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What the Text Omits: Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Violence and the Sacred*

To examine a text from the perspective of the surrogate
victim
and its attendant mechanism,
to consider "literature" in terms of collective violence,
is to ask oneself about what the work omits
as much and even more than what it includes"¹.

Introduction

This paper is part of larger project that seeks to show that Kant's transcendental philosophy points toward the expelled victim as the one who confers unity on the self, the cosmos and the divinity. Kant begins the *Critique of Pure Reason* by isolating both sensuous intuition and the understanding from desire². This allows for the theoretical equivalent to Rousseau's state of pure nature and gives us a standard by which to judge our knowing. But Kant is aware that this is a very partial view that simply avoids the problems associated with our knowing. The second great division of the Doctrine of Elements, the Transcendental Dialectic, deals with these problems. The "hinge" concepts upon which the work turns from the Transcendental Analytic to the Transcendental Dialectic are the "ideas" of reason. He derives these ideas from the different forms of syl-

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¹ R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1977, p. 207.

² All citations of the *Critique of Pure Reason* will be parenthetically included in the text, following the standard practice of giving, where possible, both the first (A) and the second (B) edition page number. In those sections that occur in only one of the editions, that edition and page number are given. For the English translation I have used (I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. eng. di P. Guyer and A.W. Wood, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998).

logisms: three syllogisms, the categorical, the hypothetical, and the disjunctive, yield the three ideas of the thinking subject, the world, and god.

Reason gets to these ideas because it is seeking the absolute, the totality of conditions to a given conditioned thing: a subject that is no longer a predicate, a series of conditions that is complete, a whole that includes all the parts. These ideas are of interest to the reader of *Violence and the Sacred*, because there Girard – in the context of his discussion of structuralism but the implications extend more widely – states that “we must first pause to consider the doubtful significations, those that imply both too little and too much: twins, illnesses, all forms of contaminations and contagions, inexplicable reversals of meaning, unexpected growths and shrinkages, strange excrescences and deformations, and all forms of the monstrous and the bizarre”³. The “ideas” of Kant always imply either too much or too little. He says: “By the idea of a necessary concept of reason, I understand one to which no congruent object can be given in the senses. Thus the pure concepts of reason we have just examined are transcendental ideas. [...] Finally, they are also transcendent concepts, and exceed the bounds of all experience, in which no object adequate to the transcendental idea can ever occur” (A 327; B 382-4). We should also note that ideas reverse their meaning in the sense that they are harmful when used constitutively and beneficial when used in a regulative manner.

In this paper I will pursue one part of this larger argument – that concerning the rational idea of the self and what it reveals about the possible expulsion of the victim.

In so doing, I wish to remain as much as possible within the limits Kant sets for a transcendental investigation. Kant never states and his position would not allow him to state what has brought about our present form of consciousness. Kant is clear that what makes our experience possible is not part of our experience and therefore cannot be known. At the same time, he is exploring the necessary conditions for the possibility of this knowing and these can be established. I am going to be pointing to aspects of these necessary conditions in relation to the possibility of the idea of a self.

I argue as follows: by explicating Kant’s position that knowledge of one’s self is limited to being able to grasp one’s self only insofar as one’s ‘I’ is like everyone else’s ‘I’, it becomes clear that for Kant this involves the notion of substitutability and hence a lack of differentiation. Second, I bring to the fore the fact that our lack of knowledge of ourselves is not simply a lack. That is, we are able to know *that* we do not know, and so are able to indicate it, somewhat akin to writing “Unknown Territory” on

³ R. Girard, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

a map. Finally, borrowing freely from the research of Rolf-Peter Horstmann, I subscribe to the view that the difference between the A and the B version of the section on the Paralogisms is rooted in Kant's deepened understanding that the self is to be understood as a spontaneous act. Putting these three points together, I am arguing that according to Kant we are able to cognize an identical spontaneous act of human beings that results in a gap in our knowledge. This is as far as the *Critique of Pure Reason* can take us. It forbids us to take the next step and to speculate that this act that creates such a gap is an act of expulsion and that what gets expelled when all humans act spontaneously together is one of their own.

Preliminaries: The Ideas of Reason and their *Ansehen*

At the beginning of his "Introduction" to the "Transcendental Dialectic" Kant informs his readers that he and they suffer from a transcendental illusion that "influences principles whose use is not ever meant for experience" (A 295; B 352). The influence of the illusion is such that it "carries us away beyond the empirical use of the categories, and holds out to us the semblance of extending the *pure understanding*" to knowledge of things in themselves (A 295; B 352). The principles that are so influenced are called "transcendent". The influence of the illusion is contagious in such way that these principles influence us. They "incite us to tear down all those boundary posts and to lay claim to a wholly new territory that recognizes no demarcations anywhere" (A 296; B 352). They demand that we overstep limits and lead to what Girard would call a crisis of the loss of distinctions or the loss of differentiation.

Looking at the way reason logically proceeds through syllogisms, Kant finds "the proper principle of reason in general (in its logical use) is to find the unconditioned for the conditioned cognitions of the understanding" (A 307; B 364). This searching is done for the sake of completing the unity of the understanding. Logically speaking this is unobjectionable.

Kant goes on to argue that for this logical maximum to become a principle for reason not merely in its logical use but in its "real" use requires that "we assume that when the conditioned is given, then so is the whole series of conditions subordinated one to the other, which is in itself unconditioned, also given (i.e., contained in the object and its connection)" (A 307-8; B 364). Together the logical principle and this assumption yield the "supreme principle of pure reason" (A 308; B 365). This principle of pure reason is synthetic in that it relates the conditioned not to its conditions but to the unconditioned and this unconditioned "if it actually occurs, is particularly to be considered according to all the determinations that distinguish it from everything conditioned" (A 308; B 365).

The critical questions these transcendent principles raise are the questions that Kant is concerned with in the “Transcendental Dialectic”. The source of that dialectic is “hidden deep in human reason” (A 309; B 366). Kant worries that a “need of reason” to “bring the highest possible unity of reason to our cognition” has been misunderstood as a “transcendental principle of reason”, which would entail postulating an unlimited completeness in the series of conditions in the object themselves (A 309; B 366). A need of reason would be simply a “logical prescription in the ascent to ever higher conditions to approach completeness in them and thus to bring the highest possible unity of reason into our cognition” (A 309; B 366). What compels reason to go beyond the logical prescription in the sense of mistaking it for a real prescription? We can answer: the illusion that these principles contain, but that only puts the further question: what is the source of the illusion?

Kant gives us one answer in the first section of the “Introduction” to the Transcendental Dialectic. Using the example “the illusion in the proposition: ‘The world must have a beginning in time’”, he holds that the cause of this illusion is that our reason contains “fundamental rules and maxims for its use, which look entirely like objective principles [*das Ansehen objektiver Grundsätze haben*], and through which it comes about that the subjective necessity of a certain connection of our concepts on behalf of the understanding is taken for an objective necessity, the determination of things in themselves” (A 297; B 353 translation modified). The important point to note here is that it is due to the *Ansehen* of the principles that they get taken as having objective necessity or as reaching to the things in themselves, instead of being properly taken as having merely subjective necessity. One might think that Kant has simply switched words, saying that the “illusion” [*Schein*] is due to their “appearance” [*Ansehen*], but “*Ansehen*” means more to Kant than simply an aspect or an appearance and provides us with an important clue to the origin of the dialectic.

The word *Ansehen* means to have authority or enjoy a reputation in the eyes of others. If we look at Kant’s usage in other passages, we find that, while the word sometimes means simply “appearance” or “look” (A 757; B 784), it more often means an appearance that causes or influences something else. For instance, towards the end of the *First Critique*, Kant writes that metaphysics in its negative function prevents errors, and this “does no damage to its value, but rather gives it all the more dignity and authority [*Ansehen*] through its office as censor” (A 851; B 879). Here the negative function of metaphysics has an *Ansehen* that secures “order and unity, indeed the well-being of the scientific community” (A 851; B 879), while transcendent principles of metaphysics have an *Ansehen* that causes disorder.

A possible translation for “*Ansehen*”, would also be “kudos”. Benveniste has several suggestive pages on *kudos* in his *Indo-European Language and Society*, which Girard refers to in *Violence and the Sacred*. For Benveniste “the gift of *kudos* ensures the triumph of the man who receives it: in combat the holder of *kudos* is invariably victorious”⁴. Rivals know better than to compete with the man who has received *kudos*. Girard sees it as “the fascination of superior violence. [...] Kudos passes to the man who strikes the hardest. [...] It belongs to the man who manages to convince others, and who believes himself, that his violence is completely irresistible”⁵.

The meaning of *Ansehen* as *kudos* is not as far away from its use in the *Critique of Pure Reason* as one might think. To make a claim that one’s title is an objective fact is precisely the kind of claim that the *Critique of Pure Reason* is meant to substantiate or to refute, and a claim that *looks like* an objective claim but was not, could undermine the whole project.

Transcendent concepts can never be the object of experience because they exceed the bounds of all experience (A 327; B 384). *They lead us on toward something that is beyond us because they are that from which experience originates*. Kant talks about this in terms of a lack of a “congruent object” being able to be given in experience (A 327; B 383). He also speaks about it in terms of the principles “containing” the unconditioned so that “they deal with something under which all experience belongs, but that is never itself an object of experience” (A 311; B 367). According to Kant, the speculative use of reason aims for an object that is congruent to its concept. Lacking that congruent object is the same as ultimately lacking the concept and thus it is about these kind of concepts that one says, “it is *only* an idea” (A 328; B 384). The absolute whole of appearances is a “problem” for us.

Step One: Substitutability

Turning to the Paralogisms of pure reason, we are concerned with “the *rational* doctrine of the soul” (A 342; B 400). Kant makes clear that a concern with “cognition of the empirical in general” and the “the investigation of the possibility of every experience” is transcendental (A 343; B 401). Kant’s problem with the supposed doctrine of the soul is that its ground is “the wholly empty representation *I*”, which is merely consciousness. Kant holds that “through this I, or He, or It (the thing),

⁴E. Benveniste, J. Lallot, *Indo-European Language and Society*, Faber and Faber, London 1973, p. 348.

⁵Ivi, p. 152.

which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of thought = x , which is recognized only through the thoughts that are its predicates, and about which, in abstraction, we can never have the least concept" (A 346; B 404).

The general principle under which the paralogisms operate is that "the condition under which I think in general and which is therefore merely a property of my subject, is at the same time to be valid for everything that thinks, and that on an empirical-seeming proposition we can presume to ground an apodictic and universal judgment, namely, that everything that thinks is constituted as the claim of self-consciousness asserts of me" (A 346; B 404). Kant holds that we cannot have any representation of a thinking being through an external experience. "Thus such objects are nothing further than the transference of this consciousness of mine to other things, which can be represented as thinking beings only in this way" (A 347; B 405). This validity for everything that thinks and this transference of my consciousness to other things is the substitution that lies at the heart of the paralogisms. My consciousness is not simply mine.

We can develop this further by looking at the second paralogism, which brings us near to the kind of concerns we find in *Violence and the Sacred* because it is the most polemical of the paralogisms. Here Kant battles the "Achilles of all dialectical inferences" (A 351). It is an inference that "seems to withstand even the sharpest testing and greatest scruples of inquiry" (A 351).

The paralogism itself is:

That thing whose action can never be regarded as the concurrence of many acting things, is simple.

Now the soul, or the thinking I is such a thing.

Thus, etc. (A 351)

According to Kant the "*nervous probandi*" of the argument is the claim that "that many representations have to be contained in the absolute unity of the thinking subject in order to constitute one thought" (A 352). The problem is that one cannot "prove this proposition from *concepts*" (A 352). He then goes on to show that neither is the proposition analytic and, of course, any proof based on experience would yield no necessity. So, the real question for Kant and for us is, from where or how did we get this proposition?

His answer is that we get it through a double substitution. First, we substitute our own subject for the object we want to consider (thus presuming what one wants to prove) and then we demand the subject of a thought has to be absolutely unified "because otherwise it could not be said: 'I think' (the manifold in a representation)" (A 354). The thought

can be divided up and distributed among many subjects but the subjective *I* cannot be divided or distributed, and this is what we presuppose in all thinking. But this is only possible by substituting my own consciousness to others.

What is substituted is simply “the form of apperception, on which every experience depends and which precedes it” (A354). Kant is able through his transcendental analysis to say something about that which precedes experience and out of which experience comes. Still this form of apperception “must nevertheless always be regarded [*angesehen*] only in regard to a possible cognition in general, as its merely subjective condition, which we unjustly make into a condition of the possibility of the cognition of objects” (A 354). That is, although it has the *Ansehen* of objectivity, through which we “unjustly” make it into a condition of the possibility of the cognition of objects, we must only allow it the *Ansehen* of a subjective condition. Kant argues that we do this *because* the only way we can represent this being is by “positing ourselves along with the formula of our consciousness, in the place of every other intelligent being” (A 354). At the root of this problem is this second substitution.

This is critical to my argument because it means that our form of apperception requires that we represent ourselves as the double of the every other intelligent being. My self, my grasp of subjectivity and my substantiality is only possible by admitting a substitutability of myself with everyone else. I cognize nothing of myself beyond its complete likeness to every other subject. I know myself and others only as “a Something in general (a transcendental subject), the representation of which must of course be simple, just because one determines nothing at all about it; for certainly nothing can be represented as more simple than that which is represented through the concept of a mere Something” (A 355).

Kant’s conclusion is that human self-consciousness is a representation of the condition of all unity, that is, it comes before the unity itself and it itself is unconditioned. But in this it is a form – a general form which means that precisely when we get a general notion of self-consciousness we are putting ourselves in the place of the other to get a sense of ourselves. The other constitutes the self, but we see the self as self-contained. I cannot cognize as an object that which I must presuppose in order to cognize an object.

Although Kant emphasizes that I put myself in the place of everyone, the result is that it is myself which I do not know. I think I am grasping the most particular part of myself and in fact I am grasping precisely that which is completely interchangeable with everyone else. The drive behind the paralogisms is the drive for immortality, identity, integration, to be a self. But the very grasping for these things in this way ensures that all I find is a self that is identical to everyone else. While there is no

real knowledge of the self, there is knowledge that I am substitutable everyone else. On the epistemological level this is the crisis of a lack of differentiation, the crisis of distinction. It may appear that this crisis is reached without any conflict, but we need to ask what stands behind the paralogisms, what stands behind the need to have such a grasp of the self. We can only understand that need as coming from being situated in a conflictual world.

Step Two, Part One: Knowing What We Cannot Know

We used as our epigraph Girard's statement to the effect that in order to get the true perspective on a text one has to look for what has been omitted or expelled from a text. He goes to admit that the "task may seem futile", because one can argue that that an infinite number of things have been omitted from the text. Proving that something was, consciously or unconsciously, omitted is an extremely difficult task. With Kant we are in luck because he himself tells us that something has been omitted.

In the section titled "Considerations of the Paralogism of Pure Reason" Kant examines the the fundamental question, "how in a thinking subject outer intuition, namely, that of space with its filling-in of shape and motion, is possible" (A 393). Apparently it all comes down to this one question, once one has left out the "fictious" (A 393). His reply is unsurprising.

This is question which no man can possibly answer. This gap in our knowledge can never be filled; all that can be done is to indicate it through the ascription of outer appearances to that transcendental object which is the cause of this species of representations, but of which we can have no knowledge whatsoever and of which we shall never acquire any concept. (A 393)

Kant is correct. We cannot answer the question of why we are constituted precisely the way that we are. Further, it is correct that we have no cognition nor can we form a concept of the transcendental object, which "is the cause of this species of representations". By ascribing these outer appearances to this unknown object we indicate a gap; we gesture towards it, as it might be worded today. As a gap it has a certain form, even if we cannot know its concept. Its non-appearance is a form of appearance.

Kant goes on to say that in our everyday experience we treat these appearances "as objects in themselves without troubling ourselves about the primary ground of the possibility or appearances". The only way to advance beyond the limits of our present knowledge would be by gaining a concept of the self, but that is quite impossible because the self is

a rational idea, not a concept. Nevertheless, perhaps now is the time to trouble ourselves. Not in the hope that we shall come to know this primary ground, that is quite impossible, but that non-knowing may take on a more concrete shape.

We do not wish to be granted special knowledge of the self, nor do we wish to fill the gap with idols, with paralogisms that treat our thoughts as things and hypostatise them (A 395). In this idolatry Kant finds the origins of “an imaginary science” in which both those who affirm and deny “treat their own representations as objects, and so revolve around in a perpetual circle of ambiguities and contradictions” (A 395).

Kant’s concern is to warn the reader against a way of thinking that is alluring. It seems to promise “felicity” but in fact leads to a “bondage” to theories and to systems – again a form of idolatry. As we saw above, Kant spells out the causal link: “all the controversy in regard to the thinking being and its connection with the corporeal world is merely a result of filling the gap where knowledge is wholly lacking to us with paralogisms of reason” (A 395). Thus, first we have the illicit attempts to fill the gap and then the controversy, the imaginary science with its affirmers and deniers.

But here is where I wish to challenge Kant’s account. According to Girard, the most fundamental shift we have to make is to see that violence precedes whatever object the violence is putatively about. Violence endows the object with value. So rather than it being first an attempt to fill some gap, followed by controversy, controversy itself is the starting point and out of the controversy emerge the various attempts to fill the gap in our knowledge.

The Paralogism allows us to say two different things about what is missing. Based on the first edition version we can say that the transcendental subject/object is trying to come to know itself, to establish its unique identity but that it can only do this at the price of making itself like everyone else. Kant is insistent on this point. The form of the self is such that it can be and is posited in the place of everyone else. For this to happen the other has to be removed from their place. Substitution means displacement. Displacement creates gaps. We deal with the second aspect of what is missing when we deal with the second edition (B) version of the paralogisms.

Step Two, Part Two: The Gap

Pure categories ground the paralogism. They, in turn, find their ground in apperception. Apperception is the synthesis of the manifold of intuition. This general self-consciousness exists; it represents the condition of all unity. That is, it presents again that which was expelled that allowed

everything to come together around it. It presents it as, on the one hand, a unified manifold and, on the other, as a gap. How does one unify the manifold in apperception? The same way one unifies any manifold – by setting it against one thing. The synthesis of the manifold of the intuition is the primal act of judgment: An act that designates one thing as not everything else and everything else as united in not being the one thing.

We, like Kant, want to leave the gap empty; we do not want to fill it with anything, not the victim and not violence. Let it stand as a representation of expulsion. The expulsion is unconditioned in that sense that it was unanimous and absolutely final – it was death.

In this way the soul, the human comes to know everything through itself without being able to cognize itself through the categories.

Kant tells us correctly that it is illuminating that I cannot cognize as an object itself that which I must presuppose in order to cognize an object at all. If expulsion is what allows me to cognize an object then I can never cognize that expulsion as an object. All I can know is the gap. Kant was thinking that the determining Subject is that which has to be presupposed and therefore cannot be known. This is true, but the X, which is used to fill the gap and which only became X when the gap was created is equally presupposed. This also cannot be cognized as an object because we need it to cognize an object.

Kant warns us that it is seductive to forget that the X was there and to assign the unity it bestows on everything, including one's own self, as somehow already belonging to, or being a characteristic of the self. One could call it the "subreption of hypostatized consciousness (apperceptionis substantialis)" (A 402).

The one single representation, "I am", governs all the universal concepts of a thinking nature in general. This thinking nature in general says "I am" and in so doing expresses what is formal and so "proclaims itself as a universal proposition, valid for every thinking being, and which, since it is individual in all respects, brings with it the illusion of being an absolute unity of conditions of thought in general" (A 405). Again, this seems to insure my own identity and unity, when in fact, it only tells me how I am exactly the same as everyone else.

Step Three: Self as An Act

A possible objection to the position presented thus far would be that when Kant completely rewrote his treatment of the paralogisms of pure reason for the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he dropped all references to the transcendental object. Kemp-Smith goes so far as to claim that this concept was a holdover from Kant's pre-critical thinking

that disappears after 1781. So, the building of any argument on the unknown transcendental object was precisely what Kant thought was misleading his readers and we would be wise in following Kant's example and dropping it. Against this one can first say that Kant is clear that his revisions did not touch on anything essential. Thus, if the evidence for my argument that the transcendental object indicates an object that is missing, leaving a gap in our knowledge that we cannot fill but can at least indicate, is taken away, other evidence and another related argument should present itself. I indeed hold that Kant's rewriting, while removing some of the evidence I have used, provides us with other compelling evidence for a complementary interpretation. In fact, the B-version fills in an element missing in the first edition. I follow Rolf-Peter Horstmann's research on the shift in the presentation from the first to the second edition, because I think that he gets it exactly right, although I draw conclusions that he might not find welcome⁶.

Horstmann begins by noting that after reading the first edition treatment of Kant's critique of rational psychology, the reader desires more precision concerning the unknowable substrate of the I-representation. We desire to know more about the shape of the gap. Horstmann notes that this is not at all what one finds in the second edition. Rather than making anything more precise, Kant simply argues against rational psychology on a totally different basis. The thesis concerning the "unknowable substrate of the I-representation is simply given up and in its place is the clearly expressed contention that the I cannot be thought of as thing, but must be thought of as an activity, as act"⁷.

Horstmann summarizes Kant's revised argument in three points. 1) All cognition of objects is bound to the conditions under which something can become an object for us – without a representation of an object then in a trivial manner one must say there is no cognition of an object; 2) in the case of the I-representation none of the necessary conditions are given which must be fulfilled in order to interpret this representation as the representation of an object; 3) from 1) and 2) it follows that there can be no cognition that relates to the I-representation as its object, because that to which the I-representation may relate itself to cannot be interpreted as an object⁸. Horstmann then quotes Kant:

I do not cognize any object merely by the fact that I think, but rather I can cognize any object only by determining a given intuition with regard

⁶ R. Horstmann, *Baustein kritischer Theorie: Arbeiten zu Kant*, Phil Verlagsgesellschaft, Bodenheim bei Mainz 1977, pp. 79-107.

⁷ Ivi, p. 98.

⁸ Cfr., ivi, p. 99.

to the unity of consciousness, in which all thinking consists. Thus I cognize myself not by being conscious of myself as thinking, but only if I am conscious to myself of the intuition of myself as determined in regard to the function of thought. All *modi* of self-consciousness in thinking are therefore not yet themselves concepts of the understanding of objects (categories), but mere functions, which provide thought with no object at all, and hence also do not present my self as an object to be cognized. It is not the consciousness of the determining self, but only that of the determinable self, i.e. of my inner intuition ... that is the object (B 406-7).⁹

This position gets repeated and emphasized throughout the rewritten text. As Horstmann states, the thesis that grounds the critique of rational psychology in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is clearly that the I cannot be represented in any thinkable sense as an object¹⁰.

For Horstmann Kant's change in his thesis is due to a fully changed way of looking at the problem of the assumptions of rational psychology. Horstmann accepts the earlier research of L. Gabe, which made the point that the second edition is concerned with a critique of method of the science, whereas the first edition had been more concerned with a critique of the system.¹¹ Horstmann goes further in explicating the motivation of the move from system critique to methodological critique. Namely, that it is enough to refute rational psychology's claim to knowledge by showing that any possible method of gaining cognition, be it analytic or synthesis, is unsuitable to make anything out about the I.

If the I cannot be represented as an object, then what remains to be said about it? This leads to the second part of the thesis of the B-edition: the I must be thought of as something that is to be described as an activity, as an act. Horstmann admits that Kant does not work this out in any detail. One can provide a partial explanation for this in that Kant is deeply invested in the transcendental deduction that showed that the representation of the 'I think' as referring to pure apperception had to be conceived as an "act of spontaneity" (B 132). Secondly, Kant is here concerned with deconstructing rational psychology, not constructing a theory of the I. The direction clearly moves from an object-related interpretation to an act-related constitution of the I-representation. Kant's understanding of the representation of the I in the footnote to B 422 is such that an act of thought analytically implies that it realizes itself not as that which could be thought of as something, "as an (objective) *is*, but as that which *occurs* in thinking"¹².

⁹ Quoted by Horstmann, *ivi*, pp. 99-100.

¹⁰ *Cfr. ibi*, p. 100.

¹¹ *Cfr. ibi*, p. 102

¹² *Ivi*, p. 105.

For our purposes this can only serve to strengthen the position outlined above that the I comes to itself in an act that it shares with all other I's. Kant does not and cannot tell us the nature of this act, but he does tell us that it leaves the "gap" of not being able to answer the question why I am constituted the way I am. This act is made in a simultaneous and unanimous way such that it keeps destroying itself in constituting itself, because it denies what it affirms: we are all one, except the one who has been expelled.

Conclusion

We are left with no model or guide; we are engaged in a cultural activity that remains undefined, and we can have recourse to no known critical discipline. What we are about to do is as novel to tragedy or literary criticism as it is to psychology or ethnology.¹³

This quote could have also served as the epigraph of this paper. After fifty years are we any closer to having developed a vocabulary that grasps what we are doing? I am willing to admit some progress, but I think one of the obstacles to developing clear conception of "what we are about to do" in *Violence and the Sacred* comes out from some basic misunderstandings among its most ardent practitioners. Girard himself is not totally blameless in this controversy either.

I am referring to an ongoing discussion as to the status of mimetic theory as either a scientific hypothesis or a theological project, or at least a project that cannot get started without explicit acknowledgment of its roots in faith. While I do not want to deny its deep relationship with Christian faith, I do think that there is a moment in it, in which the project itself asserts its proper independence from faith. One does not need to be a Christian to read, to understand, and to use *Violence and the Sacred*. My experience in Japan has given me ample personal evidence for this fact.

Girard's own comments on this are sometimes less than helpful in that they imply that it was simply external circumstances that prevented him from including his views on Christianity in the work when it was published. Even if that is historically correct, Girard would not have published *Violence and the Sacred* in its present form, if it represented a fundamental distortion of his thought. He allowed it to be published as it is because there is in orthodox Christianity not only space for, but even the requirement that human reason distinguish what has been given to it through supernatural revelation and strive to use its own resources, such as they are, to explore the truth.

¹³ R. Girard, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

Girard showed in this part of his project that in a vast range of human thought there is a missing piece and that when that piece is found, it “fits” in so many varied contexts and constellations, that one is filled with the same enthusiasm that filled Girard as he made his discovery.

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