



Can We Survive Our Origins?: Readings in René Girard's Theory of Violence and the Sacred (Studies in Violence, Mimesis, & Culture)

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Are religions intrinsically violent (as is strenuously argued by the ‘new atheists’)? Or, as Girard argues, have they been functionally rational instruments developed to manage and 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 post-Christendom (as argued by Steven Pinker and others)? Or are we, rather, at increased and even apocalyptic risk from our enhanced powers of action and our decreased socio-symbolic protections? René Girard’s mimetic theory has been slowly but progressively recognized as one of the most striking breakthrough contributions to twentieth-century critical thinking in fundamental anthropology: in particular for its power to model and explain violent sacralities, 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—i.e., to survive and develop in its evolutionary emergence—still represent today a default setting that threatens to destroy us? Can we transcend them and escape their field of gravity? Should we look to—or should we look beyond—Darwinian survival? What—and where (if anywhere)—is salvation?

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