

13— “Only two defining forces have ever offered to die for you: 1. Jesus Christ 2. The American G.I. One died for your soul, the other for your freedom.” These are the words of Steven Kane, aka Sack, a military blogger. Sack is a frontline soldier writing from Iraq; or as the land of the Fertile Crescent is referred to in the military blogosphere: “the sandbox”. Sack’s words are interesting for two reasons. First, by placing Our Lord and the American soldier on the same footing, he is implying that the death of the soldier is a sacred act. And secondly, the fact that these words are articulated by a soldier contributes to the verification of national mythology.

13— Hence, the last verse of Julia Ward Howe’s “the Battle Hymn of the Republic”, written in 1861, expresses the very same notion of the soldier’s sacrifice as a sanctifying act: In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea, With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me: As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free, - While God is marching on

14—All participants in a sacrifice, including the victims, must regard the death for the sacrificial cause as purposeful; they must agree with the sacrificial ideology. If not, the latent function of the sacrifice is in danger of being revealed. Should that happen, the sacrificial ideology cannot prevail. All ideology is based on certain assumptions; axioms that cannot be questioned without drawing the ideology itself into question.

The axiom of a sacrificial justification is a certain perception of worth. The latent function of the sacrifice is what defines and reaffirms this particular perception of worth. Revealing this latent function means that the contingency of this perception – the notion that it could have been different – also becomes overt. It becomes obvious that the sacrificial ideology is not the ultimate truth but simply ... ideology.

14—In warfare, the soldier is asked to violate the two most fundamental norms of social conduct: the obligation to self-preservation and the prohibition of killing. Much like religious rituals, war therefore constitutes a socially institutionalized breach of social norms. This requires justifications.

The social stability of the phenomenon of warfare draws the universality of the claim about the functions of sacrifice into question. If that claim is to be rendered universally true, then, first, the latent function of the soldier’s death must have always been to serve as a proof that something is worth dying for, and, secondly, the soldiers, as victims, must always have agreed with the mythology defining their death as a sacrifice for that particular cause. Needless to say, that has not been the case.

21—The death of the soldier serves itself as a justificatory proof that the social entity in whose name his blood is shed, is worth dying for. Yet, for a sacrifice to be regarded as justified, the latent function must remain concealed. For the latent function to actually work, the victims, in this case the soldiers, should believe in the manifest function, the straight-forward justification of the sacrifice.

23—2.1.2 The Manifest Function: calculating costs and benefits of the sacrifice. The central question in analyzing sacrifice is who the actual subject and object is: For which social entity does the sacrifice take place? Accordingly, the question in the following analysis is, is the actual object of the soldier sacrifice actually the nation? The pains and sufferings of the victim are justified by the effect of the sacrifice on the social whole.

Hence, the relation between the two fundamental elements of a sacrifice, the victim and the sacrificer can be depicted as a weighing of costs and benefits: As long as the general benefits of the sacrificer exceed the particular costs of sacrificing the victim, the sacrifice is purposeful.

The same logic may apply to the soldier sacrifice: As long as the death of the soldier is regarded to take place for a higher purpose, e.g. making society safe, it can be justified. What that higher purpose is, is what will be analyzed in the following.

24—When, in the model of Hubert and Mauss, it is emphasized that the sacrifice takes place to the benefit of the sacrificer, the definition of the actual object, is a cité or a discourse, a justificatory regime that determines the worth of the sacrifice.

The cité of a sacrifice defines the calculus by which dying for a particular social entity, a sacrificer, is made purposeful. In that view, the question why do soldiers fight and die, can be reduced to the question, what social entity can be rendered important enough to serve as sacrificer?

25—And that ideology can only be maintained as long as it is allowed to conceal the latent function, or the inverted logic of the sacrifice, saying that victims are sacrificed in order to prove that something is worth dying for.

26—Job's denial of guilt makes the fundamental deception of the sacrifice implausible. Without his consent, he may be killed, but never become a valid victim: "Job is a failed scapegoat. He derails the mythology that is meant to envelop him, by maintaining his own point of view in the face of the formidable unanimity surrounding him" (Girard 1987: 35). The argument here follows this line of thought.

If the death of the soldier is to be considered as a valid sacrifice, the soldiers must himself consent with the sacrificial ideology. If he does not, he might draw attention to the latent function of the sacrifice, that soldiers die to prove that something is worth dying for, and likewise "derail" the official mythology of the civil religious sacrifice.

26—And, regarding these benefits, if it is true that the idea of an ultimate sacrifice implies the existence of an ultimate cause, how do we prove, socially, that this particular cause, and not any other cause, is sufficiently worthy?

26-27—That proof can only be made by focusing on the constitution of worth instead of on the justification of death. How is worth established? It is established by the inverted logic of sacrifice. It is inverted because it does not prove the worth of death, but, on the contrary, uses death as a proof of worth.

The straightforward cost/benefit-logic, described above, argues that the sufferings of the soldier are endured because the benefits of the social entity he dies for exceed the cost of his life. The inverted logic, on the contrary, claims that the soldier's death serves as proof of the worth of the social entity.

27—Thus seen, the sacrifice is not the seamy side of the matter. The sacrifice is the matter. By dying for a particular cause, e.g. the society, the sacrificial death serves as proof that that cause is worth dying for.

29—For the national ideology to be intact, the soldiers must share the fundamental notion of the worth of the nation. This brings us to the second objection against this theory: Is it really so that if the soldiers call the worth of the sacrifice into question, it will pose a fundamental threat to the sacrificial cult and the national mythology whose existence depends on the maintenance of this deception?

32—Society has always recognised the importance of religion in regard to the full integration of its members. Socrates was condemned to death on the accusation that not only was he “a doer of evil, and corrupter of the youth”, but also because he, allegedly, did “not believe in the gods of the state” and had “other new divinities of his own.” (Apology: 24b-c).

97— Blogs can be divided into numerous subgenres, distinguished from one another by who the blogger is, why he blogs, to whom he addresses his postings, and how – which technology does he use to spread his messages.

168-169—Needless to say, the idea that the soldier's sacrifice is a sacrifice for freedom is not new. Neither is the, implied, comparison of the soldier's sacrifice with that of Christ. In fact, this comparison draws on a staunch discourse, expressed in American identity at least since the civil war, where it also found its most famous articulation in Julia Ward Howe's apocalyptic “Battle Hymn of the Republic”. Thus, the last verse of the “Battle Hymn” reads:

In the beauty of the lilies, Christ was born across the sea, With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me: As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free, While God is marching on (Julia Ward Howe, 1862).

As mentioned in the introduction, this song played a significant role in promoting the Union's cause as a cause of freedom (Jewett, 1973). The crucial words in that regard were, of course,

the direct comparison between the sacrifice of the Lord and the sacrifice of the American soldier, expressed in these lines.

170-171—Currie’s definition of Iraq as “(...) a place where far too many of us paid for freedom with blood”, quoted twice above, repeats in words and context his November 1 statement, when he, on the day of the memorial of Colonel Wood, Captain Hill and two other soldiers, opens his post with the statement that “The tree of liberty has yet again been watered with the blood of patriots” (Si vis pacem, para bellum: November 1, 2005). Both metaphors combine blood and freedom, and neither of them merely describes blood sacrifice as a necessary evil justified by subordinating it to a higher purpose. On the contrary, by regarding blood as either the currency of freedom or as the nutrition of which the tree of liberty lives, sacrifice becomes a proof of true patriotism.

174— In Zack’s eyes, unjust wars like Vietnam and Iraq only lead to one positive outcome: beautiful war memorials. Underneath the irony of that statement is a truth, the truth of the inverse logic of the sacrifice, already described in regard to Rusten Currie’s statement that “the tree of liberty has yet again been watered by the blood of patriots” (Si vis pacem, para bellum: November 25, 2005). The death of the soldier, even the meaningless death, serves as a means of justification: it justifies the nation as a social entity worth dying for. This is what beautiful war memorials do: “when we have enough names”, names of individuals, the death of each soldier can become a meaningful social act. Contrary to Currie’s description Zack does not celebrate this, he bewails it.

285— In expressing this ideology, by stating that “[t]he tree of freedom has been watered with the blood of patriots”, Currie even comes close to manifestly articulating what I have defined as the latent purpose of the sacrifice: With his death, the soldier proves that something is worth dying for.

289— I have claimed above that the latent function of sacrifice is to prove that something is worth dying for; a function which must necessarily be maintained in order to transfer contingent violence into meaningful violence. All of the participants in the sacrifice, including the victims, must consent to the sacrificial ideology, because only then can the latent reason remain latent, remain functional.