
Passions and Politics. Mimetic Theory Meets Machiavelli

Harald Wydra

Abstract

Although mimetic theory does not revolve around power and statecraft, its focus on desires, imitation, and passions makes Girard's thought an indispensable guide to understanding Machiavelli's work. In spite of Machiavelli's parochial concern with his homeland, the spheres of desire and passionate interests constitute no less than the contours of a mimetic anthropology of political conflict that has a universal appeal. In turn, a Machiavellian reading of Girard suggests that mimetic theory should become much more prominent in political sciences, conceived as human sciences: It is necessary to understand that political processes transcend the dichotomy between individualism and the collective action of institutional logic.

Keywords

Passions - Politics - Spheres of desire - Sacrifice - Machiavelli

Can politics be seen as a constantly changing relationship of passionate interests? I argue that a conversation between René Girard's mimetic anthropology and what I would call the mimetic politics of Niccolò Machiavelli harbour enormous potential in this regard. Despite Machiavelli's focus on the balance of particular rational interests of citizens of his time, his vision of conflict relies heavily on pre-political and pre-volitional passions. Despite Girard's structuralist approach to the origins of culture, the scapegoat mechanism, or the relationship between violence and sacred, mimetic theory is very relevant to the understanding of more narrowly defined political processes. I claim that such a connection is rooted in the existential understanding that underpins both thinkers' thoughts. Girard's mimetic theory requires an existential understanding of human beings as a symbolic species (Girard 2007). The biological-instinctive is combined with the symbolic sphere. Machiavelli's existential commitment is the regret for the fate of a homeland, who is «battuta, spogliata, lacera, corsa» (Machiavelli 2005, XXVI). In relation to this own personal fate, his work is also an expression of his own fall in disgrace.

My goal is not to demonstrate the topicality of Machiavelli for today's politics. For all the attention on the decisiveness of politics that many call "Machiavellian", a classical thought cannot be easily transferred to today's reality. My aim is rather to explore the pillars of mimetic anthropology that underpin Machiavelli's politics in order to understand the deep connections between the passions and political rationality. At first glance, the connection between the two thinkers does not appear obvious, on the contrary. Girard's scholarly interest remains on the edge of the phenomenon of power. According to political theorist Roberto Farneti, for Girard power is exercised in a framework of institutionalized collective agreements that regulate citizens' attitudes (Farneti 2015, 2). Machiavelli, on the other hand, is primarily interested in the actions of great men. His concern to discuss and regulate the governments of the princes is based on a parochial approach, the love of homeland. If Machiavelli focuses on how to curb the passions unleashed in stormy times of disruption and uncertainty, mimetic theory, founded by René Girard, puts desires and passions into the very core of its system. A Girardian reading, of course, can be unsatisfactory, if the objective of the analysis and a political solution to calm the storms of historical contingency (*fortuna*). Indeed, it is my hypothesis that mimetic theory contains the potential to decentralize the strong attention on individualism, autonomous choice, and rationality that dominates contemporary political science. The contribution of mimetic theory supports an understanding based on the naturalization of history and intersubjective relationships. Human agency is not denied but redirected towards an inter-individual understanding

Desires, passions, and interests

In a now classic work, Albert Hirschman traced the genealogy of two concepts: passions and interests (Hirschmann 1977). According to Hirschman, modern political thought tried desperately to define the conflicting passions to provide counterforces to the devastating powers of greed, ambition, and the lust for power. Interest appeared as an evident category, a third way between the two categories that had dominated the explanations of human behavior before early modernity, that is, passions and reason. Hirschmann showed that the rise of capitalist forms of economic activity would act as an effective anti-dote to the ambition of princes, arbitrary government, and reckless conquest. Interests should provide the necessary checks and balances for reason to prevail in societies threatened by dissolution of internal and external order (Hirschmann 1977, 130).

Without a doubt, political science has subjected passions to interest. The passions have become an object of politics, not one of its components. Kant rejected passions such as ambition, revenge, or greed (*Ehrsucht*, *Rachsucht*, *Habsucht*) as morally

reproachable and as the foremost cause for giving up one's freedom. Like many others, James Madison said that «it is the reason, alone, of the public, that it should control and regulate the government. The passions should be controlled and regulated by the government» (Alexander, Jay and Madison 2008, 49). Machiavelli is often invoked as the origin of such patterns of thought. For the Florentine author of the *Principe*, one must create a hegemony capable of curbing the passions unleashed by *fortuna*. In the *Discorsi*, the outlook changes. We find Machiavelli at the side of citizens who become, so to speak, mini-hegemons, each defending their own interests. Unsurprisingly, many political theorists are persuaded that Machiavelli's thought – with his parochialism and the love for the homeland – is a model case for dominating these passions. How accurate is this claim? Machiavelli conceives human beings to be in permanent motion; Their nature is not fixed or immutable. He shares Girard's skepticism regarding the autonomy of the human being. For the Florentine, any treatment of political rationality arises from the intuition that the desires are abundant, and, in principle, impossible to satisfy. Our incompleteness keeps us desiring. For him, «la natura ha creato gli uomini in modo che possono desiderare ogni cosa e non possono conseguire ogni cosa [...] Da questo nasce il variare della fortuna loro, perché disiderando gli uomini parte di avere più parte temendo di non perdere lo acquistato, si viene alle inimicizie e dalla Guerra [...]» (Machiavelli 1963, I, 37). Anthropologically, desires and passions are permanent and invariable. Desires are pre-rational in the sense that their satisfaction is a question of necessity, not of choice. Desires are not acquired, they are constitutive. This connection is decisive in all important works. In the *Florentine stories*, for instance, Machiavelli argues that the price of the victory you want is not the glory of having freed the city but the satisfaction of having passed the others and having usurped the first position. Perhaps the best known case is the antagonism between the two different moods – between the Gentiles and the people; he writes in the ninth chapter of *The Prince*: «Perché in ogni città si truovano questi dua umori diversi; e nasce da questo, che il popolo desidera non essere comandato né oppresso da' grandi, e li grandi desiderano comandare e opprimere il popolo; e da questi dua appetiti diversi nasce nelle città uno de' tre effetti, o principato, o libertà, o licenzia» (Machiavelli 2005, IX, 2).

Machiavelli therefore does not conceive history as a sequence of stable or well – ordered political orders. Rather it is an open process, full of tensions between order and disorder. Without such repetition and imitation, history would not be conceivable as a narrative continuity. Subjective experience by those who live through massive changes may see such transformations as momentous. The real changes are much less significant than contemporaries would admit. This vision of human history as cyclical, not as progressive, facilitates imitation that is essential to connect past and present. «The historically aware analyst, notably with knowledge of Antiquity will easily

recognize that the same desires and moods exist and have always existed in all cities and among all peoples» (Machiavelli 1963, I, 37). Only such knowledge will help us find and apply remedies to the problem of human communities.

For Girard, desire is not conceived as a psychological feature of isolated individuals. Indeed, we have to do with a potentially infinite constellation of a continuous change of relationships. The sociability of human beings is made up of their mimetic desire to imitate the desires of others. Human beings are not ontologically closed but are open to others, especially their desires. They are, in the terminology of sociologist Norbert Elias, *homo apertus*, not *homo clausus*. Mimetic desire is basically an unconscious process, very clearly visible in small children, but nevertheless also omnipresent in rational adults. According to Girard, «once satisfied their natural needs, men want intensely but do not know exactly what they want, because no instinct guides them [...]. The essence of desire is to have no essential objective. To really want, we must resort to people around us; We have to borrow their wishes [...] If our desires were not mimetic they would be fixed forever on predetermined objects» (Girard 2001, 15). While animals rapidly grow with a specific and complete purpose, baby children, through the gaze that follows parents, depending on the openness to others to adapt and improve. They learn by looking at others and imitating them emit sounds to form language, they emulate gestures of affection and anger. When children become consciously aware for the first time, the other has already appeared, so to speak, behind them. They seek attachment to those from whom they learn. Rousseau's idea of the *perfectibilité* of humans is crucial here: while the animal is, human beings are not, they become. Being open to others human beings have infinite possibilities, they are not the result of nature but a contingent product of their history.

Being at the very basis of any learning process, a mimetic desire for communication is a positive and creative emotion. Still, the objects we want are attractive to us because they are owned by or embodied in models that themselves change continuously. Surely, love, trust or cooperation are based on positive mimetic reciprocity. Yet, desire can be a fatality. Desires can also de-stabilise social conventions and political civility but also, externally, relations with other countries. The openness of being with others has a price. It can turn imitation into rivalry. «Rivalry here does not arise because two desires would converge on a single object; rather, *the subject desires the object because the rival desires it*. In desiring an object, the rival alerts the subject to the desirability of the object. The rival, then, serves as the model for the subject, not only in regard to such secondary matters as style and opinions but also, and more essentially, in regard to desires» (Girard 1977, 145). The reason for this is that objects of desire as material things, properties, but also intangible objects such as prestige or power are desired both by the imitator and the model. This conflictual aspect of mimetic rivalry aims ultimately to overcome or eliminate the antagonist.

Given their existential understanding of the circulation and potentially conflictual desires both are undoubtedly thinkers of violence. Although Machiavelli is interested in the stability of power structures, much depends on how to dominate a “economy of violence”. For Machiavelli, Italy had become the seat of variability and uncertainty. This variability of the times (*variabilità dei tempi*) indicates an extraordinary crisis, full of miserable conditions, fragility, clashes, and conquests. The violence of the sacrifice and the mimetic crisis that leads to the expulsion of scapegoats is central for Girard.

Interdividuality

For mimetic theory, passions and interests are not conceived as an evolutionary process in time, in which one is followed by the others. Instead, there is an intrinsic connection. The preferences are never stable but must be identified with respect to the models that have configured the trajectory of a specific leader, citizen, or nation. This vision sees men as incomplete, in constant need to find models for their own survival. Our existence is open to practically infinite pluralism. Existence, so to speak, is difference. There is no individuality without previous models who mediate desires. Girard therefore defends an “interdividual psychology” (Girard 1987, 281-431) as a heuristic device. The hypothesis of interdividuality aligns with recent intuitions of contemporary research in neuroscience, neurobiology, development psychology and psychiatry. These have confirmed and nuanced intuitions of political theorists and political anthropologists according to which humans built their sociability around collective intentionality and passionate intersubjectivity (Tomasello 2018).

In political science, interests are generally understood as personal interests, that is, how material or financial gains possessed by an individual or an organization can be defended in a certain matter. As its etymology suggests, however, the central meaning of interests escapes this autonomy. Interests do not reside in the individual. Etymologically, the interest is composed of “inter” and “esse”, which means *inter-esse*, so to speak, that is between two beings. Similarly, Adam Smith has intuitively applied interdividual psychology: his idea of love for oneself concerns the way the passions for the consideration of the other support their interest: «It will be more likely to prevail if they can affect their Love for oneself in his favor» (Smith 1958-1960, I, 2). The interests in a world of trade and division of work are underpinned by passions such as vanity. One’s interest is intrinsically linked to the desires of other people, who constantly need the help of others. In reality, therefore, our interests are never completely autonomous but interdividual and passionate.

Consequently, mimetic anthropology offers us a vision of human beings whose intentions and interests are subjected to reciprocity and affections that bind us together. Machiavelli’s spheres of desire delineate an existential journey, defined by

the tensions between order and disorder, between truth and deformation of reality. Since the variability of the times (*variabilità dei tempi*) will see the growth of desires, Machiavellian statecraft insists on impetuosity of action to create hegemony. His emphasis on the personal character of leaders does not seem to leave sufficient space for the circulation of desires between individuals that will find new models to satisfy the search for what is beyond needs, it means glory, honor, and power. One of the main reasons for this position could be prejudice regarding political structures. Often, for example, we understand conflict in a city as a confrontation of two different moods as a conflict led by ideological or class interests. There are the leading elites who are opposed to the people, both representing a class or collective will. The prince is a third party who in the territory of a state should ensure the protection of the people – who wishes not to be commanded or oppressed – and keep amongst them friendly relationship. As for adults, who want to command and oppress the people, the prince will always find themselves exposed to the desire for those who seek power. In Machiavelli's view, the leading elites, i.e. the gentiles, should in any case be repressed by the prince. Machiavelli's support for the people is strategic. To found a republic you need a strong leader, but to preserve it, to make it durable, everyone's cooperation is needed with their particular interests (Machiavelli 1963, I, 9). The ordered polity cannot last for long if it rests on the shoulders of one, but only if it is endowed to the care of many.

The passionate politics of states

The rationalist view of political science has elevated the pursuit and protection of interests to the level of dogma. Of course, the rationality of states undoubtedly possesses some plausibility. Within state borders, it is necessary to create lasting peace by eliminating all the centres of violence that do not originate from the state. In Machiavelli's terminology, the aim of internal pacification presupposes extraordinary means and power without intrusion from rivals the outside. Mimetic theory is more dynamic. From a mimetic perspective, this sacred center of a claim to the legitimate monopoly of violence is both a promise and a curse. Interdividuality constitutes a heuristic device that reveals that even a state can desire what it feels to be the largest, most attractive, most desirable in a model. Desires are free, they circulate among people, they have no reason before connecting with models. Interdividuality understands that the ambition of states is not contained behind their rationality of national interest. "Wanting more" cannot be an autonomous process. Instead, it is directed towards models. Roberto Farneti has shown that politics is not limited to the rationality of the individual actor nor to the idea that there are institutional logics that dominate politics. For him, mimetic doubles constitute the fundamental structures of politics. The fundamental causes of human discord, polarization, and war are

reciprocal imitation and ever-increasing similarity between mimetic rivals. They depend existentially on each other. As such, they are socially generated (Farneti 2015). The more intense the mimetic rivalry, the more one-sided and unilateral is the self-presentation of each side. Based on extensive research by Israeli historians, Farneti argued that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is so paradigmatic because the latter has adopted victim self-identification, which they have “learned” from their oppressors, the Israeli state. The enormous differences in terms of political status, military power, economic productivity and wealth must not hide the fact that being the victim of the victim is crucial for the quasi-identity of the two opponents. Quoting Bernard Wasserstein (Wasserstein 2001): «Zionism and Palestinian nationalism, stemming from different roots [...] and aiming at mutually antagonistic goals, have strangely imitated each other over the decades» (Farneti 2015, 35).

Mimetic anthropology, therefore, does not conceive of states as objective structures. Instead, it strives to open its experiential reality with the realistic implications of emotions, bloodshed or revenge affecting bodies and minds. As Simone Weil said: «L’esprit dit historique ne perce pas le papier pour trouver de la chair et du sang» (Weil 1949, 284). We have to face incommensurable conflicts with an anthropological lens. Rituals, prohibitions, and sacrifices are not obsolete realities that have only symbolic character. They are practices aimed to contain and channel the incessant pluralism in existence. They are socially coordinated forms of collective action, which aim to prevent internal schisms and violence. The mobilization of passions precedes the articulation of any strategy, conquest, foundation. A mimetic reading helps us to de-center the focus on the individualism and rationality that dominate the political sciences of today. No territorial government can entirely control mimetic desire. To contain means to keep bounded within oneself, but also to prevent the advance of something or someone.

The ability of states to prevent uncontrolled outbreaks of violence is necessarily ambiguous. On the one hand, they dissuade potential aggressors because they increase the bonds of solidarity within and make aggression more dangerous for the aggressor. On the other hand, competitive emulation creates limitless transgressive appetite for pushing frontiers and boundaries. States are the most powerful vehicles capable of transgressing borders and limits. The potentiality of evil – this is the ambivalence of states – must be understood and transcended by another rationality, the image of the homeland as sacred that could resist the variability of the times. According to Paul Ricoeur, the greatest rationality is allied with the greatest evil (Ricoeur 1965). Comparative historical research suggests that this intersubjectivity also model the inter-state or inter-society relations, as the contagion of desires also has effects between states-nations, and ethnic or linguistic communities. In a global world the sacrificial nature of keeping states bounded has lost its power, making sacrifice

barren (Dumouchel 2015). Rather than keeping sacrifice bounded in rituals, the immediacy of rivalry and competition has turned claims to religion and fundamentalist faith into a driver of conflict.

In today's world, the only power capable of reliably controlling violence within its borders, the state, is not immune to passionate interest that is at the basis of the disappearance of borders. Conflicts become more direct. Each model of hegemony is thus already predisposed to become a hypothetical model for another desire. Mimetic reciprocity has become global. In the global world, desires are much more mobile. Let us take the example of the rivalry of empires. Although states are founded on the ability to contain violence within their borders (and this is one side of the sacred), this ability leads to another desire: the desire to have more, to go further, to complete what they lack. Thus, empires would become the model for aspiring nations. States depend on each other in the creation of metaphysical desires, that is, desires that are above the satisfaction of basic needs. The reductionist dogma that limits the interests of states to security or material possession is blind to the fact that states and movements are also motivated by glory, honor, status or power.

Indeed, a genealogy of mimetic rivalry between empires could be written. Take, for example, England and Spain. From a mimetic point of view, England's envy of Spain's wealth and world power due to her colonial possession would trigger the imitation of the model. England's early conquests in the new world left her disappointed as neither gold nor silver was found in Newfoundland. Ridden by religious and political conflicts at home, the envious Englishmen aimed to fight the Spanish enemy mainly with piracy before they defeated the Spanish Armada against all odds. Eventually, England invented a new empire based on agriculture and trade. At a later stage, the British Empire replaced Spain, which went into decline and has since assumed the role of imitator of a more successful British model. The British Empire, in turn, would take on the character of a model for other emerging powers. Further East, the trajectory of Russia as a great power is closely linked to the competitive emulation of Europe. For the Russian elites, Europe was a model and a rival at the same time. After defeating Napoleon, Russia became an undisputed great power and the main land empire in Europe. Within the expanding orbit of its external borders, Russia vied with Britain for territories, markets, and influence. As Britain ruled supreme as a world empire in the late nineteenth century, the seemingly limitless expansion of the Russian empire into Central Asia alarmed the British. Britain was also envied by her former colonial offspring, the United States. They competed with the declining Spanish Empire, which resulted in the acquisitions of the Philippines and Cuba. The growing conflict with the British Empire was reflected in the popularity of analogies between Rome and the modern American empire. America's struggle was not only for concrete territory and influence, but also to challenge Britain's claim to be the new Rome. Despite its anti-

colonial origins, the United States has not so much broken with its English imperial past “as it has picked up the mantle”.

For both thinkers, each order is based on something transcendent. This transcendent however does not derive from God’s grace or from heaven or a God. For Girard, it is social artifact that aims to contain the fallout and adverse consequences transgression that occurred within a community or between collective groups of men. Sacrifice is a concrete act of expulsion that helps to create a collective identity through rituals. Girard demonstrated how essential it is to control violent impulses within a community. For Girard, the evolution of sacrifice indicates progress in the sense of controlling internal violence (Girard 1977). It is not that people are less conducive to violence. Myths and the gospel are full of scapegoats. Dionysius and Jesus are martyrs. Conversion, however, is also an epistemic event that takes into account major changes in people's understanding of what it means to be human. According to Girard, the greatest epistemic event in human history was the revelation of biblical texts. It was not only a revelation of the nature of God but above all the transformation of the sacrifice. While the belief that scapegoats are truly guilty prevailed in archaic sacrifice, the Bible introduces the realization that the victims are innocent. It brought about a conversion, originally in the followers of Jesus and later among the early Christians. Thus, the crucial characteristic of archaic sacrifice, which consisted in the belief that the victim was guilty, was rectified. Girard maintains that no one before Nietzsche had claimed that Judaism and Christianity had destroyed the unanimity of the persecutors who had maintained the legitimacy of sacrifices in myths. For Nietzsche, humanity could only survive if it continued with human sacrifice. Instead, it seems undeniable that Machiavelli had formulated this position 350 years before Nietzsche, precisely with regard to the ordering of political life.

As outlined earlier, the durability of the republics requires a free game of interest, the competitive struggle for the advantage. But it also needs to curb this centrifugal tendency, an enveloping loyalty is needed that would transcend particular interest. In one of his last letters to Francesco Vettori he said: «I love my paternal city more than my soul». Invoking loyalty and affection for the patria, Machiavelli gives priority to these components who can exercise hegemony (prince or citizens). For him, the normativity of the regime is the standard to measure the dynamics of mimetic desires.

Insisting on the national good as the sacred good, the Florentine sees in the state an expression of historical rationality, a triumph of man against individual passions, against even class interests and other groups. The potential of evil – this is the ambivalence of states – must be understood and transcended by another rationality, the image of the homeland as sacred that could resist the variability of the times. Besides the action of a prince, Machiavelli invokes the importance of sacrifice. Sacrifice and central to

education. In preface B of the first book of the *Discorsi* he had insisted that religion has its most fundamental force in the culture of education. For Machiavelli, Christianity is not just primarily a set of doctrines or faith. Rather, it is a complex system of practices, rules and rituals. Christianity won because it obliterated the institutions and ceremonies of paganism (Machiavelli 1963, II, 5). In the very remarkable passage in the second chapter of the second book of *Discourses*, he recognized that the Gospels revealed the truth. But he thinks that this truth is irrelevant and ineffective in the face of the rupture of political reality. For him, the Christian religion had become idleness. The education of Antiquity took the value of honor as *summum bonum* and was supported by the magnificence of sacrifices. Instead, the modesty in the religion of his time glorifies humble and contemplative men.

For Girard, we must reject all the scapegoats that Nietzsche offers us; the morality of slaves, and resentment against others. Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx "sing the praises of murder and madness as the only true forces of liberation". Could this critique be applied to Florentine? Unlike Nietzsche, Machiavelli does not reject care for the victim categorically. For the latter, the archaic sacrifice is not primarily a dogma but depends on the variability of the times and the degree of corruption. In politics, the rationality of pagan sacrifice and Christian self-sacrifice can coexist. In fact, Machiavelli never takes the good for the bad or the other way around (Machiavelli 2005, XVIII). The structures of power could achieve a certain degree of stability only if the authorities mastered the extent, degree and meaning of violence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, allow me some observations on the fertility of mimetic anthropology. Political theory is dominated by methodological individualism according to which our preferences are ontologically stable. In our autonomy, our desires belong to us, they are unique. A critic might say that Machiavelli was right. If we find ourselves, like Italy in her time, in a position to be 'beaten, stripped, torn', we must create hegemony through decisive actions, an iron will, and cunning opportunism. From Plato and the Stoics to Thomas More, political thinkers claimed they could measure the gap between reality and some kind of ideal. Machiavelli's originality lies in having articulated the inextricable dilemma according to which different systems of values are in conflict with each other without the possibility of a rational decision on them. More emphatically, Isaiah Berlin rejected the idea that Machiavelli's thought can be divided into two "autonomous spheres" of action: politics and morals. Rather, the conflict would be between two morals, which can be seen as Christian or pagan. «Machiavelli's values are not Christian, but they are moral values» (Berlin 2013, 55). He is the first to affirm «that equally ultimate ends could exist, but incompatible with each other, that there

could not be a single general universal standard that would allow a man to choose rationally between them».

From a mimetic point of view, therefore, the artificial gap between the pre-modern and modern paradigms of politics must be bridged. Politics is irreducible to fundamental principles of human nature such as fear (Hobbes), reason (Rousseau, Kant), history (Hegel) or conflict (Schmitt). Rather, a mimetic perspective constitutes a counterweight against a pessimistic anthropology dominant in modern political theory. One should integrate positions and insights derived from premodern human dispositions, as established by ancient philosophy, ethnography or social theory which emphasize the relational character and metaphysical openness of human beings. States will easily be drawn into negative forms of mimetic rivalry, but they can also overcome selfish interests by recognizing others. If we recognize how deeply politics rely on mimetic passions, we see that there is no individuality without previous models that mediate desires. The imitative processes show that «only mimetic desire can be free, it can be genuine desire, human desire, because it must choose a model more than the object itself» (Girard 1977).

The Cold War is often seen in terms of a divided world and the Iron Curtain. Paradoxically, this borderless world with elusive horizons and limitless opportunities was a high time for the circulation of interdividual desires. It would turn rivals into models, each with the goal of reassuring internal fronts of their own moral superiority and security by engaging in rituals of sacrifice and scapegoat. The imitative rivalry between superpowers began long before 1945. The United States entered competition with the British Empire and also for Russia – and later for the Soviet Union – the British Empire was the primal rival. With the collapse of the British Empire, the two opponents gained power but also lost the model. Despite their growing conflict and ideological polarization, the rational position of any superpower would be that the accumulation of an ever-growing nuclear arsenal would ensure self-protection.

Mimetic anthropology explains how political ideologies that promise ultimate liberation, happiness or justice must remain illusory. Taking the example of communism political theorist Claude Lefort argued that «the destruction of a ruling class did not give rise to a homogeneous society, but rather to a new form of social division. This is not a [...] factual division. This is why the presumed triumph of the people is accompanied by a new schism between a small number who wish to command, oppress, possess and, the others [...]. There is no doubt that the desire of the great, if it does not find an obstacle, will not stop grow, the intensity of the opposition depends on the strength of the people's resistance» (Lefort 1992, 173-4).

A mimetic anthropology demonstrates that revolutionary cannot be readily ritualized. On the contrary, more blood and more sacrifice are needed. Revolutions provoke

counterrevolutions, which in turn will require the revolutionaries to make use of the force of the state. Is there any ethical way out? Ethics here would not be the distinction between good and evil, but rather an attitude of limitless incommensurability. Disturbing questions must be asked, and measures must be found to save oneself and others from destruction. Historically, self-limiting revolutions did occur, as the cases of Solidarity in Poland and the velvet revolution in Czechoslovakia demonstrated (Wydra 2007). They were not aimed at conquering political power from the state but rather at changing people's approach to reality, recovering existential ground from the fantasy world and the false reality created by communist rituals. Dissidence rejects the sacrificial and "inhuman" logic of communism but followed a self-sacrificial logic.

The competitive emulation amongst of empires and nation-states has produced mimetic reciprocity at the global level. Passions are not objects of politics, but, on the contrary, can accelerate mimetic crises. Mimetic anthropology as a heuristic device offers an ethics of experience in which passionate interests could create an ethics of experience. If for mimetic anthropology there is no individuality without openness to the other, it also requires that human beings could open themselves to a metaphysical 'other'. It is not so much a theological concern, but rather an anthropological necessity of the human being. Quite late in his career Girard recognized that three-quarters of his theory is already there in St. Augustine. For Saint Augustine there is the proud man who seeks glory who is determined by self-love, *amor sui*. Yet human beings are also open to transcendence and the kingdom of God, inspired by the *amor Dei*. As Eric Voegelin has argued, modern political theory marks the break by limiting human nature to the selfish character of *amor sui* (Voegelin 1987). Thomas Hobbes' anthropology, for example, reduces human nature to *amor sui* as the only possible existential form, ridden by fear and intent on selfish self-preservation. On the contrary, a return to Machiavelli via the mediation of mimetic anthropology allows greater refinement and nuance. Interdividual psychology as a heuristic device allows hypotheses about human beings as naturally sociable in the sense of the need for recognition of the other.

Bibliography

- Berlin, Isaiah. 2013. "The Originality of Machiavelli." In *Against the Current*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Dumouchel, Paul. 2015. *The Barren Sacrifice*, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.
- Farneti, Roberto. 2015. *Mimetic Politics. Dyadic Patterns in Global Politics*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.
- Girard, René. 1977. *Violence and the Sacred*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Girard, René. 1987. *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Girard, René. 2001. *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*. Translated by James G. Williams. Leominster: Gracewing.
- Girard, René. 2007. *Evolution and Conversion*. London: Continuum.
- Hamilton, Alexander and Madison, James and Jay, John. 2008. *The Federalist papers*, edited with an introduction and notes by Lawrance Goldman, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hirschmann, Albert. 1977. *The Passions and the Interests*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Lefort, Claude. 1992. *Ecrire à l'épreuve du politique*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy.
- Machiavelli, Niccolò. 1963. "Discorsi." In *Opere*, edited by Mario Bonfantini. Milan-Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore.
- Machiavelli, Niccolò. 2005. *The Prince*. Translated and edited by Peter Bondanella. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ricœur, Paul. 1965. *History and Truth*. Translated and with an introduction by Charles Kelbley. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Smith, Adam. 1958-1960. *The Wealth of Nations*. Introduction by Edwin R.A. Selipman. New York: Dutton.
- Tomasello, Michael. 2018. *Becoming Human*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Voegelin, Eric. 1987. *The New Science of Politics. An Introduction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wasserstein, Bernard. 2001. *Israelis and Palestinians: Why Do They Fight? Can They Stop?* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Weil, Simone. 1949. *L'engracement*. Paris: Gallimard.

Wydra, Harald. 2007. *Communism and the Emergence of Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Harald Wydra is Professor of Politics and Holden Fellow in Politics at St Catharine's College (University of Cambridge).

Email: hbw23@cam.ac.uk