

1 Mimetic Desire

We desire according to the desires of others



“We desire according to the desires of others.”

[Click here](#) for swift explanation of Mimetic Desire (2.5 min)



Scapegoating

Mimesis

Christianity

The Bible

Desire

Victim

[Click here for Bishop Barron on Girard](#) 9.5 min

★ Imitation

“Imitation is not just the sincerest form of flattery - it's the sincerest form of learning.”

— George Bernard Shaw

“To do just the opposite is also a form of imitation.”

— Georg Christoph Lichtenberg,

“Now, it is of course well known that Christ continually uses the expression 'imitators.' He never says that he asks for admirers, adoring admirers, adherents; and when he uses the expression 'follower' he always explains it in such a way that one perceives that 'imitators' is meant by it, that is not adherents of a teaching but imitators of a life....”

— Søren Kierkegaard

“If the tendency to imitate is present on both sides, imitative rivalry must tend to become reciprocal; it must be subject to the back and forth reinforcement that communication theorists call a positive feedback. In other words, the individual who first acts as a model will experience an increase in his own appropriate urge when he finds himself thwarted by his imitator. And reciprocally.”

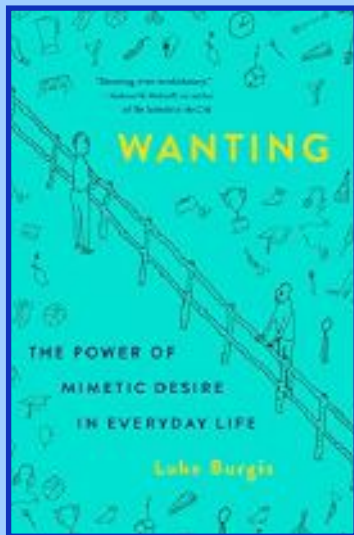
The Girard Reader, p. 9.

★ WANTING: THE POWER OF MIMETIC DESIRE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

This book by **Luke Burgis** has been described as “A groundbreaking exploration of why we want what we want, and a toolkit for freeing ourselves from chasing unfulfilling desires.”

Luke draws on Girard’s insights to bring the hidden force of mimesis to light and to reveal how it shapes our lives and societies.

[Click here](#) to buy ebook, paperback or hard cover.



YouTube has numerous interviews with Luke Burgis.

[Click here](#) for one that runs for about 25 minutes.

“...the whirlwind of desire corrupts the simple heart.”

Wisdom 4:13

The question of desire has concerned, one could say bedevilled, the great spiritual traditions since time immemorial, all of which contain warnings and prohibitions which refer to the dangers of uncontrolled desire. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the tenth commandment of the Decalogue warns us of these dangers: “You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.” (Exod. 20:17)

Girard tells us: “if the Decalogue devotes its final commandment to prohibiting desire for whatever belongs to the neighbour, it is because it lucidly recognises in that desire the key to the violence prohibited in the commandments that precede it. If we ceased to desire the goods of our neighbour, we would never commit murder or adultery or theft or false witness. If we respect the tenth commandment, the four commandments that precede it would be superfluous.”

Rather than beginning with the cause and then pursuing the consequences as a philosophical account, the Decalogue follows the reverse order, tackling the most urgent matter first: in order to avoid violence it forbids violent acts. It turns then to the cause and uncovers the desire that the neighbour inspires. The Decalogue prohibits this desire but is able to prohibit it only to the extent that the objects desired are legally possessed by one of the two rivals. It cannot discourage all the rivalries of desire.”

[I See Satan Fall like Lightning](#), p. 11-12

It is necessary to clarify at this point that the term desire should be seen in two different lights; the desire for God or the greatest good, of which Girard says: “mimetic desire is good in itself; it is the basis of love even though it often – and inevitably in terms of the history of the human race – takes destructive forms. It cannot be renounced by the Christian because what Jesus advocates is imitation of himself just as he imitates God the Father’. That doesn’t mean that evil is the whole of life. I hear this question all the time: “Is all desire mimetic?” Not in the bad, conflictual sense. Nothing is more mimetic than the desire of a child, and yet it is good.Mimetic desire is also the desire for God.”

[Adams and Girard, “Violence, Difference, Sacrifice,”](#) pp. 23, 25

However, it is disordered desire, which is the topic of most of the soul searching in the various spiritual traditions. It is disordered desire in the sense that, desire for things other than God, leads to rivalry and violence. Religious violence is the idolatry of disordered desire.

Desire is not to be confused with biological instincts, such as the need for sleep, food, shelter, love etc. Rather, it is a learned attribute, an inculturation process as is a language, gained by imitation & mime.

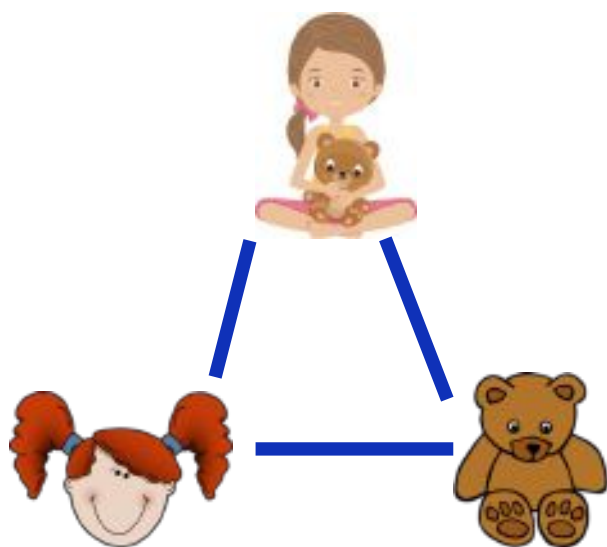
Desire...rivalry...

Girard's ground-breaking work tells us that the key to understanding the source of human violence comes from appreciating the way in which we learn, as man is a social animal whose first steps and early sense of identity come from observing and copying others.



A baby learns language and its social behaviour in this manner, and will carry this capacity to mime into adolescence and adulthood; contemporary fashion and advertising industries being testimony to the efficacy and potency of this imitating. Girard describes this process as mimetic desire.

Triangular Desire



But while the child is learning language and the ability to relate to others from its surroundings, it will also learn to want what his or her sibling or playmate wants. Two children in a playpen with many different toys will, within no time at all, both want the same teddy bear. The more the child in possession of the bear resists giving it up, the more the other child wants it, with the wanting growing in crescendo as each child fuels the other's desire.

This is an example of the triangular nature of mimetic desire; the triangle of subject, model, object. The desire of child A, (the subject) for the bear C (the object), is mediated by the desire of child B, (the model). This wanting, which Girard describes as acquisitive mimesis or the desire to acquire what the other desires, is a dangerous development in that it must inevitably lead to rivalry and conflict. Great literature and history abound with examples of acquisitive mimesis where one individual desires the spouse, fortune, land, fame, reputation, social position, or even "the (apparent) success of having renounced desire" of the other.

★ Remember that time you were a toddler...

...and you chose blonde Barbie to play with, but then your friend chose brunette Barbie, and suddenly you realised you really wanted brunette Barbie all along!



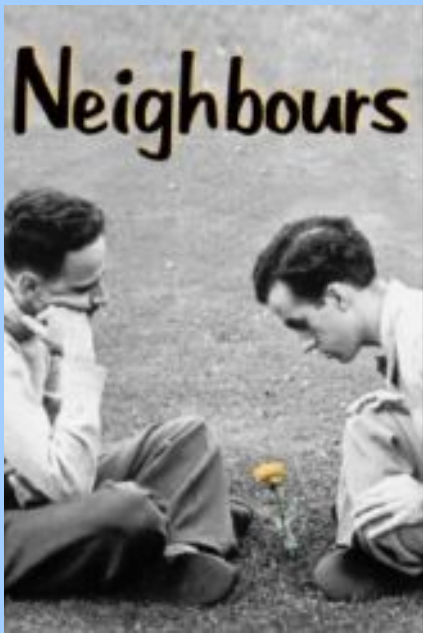
[Kerrie Sackville](#)



<http://www.yoddler.com/?page=Quote&q=644#page=Quote&q=644>

Desire - rivalry- violence

[Click here](#) to view Norman McLaren's confronting 1952 Oscar winning film.
(8 minutes)



People fight, not because they are different, but because they are the same.



Hitler and Stalin were opposites philosophically, yet their rivalry produced human violence on a scale impossible to comprehend.



Contemporary rivals

If we do not imitate Christ,
or Christ-like models,
we will continue
to imitate each other
and remain
in the thrall of mimetic rivalry
and violence.



Further reading. Click on titles:
[Raven Review Intro Mimetic Desire](#)
Ross: [A Terrible Theory \(about the "Terrible Twos"\)](#)

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