The Nonself of Girard

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GIRARD AND PHILOSOPHY

According to René Girard, mimetic theory and philosophy cannot go together; mimetic theory must go beyond philosophy. More than an ideological disagreement, there is here an actual methodological divergence. Philosophy, he argues, tends to remain at the superficial level of pure intellectual understanding, whereas other human faculties must be accessed to overcome the illusions of an independent desire:

> In reality, no purely intellectual process and no experience of a purely philosophical nature can secure the individual the slightest victory over mimetic desire and its victimage delusions. Intellection can achieve only displacement and substitution, though these may give individuals the sense of having achieved such a victory.[1]

Furthermore, Girard relates the impossibility of philosophy's real progress to its incapacity to question the ultimate levels of introspection, namely, "ego," "personality," or "temperament":

> For there to be even the slightest degree of progress, the victimage delusion must be vanquished on the most intimate level of experience; and this triumph, if it is not to remain a dead letter, must succeed in collapsing, or at the very least shaking to their foundations, all the things that are based upon our interdividual oppositions—

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> consequently, everything that we can call our 'ego,' our 'personality,' our 'temperament,' and so on.[2]

In other words, Girard affirms that philosophy has always been biased by the romantic axiom *par excellence*: the existence of an autonomous self. However, one may argue that not all philosophical traditions of the world repeat this faith in the independence of the self. Buddhism is one of them, and it actually fulfils both of the aforementioned requisites of Girard's theory.[3] Buddhism, too, argues that a purely intellectual inquiry, without the practice of morality (*Sīla*), concentration (*Samādhi*), and wisdom (*Prajñā*), cannot suffice to reach the truth. Furthermore, Buddhism also refutes the hypothesis of an independent self; fighting this belief is actually the central element of the Buddhist path to liberation. Although Girard does not directly address ethics, we can gain much by extending his reflections into this realm. Doing so, we can discover certain values that may be common to Girard and Buddhism and that naturally point to the same conclusion: the need to forsake the romantic lie of the autonomy and independence of human beings in favor of a deep awareness of the interdependence in human life and all worldly phenomena. This awareness is the starting point and essential precondition to a new understanding of what an ethical life is.[4] In this essay, I shall attempt to highlight some of the common features and possible meeting points of mimetic theory and Buddhist philosophy. This will be done on the basis of the Buddhist notion of *Anattā*, nonself, which Leo D. Lefebure already noted as offering a deep conceptual compatibility with the theory of mimetic desire.[5] I will try to go further and present some initial arguments in favor of a more ambitious hypothesis: that mimetic theory could finally find, with Buddhism, support from a major philosophical tradition. This short article is intended as a speculative and provocative introduction to an intellectual encounter that deserves greater academic attention. In addition to advancing some preliminary arguments that will be developed further in subsequent works, the present essay, taken alone, still serves an important purpose: to introduce parts of Buddhist terminology that will be relevant for future philosophical and ethical studies of Girard's work.[6]

ANATTĀ: NONSELF

Anattā is one of the unique contributions of Sakyamuni Buddha, the founder of Buddhism who lived in the fifth-century BCE in India. Along

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with his rejection of the caste system and the practice of sacrifice, Buddha questioned the existence of the *Ātman* (Sanskrit) or *Atta* (Pāli), the self or soul[7] widely accepted in Brāhmaṇism. The *Ātman* concept is similar to the idea that each person or thing has an independent self, a view that is shared by several main families of Western philosophy, from the Greek era to the Enlightenment. Walpola Rahula recalls that, in the Brāhmaṇical tradition, it was believed that "in man there is a permanent, everlasting and absolute entity, the unchanging substance behind the changing phenomenal world."[8] For the Buddha, the belief in the self was one of the most deeply rooted mistaken views of humans, which keeps them as suffering beings, because belief in the ego gives rise to the harmful mental phenomena of craving, attachment, and the impression of ownership. According to the Buddha, as K. T. S. Sarao points out, "the individual is entirely phenomenal, governed by the laws of life, without any extra phenomenal self within him."[9] The Buddha felt the need to clarify this illusion, and explained to his first disciples the notion of *Anattā*, no-self.

Buddhist Demonstrations of Anattā

The Buddhist canons contain many explanations of *Anattā* and different ways to prove that there cannot be a self. The study of the *pañcakkhandha* or *five aggregates* is one of them. The Buddha explained that what we usually call a "human being" is in fact the combination of five groups of energies, the *pañcakkhandha* or *five aggregates*, namely:

1. *Rūpakkhandha*: the Aggregate of Matter;
2. *Viññāṇakhandha*: the Aggregate of Consciousness, i.e., the act of undifferentiated awareness;
3. *Saññākhandha*: the Aggregate of Perceptions, i.e., the act of recognition of a particular object;
4. *Vedanākkhandha*: the Aggregate of Sensations, i.e., the signal that something is happening, evaluated as neutral, positive, or negative; and
5. *Samkhārakkhandha*: the Aggregate of Mental Formations, i.e., the reaction following this evaluation.[10]

These five elements are *energies*: they are passing forces. They may leave us with the impression that there is a continuity and a unity in what we usually see as an individual, in other words, that my body, my perceptions, my emotions, and my reactions are somehow linked and form together my "I." However, the Buddha argued that each of these elements is a passing phenomenon, without sustainability in time: they are impermanent (*Anicca* or *Anitya*).

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Because there is nothing more than these five energies "in" a person, and because they are all transient events, the *Ātman*, which presupposes permanence, cannot be found behind any of them or in their combination.[11] The Buddha found these conclusions after having an intense experience of introspection, or what we know today as meditation, in particular in its Vipassanā form.

The Buddha showed that belief in the *Ātman* is false by means of a second demonstration. The equally fundamental concept of *Dependant Origination* (*Paticca-samuppāda*) details the Buddhist understanding of the principle of causation, comprising 12 factors,[12] where each is the product of the previous and the cause of the next. The twelfth connects to the first again, thereby forming a cycle that explains the *Saṃsāra* or continuation of the suffering of living beings, during the present life but also after the demise of the body, in the future lives. Within this cycle, no factor is permanent and everything is conditioned; therefore, there is no room for an unconditioned and permanent entity such as the self or soul.

The teaching on the *Trilakṣaṇa*, or *Three Characteristics of the World*, is perhaps the most systematic and direct demonstration that there cannot be an *Ātman*. In a compendium of lessons called the *Dhammapada*, Sakyamuni Buddha explained:

> All *Saṃkhārā* are impermanent.
> All *Saṃkhārā* are suffering.
> All *Dhammā* are void of self.[13]

Impermanence, suffering, and selflessness are the three characteristics of the world for the Buddhists.

Two logical implications must be noted regarding these three characteristics. First, impermanence implicates a denial of substance: if all things are transient, there is no unchanging entity such as a self. Therefore, the third characteristic is an implication of the first. Second, if there is no self, then there is no quality, or essence, of that self. Indeed, there cannot be an "essence of A" if there is no "A" from the beginning. Thus, *Anattā* is at the same time the claim that there is no substance, or in the case of animate beings, no self, but also that there is no quality, or essence, either.

Buddha's emphasis on selflessness can be noticed by his careful choice of words. Buddha presented impermanence and suffering as the characteristics of the objects known in Pāli and Sanskrit as *Saṃkhārā*, which means the *conditioned things*, all the phenomenal events that are part of the chain of cause and effect: animate objects, which possess both *Nāma* (mental

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constituents) and *Rūpa* (material form) like human beings or animals, as well as inanimate objects, like chairs, or cars, but also immaterial things such as ideas, concepts, feelings, etc. In other words, all the conditioned things of the world are impermanent and subject to decay, which is, for sentient beings, suffering.

In contrast, Buddha emphasized so intently the absolute absence of a self that he chose a term other than *saṃkhārā*: "All *Dhammā* are void of self." The term *dhammā* has a much wider meaning than *saṃkhārā*. "There is no term in Buddhist terminology wider than *dhammā*."[14] The polysemous term *Dhammā* comprises the conditioned, *saṃkhārā* but also the unconditioned, the absolute, the fundamental discovery of the Buddha: the cessation of suffering, known as *Nirvāṇa*. Buddha stressed here the absolute absence of a substance, in the form of self, soul, or ego, and therefore the absence of an essence, in any thing: even in the state of *Nirvāṇa* there is no *Ātman*. For the Buddha, the world is not a succession of permanent elements subsisting with a certain independence but rather a whole consisting of phenomena that are linked, or "inter-connected." He saw reality as a set of relations rather than one of entities.

Buddhist Philosophy and Nihilism

Because of the Buddha's famous statement on *Anattā*, Buddhism has been regarded in the West as a nihilistic system of philosophy. Buddhism, it is believed, allegedly denies all substance to reality. This view must be utterly rejected because Buddhism does value life in all its varieties: it is not a negative system. Buddha's position on *Anattā* must be understood as the rejection of the idea of a self in each human being, not as a positive argument in favor of the existence of nonself.[15] To clarify this point, we could say that Buddha criticized the view A, but that does not mean that he was an advocate of the view non-A. In other words, Buddha was critical when people claimed the existence of a self, but he did not want them to take the view of the absence of a self as an absolute truth either. As an intellectual abstraction of the ever-changing world around us, it is still a simplification of reality, therefore remaining in the realm of the conventional truth (*Samvrti Satya*). To those who came to ask him this kind of metaphysical question, Buddha remained silent and invited them, simply, to observe reality as it is: always changing. Using concepts or words to refer to objects or people around us is the main way in which we dupe ourselves in considering these objects as being permanent and distinct from one

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another. The Buddha did not deny existence; rather, he disagreed with the view that all phenomena could have a substance and a sustainability and, therefore, be conceptualized in absolute terms. Graham Priest describes the distinction further, arguing that it is not that "there is nothing left—just nothing *determinate*"[16]: the elements of the world are all so intrinsically intertwined that using different words to refer to them invites one to believe that they hold distinct existences. Buddha's view on *Anattā* is not a demand to humans for their absolute withdrawal of reason; rather, it is the humble invitation to *let go* of one's habitual desire to label, name, and conceptualize the world one sees and to find a peace in the fact that all is permanently changing around us.

Buddhist "Philosophy"?

Buddha was concerned with humans' common belief in the permanence of things, starting with themselves and people around them, thereby feeding their own suffering, because they will get attached to things—all things—that will ultimately disappear. To this extent, we can say that the Buddha was not very much interested in abstract postulations: Buddha was not exactly a philosopher. He is sometimes referred to as a "therapist"[17]: he was primarily focused on the possible ways for humans to diminish and ultimately cease to provoke their own suffering. Therefore, philosophizing the Buddha, or even talking of Buddhist "philosophy," it is somehow betraying the original mind of the Buddha, who probably considered abstract conceptualization as a possible source of clarification for a few but also as a potentially very strong source of confusion, and therefore of more suffering, for many.

Through the centuries, intellectually oriented individuals have used the insights of the Buddha to create philosophical systems, forming the schools of Buddhist philosophy. Because philosophizing consists in the attempt to find strict and permanent answers regarding topics such as existence, human experience, emotions, or morality, it contains the risk of taking such simplified hypotheses as absolutes. But we can correctly use the discoveries of the Buddha in a philosophical enterprise by keeping in mind that all the concepts or answers are true only in the realm of the conventional truth, which may be of use if it leads us to strengthen, ultimately, our awareness of the impermanence and interrelation of all phenomena. Philosophy, and its rational argumentations, may therefore be understood as one of the *Upāya-kauślaya*, or "skilful means"[18]: philosophy is one of the ways, developed

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through the history of humanity, for humans to get a better life, but philosophy and "philosophical truth" should not be mistaken as ultimate truth or as the final goal of human life.

Two Levels of Truth

If, according to the Buddha, all things are interconnected, ultimately inseparable, and should not be named, how are we, humans, able to live? Or, with a pun intended at Girard, one may ask: how to live in a truly undifferentiated world? The Buddha was aware of this question. As a response, he explained that it is acceptable, and that we actually must simplify the ever-changing world around us, into a set of clearly delimitated objects and people, which implies conceptualizing and naming them. This is unavoidable so that humans can live in harmonious societies. However, such can be done, without the worry of more suffering, only on the condition that we stay aware that the appellation of a person, a thing, or a concept is only relevant at the level of relative or conventional truth (*Samvrti Satya*). Such appellations must not be confused with the reality of the transcendental or absolute truth (*Parmartha Satya*). This means that we can use concepts and words that imply the existence of an individual as relatively stable in time and separate from other things (that is, naming things and people around us), but only if we keep in mind that, in reality, nothing in that person is everlasting or unique to her; that this person *is* not as such.[19] "A person should be mentioned as existing only in designation, but not in reality (or substance)."[20] This opens the doors to a way of naming things without creating more suffering for ourselves. By extension, this also allows for attempts in philosophical reflections. We can now, with certain precautions, use *Anattā* as a philosophical concept to make Buddhism encounter other intellectual views, such as mimetic theory.

GIRARD AND BUDDHISM

Girard's comments on Buddhism have been, throughout his long career, quite sparse. This is understandable: even though particular readers have sensed a possible connection between mimetic theory and Buddhism, the topic was probably not one of his main interests. Besides, he minimized this tradition by describing it as a rather morbid soteriological system, which allegedly consists, in his own words, in a "renunciation" led by an intent to get "out of the world altogether."[21] The reduction of Buddhism to this very

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ascetic principle, one that is at the edge of self-mortification, is an unjust and incorrect claim, and it is, to say the least, poorly formulated. Doing so is just like reducing the whole Christianity to the very rigorous and rather depressing lifestyle of a few silent monks in the Alps. By presenting Buddhism in these terms, one gets rid of the profound joy at the center of the life of the Buddhist practitioner, and, more interestingly for our research, one also misses, among many other things, a refined metaphysical understanding that gives rise to a very powerful and responsible conception of ethics.

In an article entitled "Mimesis, Violence and Socially Engaged Buddhism: Overture to a Dialogue,"[22] Leo D. Lefebure has offered perhaps the most advanced comparative study of Buddhism and mimetic theory to date. Lefebure notices a number of interesting and important points. First, that desire, violence, and their possible solutions are the concern of both Girard and the Buddhists. Second, that both traditions question the autonomy of the self. Third, that for both Girard and the Buddhists, there cannot be "good violence"; the rejection of sacrificial violence being one implication in both traditions. Lefebure also notices stronger incompatibilities, mentioning in particular that there is no God in Buddhism, unlike in Girard's view (and in the greater Christian perspective he adopts). He also mentions that Buddhism lacks an explicit understanding of mimesis as a source for violence and suffering. Lefebure's greater claim concerns a contemporary movement known as Socially Engaged Buddhism, which consists in famous Buddhist monks who have a strong intention to play a substantial social role, unlike their forest-dwelling elders. On this topic, Lefebure is right to recognize Girard's concept of the *interdividual* as being very close to the notion of *Inter-Being* coined by the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh, the founding figure of Socially Engaged Buddhism. Lefebure closes his analysis by presenting the practice of meditation as the personal Buddhist response to the issues and possible rivalries of life. This link is very valuable because Girard remains quite silent on the practical implications of his reflections for everyday life. Lefebure briefly presents the concept of *Anattā*, and he does so only to emphasize the concept's main implication: the Buddhist view of reality as a set of interrelated phenomena. In this context, desire, too, would be interconnected and therefore socially constructed, which joins Girard's view. Lefebure's work leaves space and invites a more systematic study of the technicalities of *Anattā*, toward a proper and generalized meeting of the Buddhist concept with Girard's theory of mimetic desire.

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ANATTĀ BEHIND THE MIMETIC DESIRE

René Girard, through his oeuvre, and in particular *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, quotes hundreds of passages of the great novelist to comment on *how* desire is mimetic. But *why must* desire *be* mimetic? To my knowledge, Girard did not really dig into the metaphysical implications of this question. But the very words of Girard suggest that he would agree that the subject and the model of desire are void of a self. And, through a simple demonstration, borrowing from both the mimetic theory and Buddhist metaphysics, we will be able to suggest that, in Girard's system, there may be no self behind the object of desire either, even when this "object" desired is a human person. In other words, we may be able to find *Anattā* behind each of the three poles of the mimetic desire. This, in turn, will lead us to find an answer to our question, to explain why desire can only be mimetic and why it cannot be otherwise. The Buddhist view will also invite us to slightly modify Girard's terminology, as well as proposing new compatible notions.

Anattā Behind Both the Subject and the Model of Desire

On several occasions, Girard referred to the impression of inner *nothingness* that the subject of desire aims to change: "Because [the *vaniteux*] cannot face his nothingness he throws himself on Another who seems to be spared by the curse."[23] In contrast, the model of desire appears as being *full of essence*, an attribute that gives him almost superhuman forces:

> Proust and Dostoyevsky describe in the same way the mediator's arrogant bearing as he forces his way through the crowd, his disdainful indifference to the insects swarming at his feet, the impression of irresistible strength which he makes on the fascinated spectator. Everything in this mediator reveals a calm and serene superiority of essence which the miserable victim, crushed and trembling with hatred and adoration, tries in vain to steal.[24]

Elsewhere, the fundamentally metaphysical differentiation is expressed by Girard in an entirely philosophical terminology:

> Once he has entered this vicious circle, the subject rapidly begins to credit himself with a radical inadequacy that the model has brought to light, which justifies the model's attitude toward him. The model, being closely identified with the object he jealously keeps for himself, possesses—so it would seem—a self-sufficiency and omniscience that the subject can only dream of acquiring. The object is now more

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> desired than ever. Since the model obstinately bars access to it, the possession of this object must make all the difference between the self-sufficiency of the model and the imitator's lack of sufficiency, the model's fullness of being and the imitator's nothingness.[25] [In French: Puisque le modèle en barre obstinément l'accès, c'est la possession de cet objet qui doit faire la différence entre la plénitude de l'Autre et son vide à lui, entre l'insuffisance et l'autosuffisance.[26]]

The belittlement of the subject of desire, his quest, which becomes, in Girard's words, the *ontological desire*,[27] is only the other face of the coin of the model's belief in his own fullness, in his own *self*. Of course, Girard's criticism of this structure is that the model's fullness is only an allegation, more, an illusion. All these alleged forms of superiority of being are only the byproducts of mimetic desire and do not represent an actual *metaphysical* truth:

> Proust pushes the demystification of the Faubourg Saint-Germain much further than his democratic critics. The latter, in fact, believe in the objective existence of the magic object. Proust constantly repeats that the object does not exist. "Society is the kingdom of nothingness." We must take this affirmation literally. The novelist constantly emphasizes the contrast between the objective nothingness of the Faubourg and the enormous reality it acquires in the eyes of the snob.[28]

Girard's analysis goes further. The metaphysical deception, the realization that the belief in the model's ontological superiority is a lie, constitutes a very particular event, of tremendous importance: the *conversion*.

> It is easy to understand the hostility of the romantic critics. All the heroes, in the conclusion, utter words which clearly contradict their former ideas, and those ideas are always shared by the romantic critics. Don Quixote renounces his knights, Julien Sorel his revolt, and Raskolnikov his superhumanity. Each time the hero denies the fantasy inspired by his pride.[29]

In the conclusion, the hero and his author realize that the model/rival does not possess the independence and the fullness of his supposed, legitimate *self*. Does this mean that Girard would argue, with Buddhism, that human beings are void of a *self*? Not necessarily: it could also be that the model is not metaphysically superior to the subject, but that they still each have a self, with none superior to the other. But we must also notice that the Buddhist view of the absence of a self—behind the subject and behind the model—is an equally compatible solution to this question. In other words, the Girardian ontological tension between subject and model can be read in the sense of the Buddhist *Anattā*.

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Anattā Behind the Object of Desire?

When we get to the object of desire, it is trickier to show the closeness of Girard's thought and Buddhist metaphysics. Girard explains that it is the mediation of a model that makes us desire a particular object and not the alleged intrinsic value of this object. There is a tiny gap here, to reach the Buddhist conception, but a gap of tremendous importance: we can't desire an object for its intrinsic value, because, Buddhism would add, the object does not possess any intrinsic value, in and of itself. For Buddhism, the attachment of characteristics, or values—or anything unchanging—to any object, is an illusion, a mental curtain hiding from us the ever-changing reality of worldly phenomena. This small gap is important: Girard simply says that our desire is not determined by the intrinsic values of an object, but he does not add that it is so because the object actually does not have any such value. We do not know whether Girard's intuition contains this element. However, we should notice, at least, that here again, Buddhist metaphysics and the mimetic theory are highly compatible.[30]

Mimetic Because Through *the Model*

The view that Buddhism defends, and is compatible with, Girard's theory is that there is no substance behind the subject, behind the model, and behind the object of desire. Without substance, these poles cannot be seen as existing as such, and therefore cannot be at the origin of desire. Desire is not produced by the subject, the object, or the model of desire. And with good reason: desire does not start; it is an energy that goes from one triangular relation to the other, spreading over cultures, each time in particular ways. The child sees his parents and imitates them. Before involving values or intellectually mediated choices, this transfer of desire takes place, first, through the body: we learn habits, we imitate gestures, sounds, we acquire tastes, we learn what to enjoy. Certainly, we do not all desire the same objects, and we do not all desire via the same models, but we all desire for the same reasons: we see in the object what the model saw in his object, when he was subjugated to his own model, who too saw the same thing in his own original object of desire . . . Therefore, I would argue for a small modification of Girard's terminology in his theory of the dynamics of desire: we do not desire *from* the model but *through* the model. This new term allows for a consideration of desire as something fluid, a

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movement, a human feeling that we borrow from others and that will be borrowed from us later. A desire is never singular, specific to one individual who possesses it. We only continue the desires of others before us: our desires are only the adaptations, the copies of older desires, adjusted to a new setting. There are no new desires; they are only borrowed: desire can only be mimetic.

Not Only Mimetic*: Interrelated*

It is through the sum of our mediated relations that we learn how and what to desire. But this *sum of our mediated relations* is nothing but our society, our surrounding culture. Then, desire must indeed be mimetic, in the sense that we need others, and others' desires, to tell us how to manage our desire. Desire is never just our own; it is something about which we have no choice except to learn to share, hence the rivalry. Here again, a slight reformulation can be offered: desire is not only *mimetic*; it is also *interrelated*. When we qualify desire as *mimetic*, we are still seeing the phenomenon of a particular instance of desire as separate and distinct from others; we are repeating the illusion of separate individuals who have each a somehow unique and independent desire. It is hiding the forest behind the tree. *Mimetic* is the appropriate qualifier for desire, but only in the narrow sense. In the larger sense, we should talk of *interrelated* desire. Qualifying desire as *interrelated* is to see it as the personal and particular form taken by one instance of desire within a vast number of desires, in the same manner that a sheet of paper and a beam are two possible ways in which the same tree can evolve. These networks of interconnected desires are what constitute a particular society. Alain Delaye completes this reflection and opens Girard's triangle to what has sometimes been coined as *cultural mediation*:

> From this perspective, the model is no more an individual considered to be illusory and ultra-powerful, a rival to be eliminated and imitated, but a diffuse social consensus that sets itself through the arts, the fashions, the media . . . A normative consensus, since all seem to agree to accept it, but one that is no less illusory, different and changing according to the places and times.[31]

CONCLUSION: TOWARD A GIRARDIAN ETHICS

Following Buddha's view on abstract postulations, we believe that what really matters is not the extent to which our brain can grasp hypothetical views on

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fundamental metaphysics but what this brings to our practical embodied life. The question is not whether Girard would agree with a metaphysics without selves (Girard probably follows traditional Christian beliefs about the soul). What is at stake here is what other researchers can conclude from his reflections. By reading Girard in the direction of the *nonself*, we open his work, rather factual and nonmoralistic in nature, toward its explicit ethical implications. Girard leaves us with the knowledge that all societies are violent and that our desires—perhaps our strongest feelings—are in nature rivalrous. What to do from there? The conceptual strength of *Anattā* is that it offers us a view of reality as being fundamentally a matter of relation, of permanent and absolute interconnection. This can have tremendous application and implications in the realm of ethics, a field that focuses on the nature of the *relations* among humans and between humans and their environment. This is also opening bigger doors toward *religion*, which recalls the meaning of a relation that is responsible, and therefore ethical (from the Latin *religio*, an obligation, a bond). Reality happens first in the form of relations, positing us as interrelated and therefore ethical agents, from the very fact of living.[32] If, as Girard tells us, "There is no solution to mimetism aside from a good model,"[33] then the new mimetico-Buddhist account of desire must lead us to realize that mimetic relations are unavoidable, constituting therefore the very setting of our ethical life. It is through her mediated relations that one will perform her ethical life. We first build our ethical attitude in our relations to others, and later, via rational principles. In other words, ethical models precede ethical principles. If human life is fundamentally mimetic, and if mimesis brings the ethical responsibility at the forefront of the human experience, then we must conclude that ethical responsibility is the fundamental modality of human life. This very fertile set of new considerations calls for a longer study that we will attempt to explore in a later work.

NOTES

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1. René Girard, with Jean-Michel Oughourlian and Guy Lefort. *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 399.

2. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 399–400.
3. Buddhism is not the only philosophical tradition that questions the alleged foundation of the self. Several pre-Socratic thinkers as well as some phenomenologists, such as Merleau-Ponty, also share this concern.
4. Thomas Crowley argues that the awareness of interdependence is not so much ethical as such, but pre-ethical, that is, necessary for the development of any ethical attitude. [Thomas Crowley, "From 'Natural' to 'Ecosocial Flourishing'—Evaluating Evaluative Frameworks," *Ethics & The Environment* 15 (2010): 69–100.]
5. Leo D. Lefebure, "Mimesis, Violence and Socially Engaged Buddhism—Overture to a Dialogue," *Contagion* 3 (1996): 121–40 and "Buddhism and Mimetic Theory: A Response to Christopher Ives," *Contagion* 9 (2002): 175–84.
6. It must be understood that this article is not meant as a comparative study of two systems of desire (the desire sprouting in ignorance and ending in suffering for Buddhism and the mimetic and rival desire for Girard). It is beyond the scope of this article to draw all the lines of comparison between Buddhism and mimetic theory; for the time being, we will limit our reflection to the possible presence of Anattā in Girard's theory and the resulting consequences for mimetic desire.
7. The Pāli term *Atta* comprises both the soul and the self: they are not distinguished, unlike in European languages. They represent two distinct concepts, but they share the characteristics of being somehow permanent and separate from their environment. Thus, Anattā is the critique of the belief in both the soul and/or the self. Because the Pāli term does not make a distinction, in this article, the two terms are regarded as being related and criticized in the same movement. However, for a deeper study of our topic, separate research in both of these notions should be realized, and it could reveal different treatments both in Buddhism and in Girard's theory.
8. Walpola Sri Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (London, UK: Gordon Fraser, 1978), 51. The notion of *Ātman* is also understood, in some Indian philosophical traditions such as Vedanta, not as an individual but a sort of "collective" soul. We focus here on the individual self.
9. K. T. S. Sarao, "Anattā," in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Robert E. Burswell Jr. (New York: Macmillan, 2004), 18–20.
10. These evocative English definitions are borrowed from the Vipassanā teacher S. N. Goenka [William Hart, *The Art of Living: Vipassana Meditation as Taught by S.N. Goenka* (Dhammagiri, India: Vipassana Research Institute, 1988), 27].
11. The *Anatta-lakkhana Sutta* (The Discourse on the Not-self Characteristic) of the Saṃyutta-Nikāya details how the self cannot be found behind any of the five aggregates. N. K. G. Mendis, "The Anatta-lakkhana Sutta: The Discourse on the Not-self Characteristic," *Access to Insight, www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn22/sn22.059.mend.html* (accessed April 20, 2012). A Buddhist story recalls the delusion of Khemaka, an advanced monk, who compared the impression of "I am" to the smell of a flower:

> It is just like the scent of a blue, red or white lotus. If someone were to say, "The scent belongs to the petals, or the color, or the fibers," would he be describing it correctly?

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–Surely not, friend.

–Then how would he describe it correctly?

–As the scent of the flower, would be the correct explanation.

Khemaka knew that the self cannot be reduced to its components but, even as a spiritually mature monk, he succumbed to the misguided belief of a self that exists as a combination of its aggregates. This passage is found in the *Khemo Sutta* of the Saṃyutta-Nikāya. [Maurice O'Connell Walsh, "Khemo Sutta: Khemaka," *Access to Insight, www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn22/sn22.089x.wlsh.html* (accessed April 20, 2012)].

12. The 12 factors are: (1) ignorance; (2) mental activities; (3) consciousness; (4) body and mind; (5) six senses; (6) contact; (7) feeling; (8) desire; (9) craving; (10) becoming; (11) birth; and (12) decay, disease, death. They are mentioned in several texts, for instance, the *Paticca-samuppada-vibhanga Sutta.* Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "Paticca-samuppada-vibhanga Sutta: Analysis of Dependent co-Arising," *Access to Insight, www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn12/sn12.002.than.html* (accessed April 20, 2012).
13. K. T. S. Sarao, *The Dhammapada, A Translator's Guide* (Delhi, India: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2009), 339 – 42.
14. Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 58.
15. The Buddha made this clear by rejecting both the eternalist position ("there is a self") and the annihilationist position ("there is no self") (Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 66).
16. Graham Priest, "The Structure of Emptiness," *Philosophy East & West* 59, no. 4 (2009): 472.
17. Alain Delaye, *Sagesse du Bouddha, Religion de Jésus* (Paris, France: Accarias L'Originel, 2007), 102.
18. Michael Pye, *Skilful Means: A Concept in Mahayana Buddhism* (London & New York: Routledge, 2003), 1.
19. Interestingly enough, we find in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* a quote of Proust that clearly follows these lines:

> the atomic and sensationalist point of view, which enables an anonymous perception to be split into objective atoms, is refuted at the very beginning of the novel: [quote from Proust] "Even the simple act which we describe as 'seeing some one we know' is, to some extent, an intellectual process. We pack the physical outline of the creature we see with all the ideas we have already formed about him, and in the complete picture of him which we compose in our minds those ideas have certainly the principal place. In the end they come to fill out so completely the curve of his cheeks, to follow so exactly the line of his nose, they blend so harmoniously in the sound of his voice that these seem to be no more than a transparent envelope, so that each time we see the face or hear the voice it is our own ideas of him which we recognize and to which we listen."

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René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 229–30.

20. This understanding in found in the Mahāyāna Sūtrālaṅkāra (Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 55).

21. René Girard, "Séminaire de recherche sur l'œuvre de René Girard tenu au RIER," *Studies in Religions/Sciences Religieuses* 10, no. 1 (1981): 83 and René Girard, *The Girard Reader*, ed. James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad), 63, as quoted by Lefebure, "Mimesis, Violence and Socially Engaged Buddhism," 122 and "Buddhism and Mimetic Theory," 177. It is also found in Rebecca Adams, "Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard," *Religion and Literature* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 24.

22. Lefebure, "Mimesis, Violence and Socially Engaged Buddhism."

23. Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 66.

24. Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 93.

25. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 296.

26. René Girard, with Jean-Michel Oughourlian and Guy Lefort. *Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (Paris: Grasset, 1978), 395.

27. Girard discusses the *ontological* nature of mimetic desire and mimetic mediation on many occasions, for instance: "What we have just said suggests that, in so far as the mimetic process comes to a conclusion, the model of desire is transformed increasingly into an ontological model." (Girard, *Things Hidden*, 333).

28. Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 219.

29. Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 293.

30. As a side note, we may mention that Girard explicitly refers to pride as the cardinal source of suffering: "The novelists themselves, through the medium of their heroes, confirm what we have been asserting all the way through the book: the sickness is rooted in pride" (Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 307). This is an interesting coincidence: Buddhism also sees pride as a major source of sorrow. Pride is based on the belief in the self: it is the feeling of satisfaction one feels regarding her achievements.

31. Translated from the French: "Dans cette optique, le modèle n'est plus un individu jugé illusoirement surpuissant et un rival à éliminer autant qu'à imiter, mais un consensus social diffus qui s'impose à travers les arts, les modes, les media . . . un consensus normatif puisque tous semblent d'accord pour l'admettre, mais qui n'en est pas moins illusoire, différent et changeant suivant les lieux et les temps." Alain Delaye, e-mail message to author (July 29, 2012).

32. David J. Kalupahana actually argues that Buddhist philosophy is characterized by a practical concern that posits ethics as being primal to other philosophical spheres such as aesthetics, logic, or metaphysics [*The Principles of Buddhist Psychology* (New York: SUNY Press, 1987), 147].

33. René Girard, with Benoît Chantre. *Battling to the End*, trans. Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2010), 101.

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