

Diego Bubbio. *Il sacrificio. La ragione e il suo altrove*. [Sacrifice, Reason and its Other]. Rome: CittNuova, 2004.

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Preview

Book Review. Angelo Maria Vitale reviews Diego Bubbio's 2004 book *Il sacrificio. La ragione e il suo altrove*. [Sacrifice, Reason and its Other].

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Paolo Diego Bubbio. *Il sacrificio. La ragione e il suo altrove* [Sacrifice, Reason and Its Other]. Rome: Città Nuova, 2004.

The book, organized in three chapters, analyses the philosophical elaboration of sacrifice and its relation with the structures peculiar to reason, through a comparison of thinkers from the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. The preliminary explanation of the research's methodological framework is meant to carefully define the sphere of inquiry. Although the analysis is restricted to philosophical reflections on sacrifice, excluding theological and religious approaches, the method of survey is not historical, but rigorously hermeneutic.

The first chapter examines those authors who, placing the notion of sacrifice at the center of their thought, linked to a dimension unconnected to reason. "The irreducibility of sacrifice to the concept which expresses it" first appears, according to Bubbio, in the modality of the *transcendent*. Joseph de Maistre, Solger, Kierkegaard, and Girard all express, from different perspectives, an "other of reason" constituted by sacrifice in the modality of the transcendent. Maistre's philosophical value as an anti-Enlightenment polemic is discerningly reappraised, overcoming a conventional exegetical tradition of a political kind. The truth of sacrifice takes its place in the difficult equilibrium between reason and that which transcends reason, so that "in this difficult equilibrium a laceration sometimes appears, allowing us to look on transcendence" (25). What appears as a problematic equilibrium in Maistre's perspective is, in Solger's thought, a "tragic dialectic." The place of sacrifice in the perspective of the German thinker is the "ontological disproportion" between finite and infinite, a peculiar "dual dialectic in which the contradiction remains open." For Kierkegaard, in his complex and ambiguous confrontation with Hegel (a confrontation which is decisive also for an understanding of Solger's dialectic), Christianity is co-essential with sacrifice. Girard's "mimetic and victimage theory," according to which the primary mimetic desire produces the violence and the blame that is heaped on the scapegoat, becomes the key to understanding the demystifying power of the Gospels, where this original mechanism is revealed. Here the "other of reason" constituted by sacrifice is "the passage from the deviated transcendency of metaphysical desire to the demystifying knowledge of the vertical transcendency" (41). If sacrifice is offered as a *super-rational* overcoming of reason in the modality of the transcendent, then in the modality of *life*, it indicates the possibility of a "pre-rational other." Nietzsche's criticism of the Western metaphysical dualism and his reclamation in the name of "fidelity to life," as an "other of reason" constituted by the Dionysian dimension, are well emphasized by Bubbio. In Nietzsche's thought, the Jewish-Christian sacrifice,

with its suppression of the original bloody dimension, appears as a reversal of the authentic sacrificial experience. Bataille, building on Nietzsche, identifies sacrifice with the notion of *dépense* which clashes with reason and which, through the identification between persecutor and victim, leads to the loss of distinction between subject and object and the return to the original and indistinct “prerational.”

Having determined the way in which different concepts of sacrifice touch a dimension unconnected with reason and its criteria, Bubbio’s critical analysis focuses in the second chapter on the problems of internal coherence and logical strictness which emerge when the notion of sacrifice is included within a philosophical system. The aporetic nucleus on which Bubbio immediately focuses his attention is the irrepressible dialectic of suppression and oblation which is present in the notion of sacrifice; “This dialectic is one of the elements inducing the *logos* to suspend itself in the *alogon*” (the “other of reason”) (64). But how to express this *alogon* without turning to the means and criteria of the *logos*? How is it possible to say what is unspeakable by nature? How do we translate existential experience in to conceptual terms? All the thinkers considered by Bubbio refer to the *experience* of sacrifice, to its existential dimension, that is to say, its logical or prelogical dimension, rather than to the *concept* of sacrifice. Here Bubbio recognizes a paradox within the notion of sacrifice, which makes the logical-theoretical coherence of the thinkers under consideration waver, a paradox which is grasped not only in its strictly logical sense, but also as the irrepressible reciprocal relation between the speakable and the unspeakable.

The dynamic of the relation between the *logos* and unspeakable otherness is examined in the third chapter. Conceptual analysis (in de Maistre, Solger and Kierkegaard) and existential narrative (in Nietzsche and Bataille) are the two directions in which the relation between the speakable and the unspeakable, *logos* and *alogon*, is set up, illuminating the original inseparability of the two poles of the relation. The paradoxicality of sacrifice, deriving from the irrepressible dialectic of suppression and oblation, leads to the setback of the *logos* but, at the same time, to the necessity of expressing the *alogon*, the other of reason. In the face of this alternative between the reduction and the aphasia, Bubbio indicates a third possibility: “not thinking the paradox according the *logos* or outside the *logos*, but thinking the *logos* of paradox” (117).

As a whole, the book combines a hermeneutic strictness in textual interpretation with an outstanding theoretical commitment, particularly in the analysis of the self-referentiality and circularity constitutive of the notion of sacrifice and the attempt of elaboration of a *logic of paradox*.

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