinomianism in 17th-century England“, pp.162-184.

¹¹⁴ Heyd (1981), p.276.

of the new natural sciences with a philosophy of the social order; thirdly, Locke's theory of knowledge.

In the recent historical studies of this period, Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* is seen as the initiator of an entire tradition of Anglican polemic in which enthusiasm was explained in naturalist terms.¹¹⁵ Ecstatic visions, divination, and inspiration were increasingly reduced to melancholic affectations of the brain; aberrant vapors accounted for wild imaginations. Such explanations competed with older demonological accounts and gradually gained ground. Burton's influence on later critics of enthusiasm - Henry More and Jonathan Swift - has been proven. Michael Heyd has suggested that this psychologisation of religious experience changed the taken-for-granted background assumptions of moral discourse in a quite paradoxical way. Although the polemic served established Christianity in the short run, the long-run effects seem to have been self-defeating:

„When so-called 'enthusiasts' and other critics of the established Church who allegedly claimed direct divine inspiration were refuted not only by reference to theological arguments (the indispensability of scripture, the apostolic tradition, or even human reason), but on the basis of medical and psychological arguments, the debate, in a sense, was partly 'secularised' and the ideological foundation of the social order itself became more secular. Furthermore, the physiological and psychological analysis of enthusiasm, prophecy and 'false' inspiration could easily be applied to Christian inspiration in general, as the deists and other critics of Christianity were to prove in the eighteenth century.“¹¹⁶

Margret Jacob sees a similar change of the background at work in the latitudinarians' attempt to back-up 'natural religion' with the new mechanical philosophies. According to Jacob, „the most historically significant contribution of the latitudinarians lies in their ability to synthesize the operations of a market society and the workings of nature in such a way as to render the market society natural.“¹¹⁷ After the Glorious Revolution, the Newtonians used the Boyle lectureship to transmit their particular synthesis of natural religion and Newton's science. In this new vision, God governs the universe with harmonious laws of motion; any attack against the smooth running of the harmonious social order is against God's will. The prestige of Newton's science is used to sanction the social laws regulating capitalism. Religion

¹¹⁵ Cf. Heyd (1981), pp.266-271 and the vast literature compiled there.

¹¹⁶ M. Heyd (1984), „Robert Burton's sources on Enthusiasm and melancholy: From a medical tradition to religious controversy“, *History of European Ideas*, vol.5 (1), pp.17-44, p.17.

¹¹⁷ Jacob (1976), p.51.

justifies and crowns this order against all critics dissatisfied with their own performance in the emergent capitalist society. This new synthesis was incompatible with enthusiastic piety. The rejection of enthusiasm was part and parcel of the project, even though a pupil of Newton, Fatio de Duillier, came aligned with the enthusiastic 'French prophets' after their arrival in 1704. The only religious emotion acceptable to the synthesis was „one that served as a complement to the processes of the reasoning mind and to the workings of an ordered society.“¹¹⁸ This linkage of science, religion and social order survived well into 19th century.

However, this linkage proved fatal when Darwin successfully challenged the whole edifice of science-supported religion,¹¹⁹ and it could only prove fatal because the alliance between science and religion had changed the mode of interpretation of sacred texts. Again, religious institutions were coaxed into a discourse which initially served them well but finally discredited their legitimacy.

Finally, John Locke took up the challenge to find a way to eradicate „what he took to be the social evil of enthusiasm“¹²⁰ which was compatible with his political philosophy of religious tolerance. In his abstention from political persecution Locke distances himself from the establishment. However, he did not miss his chance to discredit the enthusiasts in a philosophical, epistemological argument. Indeed, the penultimate chapter of his *Essay on Human Understanding* is entirely dedicated to the alleged errors committed by enthusiasts who, in his description, „flattered themselves with a persuasion of an immediate intercourse with the Deity, and frequent communications from the Divine Spirit“.¹²¹

Locke's style is clear and sober. Yet, his argument lives from ambiguity. As a Christian, he retains at least nominally the belief in the possibility of direct impulses of the Holy Spirit¹²²; divine revelation exists even after the canonisation of the Scriptures. Furthermore, such revelations, which cannot be gained by reason alone, are always true. However, he does not give an answer to the burning question about the criteria of validity of revelation or charismatic impulses. Locke formulates this question quite well:

¹¹⁸ Jacob (1976), p.265.

¹¹⁹ Jacob (1976), p.16. The following interpretation is my own.

¹²⁰ N.Wolterstorff, „The Migration of the Theistic Arguments: From Natural Theology to Evidentialist Apologetics“, in: R.Audi/W.J.Wainwright (1986, eds.), *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment. New Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, pp.38-81, p.41.

¹²¹ J.Locke (1963), *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Vol.3 of Works. Reprint of edition from 1823.

Aalen, Scientia Verlag, book IV, xix, 5.

¹²² Cf. Locke, *Essay*, „In what I have said I am far from denying that God can or doth sometimes enlighten men's minds in the apprehending of certain truths, or excite them to good actions by the immediate influence and assistance of the Holy Spirit, without any extraordinary signs accompanying it.“ (*Essay*, IV, xix, 16 (p.158))

„But how shall it be *known* that any proposition in our minds is a truth infused by God: truth that is revealed to us by him, which he declares to us, and therefore we ought to believe?“¹²³

In his discussion of enthusiasm Locke plays down the optimism of the calculus of probability which he propounds in earlier sections of his Essay. Knowledge of the truth of a proposition, he now emphasises, can only be attained by „two ways“, „either by its own self-evidence to natural reason, or by the rational proofs that make it out to be so.“ (Book IV, xix, 11, p.154) An abyss begins to open up. On the one hand, there are the rules of reason and the instances of self-evident, certain knowledge. On the other hand, there is „ungrounded persuasion“, „fancy“, conceit. (xix, 11, p.154) The possibility to err is emphasised: nobody is exempt from it. It is not simply that a small number of people, easily identifiable by their sentimentality, are prone to misjudgement. „Good men are men still, liable to mistakes; and are sometimes warmly engaged in errors, which they take for divine truths, shining in their minds with the clearest light.“¹²⁴

Locke now asks again, „*how shall any one distinguish between the delusions of Satan and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost?*“ (xix, 13, p.155, emphasis added)

Locke's trick was never to answer this question. He confined himself to say the obvious: namely that a groundless persuasion, a feeling of warmth or light are insufficient for proper discernment. By dodging the question he could maintain all the scriptural assertions about the possibilities of prophecy, inspiration and discernment *and* discredit enthusiasm by moving the burden of proof to them.

From Locke onwards, a person claiming to receive charismatic impulses from the divine had to give not only good reasons for absolving him from the suspicion of conceit but reasons beyond doubt; such a person was invited to justify the content of the prophecy/charismatic impulse in the form of a discursive argument and reveal it as a necessary truth - which is impossible. The result was that the recourse to the agency of the Holy Spirit was expelled from moral discourse.

¹²³ *Essay*, IV, xix, 11, p.153

¹²⁴ *Essay*, IV, xix, 12, p.155

III.5. *The disappearance of the notion of evil*

By 1800 the Christian spiritual discernment of good and evil had been transformed beyond recognition. Considerations of circumstances and charismatic impulses had become irrelevant and inconceivable. Moral philosophy had moved to an abstract level of discourse. Nomism in the form of legality was fully installed and conscience psychologised. The screening device was narrowed down from a meditative reappropriation of tradition to either a test of universalisation or a utilitarian calculation. By cutting out the Holy Spirit from moral discernment, the symbolisation for articulating properly an ethical critique of excessive nomism had become impossible. By consequence, the transformation of casuistic nomism into the legality of universal rules and maxims was accelerated even more so that it had also become impossible to conceive moral life as in any way complex, non-heteronomous, and hazardous. On the foil of morality qua legality arises the presumption, rightly identified and criticised by MacIntyre, that „the ethical man has no great problems of interpretation once he has made his initial choice“ of universalisable moral principles.¹²⁵ The realm of the aesthetic arose as something opposed to or at least totally separate from morality.

The greatness of Nietzsche is that he was the first to recognise at least partly the travesty of Christianity which had been inherited to the 19th century. He was the first to see the connection between nihilism and a derailed Christianity. However, he failed to recognise that morality *qua* legality was a very recent conceptualisation of morality. He took legalised nomism to be the centre of Christian ethics. Hence, his criticism of morality *qua* legality became an attack of all morality. His aesthetised affirmation of the world is situated outside and beyond the difference of good and evil.

There have been several other important developments which added to the emergence of modern emotivism and decisionism. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to dwell on, for instance, Romanticism and the discovery of the concept of „Erlebnis“, emotional experience, which was ethically neutral and promised distance and freedom from the iron-cage.¹²⁶

I confine myself to mention one feature of popular moral experience which was exacerbated in the course of the last three centuries and gradually led Western subjectivity into nihilism: the disappearance of the notion of evil, which Alan Macfarlane considers one of the

¹²⁵ MacIntyre (1985), p.43.

¹²⁶ Cf. M. Praz (1970), *The Romantic Agony*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Praz studies the change of erotic sensibilities in 19th century literature.

„most extraordinary features of modern society.“¹²⁷ I have touched upon this theme in the discussion of Locke above. But since his days a qualitative change seems to have taken place which dislocates the moral experience of modern man of late 20th century from earlier epochs.

Evil as an abstract force has become generally inconceivable. Evil in the strong sense of the word has practically fallen out of everyday vocabulary. Today, it is difficult to conceive that Newton still believed in, and pronounced himself recurrently about, the Anti-Christ, but so he did, like most of his contemporaries.¹²⁸ Anthropological studies tell us that evil, the Evil One and evil beings belong to the furniture of nearly all densely populated agrarian societies. The presence of evil was a crucial ingredient in the moral experience of most periods of historical Christianity, with or without the Devil as the major focus. Why is this no longer possible for the average denizen of late post-industrial societies? Why is it that the acceptance of capricious fate triumphed over the psychologically more appealing notions of evil and anti-evil, or archaic notions of witchcraft and magic?

Fundamentally, Macfarlane argues, „capitalism and money order were fatally intertwined with an inability to distinguish good and evil.“¹²⁹ To begin with, the foundations of the modern capitalist society are based on „individual acquisitiveness, the love of money and pursuit of profit“ which are, „in the ethical terms laid down by formal theology, evil.“¹³⁰ On the other hand, the new economic order produced unprecedented wealth, which appeared good to most people. The economic realm did not simply emancipate itself from the ethical realm. Rather, it gained a moral character on its own with a notion of the public good defined in purely economic terms.¹³¹

Furthermore, as Georg Simmel has shown, money unsettles the hierarchical relation between ends and means and establishes a circular relation in which ends and means become indistinguishable. Money is experienced as an end; activities which outside the money order are experienced as ends in themselves are drawn into commercialisation and become means to the

¹²⁷ A. Macfarlane (1985), „The root of all evil“, in: D. Parkin (ed.), *The Anthropology of Evil*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 57-76, p. 57.

¹²⁸ C. Hill (1990), *Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England*. London: Verso, p. 1.

¹²⁹ Macfarlane, p. 74.

¹³⁰ p. 71.

¹³¹ Cf. J.-P. Dupuy (1978), „L'Économie de la Morale, ou la Morale de l'Économie. Philosophie politique et nouvelles approches épistémologiques“, *Revue d'économie politique*, n°3, pp. 404-439: „[I]l ne s'agit pas ici simplement de la consécration d l'émancipation de l'économie par rapport à l'éthique, mais de l'émergence d'une nouvelle notion de <bien>, spécifique à l'économique. [...] Il fallait donc reconnaître à l'économique un caractère moral propre, il fallait introduire une notion de bien public de nature purement économique. Dumont voit là le moment où naît l'idéologie de la croissance économique comme lieu où s'harmonisent les intérêts égoïstes dans le sens d'un bonheur toujours plus grand.“ (p. 406-7)

end of money. However, since money is also the most perfect means interchangeable to all ends, the hierarchy between definite ends and mere means is levelled down.¹³² It seems to me plausible to suggest that this confusion of ends and means is fatal for the organisation of moral experience around the difference good/evil because it eliminates or trivialises the problem of choosing ends.

The choice of ends and the permanent commitment to them is of the very essence of any ethical quest and it is this vowel of loyalty which becomes inconceivable for the ideal-typical representative of the money order. This personality-type lacks any substantial relation to the activity which procures him money; he can take on any job; his personality is not coloured by any commitment to a particular vocation or cause. Consequently, nothing can threaten this commitment which was never made. Evil was always experienced as a force which weakened loyalty and commitment to the 'good life', to a vocation, to God, to the unchallenged supreme end. The weaker the experience of commitment to a supreme end, the weaker the contrast-experience of evil. In general, the intensity of emotional life declines in metropolitan life with its exposure to an overload of stimuli,¹³³ which reinforces the incapacity for commitment to supreme ends. These processes may account for the disappearance of evil in the strong sense from everyday vocabulary.¹³⁴

Initially, the growing centrality of money was experienced as a source of confusion which inverts all moral standards. This is reflected in Shakespeare's famous passage from Timon of Athens according to which thus much of money „will make black white; foul, fair; wrong, right; base, noble; old, young; coward, valiant.“ Shakespeare continues prophetically: „This yellow slave will knit and break religions.“ (Act IV, sc.3) Later, apologists of the capitalist order, such as Bernard de Mandeville, justified the private vices with the public benefits allegedly accruing to all. It seems to me plausible that the tensions between individual ethical failure and contribution to the common good were ultimately accommodated by the reactivation of an old anti-Christian idea according to which good and evil are merely different sides of the same coin; both belong inseparably together and constitute each other. Mircea

¹³² Cf. G.Simmel (1977), *Philosophie des Geldes*. 7th ed. Berlin: Duncker&Humblot, p.482. For a broader discussion see Gianfranco Poggi (1993), *Money and the Modern Mind. Georg Simmel's Philosophy of Money*. Berkeley: University of California Press, chap.6.

¹³³ Cf. Simmel's classic treatment of this problem in his „Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben“, reprinted in: G.Simmel (1995), *Gesamtausgabe. Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1901-1908*. Vol.7. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, pp.116-131.

¹³⁴ In this environment, the mode of obeying state rules must change, too. Cf. William E.Connolly (1987), „Modern Authority and Ambiguity“, in: *Authority Revisited. Nomos* vol.29. New York: NYUP, pp.9-27.

Eliade has provided a rich survey of versions of this androgynous coincidentia oppositorum. It seems significant that in Goethe's *Faust* this idea is still voiced by the Devil¹³⁵ whereas German romanticists, above all Franz von Baader, heavily promoted such androgynous ideals on their own account.¹³⁶

In general, money combines, absorbs, and amalgamates contradictions and oppositions. Using Boehme's terminology, Simmel notes that money exhibits more than any other empirical thing the combination of throw (*Wurf*) and counter-throw (*Gegenwurf*)¹³⁷, of being means and end, of confounding having (*Haben*) and being.¹³⁸ Money thus has all the attributes of the sacred. The further money regulates human relations, the more the Christian differentiation of holiness from punishment is obliterated and the world repaganised.

IV. Outlook: Moral Philosophical Options

The first thing to be noticed is that current moral philosophy stands in headlong conflict with emotivism. Habermas calls it a pathology; MacIntyre has similar terms in store. However the various moral philosophical proposals to restore moral deliberation are antagonistic. Despite the apparent abyss between the diverse strands of debate, some attempts of reconciliation have come forward recently.

What is striking about recent attempts of reintegrating and reconciling the diverse strands of Western moral experience is the strong role attributed to the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* as a mediator between nihilism and objectivism or contextualism and universalism. Martha Nussbaum, among others, has reawakened Aristotelian practical reason for this purpose.¹³⁹

Paul Ricoeur has recently laid out perhaps the most promising and most sophisticated attempt of reconciling the Kantian universalisation with the communitarians' emphasis of particularistic traditions and historical contingences. In his scheme, the culturally contingent project of a good life and the corresponding 'naive', unreflected practical wisdom (*phronesis*)

¹³⁵ Faust asks Mephistoles to reveal his identity. Faust sees him as a 'liar', a 'destroyer' (*Verderber*). Mephistoles responds: „[I am] a part of this force which always wants evil and always creates the good.“ (Ein Teil von jener Kraft, Die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft. - *Faust I*, line 1335-6)

¹³⁶ M. Eliade (1962), *Méphistophélès et l'androgynie*. Paris: Gallimard Folio, p.145-8.

¹³⁷ Simmel (1977), p.451.

¹³⁸ Simmel (1977), p.347.

¹³⁹ Cf. M.C. Nussbaum (1986), „Non-scientific deliberation“, chap.10 of her *The fragility of goodness. Luck and ethics in Greek tragedy and philosophy*. Cambridge: CUP; idem (19), „The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian conception of private and public rationality“ in: her *Love's Knowledge. Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, chap.2.

is purified in a confrontation with the demands of universalisability. In moral judgements of concrete situations, however, conflicts and collisions of virtues may arise which are not dissolvable by tests of universalisability alone. In fact, aporias arise when the universalistic demands are actualised. For these situational moral judgements, Ricoeur proposes a recourse to 'convictions' which the subject has acquired in the course of her life in a particular culture. Convictions are the pivot of practical wisdom which had undergone several critical clarifications in the first movement. Because 'critical phronesis' „has crossed through so many meditations and so many conflicts the phronesis of moral judgment in situation is saved from any temptation of anomie."¹⁴⁰

Given this prominence of phronesis in recent discussions, it seems appropriate to conclude this essay with a comparison of the Christian spiritual discernment and Aristotelian phronesis, especially in their role of resolving situations of aporia. *Phronesis* is the capacity to mediate between the universal and the particular and to arrive at moral judgments in singular situations. MacIntyre claims that the New Testament lacks *phronesis* despite the similar teleological structure of its ethics. This study gives rise to doubt this general view. Although it is true that the term '*phronesis*' is not developed, the New Testament ethics, I suggest, has a practical wisdom which is to some extent equivalent to the Aristotelian phronesis. The mature Christian has acquired a '*sensum Christi*', a sensibility for carving up the world with the eyes of Christ and thinking in the Lord's terms; affections, feelings, aspirations, are moulded according to the example of Christ (cf. Phil. 2); the awareness for particulars has been sharpened and cultivated through meditations of parables. All this and other features make up the *pneumatikos*, who fulfills the preconditions for proper spiritual discernment and thus is the functional equivalent of the Aristotelian wise man. The mature Christian is endowed with practical wisdom. Spiritual discernment and phronesis are functionally equivalent but not the same.

The differences are threefold. First, it must be noted that the origin of Aristotelian phronesis lies in tragedy and it would be important to see how far Aristotle's phronesis has been critically distanced from this origin. At least in Nussbaum's rendition of Aristotelian ethics and phronesis, the tragic elements of a diversity of goods and the incommensurability of life projects is fully present and valorised. For Christian practical wisdom, this source of

¹⁴⁰ Ricoeur (1992), *Oneself as Another*. p.290. For an excellent discussion see C. Mandry (1998 forthcoming), „Ricoeur und Rawls. Zugleich ein Querschnitt durch Ricoeurs 'kleine Ethik'“, in: Würzburg.

conflicts cannot arise. There is a clear hierarchy of goods; service for the Kingdom of God, loyalty to Christ, is supreme. From Nussbaum's perspective, the Christian ethics is impoverished because it cherishes a absolutism of sorts.¹⁴¹ However, despite this, the Christian is recurrently confronted with non-trivial situational judgements. The source of ethical aporia is the impossibility to draw the infinity of God into the finite mind; the finite revelations are not full accounts of God's nature and God's will.

One consequence of Nussbaum's radical denial of a hierarchy of goods is the danger of empty situationalism. She responds to this criticism by saying that „perceiver [a kind of wise person] who improvises morally is doubly responsible: responsible to the history of commitment and to the ongoing structures that go to constitute her context; and especially responsible to these, in that her commitments are forged freshly on each occasion, in an active and intelligent confrontation between her own history and the requirements of the occasion.¹⁴²

This brings us to the second major difference. *Phronesis* is a capacity of the individual alone. There is no third agency to take recourse to for solving moral conflicts. However much the *phronimos* may owe to *Sittlichkeit*, in the end of the day he judges alone. In last analysis, *phronesis* entails a radical historicity, finitude, and contingency. By contrast, the Christian spiritual discernment lives from a support by the Holy Spirit; the Spirit's charismatic impulses save the individual from antinomies. Furthermore, the belief that the Holy Spirit acts throughout history reconnects the past to the present and links Christians from diverse particularistic backgrounds. The God who has revealed himself in History is the same that issues impulses for the contemporary dilemmas. On the one hand, this belief saves the Christian of an alienation from the past; the flux of being is History and not a chain of chance processes. On the other hand, past human encounters with God have left a trace of a series of spiritual discernments which belong to the basis of the single Christian's ethical commitments in the present.¹⁴³

The third difference is related to the relevance of morality in the first place. Why care about the other, mind obligations and observe duties? Nietzsche's criticism goes even further. Indeed, one of his achievements was to challenge the idea of a common morality as such.

¹⁴¹ Nussbaum (1986), writes (against Plato): „A world in which wealth, courage, size, birth, justice are all put into the same scale and weighed together, made in their nature functions of a single thing, will turn out to be a world without any of these items, as now understood. And this, in turn, looks likely to be an impoverished world: for we value these items enough in their separateness not to want to trade them all in.“ (p.296)

¹⁴² Nussbaum (1990), p.94.

¹⁴³ Cf. T.Guarino (1993), „Between Foundationalism and Nihilism: Is *phronesis* the *via media* for theology?“, *Theological Studies*, vol.54, pp.37-54.

According to his genealogy, the Jewish-Christian morality differs radically from 'natural' morality, certainly from Dionysian lust of 'life'. Girard's fundamental anthropology confirms the claim of the specificity of the Christian way of conceiving good and evil and eliciting obedience. By contrast, Ricoeur justifies his deliberate bracketing of Christian faith from his meditations with the assertion that „there is no such thing as a Christian morality, except perhaps on the level of the history of mentalités, but a common morality (one that I attempt to articulate in the three studies devoted to ethics, morality, and practical wisdom)“. Biblical faith merely sets this common morality in a „new perspective, in which love is tied to the 'naming of God'“.“¹⁴⁴ Consequently, Ricoeur is not interested in Christian moral deliberation because it can only be a sub-class of the general form of *phronesis*. However, for all those readers for whom the difference between good and evil seems less self-evident, less commonly available and more contingent on cultures, convictions, and faith, the difference between Christian and other forms of moral deliberation will appear more significant. And for all those who have taken the full cup of nihilism and deconstructionism, the acknowledgement of the Holy Spirit will seem less unjustifiable and contrary to science than it seemed to precedent generations.

¹⁴⁴ Ricoeur (1992), p.25.



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