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MBS ([00:00](#)):

If you're a worker, big company, small company, red company, blue company, your company, their company, and I promise you I'm going to pull back from going all Dr. Seuss on you here, let me ask you this. Does doing the work add to your own sense of humanity or does it lessen it? Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS. This is the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, a book that has shaped them. Luke Burgis is an author and a veteran entrepreneur. He started his working life at one of capitalism's epicenters.

Luke ([00:39](#)):

I had a miserable and short-lived career on Wall Street. I left when I was 23. I moved to California and joined the startup world. And three companies later,



three foundings later, I was still relatively miserable, even though I'd had some success, some great success with at least one of them, and caused me to take a step back and reexamine why I was doing some of the things I was doing.

MBS ([01:05](#)):

After Wall Street and startups, where do you go? Well, how about into the world of philosophy, classical literature, theology? Luke really interrogated what it means to be an entrepreneur, but in the context of a healthier human ecology. And today, he's the director of programs at the Ciocca Center for Principled Entrepreneurship. So, what exactly is principled entrepreneurship?

Luke ([01:34](#)):

I call it entrepreneurship that has the human person at the beginning and end of everything. So, human-centered design, not just for technology and apps but for business in general. It's the kind of entrepreneur who takes the time to understand humanity at a deep level, whose aims go beyond mere profit making, but I don't think there's anything wrong with profit making into something good to aim for, but who has a holistic view of developing human beings through business.

MBS ([02:07](#)):

All right. So in one corner, we have entrepreneurship that is human-centered. I'm going to call that a bit of a rookie. And in the other corner, the grizzled heavyweight entrepreneurship, just to make lots of money. When Luke's teaching this to his students, how does this land? I mean, who's going to win the fight here?

Luke ([02:30](#)):

And I've been doing this now for three and a half years. I co-teach a class at the university called Vocation of Business. And I think the students that finish that



class and go through the entire program at the end of four years, they view business with more gravity than they did at the beginning. They realize their responsibility is even greater than they thought it was. It's not just about making money. And we see that shift happen.

Luke ([02:58](#)):

I shake them up a little bit. I tell them a bit of my story and how I went out there and had great success. But I was never taught to understand the different layers of meaning in work and what it means to be an entrepreneur, the tremendous responsibility I had as an employer, as a boss to my colleagues, to my employees. So, just getting them to understand the human dimensions, I think, is a game changer for them. In terms of the kinds of entrepreneurs they want to be, the kind of jobs they want, we see that shift as they move through the program.

MBS ([03:35](#)):

Does it feel like it shifts? And I asked this because I'm the boss of a company myself. And so I wrestle with this whole tension between what you do out in the world and also what you do within your organization itself. I mean, how do you shape an organization that remains human-centered? Does it feel like they're reimagining their business model or they're reimagining their organization that's creating a business model? I guess we're looking at culture and strategy here.

Luke ([04:06](#)):

Sure. I think the shift is actually the integration of them, the integration of how they think about business. So when they start, I think, it's like business is this thing that I do to grow a company, to bring in revenue and profit.



MBS ([04:19](#)):

Yeah.

Luke ([04:20](#)):

And then I'm also concerned with being a good person and lead in a virtuous life and developing and maturing and all of these things, and they just view these as separate things. And by the time they're done, the goal is for them to see that it's actually their entrepreneurship and their business that is in fact shaping them into the person that they hope to be. So the integration is really what we're going for.

MBS ([04:41](#)):

Can you say a little more about what a virtuous life means to you? That's a really resonant phrase.

Luke ([04:49](#)):

Yeah, I have really a classical understanding of virtue, I mean, a very Aristotelian understanding of it. It's the good life. I mean, Aristotle just understood virtues to be those inner organs that we develop that lead to a good life. It's not necessarily the external things but it's the development of doing the good and pursuing and wanting to do the good and eventually integrating it and possessing it.

Luke ([05:17](#)):

And the funny thing with virtue is that it makes... Let me explain it this way. There's one frame of mind where it's more noble and virtuous if something good is really, really hard to do, like some heroic act of charity, like the harder it was for the person to do it, the more virtuous it is. My understanding is actually the exact opposite. It's the more virtue that a person has, actually, the easier it is for them to do virtuous things to the extent that they have the virtue.



Luke ([05:55](#)):

So let's say it's some act of charity for another person, something that might be hard for many people to do, that the person that has the requisite qualities actually finds that thing easier to do. So it's a nice way to live when you possess that inner machinery to be able to do those things and actually become co-natural with who you are.

MBS ([06:16](#)):

How did you go about rewiring yourself? I mean, it's one thing to have a moment of recognition when you're like, this may not just be about them, I might be involved in some way and this is how I'm showing up. It's not just tweaking what's there. It feels like it's more of a fundamental rewiring of a number of different ways that you show up in the world and you see the world and you see yourself. So what's the process of deconstructing and reconstructing that you have to go to or maybe you went through?

Luke ([06:47](#)):

Yeah, I don't think it's possible without a little bit of pain. It's like if you're addicted to caffeine, I mean, there's really no way to get better without going through a bit of suffering, where you have to go through the withdrawal symptoms.

MBS ([07:01](#)):

Yeah.

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

And what I was withdrawing from, I think, was a lot of noise and affirmations and approval that I had been seeking. And withdrawing from that is it's not that dissimilar from withdrawing from a caffeine addiction but it's more painful in the sense that it's emotional and it affects you at a deeply personal level. So,



the rewiring happened because I took time off. I mean, we could call it a sabbatical if you wanted.

MBS ([07:30](#)):

Yeah.

Luke ([07:32](#)):

And I took time alone. I learned how to be alone for the first time in my life, to be honest. And a lot of that work happened with me detaching myself from what I would call some unhealthy relationships in my life until I was more comfortable with myself. And I didn't stay detached forever, of course. I reengaged. But that time away was simply necessary for me to come to grips with things.

MBS ([08:02](#)):

That's interesting. It's a literal break which allowed you to put the past in the past. Luke, I'm wondering how you think about success now. It feels like part of what you did in that break, that reset, is shift some of the metrics of how you measured success before. So, what feels important to you now?

Luke ([08:22](#)):

Yeah, what's important to me now is just creating... I'm still very much an entrepreneur even though I'm writing more these days and I'm teaching, but still very much an entrepreneur. And a phrase that I really like is I like to create goods that are truly good and services that truly serve. And by that, I mean, serve the person, truly serving the person. So, there's no doubt in my mind that I could create some kind of technology product that would gain some pretty quick traction, or if you understand a little bit of neuroscience and you understand how human beings are wired, the shortcut is to create things that



get you immediate buy in and people that go into their pocket and give you money.

Luke ([09:15](#)):

And that's the way that I operated at the very beginning of my career. But now, I'm focused on things that I truly believe will lead to human flourishing and happiness. So it's a slower process, typically. Profit is very important. I mean, it's one of the ways that you measure the health of a company and whether there's a market for what you're doing and whether you're able to deliver these services in an efficient way. But I truly care about the relationship. So at the end of the day, it's about the relationships for me, my relationships with the people I'm serving and their relationships with the people in their life.

Luke ([09:55](#)):

So one of the things that happened to me during that in 2008 when I did shut that company down, I had a couple of beautiful moments where in spite of having to close a company down, I was able to establish really deep relationships with some of my vendors and some of my employees as we were going through that difficult time. And that meant more to me than anything at all. And I've tried to carry that through in my life.

MBS ([10:20](#)):

I love that. I like to talk about the difference between present you and future you. Sometimes what you're going through is like you plus just tweaking the current you. And sometimes you need the you 2.0, which I think is this reinvention. I always think there are glimpses of you 2.0 all around you right now. And what I'm making up in this story is that in those moments with those vendors and with those other key people, you're like, "Yeah, this is actually a glimpse of the person I want to be more consistently more regularly more in terms of how I show up in the world and the company I create next."



Luke ([10:58](#)):

Yeah, it's a little foretaste, a little foretaste of Luke 2.0 that I think was just enough to make me want that and to see a different way of moving forward.

MBS ([11:11](#)):

So Luke, tell me about the book you've chosen for us today. It's not a book that I've known or have heard of before.

Luke ([11:17](#)):

Sure. So this was a book that I was introduced to shortly after that period I described when I was going through a bit of a transition. A wise mentor recommended it for me. It's a book by the French thinker, polymath, Rene Girard. And it's called Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World.

MBS ([11:36](#)):

That is a glorious title, honestly. I mean, if you're a book writer, you just longed to have a wonderful book title. And if you're writing business books like I do, and I guess Luke does as well, you have to be a bit more descriptive. But this title, I mean, it reminds me of Dave Eggers book, A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius. I'm like, "Oh, I wish I could come up with that title." I think this is equally fantastic.

Luke ([12:04](#)):

I think only a French man could have a title that grandiose sometimes. This is the French edition of the book that I just received. This is a beautiful cover. I'm not going to read you the French. The English edition is far less impressive.

MBS ([12:22](#)):

Yeah, that is less impressive.



Luke ([12:24](#)):

Definitely less impressive. So this book is about Rene Girard's mimetic theory. It's really a theory of human culture, human behavior. It gets at the heart of human violence, to be honest. It's really a sweeping theory that affected my life greatly. I have to warn everybody who's listening. This is not an easy book to read. It's an academic book and it's relatively obscure. I'm going to read you one of the more approachable passages in the book.

MBS ([12:56](#)):

You're saying a book by a French philosopher is relatively obscure?

Luke ([13:00](#)):

Relatively obscure. I wanted to try this because you and I can talk about what the heck this means after I finished reading it, but also because the book that I just finished writing called *Wanting* is an attempt to unpack this and explain this for a broader audience. So I hope I've done my job. And after I read this, you might see why there was a need for my book. But I think this is a key passage in the book, because it gets something that's at the heart of human behavior.

MBS ([13:31](#)):

Fantastic. All right, Luke, let's take it away. And I'm quite excited to see if I understand anything you're going to be talking about in these next two pages. Over to you.

Luke ([13:45](#)):

Today, there is a unilateral swerve away from anything that could be called mimicry, imitation, or mimesis. And yet there is nothing or next to nothing in human behavior that is not learned and all learning is based on imitation. If human beings suddenly ceased imitating, all forms of culture would vanish. Neurologists remind us frequently that the human brain is an enormous



imitating machine to develop a science of man that is necessary to compare human imitation with animal mimicry, and to specify the properly human modalities of mimetic behavior if they indeed exist.

Luke ([14:30](#)):

I think it can be easily shown that the silence about mimesis among contemporary schools of thought is the result of a movement that goes back to the beginning of the modern period. In the 19th century, it proclaimed itself in romanticism and individualism, in the 20th century it asserts itself even more strongly in the fear of researchers that they will appear too obedient to the political and social imperatives of their community.

Luke ([14:54](#)):

The belief is that insisting on the role of imitation would unduly emphasize there are gregarious aspects of humanity, all that transforms us into herds. There's a fear of minimizing the importance of everything that tends toward division, alienation, and conflict. If we give a leading role to imitation, perhaps we will make ourselves accomplices of the forces of subjugation and uniformity.

Luke ([15:17](#)):

The psychologies and sociologies of imitation that were developed at the end of the 19th century were indeed strongly influenced by the optimism and conformity of a triumphant petite bourgeoisie. This is true, for example, of the most interesting of such works, that of Gabriel Tarde, who sees in imitation the sole foundation for social harmony and progress.

Luke ([15:41](#)):

The indifference and mistrust with which our contemporaries regard imitation is based on their conception of it that ultimately has its source in Plato. But already in Plato the problematic of imitation is severely curtailed. When Plato



speaks of imitation, he does so in a manner that anticipates the whole of Western thought. The examples he selects for us are consistently limited to representation, to types of behavior, manners, individual or collective habit, as well as words, phrases, and ways of speaking.

Luke ([16:13](#)):

What is missing in Plato's account of imitation is any reference to kinds of behavior involved in appropriation. Now it is obvious that appropriation figures formidably in the behavior of human beings, as it does in that of all living beings, and that such behavior can be copied. There is no reason to exclude appropriation from imitation. Plato nonetheless does just this, and the omission passes unnoticed because all of his successors, beginning with Aristotle, have followed his lead. It was Plato who determined once and for all the cultural meaning of imitation, but this meaning is truncated, torn from the essential dimension of acquisitive behavior, which is also the dimension of conflict. I can stop there or I can keep going. That was about a page and a half.

MBS ([17:07](#)):

Let's stop there, because I feel like there might be an eight-hour conversation that you and I need to have to try and untangle some of this if we keep going.

Luke ([17:16](#)):

Sure.

MBS ([17:18](#)):

What's coming up for me, Luke, is I guess first of all just recognizing the tension I feel within myself all the time, which is a quest to be different and original and distinct, and also just the deep awareness that almost everything I do is, as I like to put it, old wine in new bottles. I'm building on thinkers, I'm building on structures, I'm building on patterns and lessons learned. That is an ongoing



tension for me. And I'm really interested in the role of conflict in this and what it means and how this sense of mimeticness or mimesis contribute or doesn't contribute to conflict. I mean, there's a lot swirling around in my brain. What about this struck a chord for you?

Luke ([18:04](#)):

Yeah, it was the pervasive role that imitation had played in my own life when I first read it, and causing me to imitate the desires of other people to pursue goals and accolades and things that, frankly, I didn't really care about those things themselves. I was after something deeper. And frankly, my unconscious imitation had made me miserable at a certain point in my life.

Luke ([18:31](#)):

So one of the things Girard is saying here is that Aristotle and Plato recognize that humans are the most imitative creatures in the world. But they stopped with their understanding of imitation at the imitation of superficial things, language and manners of speech and fashion and things like that. Girard is saying that what they missed and what he discovered in the late '50s, early '60s, was that human imitation goes deeper underneath the external layers down to the very desires of other people that we imitate even other people's desires.

Luke ([19:09](#)):

So, if I have an older brother or a colleague or somebody that I look up to and admire, and he wants to be a certain person or he wants to pursue a certain accolade, that by virtue of having him as a model in my life, I naturally begin to imitate even his desires. And that imitation of desire, if you play that out a few steps, leads very naturally to rivalry and to conflict, which Girard believed was at the heart of human behavior, that violence comes from this mimetic impulse that we all have.



MBS ([19:50](#)):

I see that. I mean, I'm not a parent myself. I often say I'm happily child free. But I've heard people talk about parenting and it's like, you know what, your kid won't do, never, what you tell them to do, but they will inevitably do what you do in front of them day in and day out. Because that's just the way they learn. And they will echo those behaviors and those desires that are underneath the behaviors as well. This rise of conflict and rivalry, is this something that we should be concerned about or is it just part of the human condition, it's just part of how progress works?

Luke ([20:27](#)):

It's partly how progress works. But that progress can come at a cost. I think we all know that these great innovations have come out of war. So at what cost, right?

MBS ([20:43](#)):

Right.

Luke ([20:45](#)):

I believe you read my newsletter and you've seen it, I just wrote a piece on the relationship between innovation and imitation, and that innovation often comes out of imitation. So there's nothing wrong with imitation. But there's good imitation and there's bad imitation. And the bad imitation is when we view the other as other and we enter into the competition with them where there's no room for the two of us, where somebody has to lose, somebody has to win, and I can only win at the other person's expense.

Luke ([21:18](#)):

So it's a zero-sum game mentality. That's what we have to be very careful about. And I think Girard uses this example of I think we forget as we get older



about this mimetic nature of ours. We see it in kids quite clearly. You turn toddlers loose in a room full of toys and before you know it, they're fighting over the same toy. It's a peculiar thing, that mimesis. And pretty soon-

MBS ([21:44](#)):

That's right.

Luke ([21:45](#)):

Yup.

MBS ([21:45](#)):

Yeah.

Luke ([21:46](#)):

So we see it even in kids. When there's hundreds of toys around them, they get fixated on a single one. So it's like mimetic desire creates scarcity in some way. It's a scarcity mindset. So we need to be careful because as we get older, we imagine ourselves as having outgrown that childish behavior that would lead us to quarrel over some stupid toy. But we're not that much different from them.

MBS ([22:11](#)):

We're exactly the same. It's not even that much different. It's exactly the same.

Luke ([22:15](#)):

Yeah, we're the same nature, right?

MBS ([22:21](#)):

Yeah. How have you taken the insights from this book and made them the thesis for your book *Wanting*?



Luke ([22:29](#)):

I took the insights from this book and tried to translate them in simpler language. I think I wrote my book aiming for an eighth grade reading level, I think I came in at ninth grade. I'll take that.

MBS ([22:41](#)):

Well done, you.

Luke ([22:42](#)):

Yeah. So I was trying to be deferential to the reader. There hasn't been a lot of scholarship and thinking among Girardian scholars about the positive aspects of mimesis. They're very much focused on mimetic theory can explain a lot of human violence and a lot of conflict. But I believe that it can be used to explain how we can create positive flywheels, how we can have positive models to advance our society.

Luke ([23:15](#)):

So the first half of my book is really an explanation of mimetic theory in simpler language, and the second half of the book is really trying to propose some ways of using mimetic desire in a positive way. And one of those, frankly, is empathy. Empathy is also imitative. When somebody is empathic with you, you naturally want to be empathetic to them back. So there's little things that we can do in our lives and in our culture harnessing the power of positive mimesis, positive mimetic desire, I think, to create positive change.

MBS ([23:54](#)):

Right. So just so I understand this, are you right now thinking that through this there's basically nothing we can do about mimesis, we're just influenced at a deep level by the context in which we are? When we start imitating some of the strongest signals in that context, it's just a deep wiring? So if that's



non-negotiable, then it just feels like there's always this dark side, which rises to conflict, you're fighting over the same toy and there's always that kind of an othering of the other person because they're not humans anymore, because they're the people who've got your toy and you want that toy and you're against that. But I guess what's underexplored for me is the upside, let's call it the light side of the mimesis.

Luke ([24:38](#)):

Yeah, I think that's well said, Michael. We can't escape or transcend mimesis, because it's part of our nature. It's a beautiful thing. I mean, because we're mimetic, because we're able to imitate, we're drawn into relationships with other people. It allows us to have shared culture that, like Girard said in the passage that I read, there'd be no culture without imitation. So it's good but it's a matter of identifying the destructive part of it.

Luke ([25:08](#)):

And I use the language anti-mimetic. And when I say anti-mimetic, I don't mean not mimetic, I mean not mimetic in the destructive negative ways that will make you and the people around you miserable. So it's a matter of being intentional about the models that you imitate in your life and the way that you imitate them, and transforming the negative underground mimetic rivalry and behavior into the positive kind that other people should want to emulate.

MBS ([25:38](#)):

Right. That reminds me of a model I refer to quite often Martin Buber, his structure of these two types of relationships in the world, the I-It relationships and the I-Thou relationships. I-It is when some form of othering has happened and you've lost that sense of human connection and I-Thou is when you actually able to meet that person and see them for that for humanity.



MBS ([26:03](#)):

And I think in doing that, it kind of remained connected to your own humanity as well. And that is hard to do. So I'm curious to know, how do you counteract the not even a conscious choice to move into conflict, move into that rivalry, move into that othering? How do you counteract some of the pressure that pulls you into the darker side of mimesis?

Luke ([26:30](#)):

Yeah. Well, I was not expecting Martin Buber to come up in our conversation, but I'm really glad that he did, because it's a beautiful example. And I wanted to include it in my book. But as an author, you know how that is. It was one of the many thousands of words I wrote that I had to cut at the end or I would have went on a digression. I do think that there is a process that has to take place, and it's not a quick thing. I certainly don't think or expect anybody to read my book and become anti-mimetic or something like that when they finish it.

MBS ([27:08](#)):

Yeah.

Luke ([27:09](#)):

There's a process of detachment, I think, that people have to undergo. I do hope that just bringing awareness to our tendencies to scapegoat, which is a big part of mimetic theory that how scapegoating externalizing our problems gives us the illusion that they've went away, when, in fact, they haven't. So detachment and awareness, I think, is really step one. When you first learn about mimetic theory, you see this stuff going on all around you everywhere but yourself, and then you move to phase two and you see them yourself.

MBS ([27:44](#)):



So it's a multi-step program. Step one, you see it everywhere else, two, you go, "Oh, wait, me too. I'm actually this."

Luke ([27:52](#)):

Right, right. And having some people in your life that are not in any kind of a mimetic relationship with you, in the destructive sense, when you find the positive ones, it's amazing how it's a model of a new way of being in relationship, if that makes sense. And when you find those, they lead to a level of growth and development that would be difficult for you to do on your own. I never liked the term self-help. I always believe that the help usually comes in the form of relationships. And that's a big part of the process, I believe.

MBS ([28:30](#)):

Right. Where did you find your guides and mentors and these role models you're talking about? I mean, as soon as you said that, I aspire to those types of relationships. But I also know that they're actually pretty infrequent.

Luke ([28:44](#)):

Yeah, they are infrequent. And part of it is I feel incredibly lucky, first of all, and grateful that people just were put in my life. Some I sought out and I had to go outside of my fishbowl, so to speak. I was in the hyper mimetic startup world, Silicon Valley world, and I wasn't able to find them there. So, I think it's always a good idea to look in unexpected places, look in unexpected places, go places you normally wouldn't go, talk to people who you might not consider to be in your tribe. And the more you do that, the more you open yourself up and expose yourself to serendipitous surprises and beautiful relationships. And I think that was part of it is putting myself out there in that way.

MBS ([29:42](#)):



Yeah. I can't remember who said this quote. I'll get the quote slightly wrong, but it's something like the purpose of travel is not to see new lands but to come back to your home country with new eyes. In some ways it feels a little bit like you're offering a similar journey. You need to leave your mimetic space so that you can come back to it. You can see and start noticing some of the dynamics. In particular, I guess, your role in those dynamics, how you're part of it, not just being worked on but you're actually part of the system and structure.

Luke ([30:15](#)):

Yeah, that's really well said, Michael. I mean, that come in full circle. Now it's bugging me. I know that quote but I can't recall who said it. I hope it's not Rick Steves.

MBS ([30:24](#)):

That might be like a Thoreau or somebody like that?

Luke ([30:31](#)):

Somebody like that. But I think that's very true. And as a traveler, although not the past year, I can't wait to do a bit more of it. As somebody that has lived around the world, in my younger days, I always come home seeing my home with new eyes. So anybody who's traveled knows the truth of that. No doubt.

MBS ([30:52](#)):

And I think I'm probably asking for myself here. Is there a way that you can try and nurture this healthier type of relationship, like in a romantic relationship? I mean, I've been married for 30 years, which in itself feels quite the miracle.

Luke ([31:07](#)):

Congratulations.



MBS ([31:08](#)):

Well, thank you. I mean, I'm lucky. Somebody once said marriage is when both parties feel like they got the better half of the deal. And I definitely, definitely feel like I got the better half of the deal. But one of the things I appreciate about my wife is that she is an independent spirit, who somehow amplifies what's good about me and also diminishes the least good things about me.

MBS ([31:33](#)):

It feels like she plays this role of somebody who can break me out of the less helpful mimetic behaviors. So I'm wondering if there are any insights you might have around how you nurture those close relationships so they can continue to nourish you. Because there might be some, I guess, regressing to the mean. And you can end up not serving in such a healthy way of being together.

Luke ([31:58](#)):

Yeah. As one who's engaged to be married-

MBS ([32:02](#)):

Congratulations.

Luke ([32:04](#)):

Thank you. I've thought about this a lot. And Claire, my fiancée, and I have talked about this, frankly, because, unfortunately for her, she's had to go down the Girard mimetic theory road for the last two years with me. We've been together for a while. So we've talked about how this works in relationships. And most people don't think of this but very often, couples, even in a romantic relationship, can get in this rivalrous dynamic with each other but we never think, "Oh, this is somebody I love. Of course, they're not my rival!"



Luke ([32:37](#)):

But very often it can happen, especially when you've been with somebody for a long time. It's the thing where like she's out to get me, she's out to get me. We get it in our head that this person's actually like out to steal my happiness from me or something. I'm very lucky because Claire is anti-mimetic in the best sense of the word and in the sense that she doesn't react and respond to me if I'm having a bad day. She's stoic, in a sense, and doesn't feed any of the mimetic impulses that I have from time to time that we get into escalating debates about something.

Luke ([33:24](#)):

It's certainly helpful talking politics, which is very mimetic these days. Everybody is just reacting to everybody else, it's very rivalrous. So I think in order to develop healthy relationships and avoid that trap, I'll use a word that you don't hear a lot these days but I think it's very important. And it's renunciation of certain "I want to say this thing, I want to go, I want to get the last word," and actually renouncing the urge to do that is one of the ways, I think, to extract ourselves in relationships from the cycle. Business relationships, too, it's like, "Ah, let me just shoot off this email right now." And it's about resisting the urge to send off the nasty snarky reply I think holds in romantic relationships as well.

MBS ([34:13](#)):

That's right. Yeah. Renunciation feels like it has a religious root or meaning to it. Do you know what it technically means? Does it fit that to the context?

Luke ([34:24](#)):

I don't know if I know the etymology of the word, to be honest. But it does have religious connotations to it and typically means like renouncing something that



we want. So this comes into the title of my book is Wanting, it's all about desire, is renouncing something that we want for some greater good.

MBS ([34:53](#)):

Yeah.

Luke ([34:53](#)):

Right. So, because not everything we want is good and there's not this one to one correlation. And it's being able to recognize that some of our desires do lead to happiness and some lead to misery and pain. And we need to renounce the ones even if there's some short-term gain for the long-term fulfillment.

MBS ([35:15](#)):

Right. There's something very resonant about that word. I mean, I like it just because it's an old weighty word. But also in it, there's a kind of explicit declaration that I see the choices, I'm making this choice and I'm not making that choice.

Luke ([35:32](#)):

That's right.

MBS ([35:34](#)):

In the Coaching Habit book, which I know you came across because you did the old MBA thing with Seth Godin, there's one question, a strategic question which is if I'm going to say yes to this, what must I say no to? And I realized that if we're talking and there's an element of renunciation in that, you're actually saying, "I'm seeing the opportunity cost of this choice, and I'm settling into it because it's worth it and balanced, it's worth it."



Luke ([36:03](#)):

That's absolutely right. I do know the etymology of the word decide. And it comes from the Latin word, which literally means to cut away, *decidere*. So when you decide, you have to cut something away which is an act of renunciation. It's like I decided to marry Claire, so I have to renounce this... I can't marry everybody. So in choosing her, I, by de facto, renounced even the opportunity to be with somebody else. And that's what every decision is like.

MBS ([36:42](#)):

Luke, this has been a great conversation. And honestly, it feels like we barely scratched the surface here. And I salute you for taking on the challenge of translating a slightly obscure French philosopher into a more mainstream way of thinking. I do have a final question that I'd love to ask you. And it's a bit sweeping in general, but I'm going to throw it out there anyway. What needs to be said in this conversation that hasn't yet been said between us?

Luke ([37:11](#)):

Well, we've had a wonderful conversation and covered far more than I was even hoping to. So thank you for that.

MBS ([37:19](#)):

My pleasure.

Luke ([37:20](#)):

I would say that Girard talks about imitation and mimetic desire. And when most people are introduced to the concept, they focus in on the word mimetic because it's a strange word. And imitation is a big part of the theory. It's important part of the theory. But I think that the more important word is desire of the two, mimetic desire. What is desire? What is human desire? It's related to the will, in my opinion. And exploring and understanding desire, I think, is one



of the great challenges of our time, understanding how social media affects not just our brains but our desires.

Luke ([38:10](#)):

For instance, to give you one of many examples, I think if we begin to look at things through the lens of how desires are being shaped, whether it's for new innovations, political things, whatever it is, the shaping of desire is really critical. And it's why I titled the book *Wanting*, because it's an exploration of desire, granted, not an exhaustive one. But through Girard, and I hope it's a start, I hope, it's a start for us to begin thinking more seriously about that as a world.

MBS ([38:54](#)):

Do you remember right at the start of the conversation Luke talking about helping his students live a virtuous life? That has such an ancient ring to it, something that Sophocles or Aristotle might be teaching. But there's a shift from that, I think, because it moves away a virtuous life from me just staring in the mirror and writing myself on my own virtue and my own desires.

MBS ([39:19](#)):

And with that, looking around me as people who might distract me from my own glorious journey, but I think it moves it towards, and this is what I think Luke's pointing us to with his mimetic theory, something else, something rooted in non-rivalrous relationships. I think the paradox here in terms of the relationships you have, not just with people but with desires and with the things around you is, and there's a paradox here, how do you choose wisely, how do you commit fully, and how do you hold it lightly?

MBS ([39:57](#)):

Those are contradictory, but I think that's what I'm taking away from this conversation with Luke, the ability to do all of that. Choose wisely, commit fully,



and hold lightly. If you're after more information about Luke and his new book *Wanting*, his website is lukeburgis.com. I'll spell that for you. L-U-K-E B-U-R-G-I-S dot com. Thank you again for listening all the way through this conversation. If you're enjoying these conversations, you might like to unlock a free membership at the Duke Humphrey's. You'll find the Duke Humphrey's at mbs.works/podcast. And it's a totally free membership site where you'll get access to unreleased interviews, transcripts, and some downloads as well.

MBS ([40:46](#)):

There's a nice little group forming there. I hope you'll join us there as well. And this podcast grows by people talking about it. And you could be one of those people. So, if you'd like to get up your own mimetic desire and perhaps pass the word on about this conversation with Luke, think of somebody in your life who might enjoy the lesson and pass it on to them. And thank you in advance. If you're willing to give me a bit of a rating on your podcast app, it's a small thing but it makes a big difference to me. You're awesome and you're doing great.