Creation of the Sacred: Tracks of Biology in Early Religions

Walter Burkert

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Sacrifice--ranging from the sacrifice of virgins to circumcision to giving up what is most valued--is essential to all religions. Could there be a natural, even creation of the sacred? -- Walter Burkert

Harvard University Press 1996, 255pp, $29.95. All human groups, it seems, have had a sacred. Burkert seeks to explain this by looking for its biological foundations. He does this by asking: Could there be a natural, even biological, reason? Why are sacrifice--ranging from the sacrifice of virgins to circumcision to giving up what is most valued--essential to all religions? Could there be a natural, even evolutionary reason?