

Luke Burgis – Transcript

- Jim: [00:00:06](#) Well, hello, everyone. This is Jim O'Shaughnessy and my colleague Jamie Catherwood for another edition of Infinite Loops. I am super psyched about my guest today because he's written a really incredible book. I must say, thank you very much for letting me read it ahead of time. Luke Burgis, who is the author of *Wanting: The Power of Memetic Desire in Everyday Life*. Welcome, Luke.
- Luke: [00:00:37](#) Thanks, Jim. I'm very excited to be here because I think this is the first podcast I've done with somebody that I would consider a Girardian. I don't know if it's fair to call you that. I don't know if you consider yourself one, but I do.
- Jim: [00:00:49](#) So, well, maybe that'll come out in our discussion. I wanted to lead into this with a quote from Proust because I love this quote and I don't know why, but it made me think about this topic and the quote goes thus, "It is always thus impelled by a state of maximum desire that is destined not to last, we make our irrevocable decisions."
- So I've been fascinated by the whole idea of, first off, many people confuse our desires and our needs. You do a really good job of distinguishing between them right up front in the book. So, a need, if you're looking at the Maslow's hierarchy of needs, for example, a need would be for food, for shelter, for security, for sex, et cetera. Those are all kind of programmed into our base code as domesticated primates, right?
- Luke: [00:01:59](#) Yep.
- Jim: [00:01:59](#) And desire is a wholly different thing and I'm going to let you, because you're going to do a much better job than me, expand on that.
- Luke: [00:02:10](#) Yeah. Well, I don't know about that. That's a haunting quote by Proust, by the way. I wonder where that's from. It's very haunting, I'm sure [crosstalk 00:02:18]-
- Jim: [00:02:19](#) I think it's from *Remembrance of Things Past*. I could be wrong, but I have the bad habit of when I'm reading something, I just start writing down the notes.
- Luke: [00:02:29](#) Yeah, I'm the same way.
- Jim: [00:02:30](#) And I don't give the attribution.

Luke:

[00:02:32](#)

Yeah. Well, it is haunting and Proust has so much to say about this topic, Jim and it also reminds me of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* as well. That book is very, very similar.

So this question of desire and what is desire and how is it different than needs. Desire is a very mysterious thing and the last thing I would want to do is pretend that I've got desire figured out because I certainly don't and I don't think that Girard who was the inspiration for my book did either. He was fond of saying that desire is mysterious. But what he did put his finger on is this mechanism by which human desire works, that most of us are not familiar with. Or we don't see because we're so close to it. It's part of who we are that we often don't realize it works like this.

And Girard's fundamental discovery was that the nature of human desire is mimetic, meaning imitative. That humans rely on models outside of themselves to determine the objects of desire that they pursue. So you could think of needs. The models that we have for needs are sort of our... We don't have models. We have instincts so that our instincts or biological physiological drives are the things that direct us to one thing or another. So if you put two pieces of meat in front of me, one of them's a well cooked, medium rare, juicy steak, and the other one's a rancid piece of meat. I don't need a model to help me decide which one of those pieces of meat to eat. My body will send a pretty strong signal as soon as my nose gets a whiff of that rancid piece that I'm eating the other one, right?

So we've got these built-in instincts that help us choose those kinds of objects of desire, which I think are better called needs. Food, warmth, security. If it's raining, I typically want to be inside. If I'm cold, I want to be warm. We have those instincts. Once we get outside of that realm to more and more abstract things like lifestyles, fashions. We could even say stocks, right?

Jim:

[00:04:57](#)

By the way, excuse me. But that's why I got interested in this in the first place, because I'm very voracious and universal in what I like to read. I was reading something about psychology and he came up and I'm like, "Oh, I read that book about memes, M-E-M-E. This is something different." And so like a lunatic, I went and read all of his stuff and I'm immediately like my wife, my long suffering wife is like, "Just stop talking." Anyway, I was saying this fits markets. This fits like the art market. This fits stock markets. This is so cool. Thus, my dry diving down that rabbit hole.

Luke: [00:05:49](#) Jim. I've been meaning to ask you your origin story for mimetic theory. How long ago was that?

Jim: [00:05:55](#) Oh, probably, what are we, 2021? So maybe 2015.

Luke: [00:06:00](#) Okay. Okay. So I thought you were going to tell me that you were like Girard's investment manager or something like that. Could you imagine that? Being Girard's investment manager, getting a phone call from him, "Jim, look into the GameStop. I think this is some very mimetic things going on."

Jim: [00:06:18](#) "I think you should look at this one, my friend."

Luke: [00:06:21](#) "You should look at this one." Apologies to any French people listening. I'm not that great with accents. So Rene Girard was French and had an accent at the end of his life. He did have some things to say about the stock market. I don't know if we'll have time to get into that today, but he very specifically commented on the market. So stocks, again. Theoretically, a stock is a very abstract thing and when we get into the realm of abstract objects of desire, I would say that even a career is pretty abstract. The idea that we have of a career is very abstract and it's the idea of, it is usually very different than the thing itself once we start going down that road. Like I worked on wall street, I had an idea of what it was going to be like and my idea was so different than the reality when I was working 90 hour weeks in New York.

So, when it comes to these more abstract objects of desire, human beings need models. We rely on models of desire to help us choose between the billions. I mean, theoretically, there's an infinite number of objects that we could pursue. So we rely on models and how we choose those models is another story that I won't get into right now, but Girard says that we have the romantic lie. It's this romantic myth that our desires are entirely our own, that we generate them autonomously and independently out of some secret inner chamber of desire that's just ours and he says, that's a very romantic notion.

In fact, desire is social and desires work by contagion and we often adopt desires from the people around us. Some people that we would call role models are celebrities like Elon Musk is a super cool entrepreneur, so I want to be a little bit more like him, or people that we would never think are influencing our desires, like our colleagues or the guy that just sits at the desk over from me is probably influencing the way that I think about things and the way that I value objects more than I realize.

Jim: [00:08:25](#) Yeah. I think that, as I was reading it, so I've read everything that Danny Kahneman and his deceased partner Tversky and what Tversky has written. And I just kept making a note as I was reading your book that this man, Danny Kahneman, when he reads this, he's going to go, "Oh yeah, absolutely."

Luke: [00:08:49](#) I hope so.

Jim: [00:08:49](#) Because essentially I think the desires and beliefs, aren't really all that different. And I've written extensively about how we form beliefs and many times beliefs are formed oddly in the absence of abundant evidence. And the thing that I noticed happening with our human OS, operating system, is that people conflate a belief they have, which probably was not original with them, much like a desire, with themselves. And so that's why you see all of these tweets on Twitter. What hill will you die on?

And I always say, I subscribe to the general Georgia's patent hill of making the other poor dumb bastard die in his hill, but not me. But the idea that desire and belief and the way they kind of fit together, I think is really interesting. And the other thing that I noticed right away is, and this sounds weird, but I love literature as well. And so this is kind of like, I think it was Arthur Kessler who said, "The more profound a discovery, the more obvious it appears afterwards." And so I'm like, well, duh, because what he does is he goes back and it's a wonderful story that I'm going to let you tell.

He was told to teach something that he didn't know too much about. And so he was like once, like my wife's uncle who was a priest and a professor, he was told he had to teach Greek and he didn't know Greek. So he was one step ahead of the class all the way. And it was kind of like that with Girard, right? Because he was given a topic, that he didn't know well, and he was forced to kind of read with fresh eyes and I'll let you take it from there.

Luke: [00:10:53](#) Yeah. That's right. And it's a fascinating story. I mean, often we can see things that are outside of our domain of expertise better than people on the inside can because they're just too close to it. I've heard a story, I don't know if it's true or not, that Henry Ford got the idea for the assembly line by looking at a pig being butchered and broken up into its component parts.

Jim: [00:11:20](#) Yeah, probably apocryphal. But that story is widely supported.

Luke: [00:11:24](#) But it's true even if it didn't happen, right?

Jim: [00:11:26](#) Exactly.

Luke: [00:11:26](#) So there's some truth there. So this is the case with Girard and it is true, Jim. I mean, I have to say that when you first learned about mimetic desire, you might think that, "Oh, this is obvious." But the deeper you go, you realize that it is obvious, but it's giving language to something that you probably have already sensed. And there are non-obvious pieces to this puzzle and we'll probably get into some of them today. Like, I've pitched a couple of op-eds to editors and they're like, we need this to be more contrarian. There's nothing contrarian about this and I'm like, "Well, actually I think there is." But anyways, so Girard was a young Frenchman who'd come to America shortly after the second world war. He originally went to Indiana University and the age old story, he wasn't publishing enough.

So they basically told him to get lost. So he wasn't on the tenure track. He bounced around, he went to John Hopkins, he went to Bryn Mawr. He eventually ended up at Stanford, but early on in his academic career, he was just kind of trying to get tenure struggling, didn't want to turn down work, didn't want to turn down money. And one of the classes he was asked to teach was on European literature, mostly French literature. So Girard's background was not in literature. And he was really a historian by trade. So his PhD was in history, wrote his dissertation on French, US perceptions of each other, which is a fascinating topic, but his degree was not in literature, but he was asked to teach the class anyway. So what he did was I think, that the books that he should be teaching in that class were even kind of prescribed to him.

So you have Dostoevsky, you have Proust, was one of them. This handful of authors, Don Quixote, which would not be European, but Girard read and loved Don Quixote because it was a super mimetic book. And Girard read these works with fresh eyes and he just stayed one step ahead of his students. And he said, "I'd like to try to find some themes in these works to help everything come together for me so that I'm not reading all of these books separately." And one of the things that he'd noticed with his penetrating insight into human nature was that characters in all of these great novels didn't seem to desire spontaneously ever. Meaning they didn't just wake up in the morning and just start to desire a woman or something, or to do something. There was always a model that was affecting their desire.

And you can kind of trace their desire through these novels based on who their models of desire are. And he said, "This is more realistic." The reason that these are some of the greatest novels in history is because this is the way that desire actually works. And the novelistic truth that these great authors were capturing is in fact, mimetic desire. So Girard initially called it triangular desire because he always saw that there was sort of a triangular way that this works, and he eventually termed it mimetic desire. But was his insight just approaching these books with fresh eyes, none of the literary critics had ever noticed this before. They were kind of too deep in the weeds and all these esoteric kind of readings of these books and Girard noticed what he thought was a pretty obvious thing. And it's that look for the models and you'll find them everywhere.

Jim:

[00:15:09](#)

And one of the fascinating things. So, I sometimes joke that I'm going to change my title to professional rabbit hole diver. This goes back all the way to Adam and Eve, right? Eve was fine. She was chilling. She didn't want that apple until the serpent comes and models for her. "Hm, you want that apple." And every myth, I love Greek mythology, Norse mythology, et cetera. The similarities between these myths are far greater than many people understand, but they're all, as you say, muddled. And so I was reading and, I often make the joke on social media, it's turtles all the way down, it's kind of like models all the way down. And at some point, I think in one of our exchanges, I said the people who fascinate me are the person who throws the first stone, because they don't have a model. Or presumably they don't have a model, maybe they do. That I'm unaware of, but what do you think about that?

So one last thing I would mention is, so Charles Dodson Lewis Carroll was actually a very accomplished logician who also happened to be a terrific children's book writer, although, spoiler alert, they're not children's books. And so he had a little thing that's called *What the Tortoise Said to Achilles* and essentially in it, he makes the point that even in the most logical of systems, and he was talking about mathematics and mathematical axioms, he goes, "If you keep going down, you just keep asking, you keep asking and you get to a place at the bottom where, and this is always the case, a human being decided often without proof or evidence, this is true." And so the point being that, what we think of as, this is axiomatic, this is et cetera. Well, maybe not. So I think that I love this idea of the protagonist desire, springing from models and models springing from other models. But, where does that start, do you think?

Luke: [00:17:44](#) Yeah. So mimetic theory is a sweeping account of human evolution and culture and violence, and it all starts with this concept of mimetic desire. So we could really go down a rabbit hole here, Jim. I don't know how deep you want to go.

Jim: [00:18:04](#) I like going [crosstalk 00:18:06].

Luke: [00:18:06](#) Okay. We can do it. We might even have to get into some theology here, if you're cool with that.

Jim: [00:18:11](#) I'm up for it.

Luke: [00:18:13](#) And we can talk about the first movers, the first mover of desire, going back to Aristotle, we could say God, but Girard has a quote. And he says, "Mimetic desire is the cost of human freedom." And he describes the process of hominization. We would talk about 2001: A Space Odyssey here, right? And he's talking about the development of mimetic desire. And he describes it as being a good thing in that the animals, if we're talking about 2001: A Space Odyssey, right? Like the great apes, they didn't desire the way that we do.

They didn't have freedom. They were just kind of trapped and confined to their instincts. And at some point, something happened. There was kind of some evolutionary break where human beings transcended just the instincts, right? And somebody wanted something a little bit differently. Now, Girard would say that that probably happened when there was some rivalry and something happened to prevent violence and the scapegoat mechanism, but I don't want to get into that too much right now. But mimetic desire opened us up to a very human style of relationships that the animals don't have. And that's where I care deeply what you desire, if somebody takes me as their model, they care what I desire. It's kind of the foundation of human relationships, it's about our openness to who other people are and what they want.

And so memetic desire in a sense is actually what's allowed us to become human. Like it's a fundamentally human characteristic. And in that sense, it's a tremendously positive thing that we have mimetic desire while my cat, I'm pretty sure it doesn't. She doesn't seem to give a what I like or what I want. She just does her own thing. So in that sense, it's a powerful human attribute. But if we're not careful, it can take us places that we don't want to go. It can lead us into rivalries, but I'm glad that I'm in memetic, because I can look around me and I can choose my models of desire.

I can choose to imitate a great artist or a great entrepreneur, or an investor, or a friend, somebody that I respect that I has some virtue or something. This is the basis of human culture and education. So in that sense it's positive. I think that, the first desire we would have to talk about creation and why does anything exist rather than nothing at all? I have a weird background, it's in finance, philosophy and theology, and I somehow mashed them all together.

Jim: [00:22:00](#)

So, what's interesting for me is that as I was learning about mimetic desire, I was like, this just makes so much sense. I can't believe that this happens to everyone else, except for me. To the point where my wife was saying, "What are you studying?" And I'm like telling her, "Well, mimetic desire. And I read about it, Peter Thiel was talking about it and I just find it really interesting." And she says, "That means copying, right?" And I'm like, "Yeah. And then, we establish these desires that we have by modeling ourselves and other people." And she quite literally broke out laughing. And she looked at me and she goes, "Jim, you are the least mimetic person that I've ever met in my entire life." And I'm like, "Well, come on." I said, "We're all mimetic."

And she goes, "Jim, when you were a teenager, when we first met, you looked at me in all seriousness," and it wasn't in all seriousness, Luke. I was kidding. But I looked at my wife and I said, "If I had not been born James P. O'Shaughnessy, I would desire to be James P. O'Shaughnessy." But it's a joke, and it's true. But it also gets to a truth that I want to discuss, because I found this with friends too. When I would tell a friend about it, their first would be like, "That's crazy. What are you talking? I don't get that." Almost to a person, 24 hours later, I either get a text, a phone call or a note or a DM. "I can't stop seeing this everywhere."

Luke: [00:23:48](#)

Oh yeah.

Jim: [00:23:48](#)

But, and this is the part I want to hear your point of view on. I eventually did figure out who my mimetic models were and my friends have too, but that reaction is also very consistent, and maybe it's just because-

Jim: [00:24:00](#)

So very consistent among... And maybe it's just because it's a self-select example of people I happen to know who tend to also be very bright, but this idea that they are the only exception. And so one of my things is, listen we're all operating human OS here, okay? So as much as we like to think that it doesn't affect us and we're the exception, we're not the exception.

Luke: [00:24:25](#) No, I had the same reaction. I think a lot of people do. I just started seeing it everywhere in the world, except in myself. And it's kind of nice to be able to think that you're seeing what's going on all around you. You can point these things out. And it took me years Jim, before I kind of had this holy moment where I was, "I'm pretty mimetic." My fiance would say that I probably pretty mimetic actually. I think it's helpful to think of it, not in terms of certain things are mimetic or certain people are mimetic and other people aren't mimetic. I think it's better to think about it in various domains of life, like our orra in specific situations. So I can tell you I'm a highly mimetic when it comes to my friends or people I admire when they recommend music or books to me. I have some people that's all it takes. I will read it. I rely on those models openly. I want those models and that's basically how I pick almost all of my music. And I prefer those humans to the algorithms that suggests music to me, the recommendations are always better. Right?

Jim: [00:25:37](#) Yes.

Luke: [00:25:37](#) I'm hyper mimetic when it comes to the arts and the kinds of things that I read and listen to. I'm not very mimetic in other things. When it comes to a lot of the news and the things that were going on, sometimes I don't even have a pulse. And people are, "Why aren't you reacting more to this stuff?" I'm, "I don't really care about that." Right? So it's just an area where I'm just not... I don't quite have the mimetic reactions that I do in other domains. So I think part of it is just having a little nuance and beginning to see that, "That was a good chance, that there are some things where we might manifest more mimetic behavior than others." Whether it's Bitcoin or relationships, like romantic relationships and friendships. Those are two very different domains of life. And I don't think that we can make blanket statements about our mimesis without breaking it down a little bit.

Jim: [00:26:36](#) Yeah I agree. And in a moment I want to get back a little bit too. Because it's an interesting feeling when you discover, "Wait a minute, I do have these models." And I want to talk about that in a minute, but I also have... Just by what you just said, it leads me to a question that I jotted down and that is you have a really interesting history. You're an entrepreneur, you worked in a startup, you were very aware. You went and talked to Peter Thiel about how he avoided the mimetic conflict that was brewing. And so the question that I had for you is this: if you were going to start another startup, how would you design its culture from day one, knowing what you know now?

Luke:

[00:27:30](#)

Oh, that's a hard one, Jim. That's a hard one. And I am contemplating doing that by the way. I just haven't given that particular question enough thought. I think that I would take some advice from Peter Thiel. Something that Peter told me. And make sure that people in the startup have clearly defined roles and objectives, so that they're not ambiguously kind of competing for the same things. I used to have a different mindset by the way. I kind of... I generally like the idea of flat organizations and just kind of having people do their own thing in theory. But it can really go wrong sometimes when mimetic stuff starts happening. And I think I personally saw a little bit of that in with Zappos in the downtown project in their implementation of Holacracy down there. Where there's no more titles, it's just kind of a free for all. You pitch your idea, you do your own thing. Even your compensation is not fixed. Led to some real rivalry and some problems there.

And I actually would put some guard rails on rivalry by giving people more clearly defined tasks. I would find ways to really dis-incentivize some of the more kind of back padding kind of status recognition games, that some companies play for bullshit things that actually don't matter for the company. Right? I think that that leads to people spending a lot of time competing for status and recognition, instead of things that are actually furthering the mission of the company or doing the work. I did it myself Jim. When I was an entrepreneur in my early startup days, I cared deeply about making a list of the Top 25 Entrepreneurs under 25. It just simply doesn't matter. I don't even know how they come up with those lists.

Jim:

[00:30:03](#)

That's crazy.

Luke:

[00:30:04](#)

But I remember a friend of mine was on it and I was, "What the hell? My company has got a bigger valuation than yours does." So that kind of stuff happens all of the time. And I do think that good leaders can be intentional about dis-incentivizing people from seeking that kind of stuff.

Jim:

[00:30:22](#)

Yeah. I think the guard rail idea makes sense to me. I've started four companies and made every mistake you can possibly make. And so I do like the idea. Like you, I'm very attracted to flat organizations. But the idea of a little more definition and putting in place a process that leads away from the mimetic conflict, right? It can be a nudge. It could be very subtle. It doesn't have to be heavy handed, but I think that it is kind of an interesting thing in terms of as an entrepreneur, that was kind of one of the first things as I was reading it, "If he was going to do another company, I wonder how different that company

would look." And it led to another question which is... And this is just my opinion. But for every one authentic, distinctive expert out there, there are nine who are phoney's and frauds who happen to be very gifted at understanding how to hack human operating system. And so one sees them rising in an environment where... I think of Edward Bernays. Whenever I refer to him-

- Luke: [00:31:57](#) Charlatan.
- Jim: [00:31:59](#) I always put a paren about it. I go, "Edward Bernays, that fucker." Because he was a bad man.
- Luke: [00:32:07](#) He really was.
- Jim: [00:32:09](#) And so how do you distinguish or can you? I don't know. The answer you could just say to me, you can. And then we move on. But how do you distinguish between that one real diamond in the rough? Who maybe isn't playing mimetic games or trying to hack human systems like Bernays did continually. With great success by the way. And sent her on the real deal. What do you think? Do you think there's a way to do that?
- Luke: [00:32:40](#) I think that there's a way to get an idea of whether or not people are playing mimetic games. By the way, that's another thing that I would do differently in a startup. And going back to your last question, because you just sparked this. I would put people in place in leadership in the company that are not playing a mimetic games. In other words, I would put healthy models in place. The kind of people that are not driven by petty rivalries. That quality in a person has shot up to become one of the most important things that I look for. Certainly in a co-founder. The last thing that you want in a co-founder is somebody that is rivalrous with you. Yet people do it all the time.
- Jim: [00:33:21](#) Crazy.
- Luke: [00:33:22](#) Yeah. I don't want them anywhere in a leadership position in my company, because that way of operating really trickles down and it's contagious. It affects everybody. And pretty soon it's a war of all against all. You got everybody competing with everybody else. So that's another thing I would definitely do. Is I would put a premium on that. And there's certain ways to screen for that kind of a thing too, that I would... Typically, when I hire people, I test them a mimetically and see how they react. I just do. On the question of charlatans and experts. I

have a section of the book called The Cult of Experts. And I do think it's a problem. I think that it's easier than ever to kind of mimetically inflate the value of your expertise if you really want to. And in a world in which people are swimming in information, and it's just information overload. Most people don't have time to kick all the tires and check all the facts and read the scientific papers.

So they rely on whether or not somebody else thinks this person is an expert. So if you think about it, that's kind of a dangerous place to be in as a culture. Because if you're a charlatan, all you actually need to do is get 10 or 11 of the right people to consider you an expert. And you're sort of crowned an expert. And that's is a problem. This is a true story. I know somebody in I'm not going to out them. I won't even tell you what domain of knowledge this is. But I know somebody who joked about this, he wanted to establish a reputation in a certain area. He paid people on the website Fiverr to go around in chat rooms and subreddits and things like that and say, "Hey, I knew this guy. I'm pretty sure he's a certified genius. I went to high school with him; certified genius."

And his intuition there is pretty brilliant. He's mimetic, intuition. Talk about a way to create some mystique and expert status. Just have 20 people randomly saying that you're genius, right? Obviously this is Eddie Bernays 101 right? He's planting models places and affecting people's judgment of somebody else's expertise. I think the way to cut through is to do the work. Do some of the math. And question the source of their authority. I think there's a little bit of... I'm kind of sympathetic to the whole anti credentialing thing. But I think when that goes too far and that credentials don't matter at all anymore, that I think we actually exacerbate some of that. There's got to be a middle ground somewhere.

Jim:

[00:36:19](#)

Yeah. So I agree. I think that there will be. I think the problem is this period that we're in now. I call it the great reshuffle. And we're sort of moving from life in the physical domain, where we've spent all of human history, into life in the digital domain. Where it's we're brand new; we're infants. And I think that one of the first things... At least that I've noticed and is a thesis of mine, probably wrong. But is that in the physical realm, sort of a linear thought process works very well. In the digital realm, a nonlinear thought process works a lot better. And as we try and learn, as we get feedback from this digital domain, hopefully we'll learn more things. But during this time there'll be a lot of confusion, a lot of fear, uncertainty and doubt. The hallmarks of

a good propagandist is that they sell fear, uncertainty and doubt.

And when that happens, unfortunately, a lot of people collapse their belief systems into conspiracy theories. Because conspiracy theories fit beautifully with mimetic theory by the way. Because they are all predicated on a scapegoat. And whether it's the Illuminati or whether it's the international Zionism or whether it's... Whatever group you want to vilify, that group is responsible for all of the problems in the world. "If it weren't for those bastards, things would be going all right." And so we lived through these periods. And I know, I love that you mentioned the dancing crates back in the day. Because from our modernize, it seems so silly. But we're doing a lot of it right now. But it happens online. And so what do you think? Do you think that one of the things that will emerge is kind of that medium? That is, it won't be the credentialing that we had in the past, where it was simply...

I have a daughter who graduated from Yale, she's an author. I have two who graduated from Notre Dame. Those are two really good Degrees to have. And so in the old days, "Oh, Yale, you're hired." Now It's, "Well, what did you study? And what are your thoughts about this? And show me some of your work product." Right? So it might get you in the door, but you still got to have the work product. We might get to a stage where it's just work product, but then it'll come back in some... At least that's my thesis. It will come back. There will be some form of accreditation. It might just not be the one we're used to.

- Luke: [00:39:14](#) Yeah. I think it might emerge. I have theories. Again, probably wrong. And I think part of the way it might work is some form of a reputation score or judgment score that people get-
- Jim: [00:39:27](#) And see, I hear that. I just had to interrupt. That terrifies me. That is a bad episode of the Black Mirror.
- Luke: [00:39:35](#) Nosedive is the episode. It's a terrible... I thought that was the most terrifying episode of all of them. Horrible.
- Jim: [00:39:40](#) Terrifying.
- Luke: [00:39:41](#) Terrifying. That one hit a little too close to home for me. Is if you haven't seen it, episode is Nosedive. It's all about this, right? It's kind of the social credit system going on in China right now. It's just a different version of that. So I don't think that that's a good solution. I should be clear. But I think that that's

what we're moving towards. The whole social media, the great reshuffle that we're in right now... One of the most interesting things about social media for me and one of the reasons why it's so mimetic and can be dangerous, frankly, and so contagious. Because if you think about the way that human beings have communicated for tens of thousands of years, we rely on cues like eye contact and eye signals, and body language. Just like you and I can see each other right now. And it makes a difference.

We rely on those cues and we're evolved to pick up cues in a second and be, "Okay, this dude doesn't like me or this guy is about to punch me or whatever." And we react to it. We don't have that on social media. It's weird. You can say something on social media and nobody responds. It just goes out there into the void and you don't know what people's facial expressions look like. So that to me is problematic. So I actually see my theory. And I think Clubhouse is proving my theory a little bit. Is that social media actually has to have a human face. It has to become more like regular human relationships, okay? So Clubhouse is a step in that direction because it's dialogue. Now we can hear each other's voices. It feels more relational and a little more natural than Twitter does for instance. Where we just tweet at each other back and forth. So I think it needs a human face. And I think that's the direction that it's going to have to evolve in.

Balaji was on Tim Ferriss podcast last week. And he said something to the effect of, "How do you solve cancel culture?" And he said, "I think we're just going to have a new piece of Westphalia. Where we all just have pseudo anonymous profiles. So that nobody's immutable, personhood can ever have violence done to it on online." I think that's a terrible solution. If the answer is that we all just have to be pseudo anonymous, that to me is depressing and miserable. And I hope that's not the way out of this. I want more humanity, not less. And I think that's the direction that we need to move in on social and general.

Jim:

[00:42:18](#)

I'm with you entirely. I have a friend and a guest... Who has been a guest on the program, Brian Roemmele. And he thinks that we've got it all exactly backwards. And that current social media is backwards and that he like you, thinks that it is anti humanist. And needs to become pro humanist. And he has a lot of really out there ideas on how to do that. But I find I'm fascinated by guys like that and women. Because I think that there's a lot of truth to that. The point of view about micro expressions. I spent six months studying them because I do a lot

of negotiation in what I do. And I cannot tell you the value of face-to-face. It dwarfs even this. This is better, right? Because I can see your face and I can see the expressions on it, but we also... this has no haptic element.

And when you and I are sitting in a room together, you feel things because that's the way we're designed by evolution. Right? But we have to be able to be always on guard, but that feeds into the intuitive part of our thought process and our evaluation, if you will. And with absent that you get these kind of cancel cultures and you get these kind of... I think of T.S. Eliot, who's one of my favorite poets. And it's basically in The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, the woman is saying to him, "That is not what I meant at all. That isn't it at all."

And so the confusion of trying to be understood and not being understood... Just in the best of times, that is a very difficult thing. But it also leads to another question for you that I had jotted down. And it's this idea of the pseudo anonymous celebrity. So Satoshi Nakamoto, Jed McKenna if you like people who speculate about enlightenment. These are people who had a massive impact on real human culture in very different ways. Obviously Satoshi's is monetary and McKenna's is philosophical. I do a lot of interviews because I've read a lot of... I've read all of McKenna. I've read all of Tony de Mello and I've read...

I think these guys are interesting. But somebody once ask me, "Well, why do you think that McKenna's the real deal?" And I said, "Where is he? He could be selling \$10 million a year of workshops. He could be a guru. He could be all of these things and he's not there. In my mind that lends him credibility." Now Satoshi, that's a different question. But what do you think about that? And in terms of not regular folks like me and you deciding we're going to be the man in the dark mask. But figures who just emerge and become immensely powerful in terms of culture. And if we could just stick with Satoshi.

Luke: [00:45:54](#) Yeah we could stick with Satoshi. I find these kinds of figures fascinating from the standpoint of mimetic desire. There's also this line in The Young Pope. I don't know if you've seen that show on TV, where there's this new Pope [crosstalk 00:46:08]-

Jim: [00:46:08](#) With Jude Law, right?

Luke: [00:46:08](#) With Jude Law yeah. He says, "I'm going to not show myself and just be this kind of mysterious..." This is fictional by the way. You haven't seen the show, right? "And just be mysterious because that's going to increase my mystique and my value." He

says in the show. And I think there's something real to that. And part of that, I agree with you: it does lend people credibility. Because they can't seek some of that low hanging fruit that other people can by charging a \$100,000 to give a talk or something like that. Satoshi who knows what that guy could command. Imagine if he emerged kind of demand that you would have for him to go speak.

Jim: [00:46:51](#) But my idea is that people would be just bitterly disappointed.

Luke: [00:46:55](#) I think they would.

Jim: [00:46:57](#) Satoshi 12 year old [inaudible 00:46:59] kid from Tokyo.

Luke: [00:47:01](#) How could any of these people possibly live up to the expectations, right?

Jim: [00:47:05](#) Exactly right.

Luke: [00:47:06](#) There's literally no way. And part of what's going on here in my view... And I riff a little bit in the book. I'm speculating here just by drawing on Girard, but that's to do with why we pick models and the models that we do in the first place. And Girard says that, "We pick models of desire because we think that this model has some quality of being that we lack somehow." And in a sense, the more mysterious and sort of less of it like human they seem to us, the more mystique they take on. The more willing we are to adopt them as a model. You could even say that part of the reason that the Egyptians kind of worshiped cats, is because they thought that the cat had some quality of being that-

Luke: [00:48:00](#) Because they thought that the cat had some quality of being that they didn't have because a cat doesn't seem effected by mimetic desire the way that we are. So I think there's really something there when it comes to these pseudo anonymous figures, that's very, very powerful because it allows us to believe whatever we want to believe. And this goes back to your first point Jim, about belief in the memetic desire. It could be totally wrong, it could totally wrong. I'm a huge fan of Elena Ferrante by the way for fiction. I didn't want her to get doxed. I have this image in my mind and we always do. We always believe things about our models that are always... They're never a hundred percent accurate. And nowhere is that the case more than a pseudo anonymous figure because it just gives our imagination absolutely free rein.

Jim: [00:48:57](#) So yeah, I agree with that. And it's kind of like... "No man is a hero to his valet."

Luke: [00:49:06](#) Exactly.

Jim: [00:49:06](#) Right?

Luke: [00:49:07](#) Yep.

Jim: [00:49:08](#) And, so the other thing though, because you segregate the types of models and this was important to me when I was trying to figure out my models. You say there's celebratistan, which is some well-known, either living or dead, person who we model, who we want to be more like. And then, there is freshmanistan, which I love. Because you know my friend, Alex Danko, I hope you guys have had a chance to chat.

Luke: [00:49:42](#) We're working on connecting. Yeah. Alex is good. [crosstalk 00:49:44]

Jim: [00:49:45](#) Good, good. So, Alex did a three hour salon on memetic desire. You're going to have a blast talking to him. He's super smart and a lot of fun. But also Tim Urban, who does Wait, But Why? Right? So we all kind of landed in the same place. And it's why I love this idea of freshmenistan, because Alex has the idea that it is axiomatic, if you're trying to be cool, that you're not cool. Right?

Luke: [00:50:19](#) Yep.

Jim: [00:50:20](#) And Tim Urban has a great idea. Which is, the only way we're going to get people to do better and be better, and stop with all of this very kind of primitive behavior and doxing and all that kind of stuff is to make it cool. And his idea of making it cool is somewhat similar to Alex's in that it becomes a scene, right? And there's all sorts of different ways to create a scene. But again, if you're trying too hard to create a scene, guess what? It's not a scene. But the idea that freshmenistan is when you're a freshman in high school, for the most part. You are, oh, talk about a mimetic hell, right? Because you want to be cool. You have all these desires, you're a young adult. You're experiencing a lot of this stuff for the first time. It's very confusing and easier for boys, honestly, than for girls. I have two daughters and a son. Son, one mood all the time, basically. Daughters, now, women are more interesting than men. So there's that.

Luke: [00:51:36](#) There's that.

Jim: [00:51:38](#) But one of the things that I wanted to ask you about was, do you think that people who are naturally envious or naturally comparative, are more prone to bad mimetic choices or bad mimetic modeling? And the reason I asked you that is I have lots of faults. Boy, we could do an entire podcast just about my faults.

Luke: [00:52:10](#) Mine too.

Jim: [00:52:11](#) But one of, mercifully for me, I have never been an envious person. I have never, ever wanted to change places with another person ever. And I view that as a huge blessing. And so, is there anything to that, or am I making too much of the idea that envy might drive more mimetic comparison?

Luke: [00:52:39](#) Well, I think that there's a lot to that. I wonder. I don't think that anybody's born an envious person and people have different dispositions. I think it's a vice that people develop. And we have to be very careful. In some of these great books, like in Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, there's a character who becomes envious through the character development. And I think that can happen to any of us if we're not careful. So I don't think anybody has like the antibodies to that or anything like that. I think we're always at risk of infection through mimetic rivalries in some way, [crosstalk 00:53:19].

Jim: [00:53:18](#) That's a great way to put it. [crosstalk 00:53:20].

Luke: [00:53:20](#) So humility...

Jim: [00:53:20](#) ... On guard, it keeps the guard up.

Luke: [00:53:21](#) It keeps you on guard. And I think humility is really the thing there, right? Humility, if there's an antibody, if there's any way to build up immunity, it's humility. Because it keeps us knowing kind of like, "But for the grace of God, there go I," kind of a thing, right? So that's really important. But I do think that Girard himself said that, "Envy is the form that mimetic desire takes most often in today's world." And he made a joke and he said, "The reason that we, our culture talks about sex so much is because nobody wants to talk about their envy." He thought that it was the predominant vice in the culture because you rarely hear anybody talk about it. It's like taboo to talk about envy. Certainly nobody expresses publicly, like they're envious of another person, right? Even if they talk about sex, it's weird. It's...

Jim: [00:54:19](#) That's an excellent point. I'm stealing that from you, by the way.

Luke: [00:54:23](#) Yeah. So envy is a very unique thing. I believe in any culture, you look at the taboos and the things that you can't talk about and you go there and you'll probably find some truth there about what's going on with human nature. And I think envy is like a signpost to something going on. And I would say that it's mimetic desire, and mimetic rivalry. So I do think we have to be very careful. Yeah. I mean, the experience of being a freshmen in high school or college, it was brutal for me both times. Because you're all kind of in the same boat. You're looking all around you, you're just surrounded by people that you have to compare yourself to. You break into little fa...

I think social media has actually made us all a little bit more like freshmen in the sense. It's kind of shrunk the world on a social level, it's put us all very close together. So it's kind of recreating some of the experience. When I was in high school at my little Catholic high school, on the west side of grand rapids, Michigan man, I couldn't find a model of cool in my entire Catholic high school. I didn't think there was anybody there that was cool enough, but... [crosstalk 00:55:33]

Luke: [00:55:33](#) Maybe that made you, by de facto, the cool guy.

Luke: [00:55:39](#) But it was funny because I was like very mimetic. Pretty much everybody is, kind of, in that situation, right? It's like mimesis thrives, but you know what I could do, I could get home from school and I could log on to an AOL chat room, big social media. Things were not up yet. But I had AOL and chat rooms were really big. So I could get home at the end of the day and find some really cool kids in New York city or whatever. Wherever I was looking, right? So the internet has done very interesting things to the dynamics and like, where can we find models? Well, now we can find them wherever we want. It used to be 30 or 40 years ago. Like they were the kids that you played baseball with, the kids that lived on your block or something. Now you can find them everywhere, which has created probably a lot more anxiety in general.

Jim: [00:56:28](#) I agree. I think that that's actually a thesis that I'm working on right now about the idea that maybe just maybe, and this is just, I really literally just thought about this a week ago. So it is definitely in its nascent stages, but maybe there is a steam relief valve that is part of social media. And by that, I mean we are collapsing time and space, geography. Geography no longer matters. It does for close friendships, but for work relationships, I don't care if you're in Bangalore, Maine or Bangalore, India.

And, because of this medium, which by the way, is going to get better as Oculus goes to level five and we are doing that. And it really feels like we're in the same room.

Luke: [00:57:25](#) That's going to be really different.

Jim: [00:57:27](#) But I do have a thesis that because of everything got so atomized, right? And because geography was no longer a constraint, like let's say you had a very unusual habit that you were into, I don't know, punk tattoos and you lived in Alabama, right? So no punk tattoo artists anywhere, everyone's telling you, you can't have one of those tattoos. But now... And so geography mattered for matters of sexuality. If you were gay in the south, bad deal, not good. If you were a Catholic in a pre 1900s, Boston, not good. Especially an Irish Catholic. And that went away. Thank God, for the most part. And now I'm wondering, because the world's so atomized, you can find your tribe, even if it's the most obscure type of tattoo artistry, guess what? There's a mirror audience out there that have exactly the same interests as you. You can find that tribe. And then I wonder, and this is going to get me into mimetic violence, which I think is really important that we talk about.

Is this cyber violence, which isn't real violence. In other words, human, actual human beings are not being maimed or killed. Their egos are, their self-esteem might be, but they're not walking with a gaping wound to the hospital. Do you think that there is that element to social media? Because I've always been drawn to the idea that, you see the films on the Instagram influencers, and they're all miserable and want to kill themselves, because they're false. And being false to yourself, to me, is like death of soul. And, you're not going to do well. But what do you think about that?

Luke: [00:59:43](#) I do see that happening. We can now find that, I don't know, if I have some obscure system of beliefs and worldview and hobbies. And maybe there's only 10 people out there that have the same one. Good chance I can find them. Which is cool. That's great. That's really great. It's one thing when it's a hobby or, I'm going to try to round up all the [inaudible 01:00:09] in the world, that subscribed to my Substack. And that's really cool and we can all chat. Great. But what happens when we all kind of cluster into ideological tribes? That to me is pretty dangerous.

Jim: [01:00:27](#) I think that's the death of thought. If you descend into dogma, you have stopped thinking and to me, you're brain dead. And because if you can't think, if you can only parrot it. And by the

way, that gets back to that question and why I asked him about the charlatans, and about the frauds out there. Because there's a lot of that going on, and we are reaching Shannon limits and our ability to even perceive the information hitting our perception fields. And so it's ripe for that kind of manipulation. And so I am 100% on your side in terms of God.

Luke: [01:01:11](#) Yeah. Well, and I think this goes back to what we were talking about earlier, Jim, when social media needs a human face in the sense of how important it is that we take cues from other people. And we read someone's trustworthiness, for instance, by looking into their eyes. This is a really old saying, but there's some truth to it. Like being able to look in another man's eyes and just, "Yeah, I don't have a good feeling about it." We just don't do that anymore. Because you studied negotiation, have you read the book, Never Split the Difference?

Jim: [01:01:50](#) Yes.

Luke: [01:01:50](#) Yeah, so I love that book. And in that book, he talks about the way that human beings establish trust. One of the most powerful is actually mimicking each other. Like we imitate body language, and that's one of the ways that a hostage negotiator establishes rapport and empathy with the hostage taker. He just starts imitating the last three words that he said, and it's shocking what that little thing will do.

My point is, is that we would be able to identify the charlatans better if we just had more of that kind of level of communication, face-to-face. It's just become a lot harder now, that they can tweet something out. And I've got to read between the lines. I don't really know what they're getting at. I can't look him in the eye, and I just have a lot less at my disposal to do the things that humans are actually really good at doing. And that's just an intuition about who's a bullshitter and who's not.

Jim: [01:02:51](#) You know, I agree. And I do think that you can draw some inferences, not nearly as quickly as the ability to visually size up the person you're dealing with. But there's a couple of things that are sort of covered there. And one of them is Malcolm Gladwell has a book out called, Talking to Strangers. And one of his points is, it's in our DNA actually to default to honesty. In other words, what he means by that, is barring any sort of glaring red flag. I'm going to believe you, if you tell me, "This is my history. The reason I wrote this book was this. I love this kind of work, et cetera." It is to my benefit. And I don't mean me personally. I mean, it is to society's benefit that we believe

each other because belief creates trust, trust creates cooperation, which creates this aggregate social evolution that is a marvelous thing, right? And if we don't default to belief, it's mad max really fast. And by the way, that's another one of the hacks of the people who are disingenuous is, they know that, right? And, so one of the things that I often say to very, very smart people, and I've been very lucky that I've been associated with a lot of, as clients of mine, very, very smart people. What they don't like to hear is when I tell them that very, very smart people are the easiest people to con and they're like, "What?" I'm like, "Look at it this way, who is going to create...? How do you get caught?" You got to con yourself first, right?

Luke: [01:04:47](#) Convince yourself, Yeah.

Jim: [01:04:48](#) And the brighter you are, guess what? You're going to tell a fantastic story that just doesn't have any bad... Nothing sticking out and you're going to believe it. And you're going to go out and you're going to say, "Man, you got to buy this book because this book is going to change your life and everyone's going to go, yeah." But so it starts the cycle where there are so many kinds of roadblocks in terms of just interacting. Well, another one is voice, right? So I am really astounded by the number of people who have made comments about this podcast. And one of the first things they say is, "His voice." I don't find my voice particularly attractive or distinctive in any way. I know everyone dislikes their own voice for the most part. But another friend of mine was emailing me today. And he was talking about a different subject, which was after you've listened to like a hundred hours of somebody's podcast, you can't help but feel that you know them almost as if they were your best friend.

Luke: [01:06:11](#) Interesting.

Jim: [01:06:12](#) And, so we went back and forth and he's a very, very bright Francophone who lives in Montreal, wonderful guy. And we kind of went back and forth on this. And it's like, "I hadn't thought about that." And so that, I'm preparing to talk to you and I've got like notes upon notes. And then he drops that on me. And I'm like looking at it and I'm like, "I've never really thought about that," but I think there's a truth there, right. Don't you? And that in this world where you can listen to somebody for a hundred hours, you're going to get to know them or at least unless they're just a total fraud, right?

Luke: [01:06:55](#) Yeah. I think that's right. I mean, it just goes back to the con artists. Yeah, so Jim, I mean, the people that have been listening to this podcast for a really long time. I mean, if you really

wanted to... They love your voice, right? We could say, "Say anything you want." And you give terrible investment advice, right? Like...

Jim: [01:07:16](#)

"Put all your money, bury it in the backyard."

Luke: [01:07:22](#)

I do think that there are tactics that people use to kind of hack human nature that we have to be aware of, right? I mean, I went through a period of my life where I was fascinated about how con artists work. Because first time I visited New York City, I was in high school and I approached a guy on the streets and, he was going to give me a fake ID. And he took my 50 bucks.

Jim: [01:07:52](#)

I know that guy.

Luke: [01:07:53](#)

Yeah. It was like the only 50 bucks that I had. And he took it and disappeared upstairs in the building. And I never saw him again, But it's confidence, right. It's a confidence game. That's one of the words that we use to describe those people. So there's something really to that, like you speak confidently, like everything you say, you don't express any doubts. It's like some of these cult leaders. There are ways to hack into the human propensity to want to trust other people, like you said, right. It's like our default mechanism. Like when things don't move at the speed of trust, man, it's tough sledding. It's hard to run a company when you don't trust other people and everything. I mean, and Eddie Bernays was the master at that, right. The master at projecting confidence and getting people... [crosstalk 01:08:42]

Jim: [01:08:43](#)

Horrible human being, and I've actually read the books he's written. And I'll tell you, I know a lot about persuasion and that's what makes me nervous about it because in the hands of an evil person, or even a person that didn't think that he could... Didn't care that he was doing active harm to other human beings, or she. That can get really dangerous, really fast. I want to get to a couple of other things really quickly, because there's just so much to get to, because this is such a fascinating subject. The first thing I wanted to talk about was the whole mirroring idea. I'm sure you're familiar with neural linguistic programming.

Luke: [01:09:26](#)

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jim: [01:09:26](#)

Okay. So they were one of the first... This was back in the seventies when I was like 16 and the Richard Bandler books

were coming out. Every frog, A Princess, I think was the first one that I read when I was 16.

And I'm like, this is cool, right? And so the thing about that though, is it works and pacing and leading and mirroring and, never split the difference. Those are all... And the book influence everything in there. If you just use it, it's a handbook for alchemy. And there's another one Rory Sutherland, who I love having on the podcast, again, just a genius on this stuff. And, where does... I joke to a friend and I might've even put it up on Twitter, that I've gone down so many rabbit holes. They were talking about everything ends up being sales. And so I went back and I said, "It's a pretty good heuristic to say that everything. And I mean, everything started as a marketing campaign."

Luke: [01:10:37](#) Yep. I believe it.

Jim: [01:10:38](#) Come enjoy our religion. Come and enjoy our city by the sea. But so there's all of these things going on. And we didn't even get to this and I'm just going to touch on it because my six month old... I just saw my six month old granddaughter, was my third and visiting from Berkeley, walked down the stairs. And so I've always found this about babies. You have a whole section, which I think is tremendous, on babies. And man, you want to prove this stuff, hang out with a baby.

Luke: [01:11:13](#) Oh yeah.

Jim: [01:11:14](#) Because, in anticipation of doing this with you and doing the notes and reading your book and talking to guys like Alex and whatnot, and having a live baby right here. So, my kids were the same. My other grandkids were the same. They're older now, but Langdon is six months and I was doing it after reading your book. And I'm just like, "Missy". My wife is Melissa. Missy. I call, "Missy, come here. I want to show you something." "You're talking about Luke, right? And the book about baby." And I went, "Yes, but you're going to see Langdon actually do it."

Luke: [01:11:53](#) Do it. Did it happen?

Jim: [01:11:53](#) It happened. I go, "Hi." And no one's going to see this, but I'm making a very exaggerated, happy face.

Luke: [01:11:53](#) Yeah.

Jim: [01:12:00](#) She could be just sitting there like this and when I do that. Million wide face from Langdon, huge smile. And then I tried your thing and that I had done with my kids, but I hadn't done... I don't think with my grandchildren, and that's sticking the tongue out, and that worked too.

Luke: [01:12:00](#) It worked?

Jim: [01:12:22](#) Yeah. And I'm like-

Luke: [01:12:27](#) If you stick... I'm going to be anti-memetic, Jim just stuck his tongue out at me, and I'm not going to stick mine out back. Anti-memetic right now.

Jim: [01:12:36](#) Good for you. Anti-memetic for the win, I like it. So babies, there's a whole section in your book, I think, which is really great and really cuts to... This is human, this is what it means to be a human. And the other thing that I wanted to get to, and I'm kind of looking at our time here... I thank God Jamie isn't here, or he would be... he's my taskmaster.

Luke: [01:13:05](#) We're having fun. I had no idea that it was almost time.

Jim: [01:13:09](#) Yeah. Well that's was always the goal with this. Somebody who said to me is, I think it might've been my son, Patrick. He's like, "Why are you doing a podcast?" And I'm like, "because I love talking to really interesting people," and he goes, "that's true." And I said, "and I've always had this urge to share, and I thought this podcasting seems like a perfect deal."

Luke: [01:13:35](#) It's great.

Jim: [01:13:36](#) And he's like, "okay, fair enough." So I get to talk to really fascinating people and have fun. And it's great. Two things before we go, have you seen the movie Inception?

Luke: [01:13:52](#) That's about the dreams, right? With Leonardo DiCaprio. Yeah. It's probably a really long time.

Jim: [01:13:57](#) I couldn't help, but thinking about inception, and the implantation of both beliefs and mimetic desires, and I wanted to ask you, and this is really an unfair question. So you can just say, "Jim, that's really unfair. I'm not going to answer." But do you think it's possible to implant mimetic desires in somebody? Because we already have the propensity to look at the model, use the model and deny that, that is our model. No, of course not. I don't have that. There's a gift I use all the time, because of

reasons. We make a lot of decisions in... your work proves it, a lot of the other work that I've done proves it. We make a lot of decisions emotionally, and then after the fact, we paper them over with logic and reason. And so can you incept mimetic desire in somebody?

Luke:

[01:15:02](#)

I think the short answer is yes, it's possible. And that it happens all the time. I don't think it's inevitable. I have a strong emphasis on human freedom. So I think one of the misunderstandings about mimetic desires is, are we all just these automatons that just bounce off of other people's desires and quite... no, we have intentionality, we can have self possession, we can be more intentional about the kind of models that we adopt and the kinds that we don't. But think about a hypnotist, what is a hypnotist doing, if not suggesting desires to other people? That's what that's all about. Hypnotism is about getting people in a state of extreme suggestibility, and then suggesting desires to them. So to me, that's an example of implanting a mimetic desire because the model is the hypnotist.

I've recently learned. And I don't know much about this at all, but there's a student at the University of Michigan who sent me this really excited email... By the way, what a better thing to get as an author. The student was like, "Luke, I got to tell you, I can't wait till your book comes out." He's president of the University of Michigan, psychedelics student association or something like that.

Jim:

[01:16:21](#)

That's fantastic.

Luke:

[01:16:21](#)

And he said... Tim Ferriss is really big into psychedelics these days. Johns Hopkins has a whole center devoted to the positive use of psychedelics for pain treatment and things like that. But this student told me that there's actually a way to treat people that have addictions while they're under the influence of psychedelics. The treatment is to replace their model of desire with a different model of desire, so that they come out of it on the other side, less susceptible to the addiction, and more susceptible to whatever the new model of desire was. So it's kind of hypnotism, but it's just another application of it. So I think this kind of thing happens all the time.

Jim:

[01:17:11](#)

So on psychedelics, I'm a huge supporter of using psychedelics responsibly, and medically. For reasons I'm still trying to understand, decided to terrorize people like Timothy Leary, and talk about scapegoating. He kind of had it coming because, he said, "scapegoat me", but they did a number on that guy because very few people understand that he was a very

accomplished psychologist. And actually Leary, and Robert Anton Wilson, who is a great writer who I'm sure you've probably read. Have the circuit model, and it is one of the cornerstones of the psychedelic research. And one of the reasons why I'm such a big supporter of it, and of groups like MAPS, which is working with Johns Hopkins and others, legitimate universities is because of what you just said. The evidence is overwhelming, and we by the way, had a lot of research right up until about 1958/59, in which the government decided it was forbidden.

It was not allowed, that research was destroyed. Not all of it, obviously because we have some of it. Michael Pollan found a lot of it in his book-

Luke: [01:18:36](#) The great book.

Jim: [01:18:37](#) Great book, How to Change Your Mind, and one of the reasons why I have such urgency around it is, I do a lot of work just weirdly. I don't know how this happened, but I got hooked up with some special forces, Navy SEALs. And there's a foundation that I support called Tip of the Spear.

Anyway, PTSD can be solved in two sessions of MVMA therapy, other things like severe alcoholism, severe depression, they are finding. And of course, early days here, we can't be prematurely certain about anything because I'm sure that there are all sorts of variables that we're not looking at. Let's underline that. But the initial reports are very positive. And so when your student got excited, I'm not surprised at all because one of Leary's cornerstones was you can reimprint but the only way to reimprint after you've been imprinted, because he had it happening at very young ages. And he used horrible phrases that we would never use today, like "top dog," and "bottom dog," and "winner script," "loser script." And anyway, he and others who doing psychological researching with psychedelics, found that you can reimprint people, but you pretty much need a psychedelic agent to be there.

Luke: [01:20:07](#) So they can't do it themselves, right? So it's not self-help, it relies on an intervention from somebody else, essentially?

Jim: [01:20:16](#) The qualified answer would be MU M-U, which is I don't have sufficient information to give you a good answer.

Luke: [01:20:23](#) Gotcha.

Jim: [01:20:27](#) Because there are examples of people being able to become their own metaprogrammer, but they're the exception, not the rule.

Luke: [01:20:37](#) Got it.

Jim: [01:20:41](#) I actually have a good question for you to end with, but I also want to bring up that you have a great list of tactics, which I think... obviously I'm a fan of this book and I want it to do very well. Just everyone listening, Luke's got a list of tactics in here. If you just skim the book and understand this tactic thing, you'll walk away better informed, better armed if you will, against manipulation. So it's serendipitous that Inception came up when it did, but the thing I want to end on is maybe not the happiest note, but that's mimetic violence. Let's talk a little bit about that, because it is a part of the mimetic cycle. And it seems to me... I was trying to think of examples where it wasn't. I haven't really been able to think of it, especially at the societal level.

Luke: [01:21:46](#) So examples of where we were not in an infinite loop, where we transcended the cycle, that's what you're thinking of?

Jim: [01:21:55](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Luke: [01:21:58](#) Wow, man, you saved the hardest question for last, the violence and the scapegoating, the darkest one. Mimetic theory, it's a four step process. Girard's thinking plays out in four steps. You have a mimetic desire, humans have this propensity to imitate what other people want. If you think about that, it naturally leads us into rivalry because now we're competing with those other people for the same thing. Mimetic desire is contagious, when two people are in a rivalry or a fight, it naturally draws other people in. I don't know if you're a baseball fan, Jim, I'm a huge baseball fan. And man, when a catcher charges the mound, talk about contagious, you got both teams out of the dugout in about five seconds.

So something similar to that happens at a societal level. Mimetic desire leads to rivalry, which leads to contagion and polarization. I think we see that in national politics right now. There's an enormous amount of pressure to choose sides, we have litmus tests, everybody's got to choose a side, with everything. And Girard says, when this percolates enough throughout a culture, it creates what he says is a, "Mimetic crisis." When it's kind of a war of all against all, everybody's kind of taking everybody else as a model.

And he says that throughout history, the way that these mimetic crises have been solved from prehistoric times, has been through collective violence against somebody who's singled out. Usually an outsider, somebody that can't defend themselves, and they either expel or kill that chosen scapegoat. And by doing that, they achieve some temporary peace because the act of unifying against the scapegoat brings them together. That's the process by which people that were rivals come together by singling somebody else. So it gives them the illusion of solidarity, almost you could say, by doing violence can [inaudible 01:24:10]. It's always a temporary solution though, because give it a little while, and sure enough the whole process just starts over again. It's an infinite loop of violence, now-

Jim: [01:24:20](#) And it calls for blood sacrifices to be made with great regularity.

Luke: [01:24:26](#) With greater and greater frequency too, because the blood sacrifice has just become less and less effective as they go on. And I think we see that playing out in various ways, but I do think it's possible to transcend that cycle of violence. I have hope that there's positive loops, that we can transcend the cycle of violence. I think it involves renunciation. We just talked about a positive application of mimetic theory when it came to addictions, and PTSD. As you know, I spend the whole second half of the book trying to propose a way out, to try to encourage empathy, that's mimetic too. I do think there's a way out, and I don't know what it's going to take to kind of get to the level where we have a cultural consciousness of the scapegoat mechanism to where people can begin to choose a different way forward. But we going to have to do it.

Jim: [01:25:23](#) Yeah. I agree. And it leads to a final question, and then the question I ask everyone, so that's not unique to you. And that is, if you're a scapegoat, you're the scapegoat, there are any way out? Is there some kind of action that you can take that you can get out unscathed?

Luke: [01:25:47](#) If you're truly a scapegoat in the Girardian sense, then the answer is basically, no. The only way out is kind of through, I hate to be dark. I really do.

Jim: [01:26:01](#) That's the same answer I came up with too.

Luke: [01:26:04](#) Is really no. Other than owning it, and that's what we would call a martyr or something. Just owning the fact that you're the scapegoat, and not fighting back. Just sort of accepting that, and then hopefully creating some kind of positive wave that comes from it or some kind of positive outcome.

Jim: [01:26:26](#) There's a great book that I thought of, and have read and actually recommended on Twitter, The WEIRDest People in the World: How the West Became Psychologically Peculiar. And also Adam Grant, who I see is a friend of yours and endorse your book, his Think Again.

Luke: [01:26:43](#) Great book.

Jim: [01:26:44](#) Great book that I recommended, highly, and for those listening if you haven't read any of the three, and I know haven't read Luke's yet, because it didn't come out until June 1st, read these three together. They're really interesting, because the Weirdest People has a whole section on this idea of martyrdom, and that this is the most incredible signal that a human being can do, give one's life for an idea. What happens is that the people who witness this become fervent believers, and it decreases their belief in whatever you're murdering yourself for. And I just think it works all really well together. I wish that, this was normally a two hour podcasts because we're already at an hour and a half, and we do run an hour and a half. So don't worry about that. Now, my final question.

First, thank you. This has been a ton of fun. I was looking forward to this for a long time, because I love these ideas and I love to see people talking about them and understanding them. And it's so much fun to see somebody's face light up, when they get it. And they're like, "Oh." And then they get it, they all seem to go through the same process, which is they can't unsee it. This is like one of those things where, when that switch gets flipped, you cannot unsee it. Which I think is a good thing, because I think it makes you a better human being, so to speak.

So talking about influence, we're talking about desire, we're going to make you the emperor of the world for one day. You can't kill anyone, you can't put anyone in a reeducation camp, but you can incept. You can incept them, you can be... in The Screwtape Letters, what was the under devil's name, where he whispered in the air. You're familiar with that [inaudible 01:28:48]?

Luke: [01:28:48](#) Oh yeah, I am. Not Snape, I'm thinking of Harry Potter here. I can't remember [crosstalk 01:28:53] my head.

Jim: [01:28:54](#) Let's stick with Snape. You can snape your way into their ear and whisper two things, and they're going to wake up the next day and say, "that's a great idea, I just thought of I'm going to do that." What two do you got for me?

Luke: [01:29:09](#) Wow. So I can incept a desire in somebody? You ask everybody this question?

Jim: [01:29:15](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Luke: [01:29:16](#) Fascinating. Let's see. I have to think about that.

Jim: [01:29:23](#) It doesn't have to be a desire by the way, it can also be an action. It can be... "you know what, I'm going to start walking five miles a day," or "I'm going to stop smoking," or... whatever. It can be, anything you want it to be, they're going to do it. And they're going to think that it was their idea.

Luke: [01:29:41](#) Got it. I think mine are going to be pretty simple, very simple. One of them is a tactic straight out of the book. I think the first one would be, "Stop whatever you're doing, you're frantic hustle bustle, and just enjoy time spent with no agenda with the people that you love, your friends, your family, your parents just take a day." Maybe I'd call a national day of silence, and family, and everybody would have a desire to observe it faithfully. That's-

Jim: [01:30:24](#) It's a good one.

Luke: [01:30:25](#) That's probably the first one that I would... we don't really have a holiday that's quite achieves the level of leisure and family time that I would really like to see.

Jim: [01:30:36](#) The only one that springs to mind would be Thanksgiving.

Luke: [01:30:39](#) Thanksgiving is pretty close [crosstalk 01:30:41].

Jim: [01:30:42](#) It's very different than Canadian Thanksgiving, and outside of North America, they think we're nuts, they don't know what we're talking about.

Luke: [01:30:48](#) Yeah, totally. And then what else would I do? I think the other one would be very much related to that. The people that you're close to, "call your mother, your father," "take a day, spend time." Because we work, man. I mean, us Americans, we're just addicted to work. And I'm just a big fan of kind of breaking out of that hustle mentality. A real occupational hazard for entrepreneurs like me, and for a lot of other people. So the other one would just be a simple extension of that, and it would just be... I would want everybody to just wake up suddenly with the desire to break bread and have a conversation, and spend time with somebody that they used to consider a rival to them.

Jim: [01:31:35](#) I like that, I like that a lot.

Luke: [01:31:35](#) Somebody on the outside, somebody that they would never normally choose to spend time or hang out with. Kind of two sides of the same coin. Those would be [crosstalk 01:31:46].

Jim: [01:31:45](#) I'd say that's a really good one, I really like that. Because as you were going on, before you got to that part, I was thinking, "well, or you go to Italy."

Luke: [01:31:53](#) Really?

Jim: [01:31:57](#) Before the pandemic, we went to Italy at least twice a year. I love the Italians. I love the way that they approach life, which is a lot like you're recommending.

Luke: [01:32:08](#) Well, I lived there for three years, Jim. That's part of the... they rub it off on me for sure.

Jim: [01:32:13](#) They really do, in a good way. In a very good way. Well, listen, this has been tremendously fun,

Luke: [01:34:37](#) I think was the most fun I've had, the 90 minutes was great. I always feel like I need more than an hour. So thank you, this was tremendous.

Jim: [01:34:47](#) My pleasure. And I had a blast too, Luke, so best of luck on this book.

Jim: [01:35:24](#) Cheers.