



## **Early Life:**

Entrepreneur and venture capitalist, Peter Thiel has collected major accolades and profits in his investment history. While he is famous for investing in American companies (PayPal and Facebook), Thiel was born in Frankfurt, Germany. His family immigrated to Ohio when he was one, and his father worked in mining operations to support the family. Soon, they jumped between South Africa and present-day Namibia but resided in California later on. Thiel attended many elementary schools but most notably, the one in Swakopmund, Namibia, was notorious for its corporal punishment. This experience has been coined in shaping Thiel's support for individualism and libertarianism.

Thiel has shared that he enjoyed reading Ayn Rand during High School. Rand, renowned for her philosophical system of 'Objectivism,' was largely ignored during her time but has kindled interest in modern studies. Rand rejected altruism and supported rational, ethical egoism. In politics, she favored laissez-faire Capitalism where she defined as the system that recognizes individual rights. She frowned upon the initiation of force, collectivism, statism, and anarchism. Rand's fervent advocacy for individual rights and freedom aligns with Thiel's outspoken support for libertarianism and individualism. However, he was and is still a conservative and has divulged that he supported many Republicans ever since the Reagan administration.

## **Education in Stanford and Influences:**

Thiel majored in Philosophy at Stanford where his Professor Rene Girard, a meritorious French historian, shaped Thiel's worldview with 'Mimetic Theory.' According to Girard's 'Mimetic Theory' human behavior is rooted in imitation; the imitation of desires funnel towards competition and conflict. Once the accumulation of conflict culminates to threaten peace, society decants its anger onto a scapegoat to return to balance. In certain conflicts, people tend to forget the object of rivalry and instead become infatuated with one another. Girard believes such competition only stifles progress but also acknowledges the productive potential of certain competitions. In essence, imitation is at the root of all behavior. Thiel adopted this esoteric view of the world and Mimetic Theory has become his bedrock of the worldview.

In addition to Mimetic Theory, Girard also introduced Thiel to the Scapegoat Mechanism where when mimetic rivalries grow, tensions ensue. That tension eventually reaches an acme when violence threatens the existence of the community and often, what follows is a bizarre psychosocial mechanism where communal violence is suddenly hurled upon a single individual. "Former enemies now become

friends, as they communally participate in the execution of violence against a specified enemy. Girard calls this process ‘scapegoating’, an allusion to the ancient religious ritual where communal sins were metaphorically imposed upon a he-goat” (Girard, 1986). The person that undergoes communal violence is a ‘scapegoat’ in which expulsion or death is useful as regeneration and almost necessary for communal peace. During Thiel’s interview with *Business Insider*, Thiel has referred to this theory to explain the situations Bill Gates confronted in 2011. Furthermore, Thiel has also adopted Girard’s theories to solidify his faith in Christianity.

Thiel often coined Girard’s *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* as the architect of his perspectives. The book sums up the aforementioned mechanisms (Mimesis, Scapegoating, and Violence) and reflections on Judeo-Christian texts.

During Thiel’s time at Stanford, *The Rainbow Agenda* criticized Stanford’s ‘Western Culture’ program, citing that it overrepresented the achievements of European men. The course was later replaced with ‘Culture, Ideas and Values’ which aimed to promote diversity and multiculturalism achievements. The replacement provoked much controversy on campus and propelled Thiel’s establishment of *The Stanford Review*, a conservative and libertarian newspaper in 1987. Thiel, an outspoken critic of multiculturalism and political correctness, voiced his and like-minded opinions through *The Stanford Review*.

Thiel’s candidness as a multiculturalism critic could have also motivated his 1995 publication of *The Diversity Myth*. The book deprecates political correctness and multiculturalism in higher education alleging it in diluting academic rigor.

After finishing his undergraduate at Stanford, Thiel proceeded to obtain his J.D. from Stanford Law school and served as a judicial law clerk for Judge James Edmonson who was nominated by Reagan to serve in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit.

### **Thiel and Mimetic Theory:**

To Thiel, imitation is inescapable. He believes our actions are based upon what others are doing, thus, what we do must be valuable because others are doing it too. However, such imitations could be a distraction to deter us from what is truly important. The issue with our competition is that it fixates us on the people around us but blurs out other important objectives. While we improve at the things we are competing on, we lose sight of anything transcendent or truly meaningful. Hence it is also why humans end up competing for the same things such as schools, jobs, and markets.

Thiel states that economics disseminate that competition dilutes profits and Mimetic Theory explains this endless cycle of competition to help us remain sensitive to what drives us. According to Thiel, “competitors tend to become obsessed with their rivals at the expense of their substantive goals, and because of that, the intensity of competition doesn't tell you anything about underlying

value...[since] people will compete fiercely for things that don't matter, and once they're fighting they'll fight harder and harder" (Feloni, 2014). Thus, we must differentiate the objectives of imitation and ones that delineate from imitation, thereby dodging mass competition.

### **Thiel Trivia:**

Thiel is an avid fan of the game *Dungeons and Dragons* and J.R.R. Tolkien. He disclosed that he read *The Lord of Rings* ten times and named six of his companies after the series.

1. Palantir Technologies (An American software company that specializes in big data analytics)
  - a. Palantiri (plural) were the seven seeing-stones in the *Lord of the Rings* universe. They were used to communicate with one another across Middle-Earth. However, using a Palantir requires a person with immense strength and wisdom.
2. Valar Ventures (A US-based venture capital fund)
  - a. The Valar were the omnipotent Powers of Arda who shaped and rule the world.
3. Mithril Capital (Global investment firm specializing in large-scale economics in financial sectors)
  - a. Mithril is a fictional metal found in Middle-Earth. It resembles silver but is stronger and lighter than steel.
4. Lembas LLC (A value investing fund management company; also an early investor of Facebook)
  - a. A special travel-food made by the Elves of Middle Earth.
5. Rivendell One LLC (Another early investor of Facebook judging from Thiel selling his stocks of EB through this company)
  - a. An Elven town and the home of the Elven ruler, Elrond.
6. Arda Capital (Quantitative equity long/short hedge fund)
  - a. Also known as Earth. It encompasses the world in which all people of the Middle-Earth and Valinor lived in.

Thiel obtained his New Zealand citizenship in 2011. Coincidentally, *The Lord of the Rings* was also largely filmed in New Zealand. However, Thiel could have also obtained New Zealand citizenship for other financial or personal reasons.