Contesting Religious Identities

Transformations, Disseminations and Mediations

Edited by

Bob Becking
Anne-Marie Korte
and Lucien van Liere

BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

Contents

List of Contributors IX

Contesting Religious Identities: An Introduction 1
Anne-Marie Korte & Lucien van Liere

PART 1
Territories and Diasporas

Interpreting 'Movement' within Religious Studies: An Introduction to 'Territories and Diasporas' 11
Lucien van Liere

Home of the Mother, Exile of the Father: Gender and Space in the Construction of Biblical Identity 18
Claudia V. Camp

Western Christianity as Part of Postcolonial World Christianity: The 'Body of Christ with AIDS' as an Interstitial Space 39
Adriaan van Klinken

Religion, Media, and the Global 59
Patrick Eisenlohr

Beyond Blind Faith: Religious Identities under the Conditions of Late Capitalism 74
Joerg Rieger

PART 2
Media and Texts

Broken Texts and Distorted Images: An Introduction to 'Media & Texts' 93
Bob Becking

Psychoapocalypse: Desiring the Ends of the World 97
Tina Pippin

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

Dangerous Enthusiasm: An Aspect of the Clash between Cartesianism and Orthodoxy at Utrecht University 118
Henk van den Belt

Islam Controversies and Humour: Responses to Comedic Vlogs on the YouTube Battlefield 136
Fadi Hirzalla, Liesbet van Zoonen & Floris Müller

Fulla, the Cover-up Girl. Identity Politics via a Doll? 156
Martha Frederiks

Resilience Beyond Mimesis, Humanism, Autonomy, and Exemplary Persons 175
Joachim Duyndam

PART 3
Bodies and Rituals

Embodied Faith as Bone of Contention: Introduction to 'Bodies and Rituals' 197
Anne-Marie Korte

Contesting Islam: The Making and Unmaking of Religious Faith 203
Nilüfer Göle

Martyrdom as a Contested Practice in Rabbinic Judaism 219
Eric Ottenheijm

Conservative Evangelical Listening Practices and the Embodiment of Faith 240
Anna Strhan

A Material History of Catholic Precarity in Amsterdam 261
Markha Valenta

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

PART 4
Epilogue

At the Threshold: A Panorama for Future Research and Challenges to Religious Studies 277
Lucien van Liere

Index 297

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

Resilience Beyond Mimesis, Humanism, Autonomy, and Exemplary Persons

Joachim Duyndam

Introduction: Resilience

Currently, the topic of resilience is of much interest. In social life and social science, resilience is considered to be the 'successor' of empowerment. The empowerment discourse in turn can be regarded as the successor of the emancipation discourse. Whereas emancipation movements—such as women's liberation and gay liberation—expected highly from protective and legislative governments, empowerment stresses the bottom-up strengthening and reinforcement from-the-inside of the prospects of disadvantaged groups and minorities. It does so against the background of the declining significance of the nation state during to the last decades. Significantly, empowerment is often debated regarding the position of indigenous cultures in developing countries, where the authority of governments has usually been weak. Resilience is considered a contextualized form of empowerment, among others by the influential Resilience Research Centre, headquartered in Canada.[1] Applications of resilience research are mainly found in the sphere of care and social work.[2]

This article follows a different path to resilience. It chooses a religious premise, in a broad sense of religion including secular humanism and philosophy of life. Humanism has its own tradition of resilience since the founding father of contemporary Dutch humanism, Jaap van Praag (1911–1981), has set resilience on the agenda as his 'grand battle' or crusade against nihilism. This article picks up on that tradition. Put in somewhat lofty terms, one could state that while the social science approach of resilience focuses on 'humanization of human life', the religious approach focuses on 'meaning' and 'making sense of human life'. Regarding the contesting religious identities debate, resilience is presented here as a key concept in the contemporary context of religious pluralism, especially when it comes to existential questions of autonomy versus mimetic group pressure, and the role exemplary persons can play in the enhancement of resilience.

1 Cf. http://resilienceresearch.org, (date accessed: 01-08-2016).

2 Michael Ungar (ed.), *The Social Ecology of Resilience. A Handbook of Theory and Practice* (New York etc.: Springer, 2012).

© Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, 2017 | DOI 10.1163/9789004337459_013
For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

One of the most intriguing elements in Jaap van Praag's crusade to promote resilience is that he requires mental resilience to be an integral part of a philosophy of life.[3] To that end, he has chosen to revitalize humanism. Van Praag not only developed humanism as a philosophy of life or life stance in a theoretical way, deriving humanism back from the renaissance humanists, but he also contributed to the building of humanism in a practical sense. For instance, he was one the founders of the Dutch Humanist League. For the purpose of this article the question is: how can a philosophy of life, like humanism, manage to create, maintain and promote a phenomenon like resilience? This question aligns with the key research question of the research project *Resilience and Humanism* I supervise at the University of Humanistic Studies. If I succeed in explaining here the most important word in the project's title, the conjunction 'and', this article will have accomplished its goal.

'And' in this case connects 'humanism' with 'resilience'. Resilience is understood as the ability to uphold humaneness, i.e. principles of human decency, or to promote these principles when faced with adversity or opposition, or when under pressure. What do we mean by humaneness and human decency? What are the threatening forces which humanism can help you to resist? For Jaap van Praag this is quite clear. When he went into hiding during the Second World War, he started to question how things had managed to get into such a terrible state that so many people felt so hopeless that they proved to be susceptible to the temptation and false promises of Nazism. He concluded that this state of affairs had come about because most people were lacking in the resilience required to resist such massive enticements. In Van Praag's view the reason for this lack of resistance lay in their absence of a clear outlook on life, and a dearth of moral principles for them to cling on to, compounded by the non-existence of a motivating inspiration to guide them. In short they lacked a philosophy of life. The absence of a philosophy of life—for Van Praag this equals 'nihilism'—makes people susceptible to current delusions, certainly if these are mass delusions. For that matter, it made no difference to Van Praag, in principle, whether this philosophy of life was Christian, humanist or sprang from some other religion or worldview. By organizing philosophical humanism, Van Praag was aiming at developing a broad, open philosophy of life that would be amenable to agnostics, non-believers as well as to people with religious beliefs.

3 Jaap van Praag, *Om de geestelijke weerbaarheid van humanisten*, ed. by Peter Derkx, Humanistisch Erfgoed 5 (Breda: Papieren Tijger, 2009). Van Praag's word (in Dutch) 'geestelijke weerbaarheid' could be literarily translated as 'mental resilience'. I prefer just 'resilience', both avoiding a too narrow meaning and leaving open clues and similarities with other concepts and practices to be researched.

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

Susceptibility to mass temptation is a phenomenon of all time. Even today we can recognize such tendencies: consumerism, media hypes, pressure to share the consensus view, the power of images, the obligation to *produce* at the expense of (what Hannah Arendt calls) *action*,[4] and of course the anxiety that is spread repeatedly about anybody or anything different from us. Such phenomena are comprehensible in the light of so-called mimetic theory. Mimetic derives from *mimesis*, the Greek word for copying, imitation. According to its originator the French-American thinker René Girard,[5] mimetic covetousness is at the core of mimetic theory. Desiring something *because* someone else desires it, even if it is only to show that you too are a proud owner of the same, is a basic human trait. No matter whether it is my neighbour's larger car or my colleague's facelift, a new smart-phone a*pp*, a fashionable holiday destination, a current opinion or refined taste. To me as a man, a woman becomes attractive because someone else desires her. Our longings, wishes and aims do not arise in us as individuals, but are created, stimulated and maintained by others aiming to satisfy the very same longings, wishes or aims. The other person functions as a model for our own covetousness, in Girard's view.

It does not only hold for desires. Thinking, forming opinions, and even emotions are equally mimetic.[6] Some views and opinions are desirable, and if you think the same way too, you are considered to be part of the in-crowd. Unlike in our romantic self-image, our feelings don't represent our deepest and most authentic self, on the contrary, nothing is more susceptible to mimetic influence than what we feel.[7]

The mimetic mechanism is contagious, and because it is contagious it catches on fast and takes on a mass character of its own accord. Mimetic contagiousness is demonstrable in every stakeholder relationship. Thinking, desiring, taking action, attributing meaning, feeling, observing—in short everything that in phenomenology is called intentionality is mimetically transferred by way of models, according to mimetic theory. As a supplement to this theory, I would like to state my case here for mimesis being about 'the will'. Nowadays

4 Hannah Arendt, 'Labor, Work, Action', in: D. Moran & T. Mooney (eds), *The Phenomenology Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 124–133.

5 René Girard, *Mimesis and Theory. Essays on Literature and Criticism, 1953–2005*, ed. with an Introduction by Robert Doran (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

6 Even just looking at something is mimetic. Someday, just go along to a tourist 'attraction' (the word says it all) and stare with keen interest at an arbitrary point in the distance, the way I once did in a beautiful Palazzo in Florence. Immediately you will find yourself surrounded by crowds of people all gazing at that very same spot.

7 Nico Frijda, *The Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

our current understanding of the will is fairly narrow. 'Will' today means something like 'wish', 'desire', or even just 'like it' (see *Facebook's* invitation to click on: 'like it'). Kant's understanding of the will is more profound. To will means for Kant the ability to direct your actions according to general principles.[8] In doing so, according to Kant, you have the choice between either heteronomous recommendations for happiness, like today those provided by the media and the markets, or autonomous principles of reason. When seen in the light of resilience, this is a choice between either succumbing, or voluntarily subjecting the will to heteronomous pressures or forces, or alternately, resisting this influence by sticking to your own personal principles. Keeping in mind the idea of resilience, I shall here make a case for a relational, hermeneutic concept of the will.

I shall approach this in three steps. First, I will—after a methodological remark (§2)—defend the use of a hermeneutic solution to the mimetic pressure of mass temptations (§3). This hermeneutic solution is, secondly, closely tied into the narrative perspective of interpretation (§4). Finally, on the basis of this (§5), I intend to explain what is required from humanism, or to put it another way: what aspect of humanism is required to underpin this hermeneutic solution (§6).

Methodological Premises

First of all a methodological remark. Girard, as a literary scientist, has developed his theory from narrative interpretations of novels, classical tragedies and Bible stories. Although not an empirical researcher himself, there is a mass of empirical evidence for the theory derived from cultural anthropological research and social psychological research already in existence.[9] Also,

8 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* [Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten 1785], trans. Arnulf Zweig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

9 Cf. a.o.: A. Meltzoff, A. & M. Keith Moore, 'A Theory of the Role of Imitation in the Emergence of the Self', in: *Advances in Psychology* 112 (1995), pp. 73–93; M. Donald, *A Mind So Rare, The Evolution of Human Consciousness* (New York: Norton, 2001); S.R. Garrels, 'Imitation, Mirror Neurons, and Mimetic Desire: Convergence between the Mimetic Theory of René Girard and Empirical Research on Imitation', in: *Contagion. Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 12/13 (2009), pp. 47–86; V. Gallese, 'The Two Sides of Mimesis. Girard's Mimetic Theory, Embodied Simulation and Social Identification', in: *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 16 (2009) 4, pp. 21–44.

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

current behavioural and evolutionary biology,[10] particularly results of recent brain research,[11] point towards mimetic structures in people and other animals. As a humanist researcher, I count these empirical contributions as belonging specifically to mimetic theory. As a humanist philosopher I would first like to put forward an important premise.

This is that mimetic theory's portrayal of mankind is a relational portrayal of mankind. According to this portrayal of mankind a human being is not in the first place an individual, who from this starting point enters into relations with others, and with the world, instead, being a human being is in the first place a relational phenomenon. The word 'relational' is not really an adequate term. For if you speak about a 'relation', you assume a link with 'relata', those who are in a relation with one another, whereas in a 'relational' portrayal of mankind the 'relation' has already preceded those who are in a relationship with one another. Heidegger is more consistent, when he characterizes human existence as *Mitsein*: being a person is being part of something, being together. However, being together is not something that takes place between me and others. Before there could be a self, to which others can be compared as 'others', we are: 'us-together'.[12]

This togetherness, by the way, is anything but convivial—according to mimetic theory. Girard points out that imitating models, who themselves of course imitate models in their turn, invariably leads to a crisis—and often to violence. To Girard, violence is unavoidable. For if everyone is after the same things, by definition these desirable things become scarce, and a struggle to own or to have control of them follows. Imitation leads to crises and

10 Among others: Frans de Waal, *The Age of Empathy. Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society* (New York NY: Three Rivers Press, 2009).

11 Among others: Marco Iacoboni, *Mirroring People. The New Science of How We Connect With Others* (New York NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008).

12 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* [Sein und Zeit, 1927], trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row. 2008), § 25–27. For Van Praag as well, being human is being a fellow human; cf. J.P. van Praag, *Foundations of Humanism* (Buffalo NY: Prometheus Books, 1982), p. 165; Van Praag, *Om de geestelijke weerbaarheid van humanisten*, pp. 69,72; Alphons Nederkoorn, *Het vergrootglas van de geest. Een vergelijkende studie over het denken van J.P. van Praag en hedendaagse auteurs over humanisme in relatie tot spiritualiteit*, Humanistisch Erfgoed 13 (Breda: Papieren Tijger, 2011), pp. 36, 129–130, 166.

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

violence—whether it be the Arab spring[13] or the present financial crisis[14]—whether it be bloody or structural violence. Further, according to Girard, a mimetic crisis leads just as invariably to the singling out and banishment of scapegoats who, rightly or wrongly, are blamed for the crisis. We can all think of examples of this phenomenon: how some people or groups are blamed for a crisis, and this must also have struck Jaap van Praag during the time he was in hiding. Although, from a philosophical viewpoint, there may be no logical predictability that a mimetic crisis will lead to scapegoats, history has proven Girard right. The Jews, the blacks, in a primitive society the deformed, King Oedipus, women since biblical Eve, the local village idiot, and last but not least Socrates and Jesus, are all scapegoats who have been blamed for crises. For that matter Heidegger does not explicitly mention violence. His interpretation of *Mitsein* is 'herd-mentality': an existence characterized by being a hanger-on and echoing the words of others, of slavish tractability and scandalmongering. The parallel between Heidegger and mimetic theory is to be found in its slavish quality. The question is: how can you free yourself from it? How can you defend yourself against mimetic slavery?

Hermeneutic Solutions and Hermeneutic Deficiencies

My answer to the question how to keep free form slavery is: by engaging with mimetic powers in a different way; by literally making a virtue of necessity. We recognize virtuousness through less contagious and violent forms of inspiration; in relations in which we are not naturally exposed to what models show or hold up to us; for example in relations in which we are challenged to be courageous, to perform the brave actions of a heroic person. Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Aung San Suu Kyi, Nelson Mandela are inspiring figures for many people. However, models do not have to be such well-known figures. Presumably most of us have once experienced coping with a bewildering situation by following the example of a wise friend. Or have been moved by someone's authentic behaviour. These are not at all unusual experiences. Everyone who at some time in their life has had to make a fundamental decision, and has had to bear a loss or has had to overcome opposition, knows the power of an inspiring model. In these everyday-life situations you can get ahead, find

13 Marc Anspach, 'The Arab Rulers' New Clothes'. On: www.imitatio.org (accessed: 01 December 2011).

14 Keith Ross, 'Who's to Blame for the Financial Crisis? Not Who You Think'. On: www.ravenfoundation.org, (2008) (accessed: 01 December 2011).

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

strength, or even surpass yourself, by being inspired by exemplary friendship, exemplary conduct after a loss, or exemplary authenticity.

Now, in which ways do these forms of inspiration differ from imitating a model? There would appear to be only a subtle distinction between imitation and inspiration, nevertheless it is of the greatest importance to be able to distinguish between contagious mimesis and the 'good' inspiration of an exemplary hero. However, herein lays the first pitfall: the straightforwardness of the antithesis between good and bad. How do you know, when inspired, if this is 'good' inspiration? Even 'bad' figures—ranging from those who appeal to the imagination like top criminals right down to the notorious dictators of world history—are very inspiring to their followers and admirers. Inspiration is ambivalent: it can spur us on to do either good or evil. Conversely, imitation is not necessarily a bad thing in itself, nor necessarily wrong. Quite the contrary, without the ability to imitate we would not be able to learn anything at all, and we would not have risen so far on the evolutionary ladder.

In order to understand the difference between imitation of a model (in the sense Girard meant) and being inspired by an exemplary figure, we must first approach the model as well as the exemplary figure from the way we relate to them. There is no point in distinguishing a class comprising exceptional figures by dint of the fact that they are inspiring. Inspiration is a relational concept, and must therefore be understood by departing from the relations between the person doing the inspiring and the person who is inspired. Mimetic infection is also such a relationship.

The hypothesis of this article is to consider the relationship with an exemplary figure to be hermeneutic, and the imitative relationship with a model that fails to come up to the mark as hermeneutically deficient. The term hermeneutic denotes providing interpretation: negotiating meanings, usually from authoritative or otherwise appealing texts. Negotiating meanings you can take as being moving backwards and forwards between debating readers and texts in the process of reconstructing, in what Hans-Georg Gadamer terms the hermeneutic circle involving a flux of hypothesis-forming, testing, adjusting and testing once again.[15] The meanings which then materialize are not purely objective, as if all you had to do was simply dig them out of the text, but they are not merely subjective either, as if the reader/interpreter can extrapolate the meaning from the text to suit himself (so not just 'ferreting out of the text what was already present in the reader's mind'). The meaning is, as it were, the result of interaction and debate between readers and text. Obviously, this

15 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Wahrheit und Methode, 1960], trans. Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall (London: Sheed & Ward, 1989), pp. 250v.

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

kind of interpretative process always happens in given contexts: in historical-cultural, economic and political contexts and in the context of existing and current debates. Moreover it should be noted that a hermeneutic reader has a vested *interest* in the meaning he or she wants to negotiate. Equally, in the traditional hermeneutics of religious scriptures and legal texts great importance is attached to knowing what God meant or what the law prescribes. This important fact demands honesty and respect for the text. As a hermeneutic interpreter you cannot just change or ignore parts of the text without good reason.

A hermeneutic relationship with an exemplary figure can also be seen in this light. If I become inspired by an exemplary figure, I am attracted by a specific meaning or value that this exemplary figure demonstrates in his or her life, or in certain of their actions: courage, respect, patience, a forgiving disposition, authenticity, or whatever else it may be. The exemplary figures appeal to me because of the way they behave: 'so courageous, honest, patient (and so on) is how you should be.' However, an exemplary figure always demonstrates such qualities in a specific context. In the case of Nelson Mandela—who emerged as a black African leader during, and shortly after, the rule of apartheid—the context is very different from that in which a prosperous European free citizen finds himself today. Nevertheless, Mandela can still be a very inspiring person for Europeans.[16] Due to the difference in context, it is impossible for me as a European to imitate Mandela without further ado, so I am bound to make a leap from his context to mine.

In hermeneutics translating from one context to another is called *application*. Of the two great hermeneutic philosophers of the twentieth century, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, it is Gadamer in particular who goes into the meaning of 'application'.[17] In his major work *Truth and Method* (1960) he uses the Latin term '*applicatio*'. I myself use the term 'concretization', in addition to 'application', as a translation, in order to avoid any misinterpretation. The misinterpretation to guard against is thinking that a pre-conceived objective value has been applied, whereas in my view a value is never 'separately obtainable', but only emerges as a value when applied or concretized as a value.[18]

---

16 Richard Stengel, *Mandela's Way. Fifteen Lessons on Life, Love, and Courage* (New York, NY: Crown Publishers, 2010).

17 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 27–31, 290–323.

18 Aristotle formulated for the application of what he called ethical virtues (in our terminology: values) the virtue of practical knowledge: *phronèsis*. This is the practical wisdom that knows whether, and how, to apply a principle. Also Aristoteles emphasizes in this respect

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

By interpreting an inspiring relationship with an exemplary figure as hermeneutic, as I am proposing here, entails in the first place realizing that the inspiring actions or behaviour of the exemplary figure is in itself an application or concretization of the principle ('value') that so appeals to me; even if the exemplary figure does not do this consciously, nor deliberately. In his actions, Mandela applied courage, and in his behaviour he concretized the general principle ('value') of a forgiving disposition. And this is equally true of the less famous inspirational figures from our own circle of acquaintances. The way they act is also, hermeneutically speaking, an application of a principle ('value'). What it is now important to remember about the hermeneutic relation to an exemplary figure, is that I, as the person being inspired, do *not* imitate the way the exemplary figure applies a principle, instead, I apply the principle in question myself or concretize it in my own context. Thus performing my *own* application of the value that I have learnt, and in which I am inspired by its application demonstrated by the exemplary figure.

Therein is to be found the difference between imitating a model, and interpreting and being inspired by an exemplary figure. As far as the latter is concerned, I perform an application of my own, whereas in the former (the application of another person) I am imitating the model. For it can be said of a model that he or she applies or concretizes a principle ('value'). It is precisely the interest a model takes in an object (an interest which he or she very probably is imitating from another model) that shows or demonstrates the importance the object holds for the model. Thus it is the model's application that is contagious. But contagion becomes infection if I forget my own creative facility, which allows me to perform my own authentic application of the value held up before me. This is why I term imitating a model a 'hermeneutic deficiency'.

It is, in other words, the difference between a heteronomous contagious relation with a model, and an autonomous relation with your own authentic application. Unlike what is often thought, autonomy and authenticity are therefore indeed feasible in actions inspired by model figures. The example of authenticity is interesting because someone's authenticity can be very inspiring, even though authenticity *by definition* cannot be imitated (because it would not then be authentic). Authenticity *must* therefore be interpreted in the light of your own life.

---

the importance of an exemplary *phronimos*: a wise person who demonstrates virtue and lives virtuously. Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book VI, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

The relational approach to inspiration as supported here precludes a futile good/bad opposition between a 'pure' ideal of morally high-principled inspiration (Mandela as a 'modern saint') and something like a bad, depraved mimetic desire. A hermeneutic approach begins with the recognition that you yourself are also exposed to mimetic contagiousness, to trends and to group pressure. There*in* you can try to achieve relative hermeneutic freedom: given the opportunity to make your own interpretation; your own application. Doing this is achieving resilience. If anyone is qualified to endorse this from a situation in which he was pressured, opposed and humiliated, it seems to me it must be Nelson Mandela.

The Narrative Perspective

The contagiousness of an application of a value can be made clear by looking at it from a narrative perspective. Both our hermeneutic relationship to exemplary figures as well as hermeneutically deficient contagious relationships to models is narrative. This is most evident in the case of exemplary figures. After all, it is through narratives like legends and stories, in novels, feature films, media reports or hearsay that we know exemplary figures. Even if the exemplary figure is an acquaintance from your own circle, our knowledge of this person takes the structure of a story. But Girard's models also relate to our narrative. The mimetic mechanism is the hidden plot behind the supposed story in which we are involved.

It is precisely their narrative character that makes mimetic relations contagious. Girard's model is attractive because, and in as far as, he or she tells us, shows us or epitomizes a story. A story we do not only recognize but in which we wish to participate too. This can be clarified in terms of the classical-philosophical poles of *actuality* and *potentiality* (currently existing vs. possible events). From a narrative perspective it becomes clear that a value-application does not only include the current (*actual*) behaviour of someone who performs an act, who covets a particular object, but equally it includes my *potential* to desire to possess it. Therefore it is the narrative of the actual covetousness that makes it potential covetousness. In our terms: it is the narrative of a person's current will which makes this current will a potential will for others. The narrative perspective thus explains how mimetic volition works.

This narrative way of making a current (actual) will a potential desire, and consequently enticing you to realize it anew, holds both for the contagious will, ignited by a model, as well as that inspired by an exemplary figure. Our

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

concept of narrative relates to both, they both impel us in a narrative way, but in the hermeneutic relation we make the leap to our own application or realization, whereas in mimetic contagiousness it is only a case of imitating the application or realization of a model.

Herein lays the difference between the autonomous and heteronomous will. For we have interpreted the mimetic intentionality of mimetic theory as will, and in so doing have taken Kant's notion of will and translated it, or applied it, within the context of contemporary hermeneutics. Our hermeneutic concept of the will is therefore a hermeneutic application in itself. This concept entails: to will is to apply, or more precisely: to will is to be *able* to apply. For Kant the will is the ability to connect individual actions to general principles, be they heteronomous or autonomous. Our hermeneutic concept of the will connects values with concrete actions or performance. This connection we understand as *applicatio*. The difference with Kant is that hermeneutic application does not so much connect systematic universality with individual cases, and vice versa, but potential with actual (current), and vice versa. In its application, the narrative universality of potential values combines with current actions or performance so that, precisely because of this, the values are lived up to, are concretized. The way in which this happens, as well as the way in which we understand this occurrence, is narrative. We then have the option of: either heteronomously applying the imitation of others, or autonomously applying it: recognizing the application as such in the narrative and subsequently searching for our own application. Hence we are giving meaning by applying it ourselves. In doing so, we think for ourselves autonomously of our own volition. It can be as simple as that.

Freedom and Slavery

Making your own application therefore, implies a certain amount of autonomy and freedom. I term this hermeneutic freedom or narrative freedom. Its positive and negative facets prove that we are really dealing here with freedom. If looked at positively, it opens up exemplary-figure potentialities. By showing courage under the difficult and extremely degrading circumstances in which he was forced to live, Mandela *reminds* us of these possibilities, he invites us to be brave in our own situations. The effect of an exemplary figure is liberating, in the positive sense of making something possible. Not just neutral possibilities suggesting 'you could do that some time' in a non-committal way, but rallying possibilities. The possibilities that an exemplary figure opens up are attractive,

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

they show me 'that is how it should be done', 'that really is true friendship' and 'that you too should be so brave, or patient, faithful, honest'. This means that following or applying this inspiration effectuates a transformation. This implies that due to the influence of an exemplary figure, something in my life changes.

The inspired subject remains negatively free, to a certain extent, by resisting and distancing himself from the mimetic pressure released by a model's application. Negatively free, through your own space to think and choose, from the will to obtain and to keep in the process of application. It is up to me as an acting subject *how* I apply the courage inspired by an exemplary figure like Mandela. The value 'courage' does not in itself prescribe how it should be applied. However, it is clear that my application does not happen in a *herrschaftsfreie* space. The link with mimetic theory shows that this room to manoeuvre must be permanently negotiated from the mimetic pressure to which I am just as much, and perpetually, exposed. The freedom of the *applicatio* is therefore of a limited sort, and a relative freedom, in the literal sense of the word: inspired in a hermeneutic relation with an exemplary figure. This hermeneutic relation does not liberate me entirely from the mimetic contagiousness of the will; it must be perpetually negotiated, by adopting a fighting stance towards contagious mimesis.

I refer to a horrifying example to illustrate the concept of negotiating narrative freedom. It is taken from the exemplary resilience of Natascha Kampusch, the Austrian woman who in 1998, as a ten-year-old girl, was abducted and kept prisoner for almost eight-and-a-half years, gravely maltreated and violated by a paranoid, and very violent, abductor. Her life was spent during those 3096 days, for the most part, in a small underground dungeon in a smart residential area of a Viennese suburb. In 2006 she managed to escape and in 2010 she published a book about her experiences titled *3096 Tage*.[19] In this book, but also in countless publications about her, she makes the impression of being relatively strong and unbroken. Despite her total dependence on one violent man, for a period of more than eight years, she was able to give an impressive display of mental resilience. Regarding resilience our focus is on the stories and fantasies that the girl told herself, partly based on the literature she knew or which she could read in her captivity, like *Alice in Wonderland*. My hypothesis is that her resilience stems from her powers of narration, her ability to deploy narrative imagination as a weapon for survival. When she was 12 year's old she created her adult 18-year-old self in her imagination:

19 Natascha Kampusch, with: Heike Gronemeier and Corinna Milborn, *3096 Days*, trans. Jill Kreuer (London: Penguin Books, 2010).

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

> Far out in front of me I saw my eighteen-year-old self. Big and strong, self-confident and independent. My twelve-year-old self moved slowly forward, while my grown-up self came towards me. In the middle, we reached for the other's hand. Her touch was warm and soft, and at the same time I felt the strength of my grown-up self being transferred to my younger self. Grown-up Natascha embraced the smaller Natascha and comforted her, saying, 'I will get you out of here, I promise you that. Right now you cannot escape. You are still too small. But when you turn eighteen I will overpower the kidnapper and free you from your prison. I won't leave you alone.' That night I made a pact with my own, older self. I kept my word.[20]

This is one example of Natascha's account that shows how someone's resilience is made possible and strengthened through the power of narrative. Moreover, this example can be shown, thanks to her written narrative, because the way in which we have become acquainted with Natascha Kampusch and her trials and tribulations is through her narration, through the story that she (with the help of editors) tells us in her book and in many interviews. In this way she can become an inspiring exemplary figure for others in similar, or completely different, thorny circumstances. The narrative perspective also enables the power elements to become visible: the perpetrator is trying to write the life story of his victim. He is claiming the authorship of her life story; he is yanking the victim into his own macabre story. And the victim resists this in a narrative way—with success.

The story of Natascha Kampusch is an example of extreme pressure being exercised, and one of humiliation. It is for exactly this reason that it teaches us so much about resilience, which we defined in the beginning as the ability to maintain our human decency (humaneness) in a situation when faced with counter forces or pressure, and what's more, to promote this frame of mind. In her case it was not a struggle against mass pressure, but against intense pressure and violence. Despite all the violent attempts made by her abductor, he did not succeed in imposing his will upon hers, nor did he make her his slave. She continued, for instance, to refuse to kneel in front of him the whole time, and would not call him 'maestro' as he demanded.

The story of Natascha Kampusch also clearly shows the relational aspect of her resilience. Just imagine: as a 10-year-old girl she is torn away from her relations: her parents, family, neighbourhood, school, friends. Her relational circle was severely disrupted. She was left with only one relationship: the one with

20 Kampusch, *3096 Days*, pp. 143–144.

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

her abductor. It was with him that she had to manage to hold out. And indeed she did. According to her report she succeeded all that time in maintaining an open relationship with him; she tried to continue to see the human being in him. She knew that if she were to see him as a monster (which of course he was), she would not be able to endure it. In relation to him she could try to find a balance between adapting to the situation and resisting it, by maintaining some equilibrium.

Humanism

What are the implications of this hermeneutics of narrative freedom and relational resilience for humanism? How can humanism make you resilient? I understand humanism in the first place to be a critical movement within a culture, which gives us back the culture, its sources, or something from these sources, if necessary for the sake of humaneness.[21] I personally consider Socrates to be the first humanist in the West, but generally speaking the origin of humanism as a cultural movement is seen as being in the Renaissance where, among other factors, a reorientation towards classical antiquity brought about innovations in literature, the fine arts and religion. Humanism in the past has tried time and again to give human beings, in a manner of speaking, back to themselves, but the movement has not always appeared in the same guise. In the Renaissance it was its promotion of an anthropocentric world view to correct a theocentric tradition; in the Enlightenment arguing for the capacity of the human being to think for himself against the authority of the church and state; and in the nineteenth century upholding a classical ethical upbringing according to the *paideia* ideal as a force against the anonymizing and exploitational character of nineteenth-century industrialization. Humanism continues to reinvent itself. Today evolutional biology and neurosciences are posing great challenges to traditional anthropocentric humanism.

Crucial in this description of humanism is the notion of humaneness. It is, however, not simple to describe humanity positively; moreover it must be accepted that in different periods of history and in different cultures it did not mean the same thing. Contemporary humaneness tends to understand humaneness in terms of giving meaning and humanizing: being humane

21 J. Duyndam, J., M. Poorthuis en Th. De Wit (eds), *Humanisme en religie. Controverses, bruggen, perspectieven* (Delft: Eburon, 2005), pp. 161–175.

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

implies living a meaningful life in fair relations.[22] The development of this hopeful description still has a long way to go before it is completed. Humanism does not, of course, have exclusive rights to humaneness. The critical function of humanism means is repeatedly being discovered anew, and defended in dialogues with other philosophies of life, and other religions. The recently deceased Islamic-humanist scholar Nasr Abu Zayd excellently embodies this idea.[23] As a Muslim and humanist he epitomized in his life and work a hermeneutic philosophy of life: the necessity of interpreting the holy source-texts time and again, and of bringing them in a dialogue with other text-interpreters and other traditions. To illustrate the principle necessity of interpretation let me give an example from the Bible: if it is written: "Love thy neighbour", then this is only meaningful if I know who my neighbour is, and if I know in a concrete sense what loving means, and therefore what is being asked of me.[24] Thus, I *must* make an interpretation and an application. And that means: entering into a dialogue about it.

In a negative sense, it is usually more clear-cut when humaneness comes into play. In my opinion humiliation is the most devastating opposite of humaneness.[25] Humiliation too is a relational concept, and because a human being is a rational being, you cannot withdraw from humiliation but have to respond to it. Like Nelson Mandela did, and like Natascha Kampusch did. Humiliation in my view, however, is a more everyday occurrence that can be seen everywhere, rather than the extreme examples put forward so far here. Thus the humiliation of slavery is given due to the mimetic contagion of human will. By the term 'slavery' we may perhaps in the first instance think of forced labour or serfs, but even respectable, prosperous citizens can be slaves without knowing it. Seen from the perspective of the will, the will of the slave is the will of the master: the slave wants what the master wants. In mimetic theory this master is the Girardian model: the slave imitates the will of his model. And because the model itself also imitates a model, and that model imitates another and so

22 This idea of humanism is shared by most scholars at the University of Humanistic Studies in the Netherlands.

23 Nasr Abu Zayd, 'Rethinking the Qur'ân: Towards a Humanistic Hermeneutics', in: *Journal of the Dutch-Flemish Levinas Society*, 16, (2011), pp. 110–156.

24 B.E.J.H. Becking, 'Love Thy Neighbor', in: R. Achenbach und M. Arnett (eds), *Gerechtigkeit und Recht zu üben: Studien zur altorientalischen und biblischen rechtsgeschichte, zur Religionsgeschichte Israels und zur Religionssoziologie*, Festschrift für Eckart Otto zum 65. Geburtstag (BZAR 13) (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009), pp. 182–187.

25 Cf. for instance: Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society* (Cambridge Ma: Harvard University Press, 1996); William Ian Miller, *Humiliation, And Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence* (Ithaca NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1993).

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

on, they form a herd, i.e. *we* form a herd. A slave wants what 'they' want; what we all want.

Let me conclude by summarizing the argument in the following purview. If there is one thing characteristic of humanism, then it is the fight against slavery: not only physical slavery dealt with by human rights, but also mental slavery to the will. To fight against this, humanism has for a long time defended the individual autonomy of the self. This is understandable, but it is not enough. Not only has this autonomy been partly responsible for leading us towards a culture of self-orientation and self-overestimation (the familiar 'me, me, me too emphasis'), but also it has failed in particular to comprehend the susceptibility of the autonomous self to heteronomous mimesis. Today humanism must defend relational autonomy. Relational, because heteronomy, slavery and humiliation are also relational. You can achieve and defend relational autonomy by relational resilience to heteronomous pressure and violence.

What must humanism give back to achieve this, and from which sources? It must in the first place remind us repeatedly of humaneness. Preferably not as a voice crying in the wilderness, but like Socrates down among the people.[26] Repeated over and over again, because our will is so inclined towards slavery; it is so easy, and nobody can be so very happy as a slave, as Dostoevsky's story the Grand Inquisitor teaches us.[27] Becoming resilient and remaining resilient, that is humanism. To that end, one of the things humanism offers is an introduction to traditions of exemplary humanists, and thus to the exemplary application of the values which are at issue. It reconstructs and unlocks these traditions; it puts them forward in dialogue with others and repeatedly renews them. For that purpose humanism teaches and qualifies us to apply, to bring up-to-date (making actual) what is latent (potential) in certain sources. You could call this today a hermeneutic *competence* (some fashionable words aren't such a bad idea). Directly bound up with this is narrative competence. If we are to train ourselves in this, we do not need just one (holy) book; we need the whole corpus of world literature. Humanism does not aim to state publicly only good ideals as opposed to bad or harmful systems, but aims to promote autonomy through resilience. Epistemologically, hermeneutics and narrative work primarily on the basis of a relational participatory perspective: the researcher is first a participant, and only on the basis of this a spectator, or

26 As argued by: Emmanuel Levinas, 'Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us', in: *Difficult Freedom. Essays on Judaism*, trans. Sean Hand (Baltimore MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 231–234.

27 F. Dostoevski, 'The Grand Inquisitor', in: *The Brothers Karamazov* (Penguin Classics, 2003); Duyndam e.a., *Humanisme en Religie*, pp. 161–175.

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

observer.[28] I see humanism as a hermeneutic philosophy of life, whereby contemplation implies participation. As a hermeneutic investigative philosophy of life, humanism is closely tied to science and philosophy.

Bibliography

Abu Zayd, N.,'Rethinking the Qur'ân: Towards a Humanistic Hermeneutics', Journal of the Dutch-Flemish Levinas Society 16 (2011), p. 110–156.

Anspach, M., 'The Arab Rulers' New Clothes'. On: www.imitatio.org (2011).

Arendt, H., 'Labor, Work, Action', in: D. Moran & T. Mooney (eds), *The Phenomenology Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002).

Aristoteles, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by H. Rackham (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

Bal, M., *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

Becking, B.J.E.H., 'Love Thy Neighbor' in: R. Achenbach und M. Arnett (eds), *Gerechtigkeit und Recht zu üben: Studien zur altorientalischen und biblischen rechtsgeschichte, zur Religionsgeschichte Israels und zur Religionssoziologie*. Festschrift für Eckart Otto zum 65. Geburtstag (BZAR 13) (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009), pp. 182–187.

Buitenweg, R., *Human Rights, Human Plights in a Global Village* (Atlanta GA: Clarity Press, 2007).

Donald, M., *A Mind So Rare. The Evolution of Human Consciousness* (New York: Norton 2001).

Dostoevski, F., 'The Grand Inquisitor,' in: *The Brothers Karamazov* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003).

Duyndam, J., M. Poorthuis en Th. De Wit (eds), *Humanisme en religie. Controverses, bruggen, perspectieven* (Delft: Eburon, 2005).

Duyndam, J., 'Girard and Levinas, Cain and Abel, Mimesis and the Face', in: *Contagion. Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 15/16 (2009), pp. 237–248.

Duyndam, J., *De liefde van Alcestis. Over relationele weerbaarheid en hermeneutische levensbeschouwing* (Amsterdam: SWP, 2011).

Frijda, N., *The Emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Gadamer, H-G., *Truth and Method* [*Wahrheit und Methode*, 1960], trans. Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall (London: Sheed & Ward, 1989).

Gallese, V. & M., Stamenov, *Mirror Neurons and the Evolution of Brain and Language* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2002).

28 J. Duyndam, 'Girard and Levinas, Cain and Abel, Mimesis and the Face', in: *Contagion. Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 15/16 (2009), pp. 237–248.

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

Gallese, V., 'The Two Sides of Mimesis. Girard's Mimetic Theory, Embodied Simulation and Social Identification', in: *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 16 nr 4 (2009).

Garrels, S.R., 'Imitation, Mirror Neurons, and Mimetic Desire: Convergence between the Mimetic Theory of René Girard and Empirical Research on Imitation', in: *Contagion. Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 12/13 (2006), pp. 47–86.

Gebauer G. & C. Wulf, *Mimesis. Culture, Art, Society* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1995).

Gergen, K.J., *Relational Being. Beyond Self and Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Girard, R., *Violence and the Sacred* [*La violence et le sacré* 1972], trans. by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

Girard, R., *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel. Self and Other in Literary Structure* [*Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* 1961], trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

Girard, R., *The Scapegoat* [*Le Bouc émissaire* 1982] (Baltimore MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

Girard, R., *Mimesis and Theory. Essays on Literature and Criticism, 1953–2005*. Edited with and Introduction by Robert Doran (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

Heidegger, M., *Being and Time* [*Sein und Zeit*, 1927], trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 2008).

Iacoboni, M., *Mirroring People. The New Science of How We Connect With Others* (New York NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008).

Kampusch, N., *3096 Days*. With Heike Gronemeier and Corinna Milborn, trans. Jill Kreuer (London: Penguin Books, 2010).

Kant, I., *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* [*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* 1785], trans. Arnulf Zweig. Edited. by Thomas E. Hill, Jr. & Arnulf Zweig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Levinas, E., 'Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us', in: *Difficult Freedom. Essays on Judaism*, trans. Sean Hand (Baltimore MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 231–234.

Maas, A.J.J.A., 'Living Storytelling as an Impetus for Organizational Change: Towards Connective Observing and Writing,' *Narrative Works* 2.1 (2012), pp. 150–169.

Margalit, A., *The Decent Society* (Cambridge Ma: Harvard University Press, 1996).

Meltzoff, A. & M. Keith Moore, 'A Theory of the Role of Imitation in the Emergence of the Self,' *Advances in Psychology* 112 (1995), pp. 73–93.

Miller, W.I., *Humiliation. And Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence* (Ithaca NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1993).

Nederkoorn, A., *Het vergrootglas van de geest. Een vergelijkende studie over het denken van J.P. van Praag en hedendaagse auteurs over humanisme in relatie tot spiritualiteit*. Humanistisch Erfgoed 13 (Breda: Papieren Tijger, 2011).

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

Praag van, J., *Foundations of Humanism* (Buffalo NY: Prometheus Books, 1982).
Praag van, J., *Om de geestelijke weerbaarheid van humanisten*. Samengesteld door Peter Derkx. Humanistisch Erfgoed 5 (Breda: Papieren Tijger, 2009).
Ross, K., 'Who's to Blame for the Financial Crisis? Not Who You Think'. www.raven-foundation.org (2008).
Stengel, R., *Mandela's Way. Fifteen Lessons on Life, Love, and Courage* (New York, NY: Crown Publishers, 2010).
Tijdschrift voor Humanistiek nr. 46 (2011). Themanummer over Geestelijke Weerbaarheid. [Journal of Humanistic Studies. Special Issue on Resilience]. Amsterdam: SWP.
Ungar, M. (ed.), *The Social Ecology of Resilience. A Handbook of Theory and Practice* (New York NY: Springer, 2012
Waal de, F., *The Age of Empathy. Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society* (New York NY: Three Rivers Press, 2009).

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV