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Do Jews Make Good Protestants? The Cross-cultural Study of Ritual

Usually a ritual becomes the object of critical investigation only when it is perceived to be exotic, bizarre, nonsensical or absurd: that is, when it is *someone else's* ritual.[1] The *someone else* has classically been an indigenous person; most of the investigators, Europeans, in particular Protestants. The distorting lens of these Protestant-derived theories is addressed elegantly in S.J. Tambiah's work <u>Magic, Science, Religion and the Scope of Rationality</u>. He presents a thorough critique of scholars such as Edmund Tylor and James George Frazer, demonstrating the straitjacket that their theories of magic constructed for analyzing indigenous rituals. Their legacy continues to shape debates about rituals, and whether or not terms such as "magic" are useful analytic tools. Using Tambiah's work as a guide, in the first part of this paper I will explore his formulation of the problem. In the second part I examine a test case, Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern scapegoat rituals. We will see both the distortions brought by Protestant-based theories even to ancient Israelite rituals. Scholars continue to be haunted by the problem of whether other people's rituals are best described as magic, which seems to confine those who practice to hopeless endeavors, or whether it is better to

avoid questions of efficacy altogether. A hesitancy to ascribe perceived efficacy to native rituals can only be overcome, I will argue, when the focus of the debate is shifted. The problem of improving the study of indigenous rituals is the same as generally improving our way of understanding ritual efficacy. It is time to move from arguing about abstract cases to looking at more culturally-specific models of efficacy, employing more precise semiotic terminology as we go.

Part 1: Relativism and Problem of Efficacy

Tambiah's short book addresses what is often called the demarcation question, that is, how to distinguish between magic, religion and science. In an attempt to avoid using Western notions of science to judge traditional/indigenous rituals, he delineates a variant of the now-common relativist position. According to relativist theories, the norms from one society for definitions of rationality should not be used to study, and judge, another culture. He posits that

..it is when we transport the universal rationality of scientific causality and the alleged rationality of surrounding moral, economic and political sciences with the claims to objective rules of judgment..and try to use them as yardsticks for measuring, understanding and evaluating other cultures and civilization that we run into the vexed problems of relativity, commensurability, and translation of culture.

These vexed problems are epitomized for Tambiah in Robin Horton's controversial attempts at cross-cultural comparison of Western science and traditional African thought. Horton's theory of comparison has two parts: (1) the structure of traditional African thought is similar at point to the structure of Western

scientific theories (both are attempts at control of the external world), and (2) nevertheless African thought is dissimilar to Western science in other ways.[2] By making this comparison Horton appears to many scholars to present indigenous peoples as attempting to indulge, rather poorly, in scientific thinking when they employ traditional modes of thought. For Tambiah this is just another version of earlier claims that traditional thought is childlike or primitive.

Both halves of Horton's thesis came under serious attack before Tambiah.[3] Some of the criticisms of Horton are based on his notion of science, which appeared to some to suffer from its positivistic stance.[4] A simple reference to Thomas Kuhn is thought to be sufficient to destroy the basis for Horton's position, and thus the equation of African and Western thought.[5] This criticism does not however demolish Horton's enterprise, but

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[2]The theory was first proposed in 1967 and then modified in 1982. In his update Horton begins the reconstruction of the similarity thesis without Correspondence Rules (see below), theory-neutral distinctions between observational and theoretical statements, and other problematic elements of positivist philosophy. He also abandoned Popper's open/closed dichotomy.
[3]The volumes edited by Wilson (1970), Horton and Finnegan (1973), Krausz (1989) and Hollis and Lukes (1982) all contain critiques of Horton's work.
[4]Horton, for example, uses the notion of Correspondence Rules. Until the 1960s Correspondence Rules were historians' of science standard mode of describing the relationship between a theoretical statement and an observation. Correspondence Rules have fallen into disrepute, having as their basis a logico-positivist conception of science. See Suppe 1979:17ff.
[5]While much of Kuhn's philosophy of science has in turn been rejected, his criticisms of Correspondence Rules were important in their demise. Cf. Suppe 1979:4n.

simply sends his supporters in search of a more up-to-date philosophy of science.[6]

Another tack taken in refutation of Horton's first point is to argue that traditional thought is distinct from scientific thought and that to compare them is a "category mistake." Scientific thought relies on notions of cause and effect while religious thought does not.[7] According to this view ritual is a purely symbolic activity whose practitioners do not expect a particular outcome from their ritual activities. Instead they are participating in a symbolic expression of cultural concepts. Beattie, for example, argues that "myth dramatizes the universe, science analyzes it (1966:65)." Ritual is not an attempt to assert human influence but a meditation on the limitations of being human.[8]

The motivation behind this type of theory is laudable. Indeed, as Penner notes, "one of the strengths of the symbolic approach is its criticism of ethnocentric explanations of religious beliefs and practices."[9] However, a symbolic approach

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[6]That is, the demise of Correspondence Rules only refutes one piece of Horton's evidence, not his theoretical stance. Horton could simply update his history of science, and the debate continues.

[7]For this position see among others Winch 1964 and J.Z. Smith 1987.

[8]According to J.Z. Smith, causal interpretations of ritual are posited by anthropologists who take at face value the fantastic descriptions of ritual articulated by the natives, descriptions which the natives themselves do not believe (1987:53-65).

[9]Penner 1989:71.

to ritual is fraught with problems, two of which will be
mentioned here briefly.[10]

First, at a theoretical level a symbolic approach does not
tell us what the rituals are symbolic of, nor how to decode the
symbols. Talal Asad has pointed this out in relation to Clifford
Geertz's symbolic theory of religion. Geertz, Asad avers, does
not articulate a theory of how symbols "stand for" things. The
notion of symbol is used loosely, "sometimes as an aspect of
reality, sometimes of its representation" (Asad 1993:30).[11]

Second, symbolic explanations negate the statements by
participants who believe that their rituals are supposed to have
specific effects. The implicit accusation that participants are
wrong in their understanding of rituals is not itself grounds for
rejecting symbolic theories, but negating their direct statements
about rituals is an odd way to develop more indigenous-friendly
interpretations. The theorist may be rescuing the indigenous
people from accusations of misguided action, but he is also
telling them that they do not understand their actions. It would
be as if an observer stood up at the end of a wedding and said
"You two are not really married." In sum, symbolic theories may
look less pejorative on the surface, but they eviscerate ritual
of any real purpose. Symbolic theories can not account for the
perceived efficacy of rituals and they fail to offer a
theoretical basis for the analysis of symbols.[12]

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[10]See the criticisms by Penner 1989:69-72.
[11]Asad contrasts Geertz' ill-defined use of symbol with C. S.
Peirce's system, to which we will return below (1993:30 n.3).

Returning to Tambiah, he tries to vitiate Horton's comparisons by emphasizing the "expressive-performative" or "participatory" aspects of ritual. "Participation″ is posited as an alternative ordering of reality to causality. Rituals are about being part of something and not about causing something, even if this is not the participants' own view (1990:108). This stance brings Tambiah very close to the symbolic theorists, leaving him vulnerable to all the criticisms of their position. In addition, Tambiah's own concluding examples undermine his argument. His first case concerns Sri Lanka and South India, where smallpox epidemics were attributed to the anger of a mother goddess. Control of the disease was attempted through annual religious festivals. Tambiah notes that with the introduction of modern vaccines, the festivals died out (1990:133). The western germ theory replaced the indigenous explanation on the basis of its better record of cure and prevention. Contra Tambiah's own explanation, the smallpox-averting rituals had a major participatory component which did not save them from adjudication as inferior. Also, in this case, Tambiah does allow for a valid transcultural judgment (1990:132ff). Apparently, he has no way to explain to us which rituals will be replaced, and which will not, without recourse to the very notions of efficacy that he rejects. Tambiah realizes that "elements of participation are not lacking in scientific discourses (1990:109)." Hence it is not clear why having located some participatory component in a ritual means

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[12]On this point see the important comments about symbolic anthropology in Parmentier 1994:47-69, esp. 69.

that it can not be judged predicated on the efficacy of some causal component, just as posited by Horton.

Tambiah's second case compares Indian and Western healing systems for mental illness.

> [T]hey may both agree that certain behavioral and somatic systems--such as withdrawal from social relations, a depressed emotional state, lack of appetite, and so on--are indices of mental ill-health..But if each system in its context is no more rational and efficacious than the other, then we are faced with the conundrum whether it is possible to delineate a single transcultural context-independent profile of mental states like hysteria or depression (1990:134ff).

The Western philosopher of science is apt to be delighted, not dismayed, that ayurveda is as efficacious as Western modes of dealing with mental health. The various branches of psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and psychotherapy are not strong cases for definitions of science because of their comparatively weak empirical success.[13] This example calls for a reconsideration of the demarcation question in relation to the Western material itself (is psychotherapy a science?) and not in regards to a cross-cultural comparison. The question must be, if Western science is able to come up with a more effective therapy for mental illness, would that replace traditional Indian methods? If so, we will only able to explain this be using concepts of efficacy which Tambiah rejects.

The case where Tambiah's distinction between scientific "causality" and ritual "participation" appears to be valid is Protestantism, locatable in a specific cultural and historical

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[13]Many historians of science, such as Popper, relegate them to proto-scientific status.

setting. As Horton himself pointed out, once non-theistic paradigms in science achieved unprecedented success in explanation, prediction and control of the natural world, Christian theologians redefined religion, restricting it to spheres where it was safe from scientific refutation. From then on, assertions about natural science based on Scripture and assertions about deities (especially their non-existence) based upon 'science' could both be labeled category mistakes. Secularization is a cultural process which influences not only the cultural concept of science but of religion as well. Looking over the specific historical debates which have lead to a Western differentiation of religion from, it seems impossible to claim that "traditional thought" possessed this identical differentiation.

Similar ambiguities plague Tambiah's characterization of "scientific" versus "persuasive" analogies. In his influential article "The Form and Meaning of Ritual Acts" Tambiah argues that these two types of analogies are distinct and "persuasive" analogies should not be judged by the same standards as "scientific" analogies (1985). He writes, for example, about the Mujiwu "persuasive analogy" between a tree which has many roots and a woman who wants to have many children.

There is no intrinsic reason why the tree should be similar to a mother and the roots to children, but the analogy which says that roots are to the tree as children are to the mother makes relational sense that can be used to "transfer" effect. (1985:76)

Here Tambiah begs the question: What is "relational sense"
and how exactly is it employed to transfer effects? The premise
of any analogy is some similarity weaker than identity between
two objects; a particular aspect of one is imputed to resemble,
for some reason, a corresponding aspect of the other. The more
the similarity compels the correspondence, the more persuasive it
is. If by "relational sense" Tambiah is referring to culturally-
dependent criteria of the probative force of a similarity, then
this is a statement about analogies in general and not any
particular kind of analogy.

One of the examples Tambiah gives is the treatment of
scabies with chicken excrement. Not only do the two look the
same, as has often been pointed out, but Tambiah also argues that
part of the negative analogy is the relation that excrement is
(unwanted) waste product while the scabby skin on the child is
(unwanted) adherence to the body. Thus a "persuasive analogy"
appears to have both a positive and a negative component,
pointing out how something is <u>not</u> like something else as much as
how it is similar. However, Tambiah does not show us how to tell
when natives think the negative part of a possible analogy would
turn it into an unpersuasive analogy, i.e., one where the evident
dissimilarity leads to rejection of the comparison. This is not
surprising, because natives are aware of the positive analogies,
as Tambiah notes, but appear never to point out the negative
ones. It is not difficult to construct negative analogies out of
positive ones because the two items compared are never identical.
Until the relationship of the negative analogy to the positive

analogy is clarified, an observer can construct his own negative analogy based upon speculation about the natives' methods of reasoning without being able to prove or disprove them.

A better way out of the dilemma is to note that the transformational force of a ritual does not come from the analogy per se; it comes from the fact that a ritual is a specific example of a general type of action which is socially-understood to bring about such-and-such a state, often based on a divine model Each human marriage, for example, is the copy of a divine marriage.[14] The structure of each ritual is the same as its divine model, and even more important, encoded in this structure is the outcome of the event. That is, rituals often include what we call analogies, structural equivalents to the purpose of the rituals. If the goal is to cure sores, the healing ritual might include brushing small stones off the patient's body. The very organization of the rite then encodes the desired ends. The ends may be modeled by any action which is parallel to the desired end of the rituals. The existence of this model does not *by itself* explain why people expect the presentation of the model to be effective in bringing about the modeled results. That is, the diseased scabs do not fall off because the ritual includes the falling-off action. No ritual stand all by itself with no accompanying theology or explanatory mechanism of why someone might think that including that action in a rite leads to that end (god X did this once, sympathy between natural elements makes it work, the objects used in the rite was once existentially

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[14]On this point see Parmentier 1994.

linked with the scabs). It is a distortion of the ritual to make the analogy in isolation be the *cause* of the cure, and this distortion is most likely to happen when the ritual is analyzed by outsiders (whether or not the rituals are those of indigenous peoples). Ironically, the very existence of the analogies leads outsiders to evaluate the rite negatively, since an analogy, or model, out of its cultural context is likely to look misguided.

Finally, Tambiah's work is widely cited for his use of speech-act theory as outlined by J.L. Austin. Scholars eager for a means of characterizing the compulsive nature or perceived efficacy of ritual turned with enthusiasm to Austin's *How to do Things with Words*. Austin attempts to capture and describe the sense people have that verbal formulas have effects and accomplish ends. In particular he created the term "performativity" to capture the sense of "doing" of some types of speech.[15] However it should be noted in passing that Austin's model is not a sufficient theoretical model for finding "performativity" in any language or ritual system. His categories stem from English verbs, and he made no argument that the functions of these forms are easily transferable to other languages.[16] A more useful theory of "performativity" would have

[15]He outlines the three types of speech acts, locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. Those acts which are understood to carry out a deed in the very speaking, the perlocutionary acts, are of particular interest to scholars of ritual.
[16]As Silverstein explains, Austin "discovered certain lexical items-segmental, referential, presupposing, deductible, maximally transparent forms--called 'performatives,' that seemed to be a key to the non-referential functions of one's own language. It is not by chance that these performatives, such as promise, christen, dub, etc. were discovered first by the linguistically

to explain at a theoretical level how certain linguistic forms are related to their context of use (have a perceived efficacy).

To compound the problem of simply adopting Austin's notion of "performativity," Tambiah creates by analogy a category "performative act." This step is crucial for him, yet no argument is made that other types of action are best understood by analogy to language. Exchanging blood, Tambiah's example of a "performative act with no speech," is indeed an action--that would be hard to dispute. That a ritual is an action which is constituted as mere acting, done for no reason other than just the acting of the action, may not make it into bad science but, I would argue, does make it meaningless. To call an action "doing something" is a tautology.

Tambiah is aware of the weakness of a strong relativist position,[17] but his attempt to carve out a weak relativist position is not successful. I would argue that if we are going to find our way out of the relativist dilemma we may have to rephrase our questions to take into consideration cultural institutions and not argue about thought systems in the abstract. Individuals develop modes of thought based on the mediating systems they employ, including but not limited to cross-

naive native speakers of Oxford; they satisfy all our criteria. But unfortunately, accurate though they may be for certain of our more transparent speech functions in English, they cannot merely be treated as a universal set to be ferreted out by inaccurate translation techniques in the most remote corners of the globe..Indeed, they represent only a tiny fraction of the functioning of our [own] language, though a fraction that is easily susceptible of native awareness (1981: 19-20)."

[17]Tambiah rejects what he calls total or extreme relativism, noting that this position is untenable (1990:128-9).

culturally distinct language systems.[18] In order to understand
ritual we need to understand not so much the highly specialized
instance of scientific thinking, but more importantly the
habitual modes of thinking employed on a daily basis in a
culture. These, contra Tambiah, include all sorts of notions of
cause and effect both in and outside of rituals.

The key theoretical problem for those who study religion is
to develop a description that does not privilege the categories
of any one language or culture at the outset and that cannot be
reduced to the categories of a particular language or system of
thought (Lucy, 1992:273). [19]

Part 2: The Tenacity of Protestant Theories of Ritual

At the beginning of his study, Tambiah examines early modern
Protestant definitions of magic and religion, definitions which
would later influence scholars such as Edmund Tylor and James
Frazer. Searching for the origin of the early-modern definitions
leads Tambiah in turn to Biblical theories of magic: "Protestant
theologians of the late sixteenth century seem to be resurrecting
or repeating the dichotomy already constructed in early Israel"
(1990:19). The ultimate source of Protestant theories of magic
then is the distinction made between true religion and false
magic found throughout the Hebrew Bible.

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[18]On this point see Wertsch 1991 and his discussion of Vygotsky's
contributions in this area.

[19]A few recent studies attempt to do just that, as in Lucy's own
study of marking systems in English and Yucatec (1992b). Rumsey's
study of Ungarinin and English modes of direct and indirect
discourse (1990) both should be mentioned.

What interests me is that I believe Tambiah's schema is correct, but *in reverse*. Early Israelites were not good Protestants, but Protestant terminology shapes many interpretations of Israelite religion. In his discussion of the Biblical material, Tambiah relies heavily on the work of a major scholar of the previous generation, Yehezkiel Kaufmann (1960).[20] Kaufmann's depiction of early Judaic theology presents a monotheistic, above-nature deity sharply distinct from other Ancient Near Eastern deities. The Israelite god is the only heavenly power, unchallenged even by powerful demons. Since the Biblical god created the world *ex nihilo*, nothing exists outside of his realm of power. Nature itself is established by divine decree, and therefore subjected to his will.

Israelite religion is interpreted by Kaufmann over against pagan religion. In that belief system, according to Kaufmann, polytheistic gods-in-nature have only limited control over the cosmos. Primordial nature and primordial evil exist beyond their control, and thus the gods could be subjected to "magical" control. This magical control worked "automatically" and operated outside any moral boundaries.

While there are differences between Biblical beliefs and the belief systems of other Ancient Near Eastern cultures, Kaufmann's dichotomy is too sharply drawn (M.Smith 1952). In many Biblical

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[20]In his review of Tambiah's book Dell Hymes writes "His initial accounts (of the Western legacy) are modestly derived from others, and what is said about Christianity and Judaism misses so much of their complexity that one suspects a lesson as to the inadequacy of all such sketches" (1990:951).

texts the Israelite deity is only one of many supernatural
forces; pure monotheism is a late development in the biblical
texts at best.[21] As Baruch Levine states,

    We have yet to find in the Hebrew Bible an explicit
statement of Yahweh's omnipotence, in the sense that there is no
other power of any sort except his. There are, of course,
statements to the effect that he is the only real deity....but
nowhere do we find the notion clearly expressed that Yahweh's
rule is entirely free from opposition or conflict (1978:79 n.65).

    Creation is better described as making order out of chaos,
with parts of the cosmos pre-existent to the creative work of the
deity.[22] A clear statement of creation *ex nihilo* does not occur
until the second century CE.[23] The forces of chaos and evil
continue to exist after creation, and pose a threat not only to
the Israelites but to their deity as well.

    What is most striking in regards to our concerns is that
Kaufman differentiated the Israelites from their neighbors by
presenting the former as "protestantly" as possible. That is, the
implicit spin on his analysis was the Israelites represented the
values familiar from anti-Catholic Protestant attacks (anti-
magic, pro-morals).

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[21]See for example Psalm 82:1,6-7 which states "God takes his
stand in the assembly of El, among the gods he pronounces
judgment.. I have said, 'you are gods, sons of the Highest all of
you, But you shall die like a man, fall like a prince.'"
[22]For such creation imagery see Isaiah 44:24-8, 45:18, 51:9-11,
Proverbs 8:22-31, Psalms 74:12-17, 89:1-14, 104, Jeremiah 5:22,
Job 26, 38-39, and Isaiah 51. For an important discussion of
creation texts see Levenson 1988.
[23]See Winston 1971:185-202, 1986:88-91 for his discussions of the
first references to creation from nothing. Cf. Grant 1952:135-52.

While the apologetic slant of Kaufman's work has been widely noted, similar strategies continue to shape comparative analysis of ritual. As just one, somewhat randomly chosen example of the continuing influence of a "protestant" slant we can look at recent comparisons of the Israelite sacrificial system with other systems such as Hittite and Babylonian and in particular the scapegoat ritual from Leviticus 16 (Leviticus 16:6-10, 20-22, 26). This Atonement Day ritual involved selecting two goats over which Aaron cast lots, designating one for the Israelite deity and one for "Azazel." The priest placed his hands on the goat for Azazel, recited Israel's sins and then sent it out the wilderness. The priest became unclean and could not return to the camp until he had ritually bathed (v. 26).

The meaning of this ritual has been the source of controversy. The ancient Aramaic translators of the Bible interpreted Azazel as a place-name, a way of referring to the wilderness. Modern scholars argue, based in part on comparisons with parallel Hittite and Babylonian rituals, that Azazel is the name of a demon. The parallel rituals get rid of some form of impurity, disease, or evil by displacing it on an animal which is then sent off from the people to a deity or demon.

One such parallel rite is the Hittite "Ritual of Uhhamuwa" for ending a plague, discussed along with several other scapegoat rites in a recent work by David Wright (1987:55ff). In this ritual, colored threads are placed on a ram, which is then driven away while a prayer is said asking the god to act peacefully with the land. According to Wright's analysis, a plague is transferred

to an animal using the colored threads (transfer of evil/disposal), the animal is decorated so as to appease the angry deity (appeasement) but the animal is not killed (no sacrifice). This rite, Wright argues, includes appeasement and disposal rites while the Biblical scapegoat, in contrast, is only a rite of disposal since the goat is not decorated before it is sent out. Thus the biblical goat for Azazel is not a sacrifice and not even an appeasement.[24] Azazel has no real identity any more in Israelite religion. The goat is a neutral "sin-holder" which simply carries the sins off.[25]

However, the text of the Uhhamuwa ritual does not explicitly tell us that the meaning of the placing of the colored threads on the animal is the transfer of the plague. For this point Wright has to refer to another text which does make this point explicit. Threads symbolize the evil affecting a king in the Hittite "Ritual of Pulisa" (Wright, 1987:48). Thus we find that some versions of the scapegoat rituals are elided or telescoped, with a resulting blurring of the meaning. What we have to weigh then is: Is the same meaning implied as in the fuller rite or does the condensed rite now have a new meaning? Do we want to supply meaning even when that meaning is the *absence* of some portion (no

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[24]Wright states "The lack of the idea of appeasement in the Bible is also evident in the plain, unadorned scapegoat. It is not decorated nor is it provided with offerings of appeasement, such as bread or wine (1987:54)." Also lacking is the idea of substitution as found in rituals where, for example, a prisoner is offered to a god as substitute for a king.
[25]"Azazel is not thought of as a demon receiving the appeasement offering, but merely as a signifier of the distination of impurity (Wright, 1987:49)."

decoration=no appeasement)? Most significant for us, Wright has

chosen to see the telescoped aspect of the Uhhamuwa rite as

having the same meaning for the Hittite example, but for the

Biblical rites, telescoping or eliding means improving the rite

by jettisoning "magical" aspects.

     Incantations like the one in the Huwarlu ritual would be
theologically unthinkable in the Priestly material since they
attribute the effectiveness of the rite to the cathartic
instruments rather than to God. The sins are not removed because
the scapegoat has the power by itself to receive them and bear
them away. They are removed because of the divine power and
supervision accompanying the performance of the ceremony
(1987:60).

     Again however, it is not clear that in any of the scapegoat

rituals the scapegoat effects the transformation "by itself" and

that divine power is not part of the equation. By reading divine

presence into the Israelite rite and cathartic instrument into

the others, the superiority of the Israelite ritual is emphasized

using a Protestant model.

     Numerous rituals parallel the Biblical scapegoat ritual,

each in slightly different ways; the contours of the Israelite

rite look different depending on which comparison is chosen. Some

Ancient Near Eastern sacrificial rituals also only have transfer

and not appeasement.[26] The Hittite "Ritual of Ambazzi", for

example, is "conceptually similar to the biblical scapegoat rite

because it lacks the idea of substitution and appeasement of an

evil-causing deity by means of the dispatched animal. It is

merely a rite of transfer and disposal as is the biblical rite

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[26]The Mesopotamian rituals often lack substitution and
appeasement (Wright, 1987:72).

(1987:57)." Thus the "evolved" form of transfer-only ritual exists in other cultures as well and is not evidence of evisceration of prior beliefs.

Wright argues that the scapegoat is not a sacrifice since the goat is not harmed. However, the goat is not harmed in parallel Ancient Near Eastern rituals either. Indeed, the only references to killing the goat are found in the Mishnah.[27] The concern is for getting the sins away from the community; this does not prove that the goat was or was not considered a sacrifice in any of these cultures. We can not be absolutely certain what Azazel was meant to do with the goat, but the rite does not appear to be for the goat's benefit. Why would any deity or demon take a load of sins if not for the fact that they were packaged in goat-meat, dead or alive?

As we see the distorting lens of the Protestant theories, we realize the challenge in developing methods for analyzing traditional rituals. An alternate model for understanding the ritual is that wiping of sanctuary walls is a different mode of "standing for" than the transferring of sins to a goat's head. That is, to use Peirce's language, this part of the ritual is iconic, the form of the ritual is part of its meaning. Part of the problem of comparing the scapegoat rites is that they are mixtures of iconic and symbolic modes of representation. We have already seen Wright's claim that colored threads are used to

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[27]See Wright 1987:55 where he states that "the Hittite literature too does not always show a concern to complete the disposal rite by doing something to prevent the return of a living bearer of impurity."

transfer sins onto an animal. Colored threads "stand for" sins in a symbolic manner; that is, they are arbitrarily chosen to represent an evil in the rite. This ritual is both iconic (sending the goat out of the community representing the sending out of the evil) and symbolic (threads representing the evil). In general, symbolic rituals appear more sophisticated to modern scholars, and they are certainly open to the kinds of "intentional" interpretations scholars favor. But all rituals have iconic aspects, which in turn leave every ritual open to the charge of relying "magic." It is no coincidence that the sending out of the goat in the Biblical rite was roundly denounced as "magic" by later practitioners and scholars.[28]

Striking a similar note to Wright's, Jacob Milgrom points to the inferiority of the Babylonian atonement rite where the body of a ram is used to wipe off the walls of the sanctuary and the carcass is then thrown into a river (1991). This ritual has an automatic sense about it, according to Milgrom, and, as with such rites, no role for human intention. Such comparisons, he argues, point to the unique theology of the Priestly source of Leviticus 16. Israelite religion completely rejected the pagan notions of the demonic and of impurity as a real force. According to Milgrom, the basic premise of pagan religion is that deities are themselves dependent on a "metadivine" level and that humans can tap into this realm to acquire magical power to coerce gods

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[28] Question of cross-cultural comparison must be asked in more modest terms, such as Kearins' studies of Aboriginal and white Austrailian children which found the Aboriginal children superior at using visual strategies for recreating arrays (1981, 1986).

(1991:42). Israelite priests rejected magic, and now sin was the result of human action and not automatic forces. Israelites have "free will" and the Atonement Day/Day of Purgation scapegoat ritual proves this.

> The ethical impulse attains it zenith in the great Day of Purgation, Yom Kippur. What originally was only a rite to purge the sanctuary has been expanded to include a rite of purging the people...The scape goat, which initially eliminated the sanctuary's impurities, now became the vehicle of purging their source--the human heart (1991:51).

Purifying the heart, ethics, rejection of magic--the Israelites have been made to look as Protestant as possible. Evil is now "under control" and people are not prey to the cosmic forces and demons who attacked the practitioners of Ancient Near Eastern religion. We end up with the ironic stance that in order to distinguish the Israelites from their neighbors, the Ancient Near Eastern practitioners are depicted as the "Jews" of the ancient world. They lack the notion of free will, indulge in magical practices, and depend on external rites instead of spiritualized practices.

The Ancient Near Eastern practitioners did not consider their practices to be magic, and the value of the term as a scholarly analytic tool is suspect. Arguments about intention are also very slippery; it is impossible to tell from the outside which practitioners have ethical intentions in their hearts and which do not. Too often the scholar simply assigns intentionality to those rituals for which he has more sympathy. Sacrifice rituals, wherever in the world they are found, produce a series

of echoes whereby the ritual is altered by substitution. For example, a man substitutes for a god, then an animal for a man, and perhaps even grain for an animal. At each stage, looking backwards makes the prior level look more "magical" and the substituted one more "ethical." These substitutions are complex mixtures of semiotic signs, often with "iconic" symbols being replaced with "symbolic" ones. That is, the "standing for" relationship of the item sacrificed is made more obvious in the discourse about the ritual. Again, this looks like a move away from "magic" though, more importantly, *a sacrifice must retain at some level an iconic relationship with the primordial sacrifice tradition, or the ritual will not have any efficacy*. This means that even the ritual of wiping one's heart clean of sins without doing anything else will still be open to the charge of "magic" given the right context.

Since Kaufmann chose to present Israelite religion as "Protestantly" as possible it is no surprise when in turn Tambiah finds Protestant concepts in Kaufmann's presentation of Biblical beliefs about magic.

In its quintessential form--and this is the early Judaic legacy that has colored subsequent Western thought--magic is ritual action that is held to be automatically effective, and ritual action that dabbles with forces and objects that are outside the scope, or independent of the gods."

Tambiah does note one major difference between Biblical and Protestant ideas: the Bible sees magical practices as effective while Protestants consider them misguided and useless. It is at

this juncture that magic becomes simply fraud, and it sets the modern definition apart from most prior uses.

The gap between Biblical and Protestant definitions of magic is wider than he posits. As best as I can tell, magic is not understood to be something outside the realm of the gods in the Bible.[29] Instead, the Biblical denunciations of magic have a practical tone to them;[30] prohibited rituals rely on other people's gods or are outside of the control of the Biblical authorities. The concept of magic as the use of forbidden powers is more important than the notion of working automatically.

Tambiah appears to accept the Israelite denunciations of pagan religion as "magic" at face value. That is, despite the fact that his book recounts the historical embeddedness of terms such as "magic," it appears that Tambiah believes it is possible to identify certain beliefs as essentially magic. He states, for example, "In actual fact magic declined before the technological revolution, and was rejected before the discovery of new remedies to fill the gap." This is not a small point: we do not know *what* it is that declined according to Tambiah. Again it is Protestantism that leads the way theoretically in Tambiah's demarcation. Following Keith Thomas, Tambiah states that while the medieval church had "blurred" the line between magic and religion, it was reasserted by the Protestant Reformation. Many medieval practices look magical to Protestants; that does not mean that the medieval church blurred a distinction.

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[29]A sophisticated analysis of the use of the terms for magic in the Hebrew Scriptures is lacking.
[30]Levine 1978:89.

Finally, it is also important to remember that claims about relativity of culture are only claims about habitual modes of thought and action and not about potential ones. [31] As Tambiah's example of the smallpox vaccine demonstrated, when offered more efficacious alternative, old rituals may be quickly abandoned. At any one moment we are looking at the modes of effective action available in a particular society at a particular time. Over time iconic elements of rituals can be reinterpreted symbolically, and, if they wish, "Jews" can become "Protestants"

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[31] This point is made, in different ways, by both Benjamin Whorf and Roman Jakobson.

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