

# On Violence: A Mimetic Perspective\*

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Ten years ago a violent tragedy happened in this town that still causes us to think about the problem of human violence. This period of ten years coincides exactly with the period since the end of the cold war and its significant change of the international political landscape. The first chapter of my paper will focus on the problem of civil wars that followed the end of the cold war and gave us a new insight into the complex nature of human violence. My second chapter will give a short introduction into René Girards mimetic theory that seems to me one of the most efficient analytical tools to understand violence, especially if we look at civil wars. A third chapter will address some of those questions that arise when we are confronted with tragedies like the Montréal Massacre. I will turn to the work of Dostoevsky to understand what may cause a man to run amok and kill other people - fourteen young women - cruelly, indiscriminately and without knowing them. In a concluding chapter I will give a short summary of possible answers to the problem of violence.

## 1. From the Cold War to Civil War

During the eighties, optimistic members of the peace movement like me thought that if the cold war would ever end it would be followed by a period of peace and harmony. We were, however, quite wrong and had to learn our lesson when we were confronted with an increase of civil wars since 1989.

In 1993 the German poet and essayist Hans Magnus Enzensberger published his book *Civil Wars: From L.A. to Bosnia*, which addressed exactly the

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problem of the increase of violence after the fall of the Berlin Wall. At this time he counted forty civil wars going on all over the world. He mentions countries like Bosnia, Georgia, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Somalia but also civil wars going on in metropolis like Lima, Johannesburg, Bombay, Rio, Paris, Berlin, Detroit, Birmingham, Milan, Hamburg or Los Angeles. In 1993 he did not yet know about Ruanda, Burundi, Zaire, Albania or Kosovo. According to Enzensberger, civil wars seem to characterize our world after the cold war. Our current situation of a "hot peace" (Vollmer) enables us furthermore to recognize that "civil war is not merely an old custom, but the primary form of all collective conflict." (Enzensberger 1994, 11) Wars between nations and against external enemies are a comparatively late development. "It is generally the rule, rather than the exception, that man destroys what he most hates, and that is usually the rival on his own territory. There is an unexplained linkage between hating one's neighbour and hating a stranger. The original target of our hatred was probably always our neighbour; only with the formation of larger communities was the stranger on the other side of the border declared an enemy." (12f)

Although Enzensberger complains that "to this day, there is no useful Theory of Civil War" (12) he tries to explain the causes of human proneness to civil wars and violence. First, however, he dismisses all those theories, that are not able to give a convincing answer. Of all political thought from Aristotle to Max Weber only the "Hobbesian ur-myth of the war of everyone against everyone else" (31) remains. Any Rousseauian believe in a basically goodness of man, on the contrary, has to be given up. "Social work" is according to Enzensberger "the last refuge" of this "curious notion" (33). Also Freud's hypothesis about a death instinct is of no real help because it "could never be tested empirically and has remained vague" (29). Enzensberger also rejects theories of modernization that view civil wars as a passing period of backward societies (36f). He even claims that "biology adds nothing to our understanding of civil war" (41).

Enzensberger's search for an explanatory theory ends up with Hegel's desire for recognition as a key to understand human violence. "You don't have to be a Hegelian to see that the longing for recognition is a fundamental anthropological fact." (38) He, however, parts from all Panglossian hopes of

Hegelians like Francis Fukuyama that there was or that there ever will be a society fulfilling man's desire for recognition, that means an end of history (cf. Fukuyama 1993). According to Enzensberger, our longing for recognition has gathered a momentum today, Hegel could never have dreamed of in 1806. All attempts to lead us to the end of history by building democracy and social equality are according to Enzensberger entirely futile:

"Every community, even the richest and most peaceful, continually creates inequalities, slights, injustices, unreasonable demands and frustrations of all kinds. The more freedom and equality people gain, the more they expect. If these expectations are not fulfilled, then almost anyone can feel humiliated. The longing for recognition is never satisfied. Newspaper editors know the story well enough: the ghetto kid who wants a pair of designer training shoes enough to kill for them; the office worker who fails in his ambition to become a pop star and robs a bank or shoots into the crowd of people to get his own back for the humiliation he has suffered." (39)

Because of such remarks Enzensberger was criticized harshly by the political left in Germany. He was accused of having given up his former leftist leanings and turning into a reactionary revisionist. Enzensberger's observations, however, cannot be put aside by such easy political labelling. Antje Vollmer, Vice-president of the German Bundestag and member of the more leftist Green Party in Germany, for example, sided in her book *Heißer Frieden* from 1995 with Enzensberger (cf. Palaver 1995b). She underlines many insights of Enzensberger but helps us at the same time to go beyond Enzensberger, where he remains too close to Hegel's ontology of violence and its claim that human beings are violent by nature. Vollmer refers among Hannah Arendt and Mahatma Gandhi to René Girard's mimetic theory to understand our world of civil wars (Vollmer 109-115). In my next chapter I will give a short introduction into this theory (cf. Dumouchel).

## 2. René Girard's Mimetic Theory

René Girard's mimetic theory is in many ways close to Enzensberger's observations on current civil wars without, however, giving in to an ontology of violence. Furthermore, Girard's theory helps to explain the Hegelian desire for recognition as a special case of the mimetic hypothesis (cf. Girard 1987, 320f). His anthropology is broad enough to encompass Hegel's insights without siding with the German philosopher's assumption that human beings are necessarily violent. Mimetic theory consists mainly of three parts.

### Mimetic Desire

The first part of Girard's theory deals with mimetic desire as a basic anthropological dimension. Girard's starting point is the fact that human beings are characterized by mutual imitation. Unlike Plato and more or less the whole philosophical tradition that follows, Girard does not limit imitation to representational forms like behavior, manner or forms of speaking but emphasizes the role of imitation in connection with acquisitive desire. To emphasize this connection between desire and imitation he uses the Greek word for imitation: *mimesis*. According to Girard, human beings are strongly influenced by mimetic or borrowed desire. The desire of human beings does not aim at a definite and original object but follows the desire of others. Mimesis can easily be observed in the behavior of children or among adults if we look at fashion or advertisement. As long as our mimetic desire is oriented towards non-exclusive goods like learning a language, imitation is peaceful and productive. But if the access to an object is exclusive (social positions, sexual objects, etc.) the inevitable result of imitation is rivalry, conflict and violence. The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes described the logical result of mimetic rivalry for exclusive objects most clearly:

"If any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their End, ... endeavour to destroy, or subdue one an other." (Hobbes 1991, 87)

Imitation is the driving force of rivalry causing it to grow, often leading to violence. This violence is also imitated and comes to dominate increasingly the relationship of the rivals. The more the conflict escalates the less important the object becomes until it disappears entirely. The antagonists instead focus their attention and energy against each other and are drawn into a fight to the death. This stage is the starting point of Hegel. His anthropology views men as being borne to fight a war for recognition, which will last until men will be transformed into peaceful animals or plants at the end of history.<sup>1</sup> Francis Fukuyama made recently clear that neuropharmacology (Ritalin and Prozac) and biotechnology could even help us to arrive sooner at this stage of civilization (Fukuyama 1999).

### **The Scapegoat Mechanism**

The second part of mimetic theory proposes the hypothesis that religion and culture originate in the scapegoat mechanism. According to Girard, the beginnings of human civilization had no cultural or social institutions to keep mimetic rivalry in check. The natural outcome was a general crisis because all were drawn into rivalries and violence. Hobbes's description of the state of nature

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fukuyama's references to Alexandre Kojève's description of the end of history: "The disappearance of Man at the end of History, therefore, is not a cosmic catastrophe: the natural World remains what it has been from all eternity. And therefore, it is not a biological catastrophe either: Man remains alive as animal in *harmony* with Nature or given Being. What disappears is Man properly so-called—that is, Action negating the given, and Error, or in general, the Subject *opposed* to the Object." (Kojève 158f; cf. Fukuyama 1993, 310f) – "If Man becomes an animal again, his arts, his loves, his play must also become purely natural again. Hence it would have to be admitted that after the end of history, men would construct their edifices and works of art as birds built their nests and spiders spin their webs, would perform musical concerts after the fashion of frogs and cicadas, would play like young animals, and would indulge in love like adult beasts." (Kojève 159; cf. Fukuyama 1993, 387)

is very similar to Girard's account of this crisis at the dawn of human civilization.<sup>2</sup> He writes:

"During the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man." (Hobbes 1991, 88)

Without a solution to this war of all against all, human beings would have disappeared entirely because, unlike other mammals, no instinctive brakes or dominance patterns prevent them from destroying themselves. But according to Girard, mimesis—the source of the crisis—also helps to overcome a violent chaos. At the height of the crisis when all are drawn into violent rivalries and all objects have disappeared, mimesis can unify because all objects that created disunity have been replaced by hatred and violence between antagonists. Unlike exclusive objects, violence against a rival can be shared. Whereas mimetic desire in its acquisitive mode causes "disunity among those who cannot possess their common object *together*", it is its antagonistic mode—a highly increased form of mimetic rivalry in which violence between the opponents has been substituted for all concrete objects—that creates "solidarity among those who can fight the same enemy *together*" (Girard 1991, 186; cf. 1987, 26). The arbitrary blow of one of the rivals against another can fascinate others to such a degree that they imitate this deed and join in striking the momentarily weaker individual. The war of all against all suddenly becomes a war of all against one. The single victim is expelled or killed. Girard calls this unconscious, collective deed the *scapegoat mechanism*.

The expelled or killed scapegoat is seen by the lynchers in two ways. He is made fully responsible for the crisis; therefore, he is an absolute evil that must be expelled. But the sudden peace and the reconciliation that result among the lynchers is also attributed to the scapegoat. He or she is seen as both absolute evil and absolute good at the same time. This strange experience of badness and

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<sup>2</sup> There, however, is also an important difference between Hobbes and Girard. Hobbes views natural men as being prone to war, whereas Girard follows an Augustinian anthropology that attributes all violence at the origin of human civilization to original sin and therefore to fallen men. On Hobbes's fundamental break with Augustinian Christianity, see Voegelin 1987; 1999, 59-72.

goodness at the same time is the primitive religious experience. The latin root of the word sacred *sacer* originally meant something that is both cursed and blessed at the same time. The victim is sacralized and deified. He or she becomes a god.

According to Girard the scapegoat mechanism is the origin of religion and culture. All the central elements of religion and culture (myths, rites, prohibitions and social differentiations) become intelligible if seen in the relation to the scapegoat mechanism. Let us focus, for instance, on the origin of cultural and social differentiations. By transferring the violence of the group to the outside—to the victim—the differentiation of space is created. Because of the sacralization of the victim this distinction is at the same time also the distinction between the sacred and the profane. The victim belongs to the sacred, the group is the realm of the profane. The scapegoat mechanism also produces the order of time. The death of the victim is the decisive moment: it separates between "before" that is the time of the crisis and "after" that is the time of peace and order. The same is true for moral distinctions. During the crisis there was no good and bad, no truth and no falsity. The scapegoat mechanism overcomes this uncertainty: the victim is guilty, the others are innocent. All the social distinctions like ranks, hierarchy, relationships of subordination are based on these elementary differentiations. Their main function is to prevent a further outbreak of a mimetic crisis. Social differentiations channel mimesis in a way that makes rivalries less likely.

### **The Judeo-Christian Bible**

The third part of mimetic theory focuses on the Bible and claims that this text parts significantly from myths rooted in the scapegoat mechanism. Girard was able to demonstrate that myths and rituals of different cultures and epochs can easily be explained with his theory. When he turned to biblical texts, however, he discovered that the main passages are not like archaic myths telling the story of a collective murder from the perspective of the lynchers but side with the victim and expose the violence of the persecutors. Penitential psalms, the dialogues in the book of Job, passages in the writing prophets - especially the Suffering Servant of Yahweh in Second Isaiah - tell us about the collective violence against

an innocent victim. The climax in the Bible are the passion narratives in the New Testament. Like mythical texts these narratives talk about collective violence against a single individual. Unlike myths they do not side with the persecutors, but reveal the innocence of the scapegoat Jesus. From a Girardian point of view Christianity is therefore very different from religion as such. It is not rooted in the scapegoat mechanism but exposes it.

Girard's discovery of the uniqueness of biblical texts in their ability to overcome the mythical patterns did not lead him to a blind and apologetic justification of Christian history. Historical Christianity did not see the true insight of the biblical texts and interpreted these passages in the light of older sacrificial myths. The death of Jesus was explained like a sacrifice in other religions. The unique insight that Jesus was the innocent victim of the people was lost. Human violence was projected onto the father of Jesus. Human beings were again able to disguise their own violence and feel innocent. This sacrificial reading of the texts enabled Christianity to found a culture that was not very different from cultures rooted in the scapegoat mechanism.

In the long run, however, the biblical message could not be suppressed and exposed more and more the violent and sacrificial elements of culture. Thereby it has slowly undermined all the sacrificial brakes against human violence and rivalry. Over a long period of time Christianity has led to a global mimetic crises with all its dangers of violence and bloodshed. Jesus referred to our world when he said that he has not "come to bring peace, but a sword" (Mt 10:34). As a first reaction one would think that the old sacrificial order must be restored to prevent such an outbreak of violence. Like Dostoevsky at his best, Girard, however, knows that a return to the old constraints is not possible without the creation of a most appalling tyranny (Girard 1978, 82; 1987, 286; 1991, 282). According to Girard, humanity is therefore forced to follow the way of the Sermon on the Mount if it does not want to disappear completely. "The definitive renunciation of violence ... will become for us the condition *sine qua non* for the survival of humanity itself." (Girard 1987, 137; cf. 258; 1994, 126) Again we have to rely on mimesis. It requires according to Girard a good mimesis that takes Jesus Christi as a model who himself imitates his nonviolent father. The heavenly father who "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the



righteous and on the unrighteous" (Mt 5:45) calls us to give up violence and love even our enemies.

### 3. Competition, Masochism, Sadism

Christianity caused the breakdown of all those social differentiations - like feudal hierarchies - that helped to keep mimetic desire in check.<sup>3</sup> Our world is therefore a much more egalitarian world that is, however, also characterized by an increase of competition and rivalry. In a world of equality mimetic desire can flow without restraints. Thomas Hobbes was one of the first thinkers who became aware how the modern world equals a race in which everyone tries to be "foremost" (Hobbes 1994, 59; cf. Palaver 1995a, 57-59). "Continually to out-go the next before" is according to Hobbes "felicity" and "to forsake the course is to die" (Hobbes 1994, 60). Mimetic desire makes an egalitarian world much more dangerous than a society governed by social differentiations. Hobbes did not hesitate to mention the deadly consequences of equality. Contrary to many of his predecessors in the Western world, Hobbes acknowledged that all human beings are equal by nature. He, however, adds that this natural equality gives us also the ability to kill one another (Hobbes 1991, 87). Two hundred years after Hobbes, the French historian Alexis de Tocqueville mentioned the dangers coming along with equality, too. Like Hobbes, he refers to the increase of mimetic desire coming along with equality:

"When all the privileges of birth and fortune are abolished, when all professions are accessible to all, and a man's own energies may place him at the top of any one of them, an easy and unbound career seems open to his ambition and he will readily persuade himself that he is borne to no common destinies. But this is an erroneous notion, which is corrected by daily experience. The same equality that allows every citizen to conceive these lofty hopes renders all the citizens less able to realize them; it circumscribes their powers on every side, while it gives freer scope to their desires. Not only are they themselves powerless, but they are met at every step by immense obstacles, which they did not first perceive. They

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<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche's critique of Christianity refers to its influence on the rise of equality: "Equality of souls before God", this falsehood, this *pretext* for the *rancune* of all the base-minded, this explosive concept which finally became revolution, modern idea and the principle of the decline of the entire social order - is *Christian dynamite*." (Nietzsche, *Antichrist* No. 62)

have swept away the privileges of some of their fellow creatures which stood in their way, but they have opened the door to universal competition; the barrier has changed its shape rather than its position. When men are nearly alike and all follow the same track, it is very difficult for any one individual to walk quickly and cleave a way through the dense throng that surrounds and presses on him. This constant strife between the inclination springing from the equality of condition and the means it supplies to satisfy them harasses and wearies the mind. ... The desire of equality always becomes more insatiable in proportion as equality is more complete. Among democratic nations, men easily attain a certain equality of condition, but they can never attain as much as they desire." (Tocqueville 137f; cf. Girard 1965, 120)

According to Tocqueville, these counterproductive consequences of equality often cause a "strange melancholy" and a "disgust at life" (Tocqueville 139) in democratic countries, which may lead to an increase of suicides or of insanity. It also contributes to an increase of violence in our contemporary world. Both, Enzensberger and Vollmer, who have recently focused on our world of civil wars mention the nexus between equality and competition leading to violence (Enzensberger 1994, 38f; Vollmer 80).

Girard's mimetic theory helps us to explain the rise of violence in egalitarian and competitive societies. The more our pride and ambition forces us to be foremost the more likely it becomes that we will be defeated. Trying to be ahead of all the others forces us to turn them all into our rivals. We are never satisfied as long as there is anyone in front of us. Mimetic rivalry leads us to run those races which we cannot win and directs us towards insurmountable obstacles. The more we try to succeed the more we will increase the resistance against our claim. Resistance soon becomes the object of our quest itself and will lead to an idolization of violence (Girard 1987, 330f). If only those objects are worth to fight for which we cannot get, we are easily led to the fatal conclusion that violence is the true God of the world. We seek defeat because it brings us closer to this God and we will also use violence ourselves because by imitating this God we hope we soon can become his equal. Mimetic desire has a tendency

to fetishize violence and it would not be wrong to conclude that all anthropological and philosophical theories that result in an ontology of violence - like Hegel dialectics - are in fact worshipping this false God. Psychology has labeled the seeking of violent defeat masochism and its aggressive counterpart sadism. Mimetic theory broadens that view significantly (cf. Girard 1965, 176-192; 1987, 326-335). In Girard's view, there is no masochism in the sense that human beings directly seek defeat and suffering but only a form of pseudo-masochism, which results from mimetic desire after all its models have turned into obstacles. The same is true for sadism. Girard dismisses all concepts claiming an intrinsic tendency of human beings towards violence. From a mimetic point of view, sadism or better pseudo-sadism is nothing but the imitation of the hostile model that has turned into an obstacle. Despite the fact that the familiar term to combine these two tendencies is "sado-masochism" Girard's theory suggests to change the order underlying this term. Pseudo-masochism comes therefore first because it is the immediate outcome of the endeavor to be on top and invites all the others to become obstacles. Pseudo-sadism belongs to an advanced stage where a pseudo-masochist who has become a worshiper of violence because of his futile attempts to outdo unbeatable rivals starts to emulate his models that have blocked the way to his success.

### **Dostoevsky's Underground Hero**

In order to make these theoretical reflections more understandable I will turn to Dostoevsky's work because it was literature that made Girard's theory possible. Several characters in the novels of the Russian writer can help us to illustrate the connection between competition, pseudo-masochism and pseudo-sadism. One of the most important figures in this regard is the antihero in Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*. Like Hobbes's man in general, the underground hero is characterized by an "boundless vanity" (Dostoevsky 1991a, 45, 51) who always wants to be foremost:

"I could not understand secondary roles and that was the reason why in reality I very often took the most insignificant one. Either a hero, or mud, and there was nothing in between." (57)

Because of his proud attempt to conquer all he became in reality the puppet of all the others—of his office colleagues who are his models and obstacles at the same time—always in fear to be ridiculed:

"Needless to say, I detested all our office clerks, from the first to the last, and I despised them all, although I was somehow afraid of them as well. All of a sudden I would regard them as superior to myself. It would somehow happen so suddenly that at one minute I would find myself despising them and the next esteeming them superior to myself. A cultured and respectable person cannot be vain without making boundless demands on himself and without at various moments despising himself to the point of hatred. But whether or not I despised them or looked on them as superior to myself, at practically every encounter I lowered my eyes. I even made some experiments: I would try to out-stare someone who was looking at me, but I was always the first to give in. This drove me wild with annoyance. I also made myself ill with fear of seeming ridiculous." (Dostoevsky 1991a, 46; cf. 51f; Girard 1997, 60)

Dostoevsky's underground hero is despite his claim for victory someone who always feels humiliated by all the others. "I am alone, and they are *everybody*" (47; cf. Girard 1965, 260) is his motto. Several scenes of the novel show his pseudo-masochistic attempt to gain recognition from those who despise him. It is always the other who gets all his attention and who necessarily defeats him in his futile attempt to become the alpha male. There is a scene in which the underground hero tries to be invited to a banquet which his schoolfellows prepare for a certain Zverkov. Although he feels genuine contempt for all these people he tries very hard to get an invitation to this banquet after he realizes that nobody wants to invite him. His efforts were successful but he behaved ridiculous at the party and felt even more humiliated than before. It is after this defeat at the party

that he turns into a pseudo-sadist and tortures Liza, a prostitute he meets. Girard uses this example to underline his general thesis on the relationship between masochism and sadism:

"After the banquet at which he has degraded and humiliated himself, where he thought he was tormented by petty persecutors, the underground man actually tortures the unfortunate prostitute who falls into his hands. He imitates what he thinks was the conduct of Zverkov's crew toward him; he aspires to the divinity with which in his anguish he has clothed his petty fellow-actors in the previous scenes. The sequence of episodes in *Notes from the Underground* is of some importance. First comes the banquet then the scene with the prostitute." (Girard 1965, 185f)

### **Kolya Krassotkin**

In Dostoevsky's famous novel *The Brothers Karamazov* we can find another character who is very similar to the underground hero. It is Kolya Krassotkin, a thirteen year old schoolboy, who represents—judging on his appearance—the incarnation of coolness in our contemporary meaning. He behaves like a little tyrant and tries to bring his class-mates and school-friends all under his control. Many of them see him as their god. Even his mother has to obey his rules. Like the underground hero, he is also "extremely vain" (Dostoevsky 1991b, 516 [X.1]) and always wants to be the first. Despite the fact that he is much more successful than the underground hero, however, he is often as unhappy as the former. In a conversation with Alyosha Karamazov he reveals his true inner self with its anxiety of being ridiculed and its high potential for violence and destruction:

"'Oh, Karamazov, I'm profoundly unhappy. Sometimes I imagine God knows what, that everyone is laughing at me, the whole world, and then I ... then I'm quite ready to destroy the whole order of things.'

'And you torment the people around you,' Alyosha smiled.

'And I torment the people around me, especially my mother. Tell me, Karamazov, am I very ridiculous now?'" (Dostoevsky 1991b, 557 (X.6))

This example underlines again the problem of vanity and pride in a world of competition that easily results in violence.

#### 4. Overcoming Violence?

What are the possible answers to human violence coming from mimetic desire? We can start with Hobbes, one of the first philosophers who observed the modern political problem of vanity and pride. His answer was an absolutist state that prevents the outbreak of violence by its strong rule and its ability to channel enmity to the outside. When Hobbes named his state *Leviathan* he wanted to make it explicit that proud and vain people are in need of such a concept of state:

"Hitherto I have set forth the nature of Man, (whose Pride and other Passions have compelled him to submit himselfe to Government;) together with the great power of his Governour, whom I compared to *Leviathan*, taking that comparison out of the two last verses of the one and fortieth of *Job*; where God, having set forth the great power of *Leviathan*, calleth him King of the Proud. *There is nothing*, saith he, *on earth, to be compared with him. He is made so as not to be afraid. He seeth every high thing below him; and is King of all the children of pride.*" (Hobbes 1991, 220f)

In our age of globalization we do not really believe any longer in a Hobbesian type of politics. We are justly suspicious of strong states and of friend-enemy-distinction between states or blocs.<sup>4</sup> Therefore many of us hope for a smoother solution like the pharmacologically and biotechnologically supported end of history envisioned by Francis Fukuyama. He gives a foretaste of this kind of solution when he refers to the reduction of violence caused by Ritalin, a drug that is used by three million children in the United States today:

"There are any number of cases where severely disruptive, violent or aggressive children have been effectively sedated with Ritalin and integrated back into classrooms." (Fukuyama 1999, 30)

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<sup>4</sup> Hobbes's political philosophy does not really overcome the problem of pride. It only transfers it from the individual to the commonwealth and leads therefore to wars between nations (Cf. Voegelin 1999, 69f).



One could just wonder how Ritalin would have made Kolya Krassotkin a nice and conformist little boy. It is a sign of intellectual courage that Fukuyama does not hesitate to refer to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* in his discussion of the effects of Ritalin: "Stories of Ritalin's effects often make it seem like the drug soma administered to the citizens of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* to make them passive and conformist." (30) Indeed, Huxley's description of soma fits perfectly well to describe the ethical effects of a pharmacologically and biotechnologically produced end of history:

"There's always *soma* to calm your anger, to reconcile you to your enemies, to make you patient and long-suffering. In the past you could only accomplish these things by making a great effort and after years of hard moral training. Now, you swallow two or three half-gramme tablets, and there you are. Anybody can be virtuous now. You can carry at least half your morality about in a bottle. Christianity without tears—that's what *soma* is." (Huxley 244)

Maybe a brave new world is better than a world governed by traditional forms of power politics. As Huxley's anti-utopian novel, however, makes perfectly clear, a brave new world has its price, too. In the end it will mean nothing but the abolishment of "human beings as such" (Fukuyama 1999, 33).

Is there another possible solution? Yes! I think that Dostoevsky referred to it in his portrait of Alyosha Karamazov. The youngest of the Karamazov brothers is in many ways an alternative to the underground hero or to Kolya Krassotkin. Whereas they are moved by vanity and pride to occupy the best seats, Alyosha does not take part in this kind of race. "He never wanted to show off in front of his peers." (Dostoevsky 1991b, 20 [I.4]) - "He was always among the best of his class in his studies, but was never the first." (Ibid.) Alyosha is humble and free of pride. His humility, for instance, enables Kolya to confess his anxieties and make an important step beyond his aggressive feelings. It is worth to focus closely on Alyosha's answer to Kolya's confession. He comforts Kolya

by telling him that his anxieties of being ridiculed are shared by many others and even dares to identify this dangerous kind of vanity with the devil itself:

"But don't think about it, don't think about it at all!" Alyosha exclaimed. 'And what does it mean—ridiculous? What does it matter how many times a man is or seems to be ridiculous? Besides, nowadays almost all capable people are terribly afraid of being ridiculous, and are miserable because of it. I'm only surprised that you've begun to feel it so early, though, by the way, I've been noticing it for a long time, and not in you alone. Nowadays even children almost are already beginning to suffer from it. It's almost a madness. The devil has incarnated himself in this vanity and crept into a whole generation—precisely the devil,' Alyosha added, not smiling at all, as Kolya, who was looking at him intently, thought for a moment. 'You are like everyone else,' Alyosha concluded, 'that is, like a great many others, only you must not be like everyone else, that's what.' (Dostoevsky 1991b, 557 [X.6])

Alyosha's allusion to the devil does not mean that we have to believe in outdated religious concepts to address the problem of human violence. Satan or the devil is just another name for mimetic desire in its bad, conflictual form. Traditionally Satan and pride were identified. He is the false god we are worshiping if we are driven by mimetic desire into futile but deadly conflicts for nothing. In this sense the underground hero and Kolya are following a satanic pattern. Alyosha, on the contrary, is characterized by his humility. He too, is not an autonomous person who acts out of his own but is also moved by mimetic desire. The difference, however, is that he has chosen Jesus Christ as his model. Dostoevsky's novels explain what mimetic theory and Christianity is all about. It is the distinction between a humble imitation of God through Jesus Christ and a perverse imitation of God that remains satanic and prideful (Girard 1997, 105; 1996, 64, 197f, 215, 290f). Whereas the first type of imitation is non-violent the second type is violently leading towards destruction (Girard 1987, 430).

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