A Call for Papers

"DESIRING MACHINES:

ROBOTS, MIMESIS, AND VIOLENCE IN THE AGE OF AI"

A meeting of the annual Colloquium on Violence and Religion

July 8-11, 2020, at Purdue University, West Lafayette, INDIANA 47907

In our conference next July at Purdue, we would like to open a conversation between Girardian thinking—especially his ideas about mimetic desire, sacrificial violence, and scapegoating—and issues that arise in connection with artificial intelligence. Theorists of AI sometimes speak of a "singularity" by which they designate an anticipated moment when systems of artificial intelligence will become self-aware. As AI assumes an increasingly prominent role in our lives, a host of questions come up for those of us who regard Girard's ideas as important. Does self-awareness come with mimetic desire the way Girard claims it does for human beings? Are we sure robots can become self-aware the way humans can? If robots do become self-aware, and do desire, does that awareness and that desire necessarily lead to conflict and violence the way it does for Girard in human communities? Does mimesis presuppose self-awareness necessarily? Could there be machines that are hyper-mimetic without being self-aware? Do machines have models the way Girard shows that humans do or do they exclusively respond to stimuli, signals, algorithms? Do machines have models or is it perhaps humans who take machines as models? If machines do have models, what are they? What will self-aware machines imitate? Other machines? Human beings? Objects around them? A transcendental intelligence of some kind (conceived digitally)? Is consciousness a condition of mimesis or is mimesis a condition of consciousness?

We invite papers that probe these and other related questions from a wide variety of disciplines. We require only that some serious engagement with Girard's ideas be a part of the mix. For example, Girard suggests that humans desire not according objects or subjects but other individuals who model those objects and those subjects for us, and that such borrowed or appropriated desire almost always leads to violence. Or Girard suggests human communities are constituted by nature and origin as systems of management for such borrowed desires (and attendant conflict), and that the primary means for such social control is a multifarious variety of exclusionary behaviors—from individual projection to surrogate victimage and everything in between—and that a primary concern today remains how to avoid or dismantle such sacrificial lynching behavior. A third strain in Girardian thinking is the recourse to certain important texts—religious, literary, and the like—that expose such scapegoating and its history and that explore these questions for us.

In this spirit, we invite papers in the fields of AI, robotics, theology, philosophy, literary criticism, history, physics, biology, sociology, film studies, cognitive science, psychology, religious studies, environmentalism, political economy, the internet of things, and any other disciplines that touch upon these issues (or that re-conceptualize these issues) in such a way that might help advance serious reflection within the conversation that we have in mind.

Abstracts (of at least 150 words) should be sent to **SANDOR GOODHART** at:
goodhart@purdue.edu by March 15, 2020.