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Battling to the End
Conversations with Benoît Chantre

René Girard

Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831), the Prussian military theoretician who wrote On War, is known above all for his famous dictum: “War is the continuation of politics by other means.” In René Girard’s view, however, the strategist’s treatise offers up a more disturbing truth to the reader willing to extrapolate from its most daring observations: with modern warfare comes the insanity of tit-for-tat escalation, which political institutions have lost their ability to contain. Having witnessed the Napoleonic Wars firsthand, Girard argues, Clausewitz intuited that unbridled “reciprocal action” could eventually lead foes to total mutual annihilation. Haunted by the Franco-German conflict that was to ravage Europe, in Girard’s account Clausewitz is a prescient witness to the terrifying acceleration of history. Battling to the End issues a warning about the apocalyptic threats hanging over our planet and delivers an authoritative lesson on the mimetic laws of violence.

“Battling to the End is elegant, profound, wide-ranging and frequently punchy. The introduction and epilogue are persuasive, prophetic tours de force.” —San Francisco Chronicle

“I think Girard is the most important theorist on the competitive behavior of human beings.” —German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, interview in Frieze Magazine, 2009

“Battling to the End is a powerful re-thinking of the Bible’s apocalyptic literature developing from an insightful analysis of Carl von Clausewitz’s unfinished classic, On War. . . . Theologians, military strategists, anthropologists, any thoughtful person who cares about humanity’s future, in fact, will profit from engaging Girard.” —Right Reverend Pierre W. Whalon, Bishop in Charge of the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe, Anglicans Online

René Girard is a member of the French Academy and Emeritus Professor at Stanford University. His books have been translated and acclaimed worldwide.
Although women alone have the ability to bring children into the world, modern Western thought tends to discount this female prerogative. In *Giving Life, Giving Death*, Lucien Scubla argues that structural anthropology sees women as objects of exchange that facilitate alliance-building rather than as vectors of continuity between generations. Examining the work of Lévi-Strauss, Freud, and Girard, as well as ethnographic and clinical data, *Giving Life, Giving Death* seeks to explain why, in constructing their master theories, our greatest thinkers have consistently marginalized the cultural and biological fact of maternity. In the spirit of Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*, Scubla constructs an anthropology that posits a common source for family and religion. His wide-ranging study explores how rituals unite violence and the sacred and intertwine the giving of death and the giving of life.

“*Giving Life, Giving Death* delivers a challenge to both psychoanalysts and anthropologists. It makes something that neither group has wanted to see look like an obvious fact, namely that the desire and organization of human societies do not revolve around *Penisneid*, the Oedipus complex (classically interpreted), or alliance, but instead around masculine envy of women’s power to give birth and relations of filiation as much as or more than alliance. *Giving Life, Giving Death* marks a turning point in the field.” —Alain Caillé, professor of sociology, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense

**Lucien Scubla** is a researcher at the Institut Marcel Mauss of the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. He is the author of a study on Claude Lévi-Strauss and wrote the preface for the French translation of *Social Origins*, a posthumous work by A. M. Hocart.
Vengeance in Reverse
The Tangled Loops of Violence, Myth, and Madness
Mark R. Anspach

How do humans stop fighting? Where do the gods of myth come from? What does it mean to go mad? Mark R. Anspach tackles these and other conundrums as he draws on ethnography, literature, psychotherapy, and the theory of René Girard to explore some of the fundamental mechanisms of human interaction. Likening gift exchange to vengeance in reverse, the first part of the book outlines a fresh approach to reciprocity, while the second part traces the emergence of transcendence in collective myths and individual delusions. From the peacemaking rituals of prestate societies to the paradoxical structure of consciousness, Anspach takes the reader on an intellectual journey that begins with the problem of how to deceive violence and ends with the riddle of how one can deceive oneself.

“Mark Anspach’s Vengeance in Reverse is a brilliant integration of great themes in anthropology: reciprocity, revenge, war, sacrifice, the birth of the gods, and the anti-communal tragedy of madness. It will take its place among the works that have helped us understand both the bright and dark sides of human nature and culture.” —Melvin Konner, Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor, Emory University, and author of The Tangled Wing: Biological Constraints on the Human Spirit

Mark R. Anspach is an American anthropologist and social theorist whose writings have appeared in nine languages. He is affiliated with the LIAS research team at the Institut Marcel Mauss, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris.
Conrad’s Shadow
Catastrophe, Mimesis, Theory

Nidesh Lawtoo

Western thought has often dismissed shadows as fictional, but what if fictions reveal original truths? Drawing on an anti-Platonic tradition in critical theory, Lawtoo adopts ethical, anthropological, and philosophical lenses to offer new readings of Joseph Conrad’s novels and the postcolonial and cinematic works that respond to his oeuvre. He argues that Conrad’s fascination with doubles urges readers to reflect on the two sides of mimesis: one side is dark and pathological, and involves the escalation of violence, contagious epidemics, and catastrophic storms; the other side is luminous and therapeutic, and promotes communal survival, postcolonial reconciliation, and plastic adaptations to changing environments. Once joined, the two sides reveal Conrad as an author whose Janus-faced fictions are powerfully relevant to our contemporary world of global violence and environmental crisis.

“Nidesh Lawtoo is a rising figure in Conrad studies, and Conrad’s Shadow adds significantly to his reputation. Lawtoo connects the Conradian idea of homo duplex and doubling in his works to mimetic theory and in the process provides a welcome return to a textual-based literary analysis in which Lawtoo gives us new, challenging, and insightful readings of Conrad’s works. Conrad’s Shadow will likely prove to be one of the most innovative books on Conrad to appear in some time.” —John Peters, University Distinguished Research Professor, University of North Texas, and general editor of Conradiana

David Humbert

Violence in the Films of Alfred Hitchcock
A Study in Mimesis

Parting ways with the Freudian and Lacanian readings that have dominated recent scholarly understanding of Hitchcock, David Humbert examines the roots of violence in the director’s narratives and finds them not in human sexuality but in mimesis. Through an analysis of seven key films, he argues that Girard’s model of mimetic desire—desire oriented by imitation of and competition with others—best explains a variety of well-recognized themes, including the MacGuffin, the double, the innocent victim, the wrong man, the transfer of guilt, and the scapegoat. This study will appeal not only to Hitchcock fans and film scholars but also to those interested in Freud and Girard and their competing theories of desire.

“This book is a brilliant response to a famous volume edited by Slavoj Žižek in which Jacques Lacan takes the place of René Girard. The author convinces us that one of the best guides to understanding Girard is Hitchcock’s filmography. The anguish of the wrongly accused, the irresistible escalation of violence, and the independence of desire from its object are all ingredients of the Hitchcockian suspense, and we follow the author’s analyses with the same pleasure as we watched the movies.” —Jean-Pierre Dupuy, author of The Mark of the Sacred

David Humbert is associate professor in and chair of the Department of Religious Studies at Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario.
The Mimetic Brain

Jean-Michel Oughourlian

The discovery of mirror neurons in the 1990s led to an explosion of research and debate about the imitative capacities of the human brain. Some herald a paradigm shift on the order of DNA in biology, while others remain skeptical. In this revolutionary volume Jean-Michel Oughourlian shows how the hypotheses of René Girard can be combined with the insights of neuroscientists to shed new light on the “mimetic brain.” Offering up clinical studies and a complete reevaluation of classical psychiatry, Oughourlian explores the interaction among reason, emotions, and imitation and reveals that rivalry—the blind spot in contemporary neuroscientific understandings of imitation—is a misunderstood driving force behind mental illness. Oughourlian’s analyses shake the very foundations of psychiatry as we know it and open up new avenues for both theoretical research and clinical practice.

“Seldom is a scientific book written with such grace and power that it opens up new psychological worlds in the manner of a novel. This is such a book. It combines neuroscience with unlikely bedfellows—anthropology, psychiatry, child development, Don Quixote, and Freud. Oughourlian explores the rational mind, the emotional brain, and the delicate connections between self and other. Readers will be seduced by Oughourlian’s brilliance, shocked by his analysis of human desires, and introduced to a scientific revolution that is destined to change how we think about the human brain.”
—Andrew N. Meltzoff, coauthor, The Scientist in the Crib

Jean-Michel Oughourlian is President of the Association of Doctors of the American Hospital of Paris, where for more than three decades he served as Chief of Psychiatry.

Enigmas of Sacrifice

A Critique of Joseph M. Plunkett and the Dublin Insurrection of 1916

W. J. McCormack

Enigmas of Sacrifice: A Critique of Joseph M. Plunkett and the Dublin Insurrection of 1916 is the first critical study of the religious poet and militarist Joseph M. Plunkett, who was executed with the other leaders of the Dublin insurrection of 1916. In this eye-opening book, W. J. McCormack explores and analyzes Plunkett’s brief life, work, and influence, beginning with his wealthy but dysfunctional family, irregular Jesuit education, and self-canceling sexuality. McCormack continues through Plunkett’s active phase when amateur theatricals and a magazine editorship brought him into the emergent neonationalist discourse of early twentieth-century Ireland. Finally, the author arrives at Holy Week 1916, when Plunkett masterminded the forgery of official documentation in order to provoke and justify the insurrection he planned. Enigmas of Sacrifice is unique in its effort to understand a major figure of Irish nationalism in terms that reach beyond political identity.

“A compelling reassessment of one of the most intriguing cultural figures responsible for the insurrection during Easter 1916, Enigmas of Sacrifice draws on a remarkable breadth of scholarly disciplines and original research to locate Joseph Plunkett within the complex transnational web of intellectual currents that shaped his life and times.”
—Fearghal McGarry, reader in modern Irish history, Queen’s University Belfast

W. J. McCormack has taught in American, Austrian, Belgian, British, Hungarian, and Irish universities, specializing in a comparative criticism of Irish culture and history. He is a bibliographer, biographer, and poet (under the name Hugh Maxton).
The Barren Sacrifice
An Essay on Political Violence

Paul Dumouchel

According to political theory, the primary function of modern states is to protect us—both from one another and from external enemies. Yet these same states commit genocides, ethnic cleansings, and large-scale massacres against their own citizens. This paradoxical reversal, suggests Paul Dumouchel, is an ever-present possibility inscribed in the very structure of modern states. The latter need an enemy to exist not because they are essentially evil but because modern politics constitutes a violent means of protecting us from our own violence. Drawing on and critiquing the insights of Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, Hobbes, and René Girard, Dumouchel develops a theory of territory and solidarity of profound relevance to a contemporary world of long-term civil conflict and stateless refugees. Increasingly, in times of both war and peace, the sacrifices demanded by the state no longer suffice to protect us from ourselves.

“The reflection on political violence Paul Dumouchel conducts in this book is one of the most original and stimulating I have had the opportunity to read in a long time…. Dumouchel always presents his arguments precisely and clearly. While his intention is not to teach us a lesson, his book itself amounts to a lesson in intellectual rigor. It also constitutes an implicit call for us to find a way to deal with the violence that consumes our societies.” —Marcel Hénaff, Distinguished Research Professor, University of California, San Diego

— Paul Dumouchel is Professor of Philosophy at the Graduate School of Core Ethics and Frontier Sciences, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan.

Machado de Assis
Toward a Poetics of Emulation

João Cezar de Castro Rocha

This book offers an alternative explanation for one of the central riddles of Brazilian literary criticism: the “midlife crisis” that Machado de Assis experienced between 1878 and 1880, which resulted in the writing of The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas, as well as in the remarkable production of his mature years. Focusing on Machado’s masterpiece Dom Casmurro, Castro Rocha explores tensions generated when Eça de Queirós published the acclaimed novel Cousin Basílio and analyzes Machado’s two long texts condemning his literary rival. This approach enables Castro Rocha to construct a new theoretical framework based on a literary appropriation of “thick description,” an ethnographic method from which he derives his key hypothesis: an unforeseen consequence of Machado’s reaction to Eça’s novel was a return to the classical notion of aemulatio, which led Machado to develop a “poetics of emulation.”

“Acute, captivating, beautifully written and translated, this is a masterly reinterpretation of one of the world’s greatest novelists…. João Cezar de Castro Rocha unfolds in front of our eyes the subtle, ramified, mimetic complexity of Machado de Assis’s genius, along with the anxieties of its formation.” —Pierpaolo Antonello, Reader in Modern Italian Literature and Culture, University of Cambridge

— João Cezar de Castro Rocha is Professor of Comparative Literature at the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro.
A Short Treatise on the Metaphysics of Tsunamis

Jean-Pierre Dupuy

This incisive essay examines recent catastrophes—including the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami and the Fukushima nuclear disaster—in light of metaphysical debates surrounding the 1755 Lisbon earthquake and twentieth-century meditations on Auschwitz and the nuclear bomb. Philosophers have long distinguished between contingent natural catastrophes and intentional acts of moral evil. The last century, however, produced moral atrocities so incommensurable that their victims understood them as divorced from human responsibility. Survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki likened the horror they had suffered to a natural disaster—a tsunami. The collapse of the distinction between natural and moral evil calls for a new way of thinking about humanity’s future. The better to rouse us from our collective lethargy, Jean-Pierre Dupuy embraces the paradoxical logic of Biblical prophecy, which views apocalyptic disaster as both unlikely and inevitable.

“This is a remarkable book that will deepen appreciation among English language readers for the significance of Jean-Pierre Dupuy’s work. . . . Having been influenced by a diverse spectrum of contemporary thinkers—John Rawls, Hannah Arendt, Hans Jonas, René Girard—he steps beyond them to engage one of the fundamental challenges of our time: how to comprehend and respond to those newest forms of evil that are intertwined with advances of science and technology.”

—Carl Mitcham, Professor of Liberal Arts and International Studies at the Colorado School of Mines and Professor in the School of Philosophy, Renmin University of China

Jean-Pierre Dupuy is Professor of French and Professor by courtesy of Political Science at Stanford University.

Mimesis, Desire, and the Novel

René Girard and Literary Criticism

Edited by Pierpaolo Antonello and Heather Webb

Fifty years after its publication in English, René Girard’s Deceit, Desire, and the Novel (1965) has become a classic of modern criticism, and the notion of triangular desire has entered the theoretical lexicon. This volume provides a forum for a new generation of scholars and critics to reassess, challenge, and expand the hermeneutical reach of key issues raised by Girard’s book, including literary knowledge, realism and representation, imitation and the anxiety of influence, metaphysical desire, deviated transcendence, literature and religious experience, individualism and modernity, and death and resurrection. It also provides an extensive and detailed historical understanding of the representation of desire, imitation, and rivalry in European and world literature, from Dante and Dickens to Proust and Jonathan Littell.

“This powerful collection of informed critical responses to René Girard’s seminal work—both to its central tenets and multiform applications—could not be more pressing in contemporary literary-cultural studies. Scholars across all the disciplines that Girard has interrogated will discover anew his key understanding: literature as theory is very much alive.”

—Mary Orr, Professor of French, Director of the Institute of Language and Culture, University of Southampton

Pierpaolo Antonello is Reader in Modern Italian Literature and Culture at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of St John’s College. Heather Webb is Lecturer in the Department of Italian at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Selwyn College.
Intimate Domain
Desire, Trauma, and Mimetic Theory

Martha J. Reineke

In *Intimate Domain*, Martha J. Reineke reframes the Freudian notion of the “family romance” in order to initiate a long-overdue dialogue between psychoanalysis and René Girard’s mimetic theory, which she argues can benefit from a richer and more elastic understanding of Freud’s thought and legacy. Attending to familial dynamics Girard has overlooked and reclaiming aspects of his early writing on sensory experience, Reineke uses psychoanalytic readings of literature to place mimetic theory on firmer ground. She draws on three exemplary narratives—Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, Sophocles’s *Antigone*, and Julia Kristeva’s *The Old Man and the Wolves*—in order to explore fundamental patterns of mimetic desire among family members, foregrounding the affective and bodily nature of repetitive violence. When our childhood relationships are etched by trauma, she argues, we are precluded from experiencing restorative transformation—and yet families can also act as intimate spaces for healing and positive mimesis.

“Reineke’s *Intimate Domain* is an authoritative and timely response to many of our contemporary dilemmas. Drawing on René Girard’s neglected early work on sensory experience, Reineke boldly reactivates the stalled relationship between mimetic theory and psychoanalysis.” —Maria Margaroni, Associate Professor in Literary Theory and Feminist Thought, University of Cyprus

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Can We Survive Our Origins?
Readings in René Girard’s Theory of Violence and the Sacred

Edited by Pierpaolo Antonello and Paul Gifford

Are religions intrinsically violent (as argued by the ‘new atheists’)? Or, as René Girard claims, have they been functionally rational instruments developed to cope with the intrinsically violent runaway dynamic that characterizes human social organization in all periods of human history? Is violence decreasing in this time of secular modernity (as argued by Steven Pinker)? Or are we, rather, at increased and even apocalyptic risk from our enhanced powers of action and our decreased socio-symbolic protections? Girard’s mimetic theory has slowly been recognized as one of the most striking contributions to fundamental anthropology, in particular for its power to model and explain the violent sacred, ancient and modern. The present volume sets this power of explanation in an evolutionary and Darwinian frame. It asks: how far do cultural mechanisms of controlling violence, which allowed humankind to cross the threshold of hominization, still represent today a default setting that threatens to destroy us?

“The importance of studies such as the ones contained in this book is that they both underline the urgency of the cultural crisis and open up impressive possibilities for conversation between Girardians and others in the mainstream of our discourse.” —Right Reverend Rowan Williams, Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, former Archbishop of Canterbury

Pierpaolo Antonello is Reader in Modern Italian Literature and Culture at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of St. John’s College. Paul Gifford is Buchanan Professor of French Emeritus at the University of St Andrews.
French philosopher of science Michel Serres has stated that Girard’s mimetic theory provides a Darwinian account of culture. Girard, he writes, "proposes a dynamic, shows an evolution, and gives a universal explanation." Joining disciplinary worlds, this book aims to explore that ambitious claim, invoking viewpoints as diverse as evolutionary culture theory, cultural anthropology, archeology, cognitive psychology, neuroscience, ethology, and philosophy. The volume’s contributions, including articles by anthropologist William Durham, psychologist David P. Barash, and behavioral biologist Melvin Konner, cover topics ranging from coevolution to Stone Age animal sacrifice. Antonello and Gifford argue that Girard’s theory has the potential to become for the human and social sciences an overarching framework akin to the integrating model that present-day biological science owes to Darwin.

"Rarely does one see such an esteemed collection of scholars brought together to discuss issues of the first importance—both to the sciences and the humanities... This is, in short, an outstanding work of interdisciplinary scholarship." –Dr. Chris Fleming, Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities and Communication Arts, University of Western Sydney

Roberto Farneti has taken a series of interlocking ideas from the immensely influential anthropologist René Girard; greatly expanded, modified, and in some places refined them; and then turned them to an understanding of the modern politics of global conflict. The result is a work of troubling and stunning originality..." –Anthony Pagden, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, University of California, Los Angeles
PHILOSOPHY

Economy and the Future
A Crisis of Faith
Jean-Pierre Dupuy

A monster stalks the earth—a beast that takes fright at the slightest noise and starts at the sight of its own shadow. And yet the world’s leaders tremble before it. They tremble, Jean-Pierre Dupuy says, because they have lost faith in the future. The monster in question is the market. What Dupuy calls Economy has degenerated today into a mad spectacle of unrestrained consumption and speculation. But in its positive form—a truly political economy in which politics, not economics, is predominant—Economy creates not only a sense of trust but also a belief in the open-endedness of the future without which capitalism cannot function. In this indictment of the hegemonic pretensions of neoclassical economic theory, Dupuy argues that the immutable decision of God has given way to the unpredictable and capricious judgment of the crowd. Our future depends on whether we can see through the blindness of orthodox economic thinking.

“A mastery of a wide range of disciplines allows Jean-Pierre Dupuy to penetrate an enigma compounded of the mystery of time, apocalypse, faith, Calvinism, Max Weber’s great masterpiece, Sartre’s concept of bad faith, and Camus’s The Stranger.” —Gérard Leclerc, France Catholique

Jean-Pierre Dupuy is Professor of French and Professor by courtesy of Political Science at Stanford University.

SOCIAL SCIENCE

The Ambivalence of Scarcity and Other Essays
Paul Dumouchel

We associate insufficient resources with conditions of poverty that produce social unrest. And yet scarcity also functions as a driving force for economic growth. In The Ambivalence of Scarcity, Paul Dumouchel reveals the blurred line separating undesirable deprivation from healthy incentive and argues that scarcity—and the accompanying disappearance of reciprocal ties of obligation—is the price at which modern economies purchase a diminution in contagious violence. Dumouchel also addresses the question of envy and its role in debates about economic anthropology. He offers a critique of Helmut Schoeck’s Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior and explores the benefits of using mimetic theory as both a general framework for economic analysis and a tool to understand situations in which economic agents change preferences or behave inconsistently. Additional sections explore the notion of méconnaissance central to Girard’s work and analyze the violence typical of modern societies, from high school bullying to genocide and terrorist attacks.

“Paul Dumouchel is a subtle, powerful, and profoundly original thinker. He has an uncommon knack for making us look at the most basic social facts with different eyes. Taking mimetic theory in new directions, this book uncovers the hidden logic behind the economic and political transformations of our time.” —Mark R. Anspach, anthropologist and editor of Oedipus Unbound: Selected Writings on Rivalry and Desire by René Girard

Paul Dumouchel is Professor of Philosophy at the Graduate School of Core Ethics and Frontier Sciences, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan.

978-1-61186-132-7 $29.95 PAPER • 388 PAGES • 6 × 9"

978-1-61186-146-4 $19.95 PAPER • 194 PAGES • 6 × 9"
The Prophetic Law
Essays in Judaism, Girardianism, Literary Studies, and the Ethical
Sandor Goodhart

Whether engaging the European novel, ancient Greek tragedy, Shakespeare’s plays, or Jewish and Christian scripture, René Girard teaches us to draw upon the interpretative readings already available within (and constitutive of) those classic texts. In The Prophetic Law, literary scholar, theorist, and critic Sandor Goodhart brings mimetic theory together with Biblical scripture (Genesis and Exodus), literature (the European novel and Shakespeare), and philosophy and religious studies (ethical and Jewish subject areas). He also reproduces polemical exchanges—including with René Girard—as part of what could justly be deemed Jewish-Christian dialogue. The twelve texts that make up the heart of this volume constitute the bulk of the author’s writings to date on mimetic theory outside of his three previous books on Girardian topics. Together they offer a comprehensive engagement with Girard’s sharpest and most original literary, anthropological, and scriptural insights.

“Essays by Goodhart and responses from Girard and others address a common theme: Goodhart’s call to bring within the purview of mimetic theory the anti-sacrificial message of Judaism and other religious and reflective traditions. An essential backstory to the Girardian corpus, these essays chronicle and preserve for future generations a conversation that spanned two decades and had a transformative impact on mimetic theory.” —Martha J. Reineke, Professor of Religion, University of Northern Iowa

Sandor Goodhart is Professor of English and Jewish Studies at Purdue University.

The Head Beneath the Altar
Hindu Mythology and the Critique of Sacrifice
Brian Collins

The Head Beneath the Altar is the first wide-ranging study of Hindu texts through the lens of René Girard’s theory of the sacrificial origin of religion and culture. The book also performs a careful reading of Girard’s work, drawing connections between his thought and the ideas of Georges Dumézil and Giorgio Agamben, among other theorists. Brian Collins examines the notion of sacrifice from the earliest recorded rituals through the flowering of classical mythology and the ancient Indian institutions of the duel, the oath, and the secret warrior society. He also uncovers implicit and explicit critiques in the tradition, confirming Girard’s intuition that Hinduism offers an alternative anti-sacrificial worldview to the one contained in the Christian gospels.

“This study both honors Girard’s many contributions and, with respect to the Indian context, pushes beyond them. It greatly widens, beyond the Christian West, our necessary conversation about religion, violence, and the heritage of sacrifice in today’s global web of religious and secular societies.” —Francis X. Clooney, SJ, Parkman Professor of Divinity and Director of the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University

Brian Collins holds the Drs. Ram and Sushila Gawande Chair in Indian Religion and Philosophy at Ohio University.
When These Things Begin
Conversations with Michel Treguer
René Girard

In this lively series of conversations with writer Michel Treguer, René Girard revisits the major concepts of mimetic theory and explores science, democracy, and the nature of God and freedom. In Girard’s view, “our unprecedented present is incomprehensible without Christianity.” Globalization has unified the world, yet civil war and terrorism persist despite free trade and economic growth. Because of mimetic desire and the rivalry it generates, asserts Girard, “whether we’re talking about marriage, friendship, professional relationships, issues with neighbors or matters of national unity, human relations are always under threat.”

Literary masters Marivaux, Dostoevsky, and Joyce understood this, as did archaic religion, which warded off violence with blood sacrifice. Christianity brought a new understanding of sacrifice, giving rise not only to modern rationality and science but also to a fragile system that is, in Girard’s words, “always teetering between a new golden age and a destructive apocalypse.”

“These conversations with Michel Treguer—who admires and is familiar with his interlocutor’s work, but also is critical of it—show the amazing degree to which today’s earth-shaking events bear out Girard’s theses.” —P. Gardeil, Nouvelle revue théologique

The One by Whom Scandal Comes
René Girard

Even the most faithful Christians have felt the need to rescue the Sermon on the Mount, with its command to turn the other cheek. Is there no way to inject some virile defiance back into the passive behavior that Jesus asks of us? In this collection of essays and conversations, anthropologist René Girard warns against underestimating the Gospel text’s implacable logic. Far from recommending weakness for its own sake, Jesus provides the only foolproof antidote to escalating violence rooted in mimetic reciprocity. And in a world endowed with the capacity for total self-annihilation, we all have excellent reasons for wanting to keep the peace. Essays on the cause of violence (“Violence and Reciprocity”), the internal contradictions of neo-primitivism (“Noble Savages and Others”), and the continuity between archaic religions and Christianity (“Mimetic Theory and Theology”) precede a wide-ranging conversation between Girard and Sicilian cultural theorist Maria Stella Barberi.

 “[Girard’s] books . . . constitute essential reference points for anyone seeking to understand the foundations of religious phenomena. . . . The One by Whom Scandal Comes . . . seeks to explore the underpinnings of the religious universe, and offers up reflections on a theory that Girard has never ceased to develop and refine.” —Jean-Pierre Thomas, Université de Sherbrooke, review in Religiologiques

René Girard is a member of the French Academy and Emeritus Professor at Stanford University. His books have been translated and acclaimed worldwide.
The Phantom of the Ego
Modernism and the Mimetic Unconscious

Nidesh Lawtoo

The Phantom of the Ego shows how the modernist account of the unconscious anticipates contemporary discoveries about the importance of mimesis in the formation of subjectivity. Lawtoo starts with Friedrich Nietzsche’s antimetaphysical diagnostic of the ego, his realization that mimetic reflexes—from sympathy and hypnosis to contagion and crowd behavior—move the soul, and his insistence that psychology informs philosophical reflection. Through a comparative reading of Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, and Georges Bataille, Lawtoo shows that before becoming a timely empirical discovery the “mimetic unconscious” emerged from an untimely current in literary and philosophical modernism. If the modern ego is born from the spirit of imitation it is not strictly speaking an ego at all but what Nietzsche calls “a phantom of the ego.” Lawtoo’s study explores an unconscious whose via regia is mimesis rather than dreams, and in doing so renews our understanding of the human psyche.

“A Nidesh Lawtoo delivers a brilliant, solid, and lucid essay on the contradictions and aporias of the mimetic impulse. The work primes a wide-ranging critique of modernity and its still-fighting shadows, overhauling our Platonic home base with the shrewd alliance of Nietzsche and Lacoue-Labarthe.” —Avital Ronell, University Professor of the Humanities, New York University

Nidesh Lawtoo is Visiting Scholar at The Humanities Center, Johns Hopkins University.

A God Torn to Pieces
The Nietzsche Case

Giuseppe Fornari

Friedrich Nietzsche’s importance as a religious thinker and his “untimeliness” place him at the forefront of modern thought. Capable of exploiting his own failures as a cognitive tool to discover what other philosophers never wanted to see, Nietzsche ultimately drove himself to mental collapse. In A God Torn to Pieces, Giuseppe Fornari seeks the cause of this self-destructive destiny, which, he argues, began earlier than his rivalry with the composer Richard Wagner and dates back to the premature loss of Nietzsche’s father. Fornari examines the author’s poetry as well as testimony from close friends and interlocutors and concludes that Nietzsche’s fatal rebellion against Christian consolation led him to become one and the same not only with Dionysus but also with the crucified Christ. This self-crucifixion, Fornari argues, repeated the fate of the victim whose compassionate innocence Nietzsche denied in his writings: the philosopher’s madness amounted to a desperate refusal of grace and forgiveness.

“A God Torn to Pieces presents a fascinating, original interpretation of one of the most misunderstood thinkers in the history of philosophy.”

—Wichita Eagle

Giuseppe Fornari is Professor of History of Philosophy at Bergamo University, Italy.
A Refuge of Lies
Reflections on Faith and Fiction

Cesáreo Bandera

In a series of ambitious essays, Cesáreo Bandera has charted the role of religion in the emergence of modern literature. His latest study expands on that project through readings of Homer, Virgil, and Cervantes. In his seminal Mimesis, affirms Bandera, Erich Auerbach saw the chasm separating epic poetry and Biblical narrative, yet failed to grasp the Homeric text’s religious implications. Bandera points to Greek poetry’s profound ties to the archaic sacred and re-reads Odysseus as both a mythical hero-god and an archetypal deceiver. Contemporary readers assume that the Iliad, with its dazzling literary effects, stands closer to modern fiction than does the Bible. And yet the epic’s flawless surface hides an anthropological reality that ancient culture managed to approach only by means of subterfuges and masks: Homer’s work is “a refuge of lies.” The greatest modern fiction, by contrast—and notably Don Quixote—partakes of the Bible’s passionate and unprecedented concern for narrative truth.

“Cesáreo Bandera’s clear and insightful study starts with Erich Auerbach’s distinction between Homeric poems and the Old Testament, leading to a profound understanding of the biblical legacy and its uncovering of sacred violence.” —Wolfgang Palaver, Professor of Catholic Social Thought and Dean of the Faculty of Theology, University of Innsbruck

Beneath the Veil of the Strange Verses
Reading Scandalous Texts

Jeremiah L. Alberg

An episode in Plato’s Republic describes Leontius’s unwillingness to look directly at corpses by the city wall and his simultaneous inability to look away. His combination of fascination and revulsion exemplifies what Jeremiah Alberg refers to as “scandal.” Beneath the Veil of the Strange Verses traces the roots of this conflicted desire in the work of great thinkers and poets. In Nietzsche, tragedy is a compelling spectacle that diverts our gaze from a deeper truth, while Rousseau, in portraying himself as the eternal victim, narrows our understanding of persecution. In Dante’s hermeneutics of blindness and Flannery O’Connor’s salutary shocks of violence, on the other hand, go beneath the surface of our illusions about exclusion and victimhood. By its nature, the author argues, scandal is the basis of interpretation; it is the source of the obstacles that prevent us from understanding what we read, and of the bridges that lead to a deeper grasp of the truth.

“What is the relationship between looking, reading, and scandal? Alberg answers with a subtle, thoughtful, and finally stunning meditation on the work of Nietzsche, Rousseau, and Flannery O’Connor.” —Sandor Goodhart, Professor of English and Jewish Studies, Purdue University

Cesáreo Bandera is Emeritus Distinguished Professor of Spanish Literature at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Jeremiah L. Alberg is Professor of Philosophy and Religion at International Christian University in Tokyo.
RELIGION / SOCIAL SCIENCE

René Girard’s Mimetic Theory
Wolfgang Palaver

This systematic introduction explains mimetic theory’s three main pillars (mimetic desire, the scapegoat mechanism, and Biblical revelation) with the help of examples from literature and philosophy. Palaver also examines the broader implications of Girard’s ideas, from the mimetic dimension of war to the relationship between generative scapegoating and capital punishment. He places mimetic theory in the context of cultural and political debates about terrorism, gender, and the relationship between religion and modernity. An accessible book aimed at students and teachers, Palaver’s text is complemented by annotated references to Girard’s wide-ranging work as well as to the secondary literature on mimetic theory and its applications.

“Palaver’s survey of Girard’s mimetic theory is the most thorough introduction to Girard’s thought and its ramifications that has been written, uniting profound insight, clear explication, and a tremendous breadth of research.” —James G. Williams, author of The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred and editor of The Girard Reader

David Dawson

Though its coinage can be traced back to a sixteenth-century translation of Leviticus, the term “scapegoat” has enjoyed a long and varied history of both scholarly and everyday uses. While Tyndale employed it to describe one of two goats chosen by lot as part of the Day of Atonement ceremonies, the expression was soon used to name victims of false accusation. Flesh Becomes Word follows the scapegoat from its origins in Mesopotamian ritual across centuries of typological reflection on the meaning of Jesus’ death, to its first informal uses in the pornographic and plague literature of the 1600s, and finally into the modern era, where the word takes recognizable shape in the context of the New English Quaker persecution at the close of the seventeenth century. The circumstances of its lexical formation prove rich in implications for current theories of the scapegoat and the making of the modern world alike.

“Not since Erich Auerbach’s magisterial ‘Figura’ has an original philological study doubled so effectively as a theory of history or demonstrated so clear an understanding of history as the invention of acts of signification. . . . An extraordinarily thorough work of textual research and thoughtful analysis, Flesh Becomes Word is a powerful contribution to religious, anthropological, political, and social theory; to philology; and to theory of history.” —Claudia Brodsky, Professor of Comparative Literature, Princeton University

David Dawson teaches at the University of Costa Rica in San José. He wrote Flesh Becomes Word while a Visiting Scholar at Stanford’s Department of French and Italian.

Wolfgang Palaver is Professor of Catholic Social Thought and Chair of the Institute for Systematic Theology at the University of Innsbruck.
Psychopolitics
Conversations with Trevor Cribben Merrill
Jean-Michel Oughourlian

For thousands of years, political leaders have unified populations by aligning them against a common enemy. War acted as a sacrificial outlet for dangerous internal strife. Yet today more than ever, the search for enemies results in anything but unanimity. In a world of global terrorist networks and contagious financial crises, evaporating national borders and metastasizing civil war, power politics is increasingly helpless to trigger the ancient mechanism of violent polarization. Psychiatrist and diplomat Jean-Michel Oughourlian, who pioneered an “interdividual” psychology with René Girard, argues that future leaders must walk in the footsteps of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela. Having overcome their own vengeful passions, these psychopolitical geniuses led by example, teaching their followers to overcome rivalry instead of channeling pent-up violence against a scapegoat.

“Bringing together the psyche, which is normally individual, and the political, which is normally collective, was an excellent idea . . . The analysis of the psychological effects of globalized information is truly innovative.” —Olivier Kempf, Professor at Sciences Po and author of NATO in the Twenty-First Century

Jean-Michel Oughourlian is President of the Association of Doctors of the American Hospital of Paris and Ambassador of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the Republic of Armenia.

The Sacrifice of Socrates
Athens, Plato, Girard
Wm. Blake Tyrrell

About 404 BCE, when Athenians suffered the shame of losing a war because of their own greed and foolishness, the public’s blame fell upon Socrates, a man whose extraordinary appearance and behavior made him a ready target. The philosopher was subsequently put on trial and sentenced to death. Plato’s Apology depicts Socrates as both the bane and the cure of Greek society, while his Crito shows a sacrificial Socrates, a pharmakos figure, the human drug through whom Plato can dispense his philosophical remedies. William Blake Tyrrell analyzes classical texts through a Girardian lens in order to suggest that Plato, although without an explicit theory of mimetic crisis and sacrificial resolution, possessed a sophisticated implicit understanding of both. The Sacrifice of Socrates uncovers abundant evidence connecting the death of Socrates to the rituals of ancient Athens and places the philosopher in the context of Plato’s “victimary culture.”

“Blake Tyrrell offers more insight to the man of Socrates, who perhaps knew more about his fate than he truly let on. The Sacrifice of Socrates is an essential pick for philosophy and literary criticism collections.” —Midwest Book Review

Wm. Blake Tyrrell is Distinguished Professor of Classics at Michigan State University.
Resurrection from the Underground

Feodor Dostoevsky

René Girard, edited and translated by James G. Williams

Midway through an uneven literary career punctuated by tragedy and trauma, Feodor Dostoevsky suddenly began producing the great novels for which he is remembered today. Comparing the works written after his decisive creative rupture (notably Notes from Underground and The Eternal Husband) with earlier, lesser-known novels and correspondence, René Girard argues that Dostoevsky’s genius is rooted in a profound personal transformation. Having first justified his perversely jealous behavior as noble generosity, the Russian novelist ultimately saw through his own romantic illusions to skewer self-defeating, “underground” patterns of desire. Girard’s essay highlights the bitter comedy of Dostoevsky’s famous short masterpieces as well as the essentially religious impulse driving the Russian author’s aesthetics in Crime and Punishment and The Brothers Karamazov. Resurrection from the Underground is an essential and thought-provoking companion to Dostoevsky’s oeuvre.

“Resurrection from the Underground is of interest not only to aficionados of Dostoevsky, but to those wishing to gain a better understanding on Girard’s work on desire, violence, and religion.”  —Joshua Paetkau, review in Rain Taxi

—René Girard is a member of the French Academy and Emeritus Professor at Stanford University. His books have been translated and acclaimed worldwide. —James G. Williams is the author of The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred and editor of The Girard Reader.

Mimesis and Science

Empirical Research on Imitation and the Mimetic Theory of Culture and Religion

Edited by Scott R. Garrels

This compendium brings together some of the foremost scholars of René Girard’s mimetic theory with leading imitation researchers from the cognitive sciences. Interlocking chapters explore the foundational yet previously overlooked role of imitation in child development, adult psychology, emotions, social identification, aggression, and war. Contributors include developmental psychologist Andrew N. Meltzoff, neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese, philosopher Jean-Pierre Dupuy, and anthropologist Mark R. Anspach. Their articles outline the empirical evidence and theoretical arguments linking the neural basis of social interaction to the structure and evolution of human culture and religion. A concluding interview with René Girard retraces the development of mimetic theory. This interdisciplinary volume deepens our understanding of the distinctive human capacity for acts of both empathy and violence, shedding light on some of the most pressing and complex questions in our contemporary world.

“The most exciting and generative new ideas arrive over bridges built between previously isolated fields. Mimesis and Science brings together Girard’s paradigm-changing mimetic theory with a very large literature on human imitation from fields of psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and cultural anthropology. The result is a stimulating set of essays that will advance current perspectives on human nature and human culture.”  —Warren S. Brown, Graduate School of Psychology, Fuller Theological Seminary

—Scott R. Garrels is a licensed clinical psychologist in private practice and Adjunct Professor in the School of Psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary.
PSYCHOLOGY

The Genesis of Desire

Jean-Michel Oughourlian

How can we build strong, lasting love relationships in an era of restless desires and high divorce rates? Though we have shrugged off the constricting rules that governed courtship and marriage in previous generations, our increased freedom presents serious challenges to the stability of couples. Jean-Michel Oughourlian argues that our tendency to imitate the desires of our partner leads to the jealousy, envy, and competition that tear marriages apart. Illustrating his theoretical points with rich case studies, Oughourlian shows how couples who find themselves on the “infernal seesaw” of rivalry can replace the sterile game of one-upmanship with clear boundaries and a realistic understanding of the mimetic mechanisms that shape their feelings. He analyzes the archetypal story of Adam and Eve and outlines a concrete “politics of desire” to help defuse the unpredictable conflicts generated by reciprocal imitation.

“Finally, the war between the sexes is explained. The Genesis of Desire, alternating between case studies and more theoretical statements, convincingly defends the possibility that breakups need not be permanent.” —SirReadaLot.org

Jean-Michel Oughourlian is President of the Association of Doctors of the American Hospital of Paris, where he was Head of Psychiatry from 1981 to 2007.

SOCIAL SCIENCE

For René Girard

Essays in Friendship and in Truth

Edited by Sandor Goodhart, Jørgen Jørgensen, Tom Ryba, and James Williams

Like Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, Émile Durkheim, Martin Buber, or others who have changed the way we think in the human sciences, René Girard’s ideas have altered our understanding of the world. We will never think the same way again about violence, myth, and the Jewish and Christian scriptures, which in Girard’s view explain the crises and scapegoating events from which our culture emerged. The essays in this volume, including personal testimony and appreciations from many of Girard’s closest friends and collaborators, fall into roughly four areas of interpretive work: religion and religious study; literary study; the philosophy of social science; and psychological studies. These homages reflect on each author’s encounter with Girard and on the personal and intellectual aftershocks that resulted from coming under the influence of both the man and his theory of violent human origins.

Sandor Goodhart is Professor of English and Jewish Studies at Purdue University, former President of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R), and author of Sacrificing Commentary, as well as more than ninety essays. Jørgen Jørgensen edited a collection of essays on Girard titled Syndens sold. Tom Ryba is Notre Dame Theologian-in-Residence at the Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Center at Purdue University. James Williams is the author of The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred and editor of The Girard Reader.
Politics and Apocalypse

Edited by Robert Hamerton-Kelly

Apocalypse—to most, the word signifies destruction, death, the end of the world, but the literal definition is “revelation” or “unveiling,” the basis from which renowned critic and anthropologist René Girard builds his own view of Biblical apocalypse. Properly understood, Biblical apocalypse has nothing to do with a wrathful God punishing his unworthy children, and everything to do with foretelling the future now that we have devised the instruments of global self-destruction. In this volume some of today’s keenest minds, all thoroughly versed in Girard’s work, scrutinize some of the heavyweight theorists of politics and religion, including Eric Voegelin, Leo Strauss, and Carl Schmitt. Featuring an important new essay by Girard, Politics and Apocalypse asks how to think about politics—and deal with violence—now that terrorism threatens to upend the norms of the liberal West.

Anorexia and Mimetic Desire

René Girard

In the late nineteenth century, Sisi, wife of Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria, and Eugénie, wife of Napoleon III, measured each other’s waists at a social gathering to see who was thinner. The following century would democratize their frantic quest to be slim, a trend that has culminated in today’s anorexia epidemic. In a culture obsessed with thinness, René Girard argues, the rise of eating disorders should come as no surprise. The skeletal waifs pouting from the covers of contemporary fashion magazines model an impossible ideal, while invidious comparisons among rivals at the office or gym intensify the combat. Mixing theoretical sophistication with irreverent common sense, Girard denounces a “culture of anorexia” and analyzes the competitive impulses fueling the game of conspicuous non-consumption. Featuring a foreword by psychiatrist Jean-Michel Oughourlian and an introductory essay by anthropologist Mark R. Anspach, the volume concludes with a conversation between René Girard, Mark R. Anspach, and Laurence Tacou.

“A hypothesis that explodes all the psychiatric and psychoanalytic interpretations of anorexia.… Sheds new light on the way we humans behave.” —Paul-Henri Moinet, Le Nouvel Économiste

“The great philosopher René Girard dissects with breathtaking skill the mechanisms of eating disorders, turning this affliction into a mirror of an entire society, and scrutinizing modern feminine beauty, from Kate Moss to Carla Bruni-Sarkozy.” —Diva e Donna

Robert Hamerton-Kelly (1938–2013) was a founding member of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion, Senior Research Scholar at the Center for International Security and Arms Control at Stanford University, and pastor of the Woodside Village Church in Woodside, California.

René Girard is a member of the French Academy and Emeritus Professor at Stanford University. His books have been translated and acclaimed worldwide.
Ressentiment
Reflections on Mimetic Desire and Society
Stefano Tomelleri

Nietzsche’s notion of ressentiment accounted for the way feelings of thwarted revenge shape human values. The concept would soon gain traction as a means of defining a certain type of quintessentially democratic man, permanently frustrated by his victorious rivals. Stefano Tomelleri revisits Nietzsche’s idea and shows how an analysis based on mimetic desire rather than the will to power unbinds ressentiment from spurious master-slave hierarchies and allows us to do what Nietzsche himself was incapable of doing: acknowledge the role that this insidious emotion plays in shaping our own lives. From this new vantage point, made possible by René Girard’s religious anthropology, democracy and democratic values appear not only as the institutional means by which envious losers deprive the powerful of their privilege, but also as compassionate safeguards against exploitation and tyranny.

“In giving attention to the overlooked subject of Vedic sacrifice in Indian religious tradition, this Stanford Emeritus Professor and member of the French Academy deepens understanding of the universal practice of sacrifice.” —Henry Berry, Midwest Book Review

Sacrifice
René Girard

The word veda means “knowledge,” “science.” And the object of Vedic science, as René Girard shows in this elegant essay, is nothing other than sacrifice, the immolation of victims universally present at the heart of archaic religion. Girard focuses not on the more widely known Rig Veda but on the compendium of rituals and commentaries on sacrifice contained in the second stratum of the Vedas: the Brahmanas. Taking inspiration from Sylvain Lévi’s anthology of Vedic scripture, he analyzes the rivalry between gods and demons, which the texts themselves interpret in light of imitative dynamics, and shows that the dramatic stories of the Brahmanas invariably conclude with a decisive sacrifice. Girard’s reading vindicates the intellectual power of the great Vedic texts, demonstrating their coherence as well as their capacity for turning back against themselves to offer a striking critique of ritual sacrifice.

“In giving attention to the overlooked subject of Vedic sacrifice in Indian religious tradition, this Stanford Emeritus Professor and member of the French Academy deepens understanding of the universal practice of sacrifice.” —Henry Berry, Midwest Book Review

Stefano Tomelleri is Professor of Sociology in the Department of Human and Social Sciences at University of Bergamo, Italy.

René Girard is a member of the French Academy and Emeritus Professor at Stanford University. His books have been translated and acclaimed worldwide.