

Complex mimetic systems. (Re: Hans Weigand's article)

*A truly Copernican revolution: placing relations in central position!*. From Greek times and in scholastic (thomistic) tradition in particular 'relation' was a much debated concept. The basic trend was to see it as something *secundum dici*, rather than *secundum esse*. It was the human mind that imposed the link, and relation was not an inherent category of substances. A road connecting cities is a thing in itself, but the linking of the cities is only in the human mind. Whereas both Plato and Aristotle gave more consideration to relation, the medieval debates tended to separate the entities and questioned the relation as an inherent quality, let alone as entity in itself. Nominalism and the Ockham's razor fostered the rise of modern sciences that take relation to be external and accidental to the substance. This is a parallel to the emergence of the individual in the social domain. In religious terms it says that God loves the individual rather than the collectivity. He is not less the God of Israel than of Job and of every suffering servant who is a victim of his people.

If the mimetic theory proposes to understand persons from their mimetic positions (and things from their relations), this contains a truly Copernican revolution. The first shift in perspective away from valuing relations was itself a cultural development that can be traced via the mimetic CRC-model. And the same holds for the inverse that presently restores the valuation of relations. But these are extremely complex analyses of the cultural generative process. In his final period Husserl has tried to develop a phenomenological method for the study of generative emergence of shifting values. But Girard's mimetic theory now places rivalry, conflict and crisis in a pivotal position, figuring the scapegoating sacrifice as the critical factor in this generative process.

It is clear that this puts the focus no longer on the humanist hero and the individual substances, but views reality as a historical system of reciprocal signals. This joins the shift in physics to the space-time connection and in the social sciences, eventually prioritizing the vision of system of systems (N. Luhmann). In sociology this option was already underlying Durkheim's method, who tried to work out an ethical system based on the individuals absorption in the social group. Girard has often been called a Durkheimian for viewing religion as the groups cultural self-assertion in the face of the (repetitive) ultimate crisis.

The generative force of the cultural reproduction in Girardian sense is dramatic and passes through the mimetic crisis, which differs from Husserl's generative phenomenology. Hans' article has the merit of explaining this process and thereby offering a firm basis for this paradigm shift. It suggests an fascinating extension across the scientific disciplines, by applying the concept of sacrifice to the very notion of 'change' and 'development'. In the socio-cultural domain it seems quite plausible to view change as a response to a crisis implying some form of sacrifice and even some scapegoating. Applying this to the very concept of any change, for instance in chemical or physical reactions and events implies a new philosophical vision of the idea of causation as such. It will meet with much critique, also in the domain of historical shifts.

Hans applies it to the role of wars in history (notably in Europe). His evolutionary scheme must be carefully freed from a historic idealisation that presents the present setting as an internal aim (telos), rather than a contingent outcome. Of war as a sacrificial 'tool', there have been other, and far more dramatic rationalisations. Bataille especially has viewed wars as a collective way of dealing with the productive excess, stressing its destructive purpose. As a means of the system to renovate and revitalise itself, it deserves an closer analysis from mimetic perspective. The main challenge of the concept of complex mimetic system lies in the model that is derived from the inter-personal crisis and expanded into macro dimensions. If Luhmann claims that all human interaction is basically the interaction of complex systems, will the cultural cycle which Hans presents so eloquently be able to get a grasp of that process? It certainly merits exploring.

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