

Best Wishes: A Psychophilology of Supplications

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If wishes were horses, beggars would ride, jogs the old proverb. The first version of the proverb in print seems to be William Camden's in 1657, as 'If wishes were Thrushes, then beggars would eat birds' (Camden 1657, 298), this being reproduced a couple of years later in an anonymous collection of proverbs (N.R. 1659, 67). Robert Codrington's collection of proverbs in 1664 gives the slightly less intelligible 'Beggars would eat Larks, if wishes were Thrushes' (Codrington 1664, 188). There are variations on the formula, like the three given in John Ray's collection of proverbs:

If wishes were butter-cakes beggars might bite.

If wishes were thrushes, beggars would eat birds.

If wishes would bide, beggars would ride. (Ray 1678, 219)

We also find the somewhat enigmatic 'If dreams and wishes had been true, there had been found a Mayd since the Virgin Mary to make a Nunn of' (Howell 1659, 16)

To wish means to want or desire; and it also means to articulate that desire. The difference between a wish and a want, which seem to mean more or less the same thing, is that a wish is a want tending to an articulated petition. But articulate wishing - 'I wish I could figure out why my Wi-Fi keeps cutting out' - is tellingly different from the action known as 'making a wish'. When one makes a wish one performs a special kind of action, an action that is none other than that known as 'making a wish', in the strange, giddy circularity that is characteristic of every performative, which not only performs an act, but formally performs the act of performing it. As long as we do not think too much about it, we tend to think that the signification of a wish is accessory and incident to the having of it. A Lacanian view, and to a large extent the view held to in magical thinking, is the opposite, that the making of wishes is what makes for wishing and itself makes them 'come true', if not in the sense of being granted, then of coming into their truth.

Such actions are magical in two contrasting senses. Firstly, they have a prescribed form. One must make a wish according to some formula,

often with accompanying actions that must be performed at a certain place or time, in a certain order, etc. It does not matter how ardently one might wish for a sight of one's future lover, or the extirpation of a wart, the wish will not take or work unless the locally-operative rules of wishmaking, arbitrary and therefore absolute, are followed. This mechanism makes for cast-iron cause-and-effect guarantees, as articulated for example in Ned Washington's lyrics in the 1940 Disney film *Pinocchio*: 'When you wish upon a star/Makes no difference who you are/Anything your heart desires will come to you'. Wishes have the power they do because they are separated from the self which makes them, as in the meta-wish that Bertram offers his mother the Countess at the beginning of *All's Well That Ends Well*: 'The best wishes that can be forged in your thoughts be servants to you' (Shakespeare 1993, 83).

Oddly, the fact that purpose must be obedient to prescribed process in wishing also means that the act of wishing can be performed accidentally, as in folk tales of the type known as 'the Foolish Wishes' (Aarne-Thompson-Uther 750A), a sequence of wishes which first cause unintended damage and then must be used up to return things to normal. There is, for example, the story of a couple who are granted three wishes. First the wife sees a pudding, and incautiously wishes she had one; her husband, vexed at her frittering away a wish on something so inconsiderable, wishes that the pudding was hanging from the end of her nose; which, being granted, requires him to expend his final wish on wishing it away (Anon 1932).

Wishes are usually in fact numbered, or incorporate forms of counting procedure. Thus, the compulsive handwasher must perform their votive action a certain number of times, or, as we have recently been exhorted, sing a wishing song like *Happy Birthday*, or *God Save the Queen*, a certain number of times to ensure thorough washing of the hands. Indeed, numerative affordance is perhaps one of the reasons that obsessive-compulsives are in fact so drawn to handwashing rituals: for there is no bodily apparatus more apt for digital-decimal variation than the hand, or indeed ('this little piggy') foot. The subjection of thought to number, or defined procedures, like the 'algorithms' that have long been a staple of exopistemopathic magic talk (Connor 2019a, 322-4) is another aspect of the mechanisation of desire in wishing.

If wishing magic is mechanical, it is also true that it is driven by the principle that Freud called 'omnipotence of thoughts' (Freud 1953-74, 13.84), that is, the belief that, subject to certain disciplines and procedures, thoughts are capable of acting and intervening directly, and therefore nonmechanically, in and on the world. (The very thought of the omnipotence of thoughts may in this respect be thought of as self-instancing.) And yet the point of wishing-magic, like most forms of magic, is precisely that it is not really any kind of thinking, but rather the delegation of thought to formal procedure, thinking, as it were, by acting's attorney.

So, though they may seem to form a stark contrast, the mechanical and mental aspects of wishing are in fact closely confederate. When you close your eyes to make a wish, you allow and assert the priority of the inner world of thought over the outer world of matter. When closing the eyes is associated with closing the hands ('hands together, eyes closed', as I was daily enjoined in school assembly), or in fact, with precisely the same effect of countermanding manual action, the opening of the palms in the Muslim posture of prayer, one similarly asserts the metamanual efficacy of thought. The secrecy attaching to magical procedures, and the prohibition on telling others what you have wished for seem to work (or 'work') in the same way. This reveals that, when it comes to the optative actualisation of desire in the action of wishing, subjective self-relation in fact takes the form of an imaginary machinery, rather than any numinous principle of 'soul' or 'spirit'. So wish-fulfilment is not the opposite of the material reality embodied in scientific mechanism, it is a modulated form of that mechanism, which I regrettably once called a psychotechnography (Connor 2017, 14), that is, simultaneously an imaginary mechanism and projection of imagination itself as a kind of machinery. A wish is therefore a very particular kind of quasi-object, an object impregnated with subjective force: '[This] quasi-object is not an object, but it is one nevertheless, since it is not a subject, since it is in the world; it is also a quasi-subject, since it marks or designates a subject who, without it, would not be a subject' (Serres 2007, 225).

Objects are of great importance in wishing procedures. Such objects are often known as 'votive', the word votive deriving from Latin *votum*, the past participle of *vovere*, which means both to dedicate and to desire. Things that you 'wish on' are things you wish at, or, as we will see later, by: petitory proposals seem to be prepository through

and through. There are wishing wells, wishing boxes, wishing lamps, wishing-trees, wishbones, candles, buttercups, dandelions, ladybirds and rosary beads, each one choreographing a particular wishing song and dance. Magical objects and procedures are also associated with the kind of acted-out wishing known as 'casting a vote', as one casts a spell. Indeed, the word bead itself derives from Old English *bede*, prayers or devotion, the word here passing, in the late fourteenth century, not, as is customary, from the object to the action it enables or accompanies, but from the action to the humble object it employs. Thus 'to bid a bead' is to offer a prayer. The action of praying as *beden* has been secularised into German *bitte*, please, Greek παρακαλῶ, and English 'I bid you (good day, farewell, etc)'. To bid has also become more imperative, in naming an action of commanding. The beadsman or bedesman, remembered largely from Keats's 'Eve of St Agnes', was so-named because he or she was bidden to bede, their occupation being to pray for the souls of the departed, as part of the vast theological-industrial complex of prayer-procurement in the medieval world. Bidding is one of many words in which asking approaches to requiring, and maunding (begging) becomes a kind of mandate or commanding.

The act of wishing known as prayer is avowedly devotional, or more generally, what is called votive. It may not at first, or even at length, be obvious what devotion might have to do with petition. They may even seem like opposites, since, in devotion, one gives a gift, or gives oneself as a gift, whereas in petition, one seeks, or beseeches, a benefit. But these opposites effect a transaction. The pledge, promise, or consecration involving in the votive action of vowing, *vovere*, is usually in fact part of a petitionary exchange, in which one asks by offering - hence 'the wish implied in every vow' as the definition in Lewis and Short's Latin Dictionary, offhandedly, but far-reachingly observes. F.E.J. Valpy's *Etymological Dictionary* defines *voveo* as to 'pray for a thing, while I vow to do something to obtain it' (Valpy 1828, 521). Alfred Ernout and Alfred Meillet agree that the primary meaning of *votum* is 'promesse ou offrande solennelle faite aux dieux, en échange d'une faveur demandée ou accordée', which leads to the word being used to mean 'souhait exprimé, désir' (Ernout and Meillet 2001, 753). What links giving and anticipatory receiving in a more primary sense is desire, or, more specifically, the accessory satisfaction of expressed desire. Desire expressed, we may say, is always partly the hallucinatory mime of its fulfilment. The pleasure

of self-confirming performance is a pleasure that is itself a kind of magical gift, a gift that gives itself or, in that telling contemporary locution, 'the gift that keeps on giving'. This makes even more sense of the derivation of the word *vote* from this same root. One might see in the act of voting for something a kind of wishing, in which the articulation of the wish is also a sort of pledging or dedication of it in the cause of its own granting. In devotion and votive action more generally, one votes for, and thereby in imagination pre-approves, as the credit-card salesmen say, one's own petition.

Of course, some kinds of active or magical wishing are collective and public. Part of the magical procedure of prayer is that it is performed collectively, for example in the form of hymns which often articulate oratory sentiments. When we sing 'Happy Birthday', we are collectively articulating good wishes, just as we might more explicitly in singing 'We Wish You a Merry Christmas'.

Wishing depends on and deploys the mechanical, which is to say, computational capacities of words. A pocket version of Grace in Peterhouse, spoken when no students, but only fellows are present, is, at the commencement of the meal, 'Benedictus benedicat', may the Blessed One give blessing. At the end of the meal, it modulates to 'Benedicto benedicatur', may there be blessing from or (if *Benedicto* be taken to be dative rather than ablative), to the Blessed one (Dixon 1903, 182). The circuit of vicariance carried by these active and passive subjunctives (*benedicat*, *benedicatur*) makes it clear that blessing is something that is requisite for, imparted to, and derivative from, the source of all blessing, who is already *benedictus*, blessed, or, in its magico-poetical form, *blesséd* – or even, perhaps, in the ambiguously active-passive expression used by women of my mother's generation, 'well-spoken'.

Otto Rank and Hans Sachs make a suggestive association between speech, omnipotence and religious observance which helps to interpret these petitory proxies and procurations. First of all comes the imperious what-I-say-goes word-magic that is alloyed with omnipotence of thought: 'The belief in the omnipotence of thought centers in the overevaluation of the power of speech, which is so deep rooted that it is considered sufficient to speak aloud the name of a person in order to influence him in the desired direction' (Rank and Sachs 1915-16, 80). However, this belief in the magical power of words is repeatedly rebuffed or forced into retreat by acknowledgement of

the reality principle. Nevertheless, the belief is secretly preserved, by being deflected into an accessory belief in the competence of an imaginary omnipotent being to make good the omnipotence of thoughts, as a result of their invocation through the knight's-move of prayer, an invocation which at once salutes and suborns its omnipotence:

[W]ith the giving up of the idea of a direct influencing by speech, there appears in its place the petition directed toward a personally conceived supernatural being, which petition betrays itself in double manner, as direct continuation of the faith in the omnipotence of the wishes. On the one hand, the petitioner expects that the solemn voicing aloud of his wishes avails to cause the god to fulfill them, on the other hand, he has at the same time indirectly preserved the feeling of omnipotence which he had to renounce by resignation to the godhead, with which he unconsciously identifies himself. The last step in the religious elaboration of prayer depreciates the significance of the word and renders mental the relation to god by placing faith in the central point and making the result of prayer dependent on him. (Rank and Sachs 1915-16, 80-1)

In the case of the burbled chiasmus of the Peterhouse Grace, the one who gives blessing is given the power to give blessing by being capitalised as the Blessed One from whom the power to give blessing proceeds. In prayer, one invokes the power one gives oneself to evoke the power of another. Once again, petition is a secretly imperious power, which depends on what depends on it, the petition for power giving power to its own petition.

Petitionary prayer is usually positive. But there are negative forms of prayer as well, maledictions as well as benedictions, in the form of curses, comminations, and the hostile kind of praying known as imprecation, which, for a brief period from its introduction in English in the late sixteenth century could mean to pray or supplicate to a lord or deity, but by a century later has been used almost exclusively to mean the calling down of evil or calamity on a person. The votive link between the curse and the blessing is suggested by the Greek equivalent, the *anathema*, which is derived from ἀνάθημα, an offering, or something set up for the gods, from ἀνά up + τιθέναι, to place. The meaning of something sacred, devoted to or set apart for divine use, survives as long as 1608, when Edward Topsell tenderly denominated

a spider's web as 'the very patterne, index, and anathema of supernaturall wisdom' (Topsell 1608, 262). Anathema here reechoes the well-known ambivalence of the Latin *sacer*, both consecrated and condemned.

The petitory-invocatory aspect of cursing is suggested by the fact that the curses of beggars, also expert in elaborate benedictions in thanks for offerings, have long been regarded as dangerously potent (Waters 2020). For my mother, nothing could be more reckless than to refuse to buy the withered grey sprig of 'heather' offered for sale at her door, which was 'lucky' only through the protection money paid to fend off bad luck. Although curses often involve, as the OED characterises it, 'invocation or adjuration of the deity', they also usually assume for the curser or for the curse itself the power of affecting their victim by direct *fiat*, a command which itself has the form of a precatory imperative. Occasionally, the righteous may call upon the deity to punish the wicked, though this is much rarer, given the prohibition against wishing ill upon others (for among those who are said to be cursed are the 'unmerciful'). The Anglican service of Communion only implicitly calls upon the Lord to punish sinners: rather it gives warning of what lies in store if they persist. The closest to a prayer comes in what may be heard as an implicit optative of the series of cursings: 'Cursed is he, that curseth his father or mother', and so on, which may perhaps be read as 'cursed be he', or 'may he be cursed', or even just 'cursed is he, and quite right too'. Indeed, the second half of the service of Communion quickly provides reassurance against what has been colourfully threatened in the first half of the ritual, several times guaranteeing God's 'endless pity' and 'infinite mercy', and promising purging with hyssop and various other conveniences for those who turn away from sin in time (Anon 1559, sig. U8^r).

Cursing is much more in evidence in the truncated or implicit forms of swearing, and indeed this is the usual signification of cursing or cussing in the USA: 'damn you, sir!', implying 'may you be damned', and 'blast this useless sellotape', implying 'may this sellotape be subject to blasting'. Blasting is particularly interesting, since it invokes a pernicious breath breathed out upon an object, causing death or shrivelling, which is itself a magical, or optative operation, depending on the magical belief in the power of the breath both to vivify and putrefy ('Breathe on me breath of God', in Edwin Hatch's hymn, that always imparted a waft of disgust when I sang it). Presumably there

is a special link between this kind of magical action, and the action of invoking it in speech, given the participation of breath in the latter. In such utterances, the prayer is internalised, hence the term 'imprecation'. I was warned as a child not to use the expression 'blimey', or 'Cor blimey', since I was said 'really' to be saying 'May God blind me, if...', and, as noted already, magic is magic precisely because it works mechanically, whether or not you can spell out the spell you are unknowingly purposing.

In fact, the curse is more magical than the prayer, in that it seems more obviously to assume and wield the very power that is being wished for or invoked. A curse can mean both an utterance designed to encourage God to produce ill effects, or the ill effects themselves, as in the phrase 'the curse' used of menstruation. The OED's remark on the *curse* is the familiar miracle of dry derisiveness: 'It may be uttered by the deity, or by persons supposed to speak in his name, or to be listened to by him.' It is as bizarre that God should go in for cursing as it is that he should bless, for from whom might his act of cursing invoke assistance but from himself? Again, this may give a particular potency to 'blasting', as swearing, since it contains the idea that God's curse is the blasting gust of his very utterance, a doubling which itself shadowed in the mortal curse.

And yet, although both benediction and malediction seem to require or implicate the mediating omnipotent agent dreamed up by Rank and Sachs, the curse or malediction often seems more likely to depend on the conjuration or adjuration of mediating powers. Indeed, it is the impiety of this swearing or declaring *by*, which calls for the deprecation (literally the unpraying or praying down) of the profane prayer magic contained in phrases like 'by God', 'by Jove', 'by Christ' or, in folk etymology, 'by our Lady' (bloody). We may in fact suggest that malediction is essentially a kind of biloquism (an early alternative to the word ventriloquism), or double-talk, which borrows its power from the parody of the divine invocation in blessing its effects. Though both benediction and malediction depend on supplicatory invocation, the proliferation of accessories and adjutants in diabolical wish-making may warrant the supposition that malediction is more essentially a matter of mediation than benediction. Malediction is mediation diversified perhaps, where benediction is mediation dissimulated.

Many maledictions take the form of what was known as a *defixio* or, in Greek, κατάδεσμος, a charm which arrests or paralyses. Often, these charms took the form of strips or tablets of lead on which the imprecations were inscribed, sometimes in backwards writing, reversal being especially powerful computational magic, with the lead being rolled up. Lead seems to have been used because it was relatively cheap, and quite easily scratched with a stylus (Gager 1992, 3-4). Like writing itself, lead seemed to be ambivalently both durable (cold and heavy as death) and ductile (pliable, inscribable). The defixiones were sometimes themselves transfixed with iron nails (Gager 1992, 18), or, enclosed in objects such as the fourth-century lamps apparently thrown into the cistern of the sacred spring of Anna Perenna in Piazza Euclide in Rome (Mastrocinque 2007). Another of the objects commonly employed for cursing in the ancient Mediterranean and Middle East were magical bowls, which were commonly inscribed with spells on their insides, sometimes in a spiral coiling inwards from the rim to the centre, and buried upside down, in a practical enactment of their power to trap or constrict one's enemy, or a malign spirit (Montgomery 1913, 40-5;). Occasionally, the bowl could be provided by a human skull. As so often, the supplications contained in these inscriptions, whether defensive or aggressive, rely upon supplementation, as explains: 'the insult, injury, offence or theft that was committed against a particular individual was transferred to one of the gods, so that now the god became the injured party and was thus in a position to redress the insult, injury, offence, or theft' (Levene 2013, 6).

The force of the spell, or incantation, is the force of enclosure, or the magical suspending of time and mutability, sometimes by putting things back-to-front or up-ending, that primary infraction of the irreversibility of things in nature that the symbolic order supplies. At its heart, as it is at the heart of all art, is the principle of reflexive redundancy (Connor 2011), that which turns in, or 'waves back', upon itself. In his final book, which he sent to his publisher on the day before his death, rendering it both final and yet, because he had no time himself to reread it, unfinished, Michel Serres finds in this principle of *relire*, rereading, the principle of the *relié*, retying, relying or religion (Serres 2019).

Giorgio Agamben associates this kind of performative with the making of oaths: when one says 'I swear that', followed by some

assertion, 'the performative substitutes for the denotative relationship between speech and fact a self-referential relation that, putting the former out of play, puts itself forward as the decisive fact' (Agamben 2010, 55). Like swearing, wishing goes well beyond the simple action of asking; it performs the supplementary act of exhibiting and thereby asserting a certain kind of hopeful faith in the efficacy of the performance, in and through it: I wish that wishing might make wishes come true. Invocatory prayer is the performance, not just of the power of wishes, but the special power of wishes expressed in certain ways. Prayer is one of the most important of the ways in which the power of articulation is repeatedly assumed and thereby assured. Indeed, the power invested in prayer is more than that of a mere instrument: as in the act of 'veridiction' (Agamben 2010, 57) constituted by swearing, prayer involves a recognition of the constitutive power of language for the human subject. As Agamben explains, the specificity of human language, as opposed to that of other species, consists in the fact that 'uniquely among living things, man is not limited to acquiring language as one capacity among others that he is given but has made of it his specific potentiality; *he has, that is to say, put his very nature at stake in language*' (Agamben 2010, 68). This does not occur simply in the act of swearing, which, indeed, will often require some kind of petitory requiring, or invocation of some exterior pledge or power; it is also at work in the petition of prayer. Oath and prayer seem superficially to be antithetical. In the one case, one closes uncertainty through the act of assertion; in the other, one acknowledges and inhabits uncertainty through the act of asking. But the two are linked through their performative nature. In an oath, one establishes one's authority through mediation ('I swear by Almighty God'); in a prayer, one establishes a mediation on one's own verbal authority ('Almighty God, I pray thee'). Oath and prayer are linked through the performance of the fundamental dependence on language that is an essential part of human nature. Along with the promise, a form of self-bondage that only language makes possible, petitionary prayer depends on language, and in the cases both of swearing an oath and of uttering a prayer, the dependence on language is ritually affirmed through performance. The opening of a question in petitionary prayer, and the closing of questions in the oath are superficially antithetical only because they are both variations on the essential condition that belongs to language of being able to put one's being in question. The appeal of the prayer and the assertion of

the oath will both typically depend on the power of calling by name (appellation), which can enact the demand that both God and man keep their word.

Perhaps none of this has any very obvious relation to contemporary forms of discursive action. Unless, that is, or until, one begins to notice how much of contemporary discourse may in fact be considered in the light of what Wyndham Lewis called 'blessing' and 'blasting' (Lewis 1914, 11-28). The strenuous efforts currently being made to regulate what is called 'hate speech' themselves have a strongly magical force, prompted by the sense that ill-wishes, like blessings, have a new kind of malefic autonomy conferred not only by the magical act of writing, so indispensable in both blessing and cursing, but by the kind of writing seemingly capable of writing itself that is represented by the virulently mimetic memesis of internet discourse. Academic discourse shadows media discourse in being driven either by the work of promotional benediction, or of denunciatory malediction. The two come together in exquisite coaction in the ambivalence of the celebrity, the one who is deified in order to be defiled, in the fulfilment of chiaroscuro collective wishes that dare not speak their name (Connor 2010).

Digital humanities can easily be thought of, especially, but not exclusively by those who are wary of or opposed to it (them), as part of a new cycle of calculative rationality. Digital humanities can certainly give the appearance of moving the arts further towards the humanities, that is to say, moving intellectual habits and traditions founded upon individualising invention and interpretation towards professional disciplines founded upon collectivising analysis and processing. My view is that every change in the understanding of knowledge, including, perhaps, the idea, outlandishly unintelligible for so many centuries, that the humanities 'produce' 'knowledge', has both an objective and a reflexive aspect or, as they might otherwise be understood, an epistemic and an epistemopathic dimension. The epistemic dimension involves what is done and how it is done: so, systems, structures, processes and practices, of enquiry, communication, management and certification. That is to say, in short, actions of sorting, of which all labour, according to Michel Serres, consists. The epistemopathic dimension involves feelings about what you do and how you do it, of excitement, fascination, resentment, rage, dread, desire and so on, these being imperfectly

articulated at best, and so all the more powerfully productive. Epistemic rationality is practical; epistemopathic rationality is magical, always subject to the proviso that magic is not the opposite of practice but a certain mood of it. (The affinities and procreant intercourse between terms like *mood*, *mode*, *medium* and *modulation* would repay explication at length.) By magical, we must understand something other than simply false or fictive: magical things are things we want to be, or wish were, true. Magic is the mattering of human thought to itself, or to use the reflexively epistemopathic Freudian term, the cathexis of intellectual practice (Connor 2019a, 96-7). For every new technology and accompanying set of implementing techniques, there is an equal and not-quite-opposite psychotechnography. For every new machine, there is a new machinery of fantasy. Of no concept could this be more bawlingly obvious than that of what is called 'artificial intelligence', and the fantasy it kindles that there has ever been any other kind. So machinery is magical through and through, and in no wise more potently than in the fantasy-saturated social-distancing of operation from experience, calculation from passion, method from mattering. The great global enclosure of 2020 and the massive enlargement of uterisation it has produced may be seen as an intensification of that process of explicitation identified in *Spheres* by Peter Sloterdijk (2011, 2014, 2016), in which we simultaneously expose ourselves to risks and secure ourselves against them by epistemisation, thereby enclosing ourselves in bubbles of epistemic and epistemopathic self-maintenance.

In times of crisis and duress, rituals of propitiatory humiliation become as irresistible and psychopolitically potent as the purgative excommunication of scapegoats during less obviously dangerous times (when things are precarious, imprecation is always called for). National days of fasting and humiliation were regularly declared in England and elsewhere during times of plague, the voluptuous self-sacrifice acting as a means of paying for the remission from affliction for which the self-imposed suffering makes penitential petition (Connor 2019b, 107-9). Such outbreaks of ritual wishing and counterphobic ceremonial are far from wishy-washy affairs; they are part of a solemn-sinister drama of symbolically-effected SOS and succour which forms and sustains stress-collectives:

Certainly, every social system needs a foundation of institutions, organizations, and transport means; it must ensure the exchange of goods and services. The maintenance of the feeling of social cohesion among the shareholders, however, can only follow through chronic, symbolically produced stress. The larger the collective, the stronger the stress forces need to be that counteract the disintegration of the uncollectible collective into a patchwork of introverted clans and enclaves. As long as a collective can work itself up into a rage over the notion of doing away with itself, it has passed its vitality test. (Sloterdijk 2016, 8).

The self-supplying performance of symbolic supplication, both in benediction and malediction, is central to this 'crisis-work' (Connor 2016). It is, immunologically, at once the carrier and the calmer of duress, hence, very likely, its maliciously masochistic addictiveness. The time has not yet come, though it is surely coming, for an account of how an entire world economy has been, in the literal sense, brought to its knees, carried on a tide, not of tyranny and martial law, but of what can only be described as a militant docility among entire populations, with not a murmur to be heard from academics or intellectuals. For it is the perfervid demand from below for preemptive atonement (Lock Us Down, O Lord) that has driven governments to take punitive action to imperil the basis of their populations' future security, 'saving the National Health Service' in the UK by means of measures the cost of which is neatly equivalent to burning to the ground ten fully-equipped hospitals per day. In extremity, an extremity hugely amplified by the media systems whose role is thereby fully disclosed, not as the means of conveying anything external to itself that might be called information, but rather keeping soothingly stoked the socio-cytokine storm of emotional inflammation, humans revert to their primal eleutherophobia, insisting on their right to have had no choice. In extremity, they can be relied on to rely on the most immemorial magico-symbolic immunology of all: the oblation performed in immolation, petrolled by the incinerating ardour of the exponential. The thaumaturgic covenant contracted through the sumptuary obscenity of sacrifice feeds and famishes the current craving for petitionary prostration and penitentiary observance.

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