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TITLE: "Metaphysical Desire in Girard and Plato"

ABSTRACT:

In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, Rene Girard interprets a phenomenon he dubs "metaphysical desire" in which "metaphysical" signifies objects of attraction that are not physical things but rather intangible bi-products of mimetic entanglements -- such as prestige or fame or social status. These "metaphysical objects" fuel the sometimes frenzied rivalry between the actors in their grip. Desire in the mimetic theory is always subject to mediation and Girard distinguishes two modes of mediation: external and internal. In *external mediation*, the model stands outside the field of play of the imitator; in such cases there can be imitation but not the mutually amplified rivalry that leads to violence and scapegoating. In *internal mediation* however the model/imitators become antagonists. In Girard's exposition, this difference between mediators provides a first litmus test of violent potential. But Girard's dichotomy is limited to types of *mediation* and another dichotomy is possible, one that distinguishes between types of *metaphysical objects*: those that are essentially sharable and those inherently not so.

An extension of Girard's mimetic theory can potentially cast great light on Plato's dialogues. My paper will argue both that Plato understood the double-bind of mimetic entanglement and that his "forms" (at least in the ethical/political realm) can best be understood as metaphysical objects of the sharable kind. My points of reference will be primarily Plato's *Phaedrus* and Book IX of the *Republic* (with pointers to Aristotle's analysis of *philia* in Book VIII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*).