**The Rhetorical Mimic: Using Empathy to Persuade**

We often believe that we are in control of our own identities, our own reactions, and our own beliefs. However, new research on empathy has shown that we are less able to control our feelings because a natural force of mirroring others binds us to one another. For example, in Marco Iacoboni’s book *Mirroring People: The Science of Empathy and How We Connect with Others*, he calls the tendency of humans to mimic what others are doing “reciprocal imitation.”  For rhetoricians, this process of “reciprocal imitation” sounds a bit familiar—flattery has been used by the likes of Plutarch and the Sophists, for good and for ill. This new understanding of our bodily impulses challenges the historical notion of rhetorical flattery.  Ancient rhetoricians, like Plutarch, cautioned individuals to be on the look out for too much flattery, as it might indicate weak persuasion. In this presentation, I will begin by returning to the ancient rhetoricians to see what we can learn about the use of classic rhetorical empathy.  I will then suggest that the recent psychological research on empathy has opened up new spaces for individuals to identify with the similarities in others with involuntarily reactions. Finally, I will suggest some ways that rhetoricians ensure we are responsibly persuading our audiences, especially if, as empathy suggests, we are prone to camouflaging our persuasive techniques.