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Alexander Irwin, *Saints of the Impossible: Bataille, Weil, and the Politics of the Sacred*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002. xxviii + 260 pp. Notes, bibliography and index. \$19.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-8166-3903-5.

Review by Christian Roy, Université Laval.

The author of this book argues, after Edith Wyschogrod in *Saints and Postmodernism*, that, with the contemporary breakdown in substantial cultural consensus, ethical claims can no longer be grounded in generally recognized discursive norms or moral standards, but may still be authoritatively performed by exemplary individuals, like saints.[1] However, today, both “evil” and “good” have become intellectually legitimate alternatives as horizons of critical discourse and ethical performance, within what often appears like a single, twilight realm of ambivalent sacrality. It happens that the anthropological study of religion since Frazer (*The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 1911-1915) and Durkheim (*Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, 1915) has revealed the sacred to consist in just such a state of suspension “beyond good and evil” as socially defined in the profane everyday world. It bears comparison in this respect with the holy mysteries of negative theology (using paradox to point to the unfathomable abyss of an ultimate reality that no positive conceptual statements about God can ever fully capture), on the basis of which postmodern theory now gives as much serious consideration to the mystical wellsprings of religious tradition as to utopian impulses long directed against it.[2]

In many ways, these recent developments were anticipated in the intellectual quest for new moral and political principles of action in interwar Europe. A complex relation to the sacred, the holy, and their enactment and embodiment can be seen operating across the political and religious spectrum of “Third Way” movements from that era that sought to address a crisis in civilization along lines of thought and action that often consciously defied easy ideological categorization into “right” or “left.” With respect to France (aside from Germany), Thomas Keller has recently broadened their scope from the “non-conformists of the 1930s” classically identified by Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle (the review *Esprit*, *Ordre Nouveau*, and the *Jeune Droite*),[3] and among whom Nietzschean and christian orientations coexisted (often in the same people), to include the overlapping milieu of Surrealist splinters around Roger Caillois, Michel Leiris, and especially Georges Bataille, as well as the contrasting figure of Simone Weil.[4] Bataille, on the one hand, reviled by André Breton as the “*philosophe-excrément*” and denounced by Jean-Paul Sartre as a “*nouveau mystique*,” and Weil as the unbaptised philosopher-saint on the other hand, can respectively stand for limit-cases of the Nietzschean and christian, or Dionysian and Apollinian, poles in the appropriation of the sacred by French intellectuals. To find common ground between them may sound like the kind of impossible task for which devout catholics turn for help to Saint Rita, whose title as “the saint of the impossible” the book borrows. Yet both Bataille and Weil were deeply original, wide-ranging thinkers, moved above all by a relentless striving for an improbable form of sainthood which they were intent on illustrating in their own life and writings. On this basis, Alexander Irwin’s monograph brings these two figures together in a comparative study of the politics of

the sacred that each of them carried to its logical conclusions from widely divergent assumptions along sometimes parallel paths that also crossed at crucial junctures.

An assistant professor of religion at Amherst College, Irwin is already known for the monograph *Eros toward the World: Paul Tillich and the Theology of the Erotic*, which gave its full weight to the dissolute sexual life of the influential Protestant thinker in elucidating the place of the erotic in his approach to the sacred.[5] Irwin now goes even further into territory that has much to make his natural readership uncomfortable, this time not only religious admirers of Weil, who might not have much patience for the blasphemous phantasies of a lapsed seminarian like Bataille, but also radical atheists, who would rather gloss over the religious dimension in his thought and have no time for Weil on account of its central place in hers. Irwin is to be commended for bridging the gap between the mutually exclusive academic constituencies that have formed around these two authors. He is likely the first English-speaking writer to show them to belong within a continuum of issues and sensibilities that defined the intellectual climate of the 1930s and that have echoes in the debates and concerns of our own time. He displays equal command of the different bodies of scholarship dedicated to Bataille and to Weil (a well-rounded sample of which appears among the “Works Cited”) and, guided by the thread of his chosen lines of questioning, leads us through the mazes of two eccentric minds and lifepaths. He remains admirably even-handed in his thorough discussion and perceptive comparison of the perverse twists and outrageous turns of their respective intellectual trajectories, and of the on-going controversies that have followed in their wake.

Irwin’s goal is to “show the importance of both thinkers for the theorization of relations between literary practice, the sacred, performativity, and politics,” by raising “specific issues in Bataille’s and Weil’s politics (e.g., Bataille’s wartime political ‘withdrawal’ and the apparent senselessness of Weil’s obscure self-squandering in an English tuberculosis hospital)” as well as “broader theoretical questions about politics, ‘religion,’ and resistance” (p. xxv). He closely follows the parallel lives of Bataille and Weil up until the latter’s premature death in 1943, which is about the time Bataille started to publish his work until his own death in 1962 (most of Weil’s work was published posthumously). Irwin chose to concentrate on Bataille’s early writings not just for the sake of chronological symmetry, but on account of their more direct response to the political challenges of the times, be it by the apparent detour of literature that performed his self-stylization as a sacred being.

If there were any illustrations (a regrettable omission in a study whose subjects consciously embodied the inseparability of life and thought), Bataille’s self-imaging as a fascinating embodiment of *horror sacrum* could have been readily conveyed by the famous emblem of his review and group *Acéphale* (1936-39). It was drawn by André Masson to represent him as a spread-eagled, headless monster with labyrinthine bowels, and was meant to draw this “sacred conspiracy” together into meditation on his conscious “imitation of Nietzsche” and Dionysus as opposed to Christ, as we learn from Sade scholar Pierre Klossowski’s witness in the first chapter. It is devoted to “Bataille’s investigation of sacrifice [as] an ongoing quest for liberative potentials in the conjunction of violence and an atheistic ‘religious spirit’” (p. 40). This surely begs for interpretation in light of René Girard’s identification of *Violence and the Sacred*, a most relevant line of inquiry into such matters, which is somehow never mentioned.[6] Nor is the distinction that some theologians (notably Protestant ones like Bataille’s fellow non-conformist activist Jacques Ellul) insist on making between the holy and the sacred, based on a revealed transcendence that draws saints away from the all-consuming social tug-of-war between sacred and profane and toward otherworldly grounds for affirming the infinite worth of particular beings.

Yet both of these approaches would have also been very helpful to explain that Simone Weil relies on “Transforming the Warrior’s Soul” through a “Poetics of Force,” as discussed in chapter two, to put an end to this vicious cycle of sacrifice (the age-old trap into which Bataille would lead us yet again according to a critique by Jean-Luc Nancy that Irwin often refers to).[7] As Bataille did with “The Notion of Expenditure” (“La notion de dépense”—the title of a famous article for *La Critique sociale* of

January 1933) that he derived from Marcel Mauss, “Simone Weil saw in the concept of ‘force’ a principle connecting war, social exploitation, cosmic order, and mystical truth” (p. 40), as Irwin puts it. This use of “force” calls to mind the type of paradigm based on the harnessing and unleashing of energy flows which Jacques Lacan (by then husband to Bataille’s first wife Sylvia Maklès) in his seminar would soon portray as having increasingly taken over from pre-industrial organic models in the representation of social and psychic processes ever since the advent of steam power.[8] Since such an energetic paradigm is also clearly at work in Bataille’s “general economy” of cosmic energy, one misses a comparative discussion of its vivid translation into his anthropological account of man as the creature in which, by making him stand erect, this force frees itself from the pull of earth’s gravity and of biological needs that turns animals to the ground, but is still stopped short of squandering itself into the abyss of the sky by his facing the horizon rather than the zenith. Hence Bataille’s literary fantasies of the late 1920s about the appearance of a “pineal eye” or “solar anus” on top of the skull as a new organ for this volcanic diarrhea to consume the head as the hated principle of organic integrity, rational coherence, and domination. For here, the head’s function is to repress and harness for utilitarian ends the free flow of vital forces towards their unsubordinated expenditure in laughter and tears, ecstasy and madness, vice and revolt, eroticism and death.

Irwin is well aware that this might make one wonder if there is any point in comparing the amoral, anally fixated Bataille and the ascetic, scrupulously ethical Weil. As he freely admits, “Weil’s celebration of christian love and of the crystalline beauty of a mathematically ordered, harmonious cosmos appears remote indeed from the convulsive, seething, acephalic universe of Georges Bataille. Weil’s and Bataille’s personal contacts while both were working for Boris Souvarine’s journal *La Critique sociale* (1933-34) appeared to confirm an antithetical opposition of personalities, worldviews and political principles. Yet in a novel written shortly after *La Critique sociale* ceased publication, Bataille staged a very different relationship between a character closely modeled on Weil and a narrator into whom Bataille put more than a little of himself” (pp. 80-81).

The third chapter on “Politics and Necrophilia in *Le Bleu du ciel*” is the most ingenious and revealing one for intellectual historians, tracing the image Bataille and Weil had of each other—as a “sick man” and a “dirty thin-blooded virgin,” respectively—on the basis of their actual relations and of often cryptic allusions in their writings. Weil indirectly retorted to Bataille’s review of André Malraux’s novel, *La Condition humaine*, with her own review of the *Prison Letters* of Rosa Luxemburg in the same November 1933 issue of *La Critique sociale*. She held out as exemplary the doomed Spartakist’s pious love of the beauty of the world, to ground revolutionary commitment in “an aspiration to life and not to death, to effective action and not to sacrifice” (cited on p. 85). She opposed this to the “disguised form of suicide” that was revolutionary action as an end in itself for Bataille, according to an unpublished draft rejoinder to his Malraux review that oddly prefigures his self-portrayal in *Le Bleu du ciel*’s debauched wreck of a protagonist Troppmann: “If it’s a matter of fleeing from oneself, it’s simpler to gamble and drink. And it’s even simpler to die. [...] For an existence whose object is to escape from life constitutes in the final analysis a search for death” (cited on pp. 83-84). But Bataille sees in the lofty ideals for which people like Weil yearn to sacrifice themselves—be it as revolutionaries or as saints—nothing but a hypocritical excuse to seek an eroticized death, which he exposes in the character of Lazare, based on Weil (e.g. on troubling reports about her self-destructive behavior among Spanish revolutionaries in 1933). In the novel (written in 1935 but not published until 1957), and in a review of her French Resistance manifesto and political treatise, *L’Enracinement*, for his journal *Critique* (1949), it is easy for Bataille to treat Weil in the same ambivalent way as he does other saints. To be sure, Bataille granted her a right he gave to very few people: that of judging him and demanding an account of his own ethical coherence. Yet, as Irwin notes, “Bataille reserved the right to cross-examine Weil in turn” (p. 118). And not unlike so many moderns who have insisted on fitting great spiritual figures into a reductionist psychological or sociological framework more consonant with their own materialist assumptions, he was fond of inducting such paragons of ecstatic self-sacrifice willy-nilly into his private pantheon of perverts. He did this by projecting unto them a sacred “heterology,” all his own, that folds back the higher realms and

the common good for which they strive onto a horizontal plane, as the immanent otherness of wasteful self-destruction as opposed to utilitarian self-preservation.

If this may seem like a rather simplistic, even oddly rationalistic account of religious experience and related phenomena, this book may provide some clues as to why it feels off the mark—except as self-serving apologetics for an atheist religious canon. The extensive discussion in chapter one of Bataille's debt to the sociology of Emile Durkheim made this reviewer realize that he simply borrowed from its opposition of the right ("regal") and left ("sinister") sacred the two terms of this dichotomy within the sacred (where the former supports and the latter disrupts the integrity of the social whole), to make them the pillars of his own heterology. But much as he did with the catholic economy of salvation by inverting it into a wasteful "mysticism of sin,"[9] Bataille merely turned a classification in terms of social usefulness on its head in favor of the sovereign dissolute individual, without questioning the utilitarian assumptions that structured the received scheme. This explains how he could translate Mauss's "Essay on the Gift" (1927) into his own "Notion of Expenditure" (1933) as "pure waste" (*pure perte*), thereby missing the point of the gift as the dynamic opening to each other of agents and objects in their constitutive relationships; for giving assumes at once subjective autonomy, self-sacrifice, and social bonding within the on-going givenness of the cosmos. Bataille instead collapsed the gift relationship into its moments of violent breakdown in a race to the bottom where all relations give out, so individuals experience undifferentiated "communication" with/in underlying chaos. This is why he can hold the sterility of death to be the only genuine alternative to narrow self-interest, overlooking the inherent generosity of life in its compulsion to propagate the gift of opportunities to give freely, which premodern societies have always sought to cultivate (admittedly not without self-interest, since survival and prosperity were often thought to depend on invoking such bounty).

Irwin gives the impression of being caught within the same binary opposition of servile utility and disinterested uselessness as Bataille, also overlooking the vital intermediate dimension of the gift, with associated notions of gratitude, gratuitousness, and grace. Yet the gift has become a central focus of reflection and debate for postmodern thought, from the social sciences with the M.A.U.S.S. (Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales) to religiously inspired phenomenology like Jean-Luc Marion's attempt to make of "*donation*" the touchstone of a *philosophia prima* allowing for God or a Good beyond Being.[10] Might this not give the lie to Bataille's claim, in his critique of Weil's *L'Enracinement*, "that a philosophy based on the good as an immutable cosmic principle is no longer tenable" (p. 208)? Be that as it may, "neither Weil's philosophy nor his own, Bataille affirmed, could be judged in the abstract, apart from the question of how these doctrines found expression in the lives of flesh-and-blood beings" (p. 210). As portrayed by Irwin, though "opposed in their ideological foundations, Bataille and Weil converged in the decision to perform on their own persons the experiment of a mystical politics broken open by 'impossible love'" (p. 212). In the double picture of this experiment that emerges, its terms and structures are largely the same in both cases, while its signs and values are often reversed between them as in a looking glass or like the negative and positive of the same image. This becomes apparent in a comparison of the wartime stances of Bataille and Weil as described in the last two chapters.

"*Guilty*, Bataille tells us, is born with, out of, and against World War II" (p. 124) as the first volume of a *Somme athéologique* worthy of this methodically mad Aquinas of postmodernism. It consists in spiritual "Exercises in Inutility" (to quote the heading of chapter four), dramatizing the pursuit of an "inner experience that most effectively catalyzes intimacy with death. Bataille rejects war not in the name of pacifism, but in the name of a purified and heightened violence: that of sacrifice internalized in mysticism and writing. Praising the sovereign, useless inner violence of a mysticism aimed at the shattering of the self, Bataille positioned himself to critique war's servile, instrumental violence, entirely directed toward the destruction of the other" (p. 126). For him, military violence is "not violent (not 'evil') enough" (p. 147), according to Irwin. He makes clear that it is the very idea of service of and obligation toward the higher good of a social whole that Bataille rejects as the root of servitude and

domination, writing to lure the reader away from its spell towards that of his derisive self-portrayal as a sacrificial sovereign/victim. To the profane outer realm of purposive action on others' behalf, where one may get killed without a chance to consciously attend to the horror and thrill of one's own death, Bataille opposes the obsessive contemplation of the inner war that, rejecting outer war along with inner peace, he claimed to be himself in the final, June 1939 issue of *Acéphale*: "JE SUIS MOI-MÊME LA GUERRE"—appropriately enough, given his name. It may be noted that, just as uncannily, Weil's German name refers to tarrying or waiting -- the characteristic attitude (see her posthumous mystical treatise *Attente de Dieu*) of her doctrine of attention as the polar opposite of Bataille's oft-noted voluntarism.[11] While Bataille writes his life away in blasphemous textual transgressions, we learn in chapter five that Weil means hers to be an obediently passive pen moved by the Creator to write the text His inscrutable will dictates (like the princely warrior Arjuna fighting on behalf of Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which she then studied, or the "real metaphor" of the actual life of Jesus Christ and its imitation by the saints).

Though he held violence so sacred that his *Acéphale* group had made serious plans for the ritual sacrifice of a volunteer human victim, when he sat down to write *Le Coupable* in 1939, "Bataille, living in the tranquil Paris suburb of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, affirmed: 'I will not talk about war, but about mystical experience'" (p. 124). This by no means excluded enthusiastic visualizations of rampant carnage, as in *La Limite de l'utile*, where "Bataille draws his central references on war from the morbidly rhapsodic combat descriptions of Ernst Jünger" (p. 136) as Irwin puts it (though failing to give credit to the German writer and World War I veteran for having by then started to move in a more responsible, humane direction, closer to Weil in many respects). That same year, since Weil's mystical experience—in contrast to Bataille's excremental mysticism of self-mutilation as the violent throwing (up) of the self to the outside to escape imposed identities (p. 35)—confirmed her sense that the rule of force was subordinate to sacred powers coming from "outside the world," she renounced her long-held pacifism. Through her years of exile in New York and London, she would spare no effort to try to see action in the field, planning to create and lead an order of frontline nurses who would, in Irwin's words, "carry this contemplative renunciation into the realm of overt action, consummating their mystical detachment through the offering of their bodies. They would enact spiritual transformation as a physical and political event, showing how authentic religious inspiration expresses itself in bodily engagement. Where Bataille's mysticism turned away from the war in order to contest its utilitarian logic, Weil's mystical impulses drove her forward to use war itself as an instrument of spiritual purification and of ascetic self-fashioning" (p. 189). And yet, far from simply fulfilling her own self-destructive tendencies, as many have alleged after Bataille, but feeling above all duty-bound to her country, to the afflicted, and to the Good, "she herself would not be personally choosing affliction by placing herself in the reach of enemy fire," since "authentic affliction could not be chosen" (p. 188). For "Weil's self-sacrifice as a nurse tending the wounded on the front lines of battle was to be a text inscribing the fundamental moral principle of the primacy of the other being. The sense of Weil's text, of the poem into which she hoped to fashion her life and death, was not only destruction/decreation of her self, but radical commitment to the other" (p. 207). Ironically, Weil's exalted spirituality translated as mystical writing in action, whereas Bataille's "base materialism" (proclaimed in his early article "Le bas matérialisme et la gnose" in *Documents*, vol. 2, no. 1, January 1930) drove him to perform sacrificial acts in writing. If, according to Irwin, "for Weil, all action must be understood as symbolic, performative" (pp. 198-199), as a text that can be written on the world in defiance of imposed readings and impossible odds, Bataille's wartime contemplative texts function as sacrificial *actes manqués*, making their mark in the reader's self to bring it down along with his in the sovereign ruin of mad love for the impossible.

Be it understood in terms of acephalic autonomy (Bataille) or in terms of selfless theonomy (Weil), Irwin claims "it is in the experience of this transgressive freedom that the emotive and political dimensions of sainthood (its dual aspects as active force and critical positionality) come together" (p. 223). In his conclusion, entitled "Communication, Sainthood, Resistance," Irwin thus offers a post-modernist vindication of these twin aspects of sainthood against a number of possible pitfalls he also identifies after

many critics. He still ends up leaving open the choice between “the path of holiness and that of damnation, which abruptly join at unforeseen crossroads” (p. 225) once the beaten path of the profane world has been left without return—an image taken from a 1938 article on “The Ambiguity of the Sacred” used the next year by Roger Caillois in his book *L’homme et le sacré*. However, this alternative leaves out of the equation the kind of “heroic” path that does not hinge on the opposition of the profane and the sacred, or the secular and the religious, but on the fruitful tension of a common measure between freedom and responsibility, to be found here and now in the spiritual violence of the creative personal act, as advocated by Swiss writer Denis de Rougemont of the *Ordre Nouveau* (ON) group in his theory of revolutionary “*engagement*” (long before Sartre made this term popular). Irwin barely mentions ON (or its leader Arnaud Dandieu, co-worker of Bataille at the Bibliothèque Nationale), despite its sustained contacts with Bataille and his circle[12], except to underline Rougemont’s appreciation for *Acéphale* as expressed in the review *Esprit*. The latter’s Raymond De Becker is also mentioned, but the Belgian catholic youth leader’s ambiguous yearning for a politicized community of saints, that drove this repressed homosexual into the strong arms of national-socialism (to say nothing of his post-war contributions to queer studies and the New Age movement)[13], would deserve fuller treatment to further illustrate the perils of playing the myth-making “sorcerer’s apprentice” in religion and politics, as Bataille consciously did.[14]

This propensity to toy with spiritual dynamite in a political minefield has made many people uneasy about Bataille’s own obsession to compete with Nazism, tinged as it was with secret admiration. After all, another writer from the fringes of surrealism, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, whose abortive 1931 newspaper project Bataille had joined, shared his fascination with the sacred violence fusing archaic communities around criminal/sacrificial priest-kings as described in Frazer’s *Golden Bough*. But Drieu La Rochelle made common cause with fascism instead, because he chose to believe rather than doubt its promise to turn Europeans away from the dessicating light of civilization and reconnect them with their irrational “*fond noir*” (to quote his correspondence from memory), in a new fusion of sacred authority and temporal sovereignty. A sounder spiritual answer to these temptations was available to Rougemont with his protestant understanding of sanctification, for it made him weary of the (catholic) mystic’s erotic longing for enthusiastic fusion in death, which he warned against in romantic passion as of a piece with political myths such as those fostered by the Nazi mystique. This was the thesis of his classic essay *L’Amour et l’Occident* (1939), which he was first invited to explain before the *Collège de sociologie sacrée* founded by Caillois and Bataille to explore these ominously topical issues of the late 1930s.[15] In many other ways, Rougemont’s example would have provided as much of a foil to Bataille’s take on them as does that of Weil—with whom he worked at the *Nouveaux Cahiers* in those years to foster dialogue among ex-Communists, non-conformists, reformist businessmen, and union leaders.[16]

Yet Irwin was probably wise to stick to his odd couple of subjects and concentrate on their real and virtual dialogue, leaving it to future scholars to fill in the blanks as they explore the numerous avenues of investigation he has opened, deepened, or widened here. Perhaps, more importantly, we are left with a classic statement of the unique spiritual situation of post-modern times, as a duel of good and evil amidst the wreckage of Western metaphysics over the contested ground of negative mysticism, where each vies to impose its own reading on the other. Is affliction to be read as paradoxical evidence of the Good shining by its very absence, or does all presence conceal an evil subtext of shameful desire for the sovereignty of abjection, since “all roads flow into black rot” (“*alle Strassen münden in schwarze Verwesung*”—Georg Trakl)? Outlined against the edge of the abyss of nihilism, the emblematic figures of Weil and Bataille may now appear fatefully joined in the undecidable struggle of the kind of “mimetic rivalry” (René Girard) that can reveal a troubling family resemblance between contenders at the height of their sharpest clash.

NOTES

[1] Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). A similar contention happens to provide the conclusion for an important essay published in a recent issue of the prestigious forum of a new generation of Quebec intellectuals, about the need for normative, formative ideals to break through the image-bound narcissism of the postmodern subject: “Les idéaux n’acquièrent de sens et n’éclairent l’existence que si de ‘grandes évocations’ parviennent à les incarner par l’exemplarité de leur vie ou de leurs actions. Les intellectuels ne pourront se contenter de remuer la surface du monde par des concepts; à quoi bon discourir si l’on ne sait témoigner par sa propre existence, dans sa chair, de la vérité que l’on défend.” Marc Chevrier, “Le temps de l’homme fini,” *Argument*, 5 (Fall 2002-Winter 2003): 114.

[2] See John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, eds., “Introduction: Apology for the Impossible: Religion and Postmodernism,” in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999): 1-19.

[3] Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle, *Les Non-conformistes des années 30. Une tentative de renouvellement de la pensée politique française* (Paris: Seuil, 2001).

[4] Thomas Keller, *Deutsch-französische Dritte-Weg-Diskurse: Personalistische Intellektuellendebatten der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Munich: W. Fink, 2001).

[5] Alexander C. Irwin, *Eros toward the World: Paul Tillich and the Theology of the Erotic* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

[6] René Girard, *La Violence et le sacré* (Paris: Grasset, 1972).

[7] See especially Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Unsacrificeable” (tr. Richard Livingston), *Yale French Studies*, 79 (1991): 20-38.

[8] See the end of the January 12, 1955 session in Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire*, Livre II, *Le moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris : Seuil, 1978): 94-97.

[9] Peter Tracey Connor, *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

[10] See John D. Caputo, “Apostles of the Impossible: On God and the Gift in Derrida and Marion,” in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, pp. 185-228. For an alternative radical reading of Mauss’s “Essai sur le don”—contemporary to Bataille’s—see Christian Roy, “La théorie maussienne à l’origine de la critique sociale personaliste d’Arnaud Dandieu (1897-1933): revenu de citoyenneté, service civil, libération du crédit,” *Revue du M.A.U.S.S.*, no. 19 (2002): 357-371.

[11] It is no coincidence that the Bataille scholar Jean-Michel Besnier, author of *La Politique de l’impossible: L’intellectuel entre révolte et engagement* (Paris: La Découverte, 1988), had previously published, with J.-P. Thomas, an *Éloge de la volonté. Chronique des idées d’aujourd’hui* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1987).

[12] See the last surviving ON veteran and *Critique* co-founder Pierre Prévost’s memoir, *Rencontre Georges Bataille* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1987), and his comparative study, *Georges Bataille, René Guénon: L’expérience souveraine* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1992), not to mention the use of Bataille in his hagiographic work, *Le mystère de Thérèse de Lisieux: Essai sur sa mission* (Paris: Éditions Dervy, 1999).

[13] See Christian Roy, "De Becker, Raymond," in Roy P. Domenico & Mark Hanley, eds., *Historical Encyclopedia of Christian Politics, 1789-Present* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2004). For a detailed discussion of De Becker's early career and considerable impact on the Esprit group (actually more reliable than the story of ON's founder that provides the ostensible focus of this monograph), see John Hellman, *The Communitarian Third Way: Alexandre Marc and Ordre Nouveau 1930-2000* (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002). Hellman is also the author of *Simone Weil: An Introduction to Her Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.)

[14] See Bataille's inaugural manifesto "L'apprenti sorcier" in Denis Hollier, ed., *Le Collège de Sociologie (1937-1939)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979): 59.

[15] See Keller, 343-348.

[16] Research along similar lines has just appeared, involving yet another Jewish intellectual convert to Catholicism, Paul Ludwig Landsberg, who was a key influence on the Esprit movement. As Weil dreamt of doing, he died like a saint in a concentration camp as a result of his active role in the French Resistance, having first thrown away his cyanide capsule like a character in Malraux's novel *La Condition humaine*. Landsberg has been compared to non-conformists at Esprit (Mounier) and ON (Rougemont) on the one hand, and at the *Collège de sociologie* (Bataille and Caillois) on the other hand, for his contrasting attitudes toward myth and mysticism, heroism and sanctification, expenditure and self-giving, political commitment and religious experience, in a sophisticated analysis by Thomas Keller, "Discours parallèles et transferts culturels: Scheler, Landsberg et Mounier," in Guy Coq, ed., *Emmanuel Mounier: L'actualité d'un grand témoin*, proceedings of colloquium held at UNESCO Paris, vol. 1 (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2003): 121-146.

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