# René Girard's Scapegoat and Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer*: The Asymmetry of the Sacred Victim and its Implications

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## Introduction: Sacred Victims and their Political-Theological Implications

In the heyday of Victorianism, Scottish orientalist and theologian William Robertson Smith (1846-1894) developed "the theory of the ambivalence of the sacred" in his *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1889). According to this theory, there is a close connection between violence and the sacred. Exemplary of this close connection is the Latin term *sacer,* which means "sacred" and "accursed." French American anthropologist René Girard (1923-2015) and Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1942) revive the theory of the ambivalence of the sacred in their discussion of a *sacred victim*. Girard discusses his sacred victim, the *scapegoat,* in his *mimetic theory*, while Agamben discusses his sacred victim, the *homo sacer,* in his *political philosophy*. Even though Girard's mimetic theory and Agamben's political philosophy have a completely different emphasis, some contemporary scholars note remarkable similarities between Girard's mimetic theory and Agamben's political philosophy, especially concerning their *sacred victims*. Nevertheless, the differences between Girard's mimetic theory and Agamben's political philosophy cannot be ignored. Especially their divergent political and theological prospects deserve more attention. Whereas Girard relates his political and theological prospects to Christian revelation, Agamben connects his political and theological prospects to a philosophical reading of St. Paul. However, despite their different political and theological prospects, they both situate their political and theological prospects against the background of Judeo-Christian concepts like *messianism, revelation* and *apocalypticism*. Therefore, whereas the divergence between Girard's and Agamben's political and theological prospects complicates the comparison between the two thinkers, their remarkable similarities invoke further analysis. This back-and-forth comparison between Girard and Agamben results in some remarkable insights concerning the essential structures of human life, e.g., politics, metaphysics, violence, and religion. Therefore, a comprehensive exploration of the Girard-Agamben nexus is necessary

This research article critically analyses the differences and similarities between Girard and Agamben. Based on this critical analysis, it will become clear that Girard's and Agamben's political and theological prospects can be retraced to a fundamental difference concerning the ontological conceptualisation of *the sacred*. Girard's and Agamben's definition of their sacred victims – the element that initiated the Girard-Agamben nexus in the first place – reveals this fundamental difference. Whereas Girard defines his sacred victim (*scapegoat*) as unkillable and sacrificeable, Agamben defines his sacred victim as killable and unsacrificeable (*homo sacer*). This asymmetrical formulation of their sacred victims indicates a radically different understanding of the sacred. Therefore, the research question arises: "*What does the above-mentioned asymmetry mean for Girard's and Agamben's comprehension of the sacred and the sacred victims, and what are the implications of this comprehension for Girard's and Agamben's political and theological prospects?*"

To formulate an answer on this research question, several elements must be discussed. First, it will be necessary to understand the basics of Girard's *mimetic theory* and Agamben's *political philosophy*. Therefore, I will briefly introduce the core concepts of their theories. This introduction will demonstrate that Girard and Agamben both thematise violence and the sacred. Moreover, it introduces this "thematisation of violence and the sacred" as *the* common denominator between Girard and Agamben. Then, I will summarise and discuss the relevant secondary literature to form the *status quaestionis* of this article. This in-depth exploration of the secondary literature will explicate the similarities and differences between Girard and Agamben. Furthermore, it will reveal the first indications of Girard's and Agamben's fundamental difference. Following, I will explicate this difference between Girard and Agamben with the help of secondary literature. After discussing the fundamental difference between Girard and Agamben, I will discuss how this difference affects their theological and political prospects. This will demonstrate that the core of Girard's and Agamben's different conceptualisation of the sacred reflects in their diverging political and theological prospects. Finally, I will formulate an answer to the research question while arguing that Girard's and Agamben's different conceptualisation of the sacred does not obstruct the Girard-Agamben nexus. Instead, the Girard-Agamben nexus is still in its early days, and the remarkable similarities and differences between Girard's and Agamben's theories deserve further exploration.

## Girard, Agamben, and their Sacred Victims

The concept of *mimesis* is not original to René Girard. Plato and Aristotle already discussed this concept. Yet, Girard's systematic development of mimetic theory is unparalleled. The fundamental concepts of Girard's mimetic theory are (1) *mimetic desire,* (2) *mimetic rivalry,* (3) *mimetic crisis,* (4) *the scapegoat mechanism*, and (5) *biblical revelation and apocalypse*. The difficulty of Girard's theory is that these fundamental principles do not necessarily follow each other in a strict causal fashion but are posed as a structure of interrelated presumptions and hypotheses.

In 1961, Girard introduced the first principles of his *mimetic theory.*[1] In his work *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, Girard analyses classic novels, e.g., Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Proust, and Dostoyevsky, and claims that these novels describe desire as *triangular* because the subject desires an object through a model of mediation.[2] In other words, human beings "desire according to the other."[3] The other is the model of our desires. Whereas triangular desire is the accurate way to describe the nature of desire, Girard refers more frequently to *mimetic desire.* Mimetic desire can be directed at objects or can be directed "metaphysically" as a desire for *being*. Often these two "forms" of desire intermingle, in which the "metaphysical" character of desire becomes dominant. Therefore, desire easily becomes *metaphysical desire.* However, the problem of metaphysical desire is that it is not about possessing a specific object but about the act of desiring itself. In the extremity of metaphysical desire, a problem arises. If desire is triangular and metaphysical, "the other," our model, can become an obstacle to our desires because the desired objects cannot be shared or achieved, e.g., social or sexual desires:

> As the role of the metaphysical grows greater in desire, that of the physical diminishes in importance. As the mediator draws nearer, passion becomes more intense and the object is emptied of its concrete value. If we are to believe the romantics and neoromantics, the results

[1] Girard's devoted his life to the development and exploration of the *mimetic theory*. He introduces the basic principles of this theory in his book *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (1961). In *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), he extends the claims of his work to the study of sacrifice, myths, and religion. In *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (1978), Girard reflects, extends, explains, and summarizes his theory, and connects it to Biblical revelation. This is just a short overview of some of Girard's works. For a more complete overview of René Girard's mimetic theory please see: Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*.

[2] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel : Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 2.

[3] Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 5.

> of an ever greater triumph of the imagination can only be good. But as reality diminishes, the rivalry which engenders desire is inevitably aggravated.[4]

Therefore, the inevitable consequence of mimetic and metaphysical desire is *mimetic rivalry*. In *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), Girard connects his concepts of desire to anthropological examples to support his hypotheses. Central to this book is Girard's discussion of the Oedipus myth and the function of sacrifice. According to Girard, rivalry is not limited to individuals but functions as an imitative structure; this means that people can imitate each other's rivalries. If people imitate each other's rivalries, rivalry spreads exponentially through society like an infectious disease, causing a (*mimetic*) *crisis*.[5] In the state of exponentially increasing rivalry, the existence of society is threatened by a violent collapse as rivalrous and violent trends spread through every corner of societal life. Violence demands an escape; the crowd demands a victim. Therefore, society must "channel" its violence. A way to channel violence is that society seeks a relatively indifferent victim, a *scapegoat*, and deflects upon it the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members.[6] In the collective act of sacrifice, the scapegoat represents the "negative elements of mimesis" by representing society's violence, and the positive elements of mimesis, through the reconciliatory effect of sacrifice. Sacrifice has a (temporally) reconciliatory effect because people can imitate each other's reconciliation as well as each other's rivalry. To put it differently, societies' individual rivalries are portrayed on the scapegoat that establishes a shared rivalry against a single victim, the "all-against-one structure." Thus, the scapegoat represents both the negative and positive elements of desire; it is both "accursed" and "sacred."[7]

Agamben's *political philosophy,* and his metaphysics underlying this political philosophy, are completely different from Girard's mimetic theory. Whereas Girard was concerned with mimesis, literature, and anthropology, Agamben embeds his theory in the heart of Aristotelian metaphysics. According to Agamben, modernity derives from an ontological imbalance caused by the prioritisation of the metaphysical entity *actuality* (the things that *are*) over *potentiality* (the things that *could be*). Exemplary in this regard is the idea of essentialism (everything has a predetermined essence)

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[4] Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 85.

[5] The concept of *mimetic crisis* appears for the first time in Girard's *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*. In *Violence and the Sacred,* Girard does refer to a "social crisis" and a "sacrificial crisis."

[6] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 4.

[7] Girard's concept of *double transference* "explains" the two elements of sacrifice. Girard introduces this claim in *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World, 37-38, 46, 78*. Also see Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 153,82,89,266-67,88.

versus existentialism (existence precedes essence), or even more simplified: the prioritisation of actuality over potentiality causes a reduction of potentiality and the reduction of human potential. This ontological imbalance is also referred to as a "violent ontology." To understand why this ontological imbalance is violent, Agamben's political philosophy comes into play.[8]

In the introduction of *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995), Agamben points out that the Greeks used two terms to express human life: *zoē* the natural state of human life (which for convenience's sake can be understood as the metaphysical term potentiality) and *bios* the political state of human life (which for convenience's sake can be understood as the metaphysical term actuality).[9] According to Agamben, modernity increasingly incorporates natural life (*zoē*) into the sphere of political life (*bios*); the philosophical term biopolitics characterises this process. Agamben even argues that incorporating natural life into political life is *the* original activity of political life.[10] Translated to metaphysical terminology, this means that the "dominance" of actuality over potentiality is *the* original activity of actuality. The problem with this imbalance is that actuality "determines" objects even if these objects do not exist in actuality. In Agamben's political terminology, one could say that natural life (*zoē*) is incorporated into political life (*bios*) and completely subjected to it. Hence the metaphysical and political constellations (*zoē/bios*) are in unbalance, which causes violent structures, e.g., the political extreme of *actuality* is *sovereign power,* and the political extreme of *potentiality* is *bare life.*

For Agamben, the ancient Roman figure of the *homo sacer* represents these political concepts. The *homo sacer* is a sacred victim who can be killed without impunity but cannot be sacrificed. This means that the *homo sacer* is incorporated into political life – it is a juridical concept, and the killing of the *homo sacer* goes unpunished by law – while the law or the juridical sphere does not protect it. On the contrary, the *homo sacer* can be killed because it is included in a political sphere while being excluded from human law (which controls, protects, and regulates civil life) and divine law (which

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[8] In *The Idea of Prose* (1987), Agamben's expresses his endeavour to "deconstruct" fixed concepts to a free "potentiality." This idea is present in his early works and remains present in his philosophical project. Related works are *Language and Death,* (1982), *Infancy and History* (1993), *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* (1999), and *Profanations* (2007). For a general overview of Agamben's theory please see: Leland De la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben : A Critical Introduction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009). Concerning Agamben's idea of *potentiality* and its connection to *sovereign power* please see De la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 1-25, 81-110, 21-44, 56-83, 200-38.

[9] Giorgio Agamben, "Homo Sacer : Sovereign Power and Bare Life," in *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 5.

[10] Agamben, "Homo Sacer," 9.

controls, protects, and regulates sacrifice).[11] In other words, the *homo sacer* is incorporated into political life while existing as an exclusion from this political life, entirely subjected to sovereign power, the extreme inevitable form of political life.[12] In this regard, the *homo sacer* exists excluded from the pure realms of *zoē* (potentiality) and *bios* (actuality) and is included in a third (ontological) realm, the realm of *sovereign power* and *bare life*. A clarification of this abstraction and an example of a *homo sacer* is the relationship between the master and the slave. The relationship between the master and the slave demonstrates that the natural life of the slave (*zoē*) is incorporated into the political life (*bios*) of the master. The slave is subjected to the master's life, and only the master is a part of political life (*bios*). However, even though the slave is the condition for the master's political life, the slave is excluded from it while completely subjected to it. The slave's relation to political life (*bios)* is wholly negative. Therefore, the slave is incorporated into the political life of the master via its exclusion, and the master holds absolute (*sovereign*) power over the (*bare*) life of the slave.

Via this introduction, it becomes clear that Girard's mimetic theory is quite different from Agamben's political philosophy. Girard focused on sacrifice, novels, and anthropology, whereas Agamben focussed on political philosophy, metaphysics, and law. Furthermore, Agamben's *homo sacer* exists at the intersection between human and divine law, representing the metaphysical and political paradox central to his philosophy, while Girard's *scapegoat* exists at the intersection between the positive and negative elements of desire. Nevertheless, both describe an (enigmatic, paradoxical, or ambiguous) sacred victim at the heart of their theory. This apparent similarity between Girard and Agamben concerning "the thematisation of violence and the sacred" is increasingly pointed out by contemporary scholars. This makes us wonder whether a Girard-Agamben nexus is possible despite the differences between Girard and Agamben.

## The Girard-Agamben Nexus

Unfortunately, pertinent literature on the Girard-Agamben nexus is slim. Thus far, eleven pertinent articles on the Girard-Agamben nexus have been published.[13] The

[11] Agamben, "Homo Sacer," 70.
[12] Agamben, "Homo Sacer," 71-72.
[13] An overview of the articles that remain undiscussed in this section. (1) Andrew Pump, "Aids and Sacrifice: A Discussion of René Girard's Scapegoat Theory of Sacrifice, Jean-Luc Nancy's Unsacrificeable, and Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer," *Ottawa Journal of Religion* (2010). (2) Kristof K.P. Van houtte, "Oh God! What a Lovely War: Giorgio Agamben's Clausewitzian Theory of Total/Global (Civil) War," *RSR Sotsiologicheskoe Obozrenie / Russian Sociological Review* 14, no. 4 (2015). (3) A. W. Bartlett,

first scholar to introduce the Girard-Agamben nexus was Rey Chow (2006). In his article "Sacrifice, Mimesis, and the Theorizing of Victimhood (A Speculative Essay),"[14] Chow connects and compares Girard's "sacrificial logic" to Agamben's "theory of sacrifice." In this regard, Chow connects Girard and Agamben via their thematisation of violence and the sacred, or more specifically, their "sacrificial logic."

In 2007, Christopher A. Fox continued the exploration of the Girard-Agamben nexus by discussing Girard's and Agamben's political prospects. In his article "Sacrificial pasts and messianic futures: Religion as a political prospect in René Girard and Giorgio Agamben,"[15] Fox presents the difficulties of Girard's apocalypticism and Agamben's messianism within the problematic political paradox of Carl Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction. Fox argues that Girard dispenses the political and assimilates it to religion, while Agamben puts religion in the service of the political; thereby, Agamben reshapes politics and escapes Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction, while Girard falls for ideological temptations and remains captured in this distinction. In this exploration, Fox notes a fundamental difference between Girard's and Agamben's approaches to politics and religion. This is the first indication that the differences between Girard's and Agamben's political and theological prospects may concern a more fundamental disagreement.

Following Fox's account is Colby Dickinson's article (2011).[16] Dickinson connects Girard's mimetic theory to Agamben's metaphysical state of pure potentiality (a state in which the metaphysical concepts of actuality and potentiality are in balance rather than imbalance) and Walter Benjamin's concept of "pure gesture."[17] Dickinson claims that Benjamin's concept of "pure gesture," which is so influential for Agamben's philosophy, is similar to Girard's non-mimesis. Therefore, he compares and equates Agamben's political and theological project with Girard's. Hence, Dickinson equates Girard's mimetic theory to the metaphysical-ontological context of Agamben's political philosophy via Benjamin's concept of *gesture*. By connecting Girard's "ultimate end" to Agamben's "ultimate end," Dickinson strengthens the

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"Girard's Lost Time: Messianic Temporality in Things Hidden," *Contagion J. Violence Mimesis Cult. Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 21 (2014).

[14] R. Chow, "Sacrifice, Mimesis, and the Theorizing of Victimhood (a Speculative Essay)," *REPRESENTATIONS*, no. 94 (2006).

[15] A. Fox Christopher, "Sacrificial Pasts and Messianic Futures : Religion as a Political Prospect in René Girard and Giorgio Agamben," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 33, no. 5 (2007).

[16] Colby Dickinson, "Beyond Violence, Beyond the Text: The Role of Gesture in Walter Benjamin and Giorgio Agamben, and Its Affinity with the Work of René Girard," *The Heythrop Journal* 52, no. 6 (2011).

[17] Dickinson, "Beyond Violence, Beyond the Text," 957-58.

possibility of a Girard-Agamben nexus. Unfortunately, he does not pay (enough) attention to the fundamental difference pointed out by Fox.

Brian Sudlow's article "Girard, Agamben, and the Life that does not Live" (2012)[18] is more sensitive concerning Girard's and Agamben's fundamental difference. In this article, Sudlow explores the *bare life* of Agamben's *homo sacer* and connects it to Girard's anthropology. Sudlow concludes that Girard's anthropological account is open to a transcendental element beyond the realms of sacred and profane, which is not present in Agamben's account. Although this difference is implicitly present in Dickinson's account, Sudlow explicates it by juxtaposing Girard's transcendental *surtranscendence de l'amour* with Agamben's "intra-anthropic philosophy." This apparent split is the second indication of a fundamental disagreement between Girard and Agamben. For Girard, there is a "beyond the sacred," whereas this is not the case for Agamben.

This latter point is explicated in Lyle Enright's "Divine but not Sacred: A Girardian Answer to Agamben's *The Kingdom and the Glory*" (2019).[19] Enright juxtaposes Agamben's secularist (political) theological prospect with Girard's transcendentalist (divine) theological prospect. He clarifies that there is a difference between Girard's sacred and divine. According to him, Agamben and Girard both comprehend the sacred as a political, anthropological, or even social structure, but he emphasises that for Girard there is something beyond the sacred. Something *divine* rather than *sacred*. Therefore, Girard draws a distinction that Agamben does not. Here the difference between Girard's transcendentalist political and theological prospect and Agamben's immanent political and theological prospect reaches its climax. Even though these authors note this ontological difference, they do not (sufficiently) "retrace" it to the core of Girard's and Agamben's theories. In this regard, three other articles prove to be adequate.

Frederiek Depoortere's "Reading Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* with René Girard" (2012),[20] "Antonio Cerella's "The Myth of Origin: Archaeology and History in the Work of Agamben and Girard" (2016),[21] and Pierpaolo Antonello's "Sacrificing

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[18] Brian Sudlow, "Agamben, Girard and the Life That Does Not Live," in *Intensities: Philosophy, Religion, and the Affirmation of Life*, ed. Steven Shakespeare and Katharine S. Moody (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).
[19] Lyle Enright, "Divine but Not Sacred: A Girardian Answer to Agamben's the Kingdom and the Glory," *Contagion: Journal of Violence Mimesis and Culture* 26 (2019).
[20] Frederiek Depoortere, "Reading Giorgio Agambens Homo Sacer with René Girard," *Philosophy Today* 56, no. 2 (2012).
[21] Antonio Cerella, "The Myth of Origin: Archaeology and History in the Work of Giorgio Agamben and René Girard," in *Genealogies of Political Modernity* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

*Homo Sacer:* René Girard's Reads Giorgio Agamben" (2019),[22] directly compare Girard's mimetic theory to Agamben's political philosophy. In this regard, Depoortere reconciles Agamben's political-juridical account with Girard's anthropological account. According to Depoortere, Girard's and Agamben's complementarity concerning their sacred victims exists in Agamben's lack of anthropological evidence and Girard's lack of (political) philosophical argumentation. Cerella's inquiry demonstrates the complementarity between Girard and Agamben based on their "archaeological methodology." According to him, Girard and Agamben share "the quest for origin" in their "archaeology of the sacred." In this inquiry, he notes the similarities between Girard's and Agamben's anthropological arguments, i.e., the development of politics, law, language, rituals, etcetera. In 2019, Antonello affirmed these findings and compared Girard's mimetic theory and Agamben's more recent notions of *causa* and *culpa* from Agamben's book *Karman: A Brief Treaty on Action, Guilt, and Gesture* (2017).

In these three articles, Depoortere, Cerella, and Antonello trace Girard's transcendentalism and Agamben's immanence to more fundamental elements in their theories. In this regard, Depoortere situates the differences between Girard's scapegoat and Agamben's *homo sacer* in their response to "the theory of the ambivalence of the sacred." Cerella continued this exploration with Girard's and Agamben's "archaeology of sacred." In this regard, Cerella notes the difference between Girard's archaeology of the "sacrificial mechanism" and Agamben's archaeology of political ontology. Here, the difference between Girard's ontological conception of the sacred and Agamben's ontological conception of the sacred is discussed against the archaeological component of their theories. In Antonello's article, this archaeological component is made explicit in discussing the development of law, sacrifice, and the constitution of the sacred. Antonello explicates Girard's and Agamben's disagreement concerning the sacred. According to Antonello, Girard understands the sacred as the "mechanism" of the world and the Christian truth as the transcendental truth that reveals this violent mechanism. Agamben, on the contrary, understands Christianity as another dominant political paradigm.[23] In this regard, the political-theological divergence noted by the first four authors turns to the more fundamental discussion of the archaeology of the sacred and the sacred victims against the background of the theory of the ambivalence

[22] Pierpaolo Antonello, "Sacrificing Homo Sacer: René Girard Reads Giorgio Agamben," *forphil Forum Philosophicum* 24, no. 1 (2019).
[23] Antonello, "Sacrificing Homo Sacer," 172.

of the sacred. Therefore, a thorough exploration of Girard's and Agamben's sacred and their sacred victims is appropriate to explore whether, or how, the difference between Girard's and Agamben's political and theological prospects is present in the essential structures of their theories; the very facets from which the Girard-Agamben nexus was drawn in the first place.

**The Ambivalence of the Sacred and the Sacredness of Sacred Victims**

To understand the context of Girard's and Agamben's sacred victims and the (ontological) sphere of the sacred – which seems to be the ground of their fundamental difference – it is necessary to discuss the theory of the ambivalence of the sacred, the background to which Girard and Agamben present their sacred victims.

The theory of the ambivalence of the sacred was introduced by William Robertson Smith in his *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*. Robertson Smith's theory significantly impacted Victorian scholars and French sociology. Furthermore, it was gratefully used by Sigmund Freud for his psychoanalytic anthropology in *Totem and Taboo* (1913). According to Robertson Smit (and Freud), the ambivalence of the sacred derives from the spheres of taboos. Taboos mark rules and prohibitions. By classifying something as a taboo, it becomes separated and allocated to the realm outside the normal social order; the sacred. Thus, what has been placed outside the social order marks something adored and repelled, holy and unholy. Some linguistic concepts support this theory of ambivalence. For example, the Latin root *sacer*. This root means both "sacred" and "accursed." Other examples are the Greek *pharmakon* (meaning "remedy," "poison," and "scapegoat") or the German *Gift* (meaning "gift" and "poison.")

Interestingly, Girard and Agamben introduce their sacred victims against the background of this theory. Although Girard and Agamben introduce their sacred victim against this theory's background, they disagree on how to respond to it. While Girard notes that the theory of the ambivalence of the sacred points "out a problem that remains to be solved,"[24] Agamben rejects this theory altogether and labels it a "scientific mythologeme," the product of the psychologization of religious experience."[25] Thus, whereas Girard is engaging with this theory, Agamben rejects it and the authors affiliated with advocating it – perhaps this explains, as Antonello notes,

[24] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 1.
[25] Agamben, "Homo Sacer," 64.

Agamben's silence on Girard.[26] Girard's and Agamben's different responses to the theory of the ambivalence of the sacred result in an asymmetrical definition of their sacred victims and different conceptualisations of the sacred.

For Girard, the sacred is the anthropological projection of a *double transference* upon the victim.[27] This *double transference* exists in the negative mimesis of the victim (the victim represents society's mimetic violence) and the positive mimesis of the victim (the victim represents society's mimetic reconciliation).[28] In this regard, the sacredness of the sacred victim derives from the victim's double inclusion of positive and negative "energy." Antonello notes that Girard's "pharmacological" (i.e., ambiguous) interpretation of the scapegoat provides an anthropological explanation for the sacredness of the sacred victim.[29] Agamben, on the other hand, must find a different way of explaining the sacredness of the *homo sacer* because he rejects the theory of the ambivalence of the sacred. Therefore, he cannot use ambiguity to explain the sacredness of the *homo sacer*. Hence, Agamben explores the political-juridical background of the *homo sacer*. In this regard, he notes that the *homo sacer,* a figure of ancient Roman law, is characterised by a double exclusion. The *homo sacer* is excluded from human law (*ius humanum*) and divine law (*ius divinum*).[30] Therefore the question is in what the sacredness of the *homo sacer* exists?

> Subtracting itself from the sanctioned forms of both human and divine law, this violence *opens a sphere of human action* [my emphasis] that is neither the sphere of *sacrum focere* [my emphasis] nor that of *profane action* [my emphasis]. This sphere is precisely what we are trying to understand here. We have already encountered a limit sphere of human action that is only ever maintained in a relation of exception. This sphere is that of the sovereign decision, which suspends law in the state of exception and thus implicates bare life within it.[31]

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[26] Antonello, "Sacrificing Homo Sacer," 152.
[27] Antonello, "Sacrificing Homo Sacer," 153-54.
[28] Antonello, "Sacrificing Homo Sacer," 154.
[29] In "Reading Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer with René Girard," Frederiek Depoortere compared Girard's "pharmacological" interpretation of the sacred victim with Agamben's juridical-political interpretation of the *homo sacer*. Concerning this issue Depoortere claims that Girard explains the ambivalence of the sacred, whereas Agamben rejects it without solving the matter. "In this way, Girardian theory offers us a mechanism that explains the ambivalence of the sacred and not merely presupposes it (as twentieth-century) theorists have, as mentioned by Girard at the outset of *Violence and the Sacred,* most often done). The ambivalence of the sacred becomes intelligible when we understand that the sacred comes into being through externalising violence, by dehumanising it and turning it into a transcendent power. This power is subsequently experienced as both the source of violence and the source of peace. As the source of violence, the sacred is maleficent (and thus to be feared); as the source of peace it is beneficent.)" Depoortere, "Reading Giorgio Agambens Homo Sacer with René Girard," 161.
[30] Agamben, "Homo Sacer," 70.
[31] Agamben, "Homo Sacer," 70.

Thus, according to this quote, the *homo sacer* exists in a "sphere of human action" that is neither sacred nor profane and is characterised by *sovereign power* and *bare life*. In this case, the sacredness of the *homo sacer* derives from his incorporation into this third sphere beyond human and divine law. To understand how this incorporation through double exclusion works, the earlier discussed examples of the master and the slave comes to mind.

The slave was excluded from participation in political life while being the condition for the political life of the master. Therefore, the slave is included in political life precisely because of its exclusion. The same logic applies to the *homo sacer*. The life of the *homo sacer* is *bare* because the *homo sacer* is excluded from human and divine law and thereby included in the sphere of *sovereign power* and *bare life*. In this realm, the sovereign decides on life and death and rules over the bare life of the *homo sacer*. Thus, the sacredness of the *homo sacer* exists in its incorporation into this third ontological sphere. According to Agamben, the logic of inclusion via exclusion explains the obscurity of the sacred victim in Roman law and the ambiguous definition of the sacred victim. Antonello concludes from Agamben's words that this ambiguity must result from an autonomous figure located in a zone prior to the distinction between religious and juridical.[32] In other words, the sacredness of the *homo sacer* derives from a confusion between the religious and the juridical, in which human life is reduced to complete subjection to sovereign power.[33] So, whereas Girard's scapegoat appears ambiguous because of a double inclusion ("included in the realm of the human" via its representation of human violence and "included in the realm of the divine" via its reconciliatory effects), Agamben's *homo sacer* exists as an inclusion via a double exclusion into a third ontological sphere.

Girard's and Agamben's different definition of the sacredness of the sacred victims translates into an asymmetrical definition of their sacred victims. Agamben claims that

[32] Antonello, "Sacrificing Homo Sacer," 155.

[33] Pierpaolo Antonello, Christopher A. Fox, and Frederiek Depoortere note that Agamben's arguments concerning the ambivalence of the *homo sacer* as a confusion between the religious and the juridical is questionable. First, it is questionable "whether the ancients really were so fastidious as to have knowingly created some third sphere distinct from the religious and juridical economies to guarantee the sovereign a power of unpunishable killing." Christopher, "Sacrificial Pasts and Messianic Futures," 573. Further, Antonello refers to Depoortere who wrote: "Questioning Agamben's interpretation of the *homo sacer* does not mean that I reject the legitimacy of the overall aim of his *Homo Sacer*-project (i.e., unmasking the violence of sovereignty), but I do contend that this aim does not justify an interpretation of the *homo sacer* that is completely at odds with historical reality and that amounts to nothing but a fanciful creation by Agamben. We will find out that Agamben's interpretation of the *homo sacer* is indeed problematical in light of the ancient sources,…" Depoortere, "Reading Giorgio Agambens Homo Sacer with René Girard," 154.

the *homo sacer* cannot be sacrificed but may be killed, whereas Girard claims the victim is sacred because he cannot be killed, but because he is sacred, he must be killed.[34] In other words, Agamben's *homo sacer* is unsacrificeable and killable, whereas Girard's scapegoat is unkillable and sacrificeable. Agamben's definition of the sacred victim must be understood from his third ontological and political sphere. The sacred victim is killable because it is incorporated into a third political sphere beyond the rules of human- and divine law. However, this third ontological and political sphere embeds the extreme and negative aspects of politics (sovereign power and bare life). Therefore, the *homo sacer* can be killed with impunity. Girard's definition of the sacred victim demonstrates that the sacred victim is unkillable, but because the victim is sacred, he must be killed. In other words, precisely because the sacredness of the victim derives from a double inclusion, the victim becomes ambiguous and must be killed. Even though the exclusionary structure remains present in this asymmetrical definition of their sacred victims, the "conceptualisation" of what constitutes the sacred differs. For Girard, the sacred and sacrifice are the product of an anthropological ambiguity that demands blood, whereas Agamben's sacred refers to a political sphere that originates through a double exclusion. However, this third sphere is merely an inversion of the existing political sphere.

In accordance with Depoortere, Antonello justly notes that Agamben's inclusion via exclusion structure is reconcilable with Girard's double inclusion, until Agamben's "establishment" of the third ontological political sphere. This is where they criticise Agamben's speculative account and prefer Girard's anthropological arguments of exclusion via double inclusion rather than inclusion via double exclusion.[35] Therefore, the problem in the asymmetry of the sacred victim does not exist in the discussion of whether the sacred victim exists as a *double exclusion* or a *double inclusion* but in the possibility and credibility of Agamben's third ontological political sphere. Hence, Girard's and Agamben's different formulation of the sacred victim should be understood in the more fundamental disagreement concerning the response of the

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[34] Agamben's definition of the *homo sacer*: "*At homo sacer is est, quem populus iudicavit ob maleficium; neque fas est eum immolari, sed qui occidit, parricidi non damnatur; nam lege tribunicia prima caventur "si quis eum, eo plebei scito sacer sit, acciderit, parricidia ne sit*." [The sacred man is the one whom the people have judged on account of a crime. It is not permitted to sacrifice this man, yet he who kills him will not be condemned for homicide; in the first tribunitian law, in fact, it is noted that "if someone kills the one who is sacred according to the plebiscite, it will not be considered homicide.] Agamben, "Homo Sacer," 61. Girard's definition of the scapegoat: "*Il est criminel de tuer la victime parce qu'elle est sacrée… mais la victime ne serait pas sacrée si on ne la tuait pas*." […because the victim is sacred it is criminal to kill him – but the victim is sacred only because he is to be killed.] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 1.

[35] Antonello, "Sacrificing Homo Sacer," 159.

theory of the ambivalence of the sacred and Girard's and Agamben's conceptualisation of the sacred. Thus, it becomes clear that Girard's and Agamben's different political and theological prospects are connected to a more fundamental disagreement and difference.

## The Asymmetry of the Sacred and Girard's and Agamben's Political and Theological Prospects

Now it has been established that Girard and Agamben developed different perspectives on the sacred the following question arises: "What are the implications of Girard's and Agamben's fundamentally different conceptualisation of the sacred?" Fox raised this question considering Girard's and Agamben's political and theological prospects. In this regard, he refers to the different "logic" of Girard's and Agamben's sacred victims.[36] Agamben situates the sacred victim in the context of the juridical and the political, whereas for Girard, the political is a consequence of the social structures that emerge from the "logic" of the sacred victim. Girard's political prospect is thus to be understood in the totality of his mimetic theory, in which politics can be understood as a development of mimetic structures. Fox refers to this Girardian perspective as a "metapolitical" perspective.[37] On the other hand, Agamben's political prospect concerns a political "recreation" or, as Fox refers to it, "reshaping politics."[38] In other words, for Girard, politics is an anthropological structure of mimetic theory, while for Agamben, politics is a metaphysical-ontological structure. Despite this fundamental difference, both thinkers discuss their political prospects in the context of Christianity and, more specifically, the Judeo-Christian concepts of *messianism* and *apocalypse*.[39]

Girard's apocalypticism results from his theory on mimesis, violence, and scapegoating (the theory that claims that scapegoating (and thus killing) is foundational to human society). Since, according to Girard, these elements are foundational to human society, humanity is inherently self-destructive. In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel,* Girard explains: "The truth of metaphysical desire is death. This is the *inevitable end* [my emphasis] of the contradiction on which that desire is based."[40] In modern times, humanity's self-destructiveness has become a tangible reality. Modernity is

[36] Fox refers to Girard's "logic of ambiguity" and Agamben's "logic of exclusion" Christopher, "Sacrificial Pasts and Messianic Futures," 572.
[37] Christopher, "Sacrificial Pasts and Messianic Futures," 574.
[38] Christopher, "Sacrificial Pasts and Messianic Futures," 574.
[39] Christopher, "Sacrificial Pasts and Messianic Futures," 574. For more information concerning Agamben's and Girard's "apocalypticism" or "messianism," please see: Bartlett, "Girard's Lost Time."
[40] Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 282.

characterised by hypermimesis, categorial violence, and global crises. The sword of Damocles is hanging above our heads. In this sense, Girard (like Agamben) refers to our contemporary time as apocalyptic.[41] However, Girard's apocalyptic time does not indicate a predestined future. Instead, apocalyptic time characterises the time left to "change things." In *Battling to the End,* Girard explains his theory of the two circles of history that helps to situate his understanding of apocalyptic time. The first circle is the story of Christ as we know it. Second is the circle that starts after Christ's incarnation and ends in the apocalypse. However, the second circle is contained in the first because the revelation already began and was completed in the first circle. The apocalypse, although yet to happen, has already been completed in Christ. The second circle is for humanity to imitate what Christ completed in the first, or as Girard referred to it:

> "There is no doubt that the apocalyptic passages refer to a real event that will follow the Passion, but in the Gospels they were placed before it. The "time of the Gentiles" is thus, like the seventy years of servitude to the King of Babylon in Jeremiah, *an indefinite time between two apocalypses,* two revelations. If we put the statements back into an evangelical perspective, this can only mean that *the time of the Gentiles, in other words, the time when Gentiles will refuse to hear the word of God, is a limited time.* Between Christ's Passion and his Second Coming, the Last Judgment, if you prefer, there will be this indefinite time which is ours, a time of increasingly uncontrolled violence, of refusal to hear, of growing blindness. This is the meaning of Luke's writings, and this shows their relevance."[42]

To prevent humanity's self-destructive spiral of violence and mimesis, Girard argues that humanity should convert itself from mimetic desire and the mechanisms of violence, i.e., the scapegoat mechanism.[43] Christianity plays an essential role in Girard's idea of conversion. According to Girard, Christianity proclaims a non-sacrificial and non-violent God. The Christian God became a scapegoat himself by his death on the cross. Therefore, according to Girard, Christ's death on the cross reveals the scapegoat

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[41] Christopher, "Sacrificial Pasts and Messianic Futures," 576.

[42] René Girard and Benoît Chantre, *Battling to the End: Conversations with BenoîT Chantre*, Studies in Violence, Mimesis, and Culture Series, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), 111.

[43] Girard's conversion of desire does not entail a complete renunciation of desire. Instead, Girard introduces the hypothesis that desire a part of the human condition, a metaphysical structure. Therefore, desire cannot simply be overcome, and human beings should comprehend their desiring nature and find "suitable" (positive) models for our desires. These forms of positive mimesis can (for example) be found in the New Testament: "For Girard, the only real and nonviolent means to overcoming mimetic rivalry is found in the New Testament….We are not speaking here of a renunciation of imitation—or any romantic glorification of spontaneity—but rather of a positive form of mimesis." Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 219.

mechanism and destroys its ways; this is the fundamental message of Christianity. In this regard, the Bible and Christianity reveal the *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World.*[44] Hence, Christianity is essential to the revelation of the scapegoat mechanism.[45] However, for Girard, there is no "restoration of politics;" instead, there is only divine revelation of human (apocalyptic) violence. Hence, to address the problem of (violent) politics, one must address the more fundamental problem of violence, desire, and mimesis.

Agamben's apocalypticism portrays some interesting similarities to Girard's apocalypticism but is very different. Girard's apocalypticism emphasises the inevitable apocalypse, (Christian) revelation, and conversion, while Agamben's apocalypticism is situated against the metaphysical-political background of "retrieving human potentiality." As earlier mentioned, Agamben understands our modern Western society from an imbalance in the metaphysical entities of potentiality and actuality. The harmful implications of this imbalance are revealed in his political philosophy by the concepts of sovereign power and bare life. The world and human beings have been reduced to meaning-given concepts enclosed in this third ontological realm of sovereign power and bare life in which human life becomes sacred. The essential aim of Agamben's philosophy is to reshape human life and dissect the harmful and violent actualisations that currently dominate our world. The method for this metaphysical restoration to retrieve human potentiality is a process of *profanation*. Whereas the concept of *profanation* indicates the more metaphysical-oriented restoration, Agamben also presents more concrete terminology for political restoration. In this regard, Agamben connects his political theory to St. Paul's description of messianic time as the time that begins to end.[46] One of the elements Agamben borrows from St. Paul is the call to the Christians to "reshape" their life based on their Christian calling (*kletos*). For Agamben, this call signifies a "revocation of every vocation." In other words, Agamben is drawn to Paul's call, directed at the Christians to (radically) change their life ('re-vocation") based on their Christian vocation.[47] The revocation of every vocation implies a radical change without drastically overturning your life; it concerns

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[44] Title of Girard's book *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (1978) and reference to Mark 13:35. In *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World,* Girard extensively discusses the "unique" characteristic of Christianity and clarifies how Christian revelation reveals what has been hidden (the violent mechanism). For more information, please see chapter five "Biblical Revelation and Christianity" in *René Girard's Mimetic Theory,* 195-273.
[45] Christopher, "Sacrificial Pasts and Messianic Futures," 576-80.
[46] Christopher, "Sacrificial Pasts and Messianic Futures," 580.
[47] Christopher, "Sacrificial Pasts and Messianic Futures," 582.

an inner revocation. Agamben explores revocation from the Pauline description of the "as not" [*hōs mē*]. This formulation of "as not" (also referred to as *meontology)* signifies a way of life in which everything radically changes while nothing really changes; what is meant is that the Christian vocation radically reshapes and "repurposes" human life without changing the physical reality of Christian life. Agamben is drawn to this Pauline concept of calling because it allows him to call for a radical (ethical) change based on something that is not strictly transcendental. Instead, Agamben's reading of Paul's radical change creates a certain indiscernibility concerning immanence, transcendence, future, present, past, etcetera. Agamben argues that: "In this way, the *messianic vocation is a movement of immanence* [my emphasis], or, if one prefers, a zone of absolute indiscernibility between immanence and transcendence, between this world and the future world."[48] In other words, the gap between transcendence and immanence is "rendered inoperative." This *indifference* and *indiscernibility* represent a way of life that demonstrates the possibility of a radical change in life, a change that can retrieve human potentiality.[49] In this sense, Agamben's apocalyptic message could not be more different than Girard's. Agamben's apocalypticism presupposes the hope to restore the metaphysical-political imbalance in human life, while Girard presents conversion as the only way to escape the violent structures of the world. Agamben's attempt to "reshape" politics and the apocalyptic background in which he situates this political "reshaping" is quite different from Girard's plea for dismantling the scapegoat mechanism and conversion.

Underlying these divergent political and theological prospects is their different definition of the sacred. Girard situates the sacred in the larger context of violence and mimesis, and, for him, politics is an anthropogenetic product situated in the worldly structures of violence and mimesis. Therefore, one should look to mimesis to "reshape politics" (or other social structures or institutions). Girard's sacred is, in this regard, immanent and subjected to anthropological developments; yet, he connects this anthropological theory to divine transcendence and Christian revelation. Nevertheless, Girard's divine revelation is not enclosed in the human structures of religion and politics. Therefore, the sacred is a concept of (violent) immanent anthropological development enclosed in a structure of transcendent divine revelation.

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[48] Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains : A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey, Meridian, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 25.
[49] Christopher, "Sacrificial Pasts and Messianic Futures," 580-86.

Agamben disagrees on this point. For him, politics is a natural form of life. His study departs from this hypothesis of *bios* (political, biological life) and *zoē* (natural biological life). The sacred is thus a category that Agamben needs to distinguish from these two natural (ontological) conditions. The imbalanced scenario in which *zoē* is increasingly incorporated into *bios* represents the development of the sacred. For Agamben, the sacred is nothing more than the violent actualisation of *bios* over *zoē*. That is why he refers to the concepts of *sacralisation* (an act of actualisation) and *profanation* (an act of de-actualisation). Whereas sacralisation captivates human potentiality, profanation aims to dissect the meaning-given structures and (re)open the sphere of *potentiality*. Therefore, it is necessary to profane the sacred realm and restore a more original (balanced) state of human life, a state of *pure potentiality* or *infancy*. Thus, for Agamben, the sacred represents the violent imbalance in the human condition. A purely anthropological and immanent process that should be undone by human effort. Hence, Agamben's messianism has no room for divine transcendence or revelation.

**Opposing Perspectives: Transcendence versus Immanence**

Concerning their theological implications, one can claim that Girard's transcendence is opposed to Agamben's immanence. Nevertheless, this difference should not obstruct a further exploration of the Girard-Agamben nexus. Instead, Girard's transcendence invokes a comparison to Agamben's immanence because of their apparent similarities. In "Beyond Violence, Beyond the Text," Colby Dickinson, as mentioned, connected the Girardian concept of mimesis to Agamben's political philosophy via Walter Benjamin's concept of *gesture*.[50] In this regard, Dickinson argues that Benjamin's project of a sphere of "non-similar gestures" is equivalent to a Girardian sphere of "non-mimetic gestures."[51] In other words, Dickinson connects Agamben's political-metaphysical prospect to Girard's theological-metaphysical prospect via Walter Benjamin. Whether this comparison upholds to the extent Dickinson proposes remains questionable, but Agamben engaged intensively with Benjamin's work. Therefore, it is likely, almost inevitable, that Benjamin influenced Agamben. So, if Benjamin's concepts of "divine language" and "non-similar gestures"

[50] Dickinson, "Beyond Violence, Beyond the Text," 953-55.
[51] Dickinson, "Beyond Violence, Beyond the Text," 954.

are compatible with Girard's theory of mimesis, Agamben's thought, inspired by these concepts, might be closer to Girard than expected.[52]

However, whereas Dickinson's connection of Girard and Agamben via Benjamin is appealing for the Girard-Agamben nexus, the transcendentalist-secularist dichotomy remains problematic. Despite Dickinson's account, it would be premature to equate Girard and Agamben's theological prospects. Furthermore, Girard does not pursue the pre-mimetic state as a human and immanent possibility as Agamben does. Instead, as Brian Sudlow clarifies, for Girard, the good life is when "the *surtranscendance de l'amour* breaks through the sentence of perpetual conflict which purely intra-anthropic relations impose on human life and human living,"[53] Agamben, on the other hand, seems to posit the pre-mimetic state within reach of humanity and is thus inherently immanent to the human world.

> "Such affinities demonstrate that these two thinkers have crucially identified a common mechanism at the heart of human relationships. However, while Girard's theory begins in human interpersonal relationship before extrapolating into theories of religion and politics, Agamben begins from the other end. Theorizing the development of Western government, Agamben appears committed to a separation between religion and politics. *Consequently, the sacred manifests differently in the projects of these two thinkers* [my emphasis]. For Girard, the sacred is the violent heart at the core of human interaction that is perpetuated within all institution. The religious sacralizing of violence has long been humanity's core threat to itself, but Girard also believes that a religion untethered from the seduction of the scapegoat mechanism and allied instead to a true transcendence can provide a path to a new form of life. Meanwhile, Agamben is keen to keep the sacred at distance, loath to dignify the violence of government with such a term as "sacrifice," and insistent that while religion may have a role to play in what he terms the "coming community," that role is as handmaid to philosophy and the pursuit of a politics yet to come. Even so, such a religion may only be permitted to function in a radically transformed way as, in such works as *The Kingdom and the Glory* (2011) and elsewhere, Agamben holds up the traditional Trinitarian-Christian theologies of transcendence, glory, and acclamation as political theologies that are at least partially responsible for the aporias of modern government."[54]

This quote demonstrates the fundamental divergence between Girard and Agamben founded on their different conceptualisation of the *sacred*. The consequence of these

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[52] Agamben frequently refers to Walter Benjamin and e.g., Benjamin's *constituting power* versus *constituted power* plays and important role in Agamben's *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.
[53] Sudlow, "Agamben, Girard and the Life That Does Not Live," 51.
[54] Enright, "Divine but Not Sacred," 238.

different conceptualisations leads to Agamben's third ontological, political realm already encountered in the *homo sacer*. According to Agamben, religion is a sphere of politics and not vice versa. Problematic of this claim is Agamben's lack of empirical support for this hypothesis. Whereas Girard's claim has a speculative element, he can support them with sociological and anthropological evidence to a certain extent; this cannot be said for Agamben's political hypothesis except for the Greek twofold definition of human life (*bios* and *zoê*). Therefore, Agamben's sacred is, in the end, metaphysical-political. In contrast, Girard's sacred is transcendent *and* anthropic, which can only be understood in the words of St. Athanasius: The Son of God became man so that man might become God."[55] For Girard, this is the realm where the human and the divine meet. Agamben, on the contrary, sees the sacred "as species of the "nullity of Glory."[56] This means that Agamben understands the sacred as a fundamental imbalanced actualised realm. There is no "transcendence" in this realm not any real relation to the divine. Instead, the realm of the sacred is nothing more than an anthropic and violent interpretation of metaphysical-political structures.

**Conclusion: The Complementarity of Opposing Ontologies**

In the introductory section of this article, a research question was posed: *"What does the above-mentioned asymmetry mean for Girard's and Agamben's comprehension of the sacred and the sacred victims, and what are the implications of this comprehension for Girard's and Agamben's political and theological prospects?"* The previous sections have carefully constructed an answer to this question. First, the Girard-Agamben nexus was introduced via Girard's and Agamben's thematisation of violence and sacred. Following, the secondary literature on the Girard-Agamben nexus was discussed. In this discussion, it became clear that some scholars note the divergence between Girard's and Agamben's political and theological prospects but refrain from carefully analysing the fundamental point of divergence. Nonetheless, three other scholars explored the essential elements of Girard's and Agamben's theories. Following their analysis, a careful analysis of the sacred and the sacred victim seemed appropriate. In this regard, the difference between Girard and Agamben appeared. First, in their different response to the theory of the ambivalence of the sacred, and consequently in their asymmetrical definition of the sacred victim. Furthermore, the different conceptualisation of the sacred as a sphere

[55] Enright, "Divine but Not Sacred," 246.
[56] Enright, "Divine but Not Sacred," 242.

of *double inclusion* versus *double exclusion* was revealed. The previous two sections discussed the political and theological implications of this rift. In these sections, it became clear that Girard's and Agamben's different conceptualisations of the sacred concern a different ontological perspective. Girard upholds a transcendent and theological-metaphysical perspective of the sacred and the Judeo-Christian concepts of *messianism* and *apocalypse,* whereas Agamben upholds an immanent political-metaphysical perspective of the sacred. Because of this fundamental rift between Girard's and Agamben's theories and prospects, a Girard-Agamben nexus seems obstructed, yet the opposite is true.

Now that the ontological difference between Girard and Agamben has been revealed, it is possible to start a comparative analysis concerning Girard's religious perspective and Agamben's political perspective. First, Girard's and Agamben's response and revival of the theory of the ambivalence of the sacred deserves further exploration. The fact that scholars cannot answer this theory satisfactorily does not mean it can be discarded. The sacred, sacred victims, sacrifice, violence, and religion once again permeate – in various forms – the philosophical discipline. Furthermore, the rise of apocalyptic philosophy, e.g., the reappearance of St. Paul in contemporary philosophy, forces us in the direction of the philosophy of religion. A comparative reading of Girard and Agamben might help us reconcile two divergent ontological perspectives and construct a refreshing (new) perspective. Furthermore, it was already indicated that Girard's account lacks a "praxis" and concrete handles to act, whereas Agamben's theories lack sociological, anthropological, and historical proof. [57] A final reason for the complementarity between Girard and Agamben, despite their transcendent/immanent distinction, is Antonello's critical observation of Agamben's *zoē/bios* distinction. As discussed, Agamben's projects aim to restore pure potentiality, a state of pure *zoē*. Interestingly, *zoē* also indicates the life that precedes the fall in biblical thematic, the life of absolute holiness, the life of Christ (*zoē tou Iesou*).[58]

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[57] Exemplary for Agamben's praxis, are his concepts *form-of-life* and theory of *use* explored in the last two volumes of his Homo Sacer Series: *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life* and *The Use of Bodies*. Via the concepts *form-of-life* and *use,* Agamben tries to find a way of life that is not submitted to actualised (violent) ontology. Inspirational for this *form-of-life* is the *form-of-life* of the Franciscan order. For Agamben, this way of life demonstrates a balance between "law" and "life". Concerning the use of bodies, Agamben argues for an approach of *use* that does not "enslave" us but allows the full experience of possibilities (and potentialities). For more information please see: Gert-Jan van der Heiden, "Exile, Use, and Form-of-Life: On the Conclusion of Agamben's Homo Sacer Series," *Theory, Culture & Society* 37 (2019).

[58] Antonello, "Sacrificing Homo Sacer," 172-79.

> The Judeo-Christian scriptures would rescue, then, the *zoe,* returning it to its pre-sacrificial divine matrix, stripped of any violent inflection. *Zoe* is life which pre-exists the fall, while *bios* is regulated by exclusionary and differentially violent practices and logic. Moreover, if the exit from the logic of the sacre extolled by Christianity corresponds, as Girard claims, to a process of de-sacralization, this would not implicate simply a process of profanation, following Agamben's interpretation, but additionally the need to enter into an intimate, superior relationship with the divine. *Zoe* therefore becomes a provenance and a destination of a life *beyond politics and beyond the law.*[59]

As this quote demonstrates, we stumble once again upon a major similarity in Girard's and Agamben's theories, calling for further analysis. In our contemporary, unstable world where apocalypse has become a tangible reality, Girard's and Agamben's *time that remains* speaks to us. A complementary approach to Girard and Agamben might shed some light on our contemporary time by exploring Agamben's "praxis" with Girard's mimetic speculation. Critical readers of Girard and Agamben can at least agree on one statement. Even though Girard's and Agamben's claims are grotesque and demand nuances and clarifications, Girard and Agamben have stumbled upon fundamental elements of human society, life, culture, politics, and religion that can no longer be ignored.

[59] Antonello, "Sacrificing Homo Sacer," 178-79.

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