ONTOLOGIES OF VIOLENCE:
JACQUES DERRIDA, MENNONITE PACIFIST EPISTEMOLOGY,
AND GRACE M. JANTZEN'S *DEATH AND THE DISPLACEMENT OF BEAUTY*

Ontologies of Violence:
Jacques Derrida, Mennonite Pacifist Epistemology,
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By Maxwell Stephen Kennel,
B.A., M.T.S.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

McMaster University DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (2021) Hamilton, Ontario, Canada (Religious Studies).

TITLE: "Ontologies of Violence: Jacques Derrida, Mennonite Pacifist Epistemology, and Grace M. Jantzen's *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*."

AUTHOR: Maxwell Stephen Kennel, B.A. (University of Waterloo), M.T.S. (University of Waterloo and Conrad Grebel University College).

NUMBER OF PAGES: 300 pp.

COMMITTEE: Dr. P. Travis Kroeker (supervisor), Dr. Dana Hollander, Dr. Morny Joy (University of Calgary), and Dr. Dawne McCance (external examiner, University of Manitoba).

Lay Abstract

This dissertation examines the early work of French philosopher Jacques Derrida (Chapter 1), debates between Mennonite philosophical theologians and John Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy (Chapter 2), and the *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* trilogy by feminist philosopher of religion Grace M. Jantzen (Chapter 3). For Derrida, Jantzen, and certain Mennonite philosophical theologians the term "violence" is used to name ways of thinking, knowing, and speaking, rather than being restricted to the sphere of physical violations. This dissertation shows how these three sources each consider violence to be something that can inhere in ways of thinking about the world and our relation to it.

Abstract

This dissertation critically examines the ontological and epistemological significance of the concept of violence in French philosopher Jacques Derrida's essay "Violence and Metaphysics" (Chapter 1), dialogues between Mennonite philosophical theologians who represent the Radical Reformation and John Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy (Chapter 2), and the *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* trilogy by feminist philosopher of religion Grace Jantzen (Chapter 3).

　　　Although Derrida, Jantzen, and certain Mennonite philosophical theologians approach the problem of violence with very different concerns and frames of reference, each understand violence to have a distinctly ontological and epistemological character, while also suggesting that ontology and epistemology themselves are profoundly vulnerable to charges of violence. In Derrida's essay "Violence and Metaphysics" language itself is imbricated in violence, and in their responses to John Milbank, Mennonite philosophical theologians Peter C. Blum and Chris K. Huebner situate their work both with and against Derrida's supposed "ontology of violence" as they apply Christian pacifism to epistemology and seek to articulate an "ontology of peace." In her late work in the *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* project, Grace Jantzen develops an epistemology that is similar to that of Blum and Huebner, while critiquing what she understands to be Derrida's equivocation of linguistic with physical violence, all as part of her argument that the cultural habitus of the west is founded on an obsession with death that violently displaces natality with mortality.

　　　In bringing together these three sources, this dissertation uses "violence" as a diagnostic concept to assess the priorities and values of its users. Considering violence to be defined by the violation of value-laden boundaries, this study of three ontologies of violence interprets and critiques the values that Derrida's deconstruction, philosophical Mennonite pacifism, and Jantzen's critique of displacement seek to further and protect against violation.

Acknowledgments

Although words fail, I want to begin by thanking my supervisor Travis Kroeker, not only for treating my dissertation with attention and care, but for reaching out to me before I began my degree and affirming this project (which I had nearly given up on). I am so grateful that Travis showed up when he did and walked me through my degree with supportive conversations, late-night emails, and challenging seminar discussions. The various comments, suggestions, and critiques provided by my committee were also of great help to me as I developed (and continue to develop) this dissertation. I am grateful to Dana Hollander for her close attention to detail, to Morny Joy for her insights into the work of Grace M. Jantzen, and to my external examiner Dawne McCance for her important questions about the framing of the dissertation. Each contributed to an enjoyable and thought-provoking defense that continues to inspire me.

Throughout my degree the Religious Studies department at McMaster provided a unique home for my interdisciplinary interests, and I am grateful that I could study Augustine, Plato, Nietzsche, Jewish philosophy, methodology, Mennonites, political theology, and the philosophy of religion, all under its generous and pluralistic auspices. I am especially grateful to Dan Machiela, Mark Rowe, and Philippa Carter for the opportunities they afforded me. I am also thankful for my colleagues Zac Klassen, Gerald Ens, Jeremy Cohen, Matthew Lee, Jonas Brandt, Anna Phipps-Burton, Rachel Matheson, and Rob Jones, who each provided humor, insight, and conversation at key moments. I want to further acknowledge and thank Kyle Gingerich Hiebert and the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre for providing a forum for my work in 2017/2019.

This dissertation was written in many places, and for the dear friends who made those places feel like home I can never be thankful enough. Tyler and Chalsi Campbell (Dayton), Jess del Rosso (Waterloo), Seija Grant, Liz and Michael Foo, Jorian van den Helm and Carlyn Hopkins (Toronto), Faith and Amos Shelley (Hanover), Jenn Neufeld and Rachael Lake (Guelph), and the members of the Niagara Anabaptist colloquium (especially Mike Driedger!) – each made my life so much better as I was reading, writing, and thinking. May there be many more conversations to come!

Several people intervened at key moments to make the continuation of my degree possible by providing me with employment and material aid, most importantly Mary Lapp, Chuck Roth, and Joe Dumering. Without their help I would not have been able to finish my degree, and words cannot express my gratitude for their generosity.

I am deeply thankful for the support that my parents Steve and Shirley, and my brother Reid, have shown me on the long road that led to the completion of this degree. Without our conversations around the dinner table about politics, religion, culture, and media, I would not have found or stayed with my love for this work. Thank you for supporting me and providing a home for us during our perpetual periods of interregnum. However, human beings can only do so much, and so I thank Atlas and Luna for their reassuring creaturely presence during long hours of writing. But most of all, these pages are dedicated to Amy, who – amidst many ordeals on a long and winding path – waited impatiently with me and shared so many therapeutic insights in our conversations about everything that these pages can only gesture toward. *uxori omnia mea*

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INTRODUCTION

Outline

This dissertation critically examines the ontological and epistemological significance of the concept of violence in French philosopher Jacques Derrida's essay "Violence and Metaphysics," in dialogues between Anglican theologian John Milbank and Mennonite philosophical theologians Chris K. Huebner and Peter C. Blum, and in the *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* trilogy by feminist philosopher of religion Grace M. Jantzen. Although Derrida, the Mennonites, and Jantzen use the term "violence" within different academic disciplines and with different priorities, each understands violence to refer to something that has a distinctly ontological and epistemological character. In their work, violence not only names physical violations of the body such as murder or war, but also describes ontological terms like "Being" and "essence," historical terms like "origin" and "telos," and uses of persuasive force or rhetorical coercion in the domains of thinking, knowing, and speaking.

What makes these three sources unique and justifies bringing them together for comparative study is that Derrida, certain Mennonite philosophical theologians, and Jantzen each consider violence to be an ontological and epistemological problem. Rather than using the term "violence" to name only physical and material phenomena, each consider ontological and epistemological terms to be profoundly vulnerable to charges of violence. Each respond – implicitly and explicitly – to ontological questions like "do we live in a violent world?" or "is the world violently ordered?" and epistemological questions like "can we know without violence?" or "can we use language, categories, and narratives without violence?" Because these questions are at issue for them, Derrida, certain Mennonite philosophical theologians, and Jantzen, consider the problem of violence to be deeply connected with how we think about the world and

narrate our relation to it. Following an introduction that surveys major works on the concept of violence and outlines my methodological approach, this dissertation examines connections between violence, ontology, and epistemology in each of its three sources. Before proceeding, however, I will briefly introduce these three sources and highlight their major connections.

In Derrida's long essay on Emmanuel Lévinas, "Violence and Metaphysics," language and categorization are imbricated in a certain kind of violence. For Derrida, language – specifically predication (when one says one thing of another, joining subject and predicate) – is part of the original violence that prevents Lévinas from achieving the peaceful face to face relation that he seeks. Throughout "Violence and Metaphysics" Derrida entangles his voice with Lévinas' and makes declarative statements about violence such as "violence did not exist before the possibility of speech" and "predication is the first violence."[1] Although Derrida often rephrases Lévinas' ideas without clearly distinguishing between what he thinks is the case and what Lévinas asserts – a problem that I address in Chapter 1 – it is clear that a constituent part of Derrida's challenge to Lévinas is the notion that language cannot be wholly free from violence.

That violence inheres in language is a complex matter for Derrida, but his critics and interpreters take up and use this idea in ways that do not always reflect the complexity of his work. In the Mennonite engagement with Radical Orthodoxy, philosophical theologians Blum and Huebner situate their work in relation to an "ontology of violence" that their mutual interlocutor John Milbank attributes to Derrida. Amidst exchanges between Milbank's "Radical Orthodoxy" and representatives of a "Radical Reformation" position in the 2000s and 2010s, Huebner outlines a "pacifist epistemology" that understands peace to be something precarious,

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[1] Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Lévinas," in *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 117, 147.

and Blum challenges Milbank's radically orthodox "ontology of peace" by suggesting (with Derrida) that pure nonviolence is impossible. Although Blum argues that we cannot be without violence, his response to Milbank mediates between a normative call to say "no" to violence and a descriptive acknowledgement of the presence of violence in the world.

In their responses to Radical Orthodoxy, Huebner and Blum position their Mennonite pacifist epistemology and ontological peace both with and against Milbank's "ontological peace." In Chapter 2 I show how the Radical Reformation perspective of Huebner and Blum is much more profoundly at odds with Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy than it first appears to be, and I provide a clarified assessment of the place of violence in the ontologies of peace put forth by Milbank, Huebner, and Blum. I conclude Chapter 2 by turning to the problem of displacement, which I argue is a structural aspect of the oppositional ways of thinking that Derrida and certain Mennonite philosophical theologians similarly challenge, and one that is clarified by Jantzen.

In Chapter 3 I critically examine the work of feminist philosopher of religion Grace M. Jantzen, who argues in her three-volume *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* project that the cultural habitus of the west is founded on an obsession with death and mortality that violently displaces beauty and natality. Although she left the Mennonite church early in her life and spent her later career as a Quaker, Jantzen's work shows significant affinities with the Mennonite critique of violence, especially in her final book *A Place of Springs*. Jantzen provides a feminist challenge and complement to the Mennonite critique of violence and pursuit of peace and justice while also resisting several of Derrida's key statements in "Violence and Metaphysics."

In the second volume of her trilogy, *Violence to Eternity*, Jantzen critiques Derrida because she is concerned that locating violence within language robs the term "violence" of its

ability to distinguish between "the force of an argument and the force of a bomb."[2] Jantzen shares Derrida's concern for the violent potential of language, and she challenges ways of thinking about violence and language that curtail the possibilities of newness, birth, and peace through claims such as "everything is violent," "creation is violent," or "boundaries are violent."[3] Chapter 3 will locate Jantzen's critique of violence within her larger counternarrative of the history of the west, and show how her critique of violence is accompanied by a critique of displacement that refuses to make competitive and antagonistic terms normative.

The main goals of this dissertation are (1) to show how Derrida, the Mennonites, and Jantzen each consider violence to be a uniquely ontological and epistemological problem by tracing this affinity throughout their works, and (2) to argue that the concept of displacement clarifies the ontologies of violence set forth by Derrida, Jantzen, and the Mennonites, because it clearly names the assumption that particular terms, propositions, or ideas will *necessarily* be in relations of enmity, antagonism, and competition with each other.

In order to show how Derrida, the Mennonites, and Jantzen share similar concerns for violence as an ontological and epistemological problem, I argue that they each use the term "violence" in ways that reflect similar desires to resist closure and totalization, and similar values of openness. Methodologically, I consider violence to be a diagnostic concept that reflects the values of its users. By asking what exactly users of the term "violence" consider violation to be, I identify the underlying values and corresponding boundaries that each thinker attempts to protect

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[2] Grace M. Jantzen, *Violence to Eternity: Death and the Displacement of Beauty*. Volume II. Ed. Jeremy Carrette and Morny Joy (London: Routledge, 2009), 18.

[3] Ibid, Ch. 1.

against violation. I develop this way of analyzing violence in detail in the rest of the introduction below, but here I will outline my approach in brief.

For Derrida, certain Mennonite philosophical theologians, and Jantzen, the term "violence" reflects underlying values. As I will show, common to Derrida's deconstruction, philosophical expressions of Mennonite pacifism, and Jantzen's critique of the violent displacement of natality by mortality, is a similar desire to keep things open and resist closure: (1) Derrida uses the term "violence" to condemn philosophical totalization and protect against the closure of language, problems, questions, discourse, difference, the other, and the future; (2) Mennonite philosophical theologians use the term "violence" to condemn the use of force and coercion in discourse and develop a Christian vision of peace that is precarious and impossible rather than secured and certain; and (3) Jantzen uses the term "violence" to resist the competitive displacement of beauty and natality by death and mortality, positing instead a positive vision of flourishing and sociality, rooted in natality, creativity, and birth. For each source, violence is not only an ontological and epistemological problem, but this problem presents itself in conceptual movements and rhetorical gestures of closure and totalization.

In addition to having similar priorities – as evidenced by their value-laden use of the term "violence" and shared values of openness – Derrida, Mennonite philosophical theologians, and Jantzen also employ similar means toward the aim of openness: (1) Derrida's desire for openness resists the "either-or" enclosures of classical philosophical oppositions by means of a "neither-nor" negation; (2) Mennonites philosophical theologians attempt to keep open the possibility of peace by theorizing its precarious and impossible character, by trying to hold knowledge without imperialistic or colonial desires to possess and control, and by mediating between or exceeding "either-or" thinking through various historiographical and theological mediations ("neither

Catholic nor Protestant," "both Catholic and Protestant," "middle-ways," "third-ways"); and (3) Jantzen articulates a creative vision of human flourishing that seeks to move beyond the logic of displacement wherein mortality and death necessarily and violently displace natality and birth.

By critically illuminating the remarkably similar priorities and means shared by Derrida, Jantzen, and certain Mennonite philosophical theologians, I demonstrate how the discourse on the ontology and epistemology of violence in their work can contribute to a greater understanding of the broader social and political problems of violence. Following a detailed account of how violence figures in the works of Derrida, select Mennonite philosophical theologians, and Jantzen, I conclude by showing how deconstruction and pacifism are both challenged and clarified by Jantzen's unique approach to the problems of displacement. By following Derrida's use of deconstructive "neither-nor" thinking against philosophical oppositions, the Mennonite attempt to hold knowledge peacefully outside of the bounds of either passivity or violent action, and Jantzen's non-displacing way of refocusing attention on natality rather than mortality, I conclude by pointing to how each source challenges the notion that the world is essentially a violent place in which things will necessarily exist at the expense of other things and boundaries will inevitably be violated by antagonistic displacements.

Before proceeding to a detailed analysis of my sources in the three chapters below, the rest of this introduction will survey several major works that conceptualize violence in ontological and epistemological ways, while further developing the notion that violence is helpfully defined by the violation of boundaries and can therefore serve as a useful diagnostic concept for assessing the values and priorities of both its users and critics.

What is Violence?

This dissertation is about violence – not understood herein as a term that has an essential meaning or definition that could be discovered and then preserved or critiqued, but as a term that loosely names a constellation of social and political problems that cause pain, suffering, injury, harm, and death. At the beginning of her book *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, Adriana Cavarero writes that "While violence against the helpless is becoming global in ever more ferocious forms, language proves unable to renew itself to name it; indeed, it tends to mask it."[4] While the rest of *Horrorism* explores hidden vocabularies of violence by examining terms like terror and war, Cavarero's insight in this part of her multifaceted work is that we do not have adequate terms at our immediate disposal to pinpoint what the term "violence" attempts to name. Violence points toward acts that initially seem easy to identify, but the term also names ontological and epistemological challenges, not least because violence is committed and judged by means of thinking and speaking. While considering the difficulty of naming and judging violence, this dissertation traces specialized uses of the term in order to critically examine the values of those who use it in ontologically and epistemologically saturated ways.

At stake in this dissertation is the question: what kinds of continuities and discontinuities between ontological and epistemological ideas about the world and how we have knowledge of it, and acts of physical and corporeal violence that pierce flesh or bring a life to an end, form the basis for the concept of violence? Put differently, this key question is: how are ontological claims that construe relations between things in the world as essentially violent, and epistemological

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[4] Adrianna Cavarero, *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*. Trans. William McCuaig (Chicago: Columbia University Press, 2009), 2.

claims that assert that we cannot know things without some measure of violence, related to the actions most often associated with violence, such as murder or war?

The conviction behind this dissertation – and one that is shared in different ways by each of those who are studied in it – is that the term "violence" names something that begins much further up the causal chain, well before a trigger is pulled or a bomb is dropped, within the same structures of thought that would decide whether something is violent in the first place. No concept of violence is without basic ontological and epistemological assumptions about how violence can be known and how it ought to be known, and no act of violence is committed without the force of concepts and language. Through reflection on the use of the term in its three sources, this dissertation attempts a critical reconstruction of the concept of violence from the standpoint that violence is foremost an ontological and epistemological problem that can be clarified by attention to values and the violation of boundaries.

The stakes of this dissertation and the usefulness of its paradigm can be further illuminated by beginning with a concrete example of state violence: drone warfare. In his 2013 book *Théorie du Drone*, Grégoire Chamayou provides a philosophical analysis of drone warfare based on the premise that the weaponization of unmanned [sic.] aerial vehicles (UAVs) represents a sea change in the way that war is conducted.[5] He writes that "their history is that of an eye turned into a weapon," and he argues that drones are defined by the elimination of reciprocal risk in combat because a drone can inflict violence upon a distant enemy without any

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[5] Grégoire Chamayou, *Théorie du Drone* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2013). I will cite from the English translation: *Drone Theory*. Trans. Janet Lloyd (London: Penguin, 2015). Alternate English Title: *Theory of the Drone* (New York: The New Press, 2015). Chamayou's work on drone warfare is preceded by another study of violence: Grégoire Chamayou, *Manhunts: A Philosophical History*. Trans. Steven Rendall (Princeton, J: Princeton University Press, 2012), esp. 77, 103. Original: *Les chasses à l'homme* (Paris: La Fabrique Editions, 2010). Furthermore, many of Chamayou's insights are corroborated in Caroline Holmqvist, *Policing Wars: On Military Intervention in the Twenty First Century* (London: Palgrave, 2014).

vulnerability on the part of the user.[6] Chamayou makes this argument not because he believes that a weapon should be subjected to philosophical scrutiny in a way that would maintain separation between the object of study and its learned observer, but because he considers the drone itself to be an "unidentified violent object" that confuses those who try to analyze it by disrupting established conceptual distinctions and categories.[7] For example, the drone challenges the assumption that attackers will have an immanent relationship with their enemy and further removes and diminishes the reciprocal risks that are often associated with combat.

To aid in his argument, Chamayou draws from the early work of Simone Weil. In a 1933 essay called "Reflections on War" Weil assessed the traditions that underpin war in a unique way that Chamayou then uses to frame his investigation.[8] Chamayou writes that Weil's insight has inspired him to use the "materialist method" to accord more importance to the complex means of violence than the consequent or desired ends of violence.[9] Chamayou resists the immediate moralizing and justificatory discourse on violence that would focus solely on ends, and instead follows Weil by "taking apart the mechanisms of violence."[10] He enjoins his reader to "Go and look at the weapons, study their specific characteristics. Become a technician, in a way. But only in a way, for the aim here is an understanding that is not so much technical as political."[11] Rather than focusing on the instrumental relations of technical knowledge, Chamayou considers the

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[6] Chamayou, *Drone Theory*, 11.

[7] Ibid, 14.

[8] Simone Weil, "Reflections on War" [1933] in *Formative Writings, 1929-1941*. Ed. and Trans. Dorothy Tuck McFarland and Wilhelmina van Ness (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 237-248.

[9] Chamayou, *Drone Theory*, 15. Weil, "Reflections on War," 241.

[10] Chamayou, *Drone Theory*, 15.

[11] Ibid.

technical means of violence to be a constituent part of the politics of violence. He argues that "rather than wonder whether the ends justify the means, one must ask what the choice of those means, in itself, tends to impose."[12]

Such is also the orientation of this dissertation. If the social problems named by the term "violence" are clarified by attending to their material, technical, and political means rather than privileging analyses of their moral and justificatory ends, then it follows that understanding violence will require close attention to the most basic means of violence: ways of thinking, knowing, and speaking in and about the world. If we consider the possibility that words are no less a means by which violence is done than a drone, and if we consider that even in its absence the drone is doing epistemological and ontological violence to the way that a person knows the world (for example, by instilling fear of attacks from the sky), then the relationship between the means and ends of violence is more complex than is expressed in colloquial uses of the term that imply violence is a matter of empirically determined physicality, materiality, and corporeality.

Rather than resting on a simple instrumental relationship in which violent but justified ends are achieved by means of neutral tools, Chamayou's theory of the drone assists us in seeing how violence is never restricted to merely physical and instrumental relationships but is forcibly present in language and categories as well. Chamayou writes that "It would be mistaken to limit the question of weaponry solely to the sphere of external violence," and it is the contention of this dissertation that this claim has significant epistemological and ontological consequences because both the means and ends of violence span the distance between the internal and external, and between thinking and action.[13] Indeed, much of the power of the term "violence," even when

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid, 18.

it is used to describe abstract ontological and epistemological concepts, is owed to the fact that it evokes images of corporeal damage and death in the minds of its users.

Few thinkers, however, study these specific means of violence in detail by attending to the presence of violence within epistemologies and ontologies or the ontological and epistemological means and effects of corporeal violence. Compared to physical violence, scholars have spent significantly less time trying to understand the relationship between ontological and epistemological terms and violent acts. Less attention still has been paid to how violence can meaningfully characterize ontological and epistemological terms themselves, such that I could know something in a violent way or claim that "to be" is itself violent. This dissertation focuses on these neglected but important uses of the term by addressing three exemplary sources who make such connections.

The wager of this study is that by critically examining how the term violence is used – even when it appears to play only a minor role – we can learn much about the normative values and priorities of its users, and we can learn even more about what complex entanglements of description and normativity are implied in uses of the term "violence." By using violence as a diagnostic concept, rather than assuming that it has an essential definition that could be possessed, categorically opposed, or used correctly, we can better understand what implicit and explicit claims its users are making and what priorities and values are being advanced and protected by its critics.[14] The potential for understanding violence diagnostically is owed to the fact that the term is so often used to protect and conserve a set of presuppositions about how the world is, and correlating prescriptions about how the world ought to be. Only by attending to the

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[14] I owe this notion of "diagnostic" concepts to Rahel Jaeggi, *Alienation*. Trans. Frederick Neuhouser and Alan E. Smith. Ed. Frederick Neuhouser (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 26-27.

normative orders that lie behind charges of violence can we come to clarity about the social problems that the term attempts to name. But in order to examine how violence features in the sources examined in this dissertation, and in order to understand how the concept of violence rests on rarely clarified relations of normativity, we must develop this preliminary definition of violence as the violation of value-laden boundaries, even if it is revised in what follows.

Charges of violence are commonplace in both scholarly and popular discourses, and they are often accompanied by identifications of willful and corporeal acts such as killing or warfare that are said to exemplify violence. Furthermore, charges of violence are often accompanied by polemical terms like fanaticism, extremism, terrorism, or radicalism – each of which rely upon highly problematic distinctions between legitimate state violence and illegitimate insurgent violence.[15] One approach to the problem of violence would be to follow these terms and examine the most common phenomena that are used as examples of violence, and then make inferences from these relations of regularity and exemplarity to say something general about what violence means. However, this study takes a different approach by considering what underlying ontological and epistemological patterns are exposed by uses of the term.

Although charges of violence call to mind images of corporeal damage and death, the term is often used to refer to phenomena well beyond the traditional limits of physical injury or harm.[16] In his lexicon of keywords, Raymond Williams writes that "violence is often now a difficult word, because its primary sense is of physical assault, as in 'robbery with violence,' yet

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[15] Compare the approaches to these terms in Alberto Toscano, *Fanaticism: On the Uses of an Idea* (London: Verso, 2010) and Dominique Colas, *Civil Society and Fanaticism: Conjoined Histories*. Trans. Amy Jacobs (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

[16] For an examination of physicalist, minimalist, and maximalist approaches to violence see Valentina Ricci, "Ontology and Ethics of Violence," PHD Dissertation. University of California, Irvine, 2016. Herein I follow my sources by adopting a maximalist approach which, according to Ricci, "associates violence with a basic mechanism that informs everything we do" (4).

it is also used more widely in ways that are not easy to define."[17] He points to "specialized" or "unauthorized" uses of the term that implicitly distinguish between supposedly legitimate uses of violent force and "unruly" actions that challenge authority.[18] Like the figure of the drone for Chamayou, for Williams there is something about the term "violence" that leads its users into confusion and perplexity. In response to its "longstanding complexity" Williams looks to the etymological roots of the term in the "vehemence, impetuosity," and "force" of *violentia*.[19] For Williams, violence can refer to both physical harm and the threat of harm, encompassing and surpassing both oppression and corruption, leading him to claim that "there has been obvious interaction between violence and violation, the breaking of some custom or some dignity."[20]

This notion that violence can be helpfully understood as a violation of customs or normative boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour is a recurring theme in the discourse on violence both within and beyond critical theory and continental philosophy. For example, in the introduction to his book *Violence and Civility* Étienne Balibar suggests that the general criteria for violence would be that "the boundaries – or barriers, protections, prohibitions, limits of the 'self,' and so on – have been violated."[21] Even more broadly stated, at the beginning of his study *Religion and Violence*, Hent de Vries provides a definition of violence that is important for the work of Jantzen in ways we will revisit below in Chapter 3:

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[17] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 278-279.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Étienne Balibar, *Violence and Civility: On the Limits of Political Philosophy*. Trans. G.M. Goshgarian (London: Columbia University Press, 2015), 3.

> "Violence, in both the widest possible, and most elementary senses of the word, entails any cause, any justified or illegitimate force, that is exerted – physically or otherwise – by one thing (event or instance, group or person, and, perhaps, word and object) on another."[22]

More recently still, in their introduction to a collection of interviews on the topic of violence from the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Review of Books*, Brad Evans and Natasha Lennard set forth a similarly ontologically grounded definition of violence, arguing that

> we need to begin by recognizing that violence is not some abstract or theoretical problem. It represents a violation in the very conditions of what constitute what it means to be human as such. Violence is always an attack upon a person's dignity, sense of selfhood, and future. It is nothing less that the desecration of one's position in the world. And it is a denial and outright assault on the very qualities that we claim make us considered members of this social fellowship and shared union called "civilization." In this regard, we might say that violence is both an ontological crime, insomuch as it seeks to destroy the image we give to ourselves as valued individuals, and a form of political ruination that stabs at the heart of a human togetherness that emerges from the ethical desire for worldly belonging.[23]

The trouble with the claims made by Evans and Lennard in the selection above is that violence *is* an abstract and theoretical problem precisely because the authors use the term as a category meant to encompass a variety of violations from "ontological crime" to "political ruination."[24] Evans and Lennard's point is doubtless that we lose something essential when we attempt to gain abstract distance from particular instances or patterns of violence (a concern shared by Jantzen), but the contention of this dissertation is that something important is also lost when we ignore the

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[22] Hent de Vries, *Religion and Violence: Philosophical Perspectives from Kant to Derrida* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 1.

[23] Brad Evans and Natasha Lennard (eds.), "Introduction," in *Violence: Humans in Dark Times* (San Franciso, CA: City Lights, 2018), 2-3. Compare with the contrasting suggestion that "Violence is all about the violation of bodies and the destruction of human lives." in Brad Evans and Terrell Carver, "The Subject of Violence," in *Histories of Violence: Post-War Critical Thought*. Ed. Brad Evans and Terrell Carver (London: Zed Books, 2017), 5.

[24] Compare with the more developed sense of "ontological crime" in Cavarero, *Horrorism*, Chapter 7.

ontological and epistemological problems that violence points toward by treating it as a strictly non-abstract and non-theoretical phenomenon.[25]

Implied by Chamayou, Williams, Balibar, de Vries, and Evans and Lennard, is a world in which violations are possible because certain things, people, and norms, are bounded in ways that can be transgressed. This underlying assumption invokes a kind of metaphysics, for it conceptualizes relations between human beings and their world in abstract terms. It is also a kind of ontology because in each case of violation it is a being that is being violated, and these violations are tied to an epistemology because they give an account of how things, their relation, and violence, can or should be known. The idea that violence is defined by a crossing, transgression, profanation, or breaking of a boundary line between one thing and another is helpful because it pushes users of the term to ask an important diagnostic question about each use of the term "violence," namely: "what boundary is being violated?"[26] Deeper questions lie beneath this question: "who decides where the boundaries are?" and "how do uses of the term violence betray where the boundaries lie for their users?" If violence names something morally reprehensible, and if violence names a violation of a boundary of some kind, then the concept of violence presupposes answers to deeper questions about legitimacy, authority, and normativity.

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[25] For example, something of what the term "violence" attempts to name is violated when acts of physical violence are epistemologized or ontologized through interpretive gestures that distract from its grotesque physicality by explaining away such violations with reference to abstract ideas. In his analysis of the Nazi Freikorps, Klaus Theweleit argues that fascist violence is not explicable by interpreting killing and rape as stand-ins for abstract desires or symbolic goals, but instead he argues that these acts of violence are exactly what are desired by those who commit them. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies* (2 Vols.). Trans. Stephen Conway, with Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minnesota, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987-1989). See especially Barbara Ehrenreich's "Foreword," I, xi.

[26] An important anthology on violence begins with a similar question: "What is violence, and how is it calculated?" See Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim, "General Introduction: Theorizing Violence in the Twenty-first Century" in *On Violence: A Reader*. Ed. Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 1.

These complex entanglements and questions frustrate the desire for a clear definition of violence, and ontological and epistemological inquiry have long been hidden players in this confusion. Even the notion that the most general form of violence is a causal force exerted on one thing by another makes an ontological claim about the relationship between things in the world, implying that some things are defined by boundaries that can be transgressed by force in a morally negative way. But what is this force and why should its exertion be called violence rather than power or influence?

In 1969 Hannah Arendt published a short book called *On Violence*, in which she challenged the political consensus that "violence is nothing more than the most flagrant manifestation of power."[27] Beyond the power to act in concert, the characteristic of strength, the movement of force, and the offices of legitimate authority, Arendt defined violence as an instrumental last resort that is used in the attempt to keep existing power structures from crumbling.[28] But following this descriptive observation, Arendt suggests that,

> Power and violence are opposites; where one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance. This implies that it is not correct to think of the opposite of violence as nonviolence; to speak of nonviolent power is actually redundant. Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it.[29]

Arendt's distinctions are helpful here at the beginning of this study because they point toward the deep relationship between violence and power. However, serious problems remain within her idea that power and violence could be distinguished so sharply – such that by definition power is

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[27] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (London: Harvest, 1969), 35.

[28] Ibid, 44-47.

[29] Ibid, 56, 87.

maintained by legitimate authority until it is challenged enough to spur violent attempts to overturn or maintain it, and, by definition, violence cannot create legitimate structures of power.

Arendt's work certainly challenges the naturalization and rationalization of violence in ways that will resonate with the sources examined in detail below, but the idea that power and violence could be so clearly opposed is deeply challenged by ontologies and epistemologies of violence that identify violence *within* supposedly legitimate exercises of power.[30] Furthermore, the ontological notion that violent expressions of force or power can violate the boundaries that define things in the world presupposes some meaningful criteria for what counts as a thing, what counts as a violation, and what powers and authorities over these boundaries are legitimate.

Rather than answering these questions by working with stable Arendtian definitions of power and violence – in which "power" is by definition legitimate, and "violence" is by definition a challenge to legitimacy – this study will use the term "violence" as a diagnostic concept in a very specific sense. Instead of attempting to stabilize its definition beforehand, whether in itself, or by contrast with power – an approach that resonates with the critiques of possessive desire articulated by the Mennonite philosophical theologians examined in Chapter 2 – I understand violence to be a keyword that reflects the normative orientation of its users by pointing to the violable boundaries that the user uses to preserve certain values and divide what is morally acceptable from what is morally reprehensible. In sum, this approach considers violence to be situated in relation to boundaries that mark off a space that is valued, protected, or even sacred.

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[30] Arendt's overly sharp distinctions between power and violence are pointed out in Rainer Forst, "Noumenal Power," in *Normativity and Power: Analyzing Social Orders of Justification*. Trans. Ciaran Cronin (London: Oxford University Press, 2017), 39-40.

The task of defining violence has not ceased to grow in difficulty since Williams wrote

his entry on the topic in the 1970s, and it remains true today that violence is "clearly a word that

needs early specific definition."[31] Like others who have since implied that violence can be done

to and through words and texts, Williams uses the term in at least two senses, even implying that

yet another kind of violence can be done when the term "violence" itself is "wrenched from its

meaning or significance."[32] Williams' notion that violence has a definition from which it can be

violently wrenched risks the same problem that we find in Arendt because it relies upon a stable

definition of violence from which one could diverge, rather than considering the myriad uses of

the term to reflect a diverse set of normative orders. What counts as violence is fundamentally in

dispute, and those who think that they possess the real and true definition of the term often suffer

from a myopic political vision that has not considered the deep and abiding differences in values

that account for the diverse uses of the term. Indeed, recent work on violence and nonviolence by

critical theorists has highlighted not only the problem of violence, but the problematic use of the

term "violence" as a political tactic in the public sphere.

For example, Judith Butler begins *The Force of Non-Violence* by suggesting that before

any debate about the ethical and political use of violence there must be some agreement on what

qualifies something as violent or nonviolent.[33] However, there is no such shared definition of

violence in our current social and political discourse. Instead, violence is a concept that is put to

many different instrumental and political uses. In *The Force of Non-Violence* Butler sees

something important in the diverse uses of the term, and writes that "some people call wounding

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[31] Williams, *Keywords*, 279.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Judith Butler, *The Force of Non-Violence: An Ethico-Political Bind* (London: Verso, 2020), 1.

acts of speech 'violence,' whereas others claim that language, except in the case of explicit threats, cannot properly be called 'violent.'"[34] Butler identifies a conflict between those who understand language to be violent, and those who do not – an important distinction for the sources I study below. Butler further addresses this problem by contrasting "the figure of the blow" with structural or systemic violence, arguing that "any account of violence that cannot explain the strike, the blow, the act of sexual violence (including rape), or that fails to understand the way violence can work in the intimate dyad or the face-to-face encounter, fails descriptively, and analytically, to clarify what violence is…"[35]

Here Butler sets out some basic conditions for understanding violence. Writing in light of recent protests against police violence in the United States, Butler argues that when "states or institutions" use the term "violence" to delegitimize forms of political dissent that do not take recourse to physical violence, "they seek to rename nonviolent practices as violent, conducting a political war, as it were, at the level of public semantics."[36] Butler critiques those who use the term "violence" to demonize and vilify groups who commit acts of protest and civil disobedience (for example, antifascists or Black Lives Matter protestors), and challenges those who would use the term "violence" as a mere means to legitimize the use of lethal force by police and thereby delegitimize civil disobedience and nonviolent protest.[37]

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid, 2.

[36] Ibid.

[37] See Daniel Loick, "'But who protects us from you?' Towards a Critical Theory of the Police," in *We Protect you from Yourselves: The Politics of Policing*. Ed. Felix Trautmann (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019). Elsa Dorlin, "What a body can do," Trans. Kieran Aarons. *Radical Philosophy* 2.05 (Autumn 2019): 3-9. This essay is the prologue to *Se Défendre: Une Philosophie de la violence* (Paris: La Découverte, 2017).

In addition to its association with material phenomena and its complex uses across the political spectrum, violence is often identified with ideas and discursive forms that do not possess materiality as we often understand it, but which nonetheless violate and have very real and material consequences. One such example is the violence of trauma and PTSD in which the persistent return of the violence of the past does another kind of violence to and through traumatized bodies in the present.[38] Sensitive to the complexities of trauma, the definition of violence proposed by the World Health Organization follows the pattern identified by Williams by beginning with the notion that violence refers to physical, bodily, or corporeal harm – defining the term as: "The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation."[39] However, these initial defining features of violence provided in the report – physical force or power – become more complex when held together with the remaining criteria of intention, threat, likelihood, and the notion of psychological harm. We may think we know a bodily violation when we see one, but we cannot identify the more abstract and implicit violence of threats and coercion, or stress and trauma, without clear criteria for doing so.

Following the various inclinations of Butler, Williams, Balibar, de Vries, and Evans and Lennard, while resisting Arendt's stark preservation of an ideal opposition between violence and power, we can observe that, whether implicitly or explicitly, identifications of violence tend to

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[38] Consider the work of Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*. Trans. Rachel Gomme (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 22, 96, 235-240. Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), Chapter 5. Berber Bevernage, *History, Memory, and State-Sponsored Violence: Time and Justice* (London: Routledge, 2012).

[39] "World report on violence and health," Ed. Etienne G. Krug, Linda L. Dahlberg, James A. Mercy, Anthony B. Zwi, and Rafael Lozano (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2002), 5.

give an account of a violable boundary, or a set of violable boundaries, between morally acceptable norms and prescriptions and unacceptable violations or profanations. This is further reflected in the definition provided by the WHO, which assumes a set of boundaries that mark off injury, death, harm, and deprivation.

Although the term is used in scholarly and popular contexts in many different senses, each mention of "violence" seems to imply an account of the boundaries that are violated when violence is done. Physical acts of violence violate the boundaries of the body. Acts of social violence violate the dignity or sanctity of various people or groups. Symbolic acts of violence cross socially determined boundaries that demarcate acceptable meanings and narratives from political and social practices that are deemed unacceptable or damaging. Structural violence – manifested in racism, sexism, classism, heteropatriarchy, ableism, ageism, and other ever-growing prejudices – names the violation of human needs, rights, and dignities.[40]

Understood analytically and diagnostically as a violation of boundaries, the use of the term "violence" in this study does not immediately make a moralizing assertion that would seek to justify or condemn violence or the boundaries that serve as measures for whether violence has taken place. On the present account, the use of the term only suggests that – by some normative account – a violation, transgression, or profanation has occurred. We can observe that what is called "violent" is contested, contextual, and reliant upon narratives that give accounts of the world and set boundaries that determine the relationships that human beings have and ought to have in their worlds. What one person or community considers to be violent may not seem so at all to another, and an act committed in one context may be called violent while the very same act

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[40] For the beginnings of the discourse on structural violence see Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research" *Journal of Peace Research* 6.3 (1969): 167-191.

done elsewhere may not – and this includes, as we will see below, speech acts and performative utterances that do violence by violating established discursive and relational norms. What matters is how the normative orders that underpin uses of the term "violence" encounter one another, and what matters even more is how we imagine the relationship between competing definitions of violence – for example, between those who restrict the use of the term to violations of flesh, and those who use it to describe language itself.

The boundaries that implicitly define the term "violence" can tell us much about those who lay charges of violence, reject charges of violence, or critique charges of violence, serving as a kind of litmus test for deeper-held values that define personhood, agency, power, and the sanctity or dignity of life (human and otherwise). This is another reason why I refer to violence as a diagnostic concept, for it often reflects the broader normative orientation of its users by mixing description and prescription. Upon examination, charges of violence reveal themselves to be simultaneously descriptive and normative, both giving an account of a present state of affairs (namely that a particular boundary, that is real to those involved, has been violated) and also presenting or concealing an account of what ought to be the case (always implying that there are particular boundaries that should not be violated). The normative orientation that defines all identifications of violence is predominantly negative, pointing to states of affairs that should not be the case. This is the case even when violence is defended on the grounds that one kind of violent act will result in less violence elsewhere or in the future.

Violence is a complex concept that is too often employed without deep attention to its simultaneously descriptive and normative character. Hence the need for clarity about the epistemological and ontological stakes and structures that inhere in charges of violence. As such, it is vital not only to clarify *which* narratives and values conflict when violence is disputed, but

also to clarify *how* relationships between conflicting narratives and values are imagined in the first place. An important methodological question arises from this distinction: are the values and narratives that clash when charges of violence are disputed rightly characterized by competition and relations of displacement, or by real differences that are not reducible to zero-sum games with winners and losers or competition over desired conceptual territory? Derrida, certain Mennonite philosophical theologians, and Jantzen each answer this question in implicit and explicit ways that I will trace in detail throughout the following three chapters, through readings of their major texts and contexts.

CHAPTER 1.

Violence in Jacques Derrida's "Violence and Metaphysics"

In her book *Violence and the Philosophical Imaginary* Ann V. Murphy draws attention to the proliferation of images of violence in contemporary continental philosophy.[1] Identifying violence as a powerful rhetorical motif used in the theorization of both identity and sociality, Murphy surveys its uses by thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, Simone de Beauvoir, and Adriana Cavarero.[2] Rather than elevate or denigrate the use of the term violence in the philosophical imaginaries that structures these contexts, Murphy suggests that by examining investments in the image of violence her readers can gain a greater understanding of the ethical stakes of continental philosophy. Through a "reflexive inquiry into the way in which images, allegories, and metaphors of violence function in recent Continental thought," Murphy identifies a persistent worry in the discourse about the naturalization of violence, alongside a problematic tendency to neutralize, domesticate, and eroticize images of violence.[3]

Concerned with the reification of violence within the discourse on violence, and insisting on self-critique within the discourse, Murphy explores ambiguities of violence in various images, scenes, and rhetorical acts, suggesting at one point that "violence is an unavoidable aspect of metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, and ethics," while also worrying that any opposition to the violence in and of these terms will only re-inscribe "the fundamental violence of critique."[4]

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[1] Ann V. Murphy, *Violence and the Philosophical Imaginary* (New York: SUNY Press, 2012).

[2] Ibid, 1.

[3] Ibid, 1, 3.

[4] Ibid, 7.

Against a nihilistic fatalism that abdicates all responsibility in light of the violence of all things, Murphy advocates for a more nuanced and partial form of compromised ethical responsibility. Just before she cites Derrida's key essay "Violence and Metaphysics," Murphy asks a question that will be important for the rest of this study: "How does one write on violence, when writing itself constitutes violence?"[5] Murphy does not provide a clear answer to this question, but instead she points to Derrida – alongside Emmanuel Lévinas, Gilles Deleuze, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Julia Kristeva – as a continental philosopher who invokes violence like an icon, in order to question the notion that any writing or any critique of violence could ever be free from violence.[6] Although she wants to retain continuity between images of violence and "concrete violence," Murphy also notes that "it is commonplace now to speak of ontological or metaphysical violence, though these kinds of violence lack an easily discernible ethical valence."[7]

This indeterminacy follows Murphy throughout her work, making *Violence and the Philosophical Imaginary* more exploratory than conclusive, so much so that her conclusion is – in a very Derridean way – marked by a refusal to conclude. Nonetheless, Murphy presents two contrasting claims: "there is no way to break entirely with the force that these images bear," and "not only is it possible, but it is also necessary to subject the terms of the philosophical imaginary to criticism."[8]

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[5] Ibid, 8.

[6] Ibid, 11, 14.

[7] Ibid, 16.

[8] Ibid, 117-120.

The proliferation of images of violence, the risk of neutralizing the term, and the impossibility of breaking with violence in order to critique violence are each lines of thinking that I follow below as I examine what it is that makes ontological and epistemological terms violent in Derrida, Huebner, Blum, and Jantzen. I begin with Derrida because, as Murphy indicates, his work is an important starting point for discussions about the relationship between violence and metaphysics.

The Early Derrida

Jacques Derrida – perhaps the most famous French philosopher of the century – began to develop his distinctive way of thinking and writing in the early 1960s, leading to the publication of three books in 1967: a book on the relationship between writing and speech called *Of Grammatology*, a collection of essays on figures ranging from Lévinas and Freud to Jabès and Foucault called *Writing and Difference*, and an analysis of Husserl's theory of signs called *Speech and Phenomena*. Below I focus on one essay collected in *Writing and Difference* in order to understand Derrida's use of the term "violence," but before looking closely at this text I will provide a brief overview of Derrida's work in order to contextualize the analysis below.

The development of the ideas expressed in the three books of 1967 began earlier in Derrida's career in several articles, in his 1954 master's thesis, and with his introduction to Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry," published by Presses Universitaires de France in 1962.[9] Much has already been said about Derrida's expansive body of work, and it is difficult to

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[9] Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*. Trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. (Stony Brook, New York: Nicolas Hays, 1978). Original: Edmund Husserl, *L'Origine de la géométrie*. Traduction et introduction par Jacques Derrida (Paris: PUF, 1974 [1962]). See also his 1954 dissertation for the *diplôme d'études supérieures*, published in French in 1990 and translated into English as Jacques Derrida, *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy*. Trans. Marian Hobson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Original: Jacques Derrida, *Le Problème de la genèse dans la philosophie de Husserl* (Paris: PUF, 1990).

make a summary statement of Derrida's work that would not constitute a generalization that Derrida himself would have rejected as a totalizing summary of an oeuvre that by nature resists such gestures. Several years after this initial flurry of work, in 1972, Derrida published three further works: a book on Plato, Mallarmé, and Sollers called *Dissemination*, a collection of essays called *Margins of Philosophy*, and a short book of interviews called *Positions*. In an interview in *Positions* dated December 1967, Derrida responds to a question about how his early works are organized by pointing to the ways in which his writing attempts to question the unified totality of a book.[10] Concerning their relation to one another, Derrida states that *Writing and Difference* belongs in the middle of *Of Grammatology*, and that *Speech and Phenomena* serves as a note to these two books. Describing his work as an "unfinished movement" that admits to no origin, Derrida evades the interviewers' desire for a systematic presentation of his thought, speaking instead of a "double play" in his writing that puts itself under erasure by "violently inscribing within the text that which attempted to govern it from without," as a part of a general deconstruction of philosophy.[11] Already "violence" is a term that Derrida uses to refuse interpretations of his work that attempt to enclose it in a system of defined relations.

Derrida's critical treatment of philosophy questions the notion that the metaphysical term "Being" is (or should be) defined by presence, and he makes use of his own French neologism *différance* to name the incalculable temporal deferral and spatial differing that characterize signification in the free play between signifier and signified.[12] As Derrida responds to Julia Kristeva's questions in the second interview in *Positions*, the problem of signification becomes

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[10] Jacques Derrida, *Positions*. Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 3.

[11] Ibid, 6.

[12] Ibid, 7-9. See also the June 1968 interview with Kristeva later in the volume, 27-29.

clearer. Rather than a kind of structuralism that would insist on a knowable correspondence between the signifying word and the signified thing, Derrida thinks it essential to "consider every process of signification as a formal play of differences."[13] Derrida's revision of the idea of writing in his grammatological notion of *différance* focuses on the interweaving of signification in and of texts, such that texts refer to each other in a chain of signifiers that compose the texture of language. His famous statement in *Of Grammatology* – widely disseminated and decontextualized in its American reception – is: "*il n'ya a pas de hors-texte*." Translated by Spivak as "There is nothing outside of the text" or "there is no outside-text,"[14] this claim has often been used to represent the whole of deconstruction, sometimes being reduced to a metaphysical and ethical claim that renders all of reality linguistically and morally relative. But rather than being a straightforwardly metaphysical assertion that subjects all being and existence to linguistic or hermeneutic neutralization, or a moralizing claim that places all normative orders on one level, one early aim of deconstruction, expressed by Derrida in a 1971 interview, is "to avoid both simply *neutralizing* the binary oppositions of metaphysics and simply *residing* within the closed field of these oppositions, thereby confirming it."[15]

Here Derrida presents one aim of his work as a double writing that overturns oppositions in a way that "recognize[s] that in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy."[16] Overturning violent

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[13] Ibid, 26.

[14] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Corr. Edition. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 158. Jacques Derrida, *De La Grammatologie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967), 220. Further references to Of Grammatology will include the page number of the English translation, followed by the page number of the French original.

[15] Derrida, *Positions*, 41.

[16] Ibid.

hierarchies that govern terms by means of subordination is a major task of Derrida's work, and toward this end Derrida seeks to avoid the dangers of denying or attempting to move quickly beyond these oppositions. Rather than saying "*either* this *or* that," Derrida says "*neither* this *nor* that."[17] Rather than remaining within the bounds of oppositional thinking, Derrida speaks of "undecidability" as a latent force within philosophical oppositions – a kind of resisting and "disorganizing" movement that refuses to posit a dialectical third term that could synthesize and surpass the two terms of the opposition in question.[18] Instead, Derrida points to movements of erasure and chiasmus that cross through and cross out writing rather than subjecting it to an economy of violence.[19]

Violence is a key concern for Derrida in his early work. It is a central theme not only in "Violence and Metaphysics" but also in *Of Grammatology*'s sub-chapter "The Violence of the Letter: From Lévi-Strauss to Rousseau," in which he writes of the unity of violence and writing in language.[20] The essay with which this first chapter is directly concerned – "Violence and Metaphysics" – is Derrida's most sustained engagement with the concept of violence, taking the form of a commentary on the work of Emmanuel Lévinas.[21]

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid, 43. See also Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy" in *Dissemination*. Trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 127.

[19] Derrida, *Positions*, 70. For further reference to chiasmus see also Derrida, *Dissemination*, 30, 35, 44. Lévinas will later write of Derrida's use of chiasmus in "Jacques Derrida: Wholly Otherwise" in Emmanuel Lévinas, *Proper Names*. Trans Michael B. Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 62. In his 1986 book on Derrida, Rodolphe Gasché interprets Derrida's work as a philosophical intervention that engages with and revises the philosophical canon rather than abandoning it for more literary or poetic projects. Gasché also points out that chiasmus is a recurring theme in Derrida's work. See Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 173.

[20] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 101, 106-113. The original version of this chapter was based on his 1965-1966 seminar at the ENS and was published as Jacques Derrida, "Nature, Culture, Ecriture: La violence de la lettre de Lévi-Strauss à Rousseau," *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* 4 (1966), 1-46.

[21] Derrida's reflections on violence are, however, not restricted to his early work. According to Elizabeth Grosz, "Derrida has never written on anything other than politics and violence, even if it is also true that he does not write

The long essay was originally written in the summer of 1963 and then published in two parts in late 1964 in the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*.[22] In 1963, following a recommendation from Paul Ricoeur, Derrida began to read Lévinas's works, including *Existence and Existents*, *Time and the Other*, and *Totality and Infinity*.[23] In 1964 Derrida began attending Lévinas' lectures at the Sorbonne, eventually sending him a copy of the first part of "Violence and Metaphysics."[24] Lévinas replied with gratitude for Derrida's reading of his work, although later he would express reservations about their "incompatibilities" following the reprinting of the essay in *Writing and Difference*.[25]

As the two issues of *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* containing "Violence and Metaphysics" were being published, between July and December of 1964, Derrida also began teaching a seminar on Heidegger at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales, from November 16 of 1964 to March 29 of 1965. In this seminar Derrida concerns himself with many themes that overlap with those of "Violence and Metaphysics," including the work of Lévinas, the problem of violence, and Heidegger's *Destruktion*.[26] Citing Heidegger's identification of

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only on politics and violence." See Elizabeth Grosz, "The Time of Violence: Deconstruction and Value" in *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 134.

[22] See also Benoît Peeters, *Derrida: A Biography*. Trans. Andrew Brown (London: Polity, 2013), 137.

[23] Although Derrida makes reference to these three works in "Violence and Metaphysics," Robert Bernasconi claims that "Derrida based his initial interpretation of Lévinas's account of violence less on *Totality and Infinity* than on the little-known essay 'Freedom and Command'" (83) in which Lévinas gives an early account of violence. See Robert Bernasconi, "The Violence of the Face: Peace and Language in the Thought of Lévinas" *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 23.6 (1997): 81-93. See Emmanuel Lévinas, "Freedom and Command" [1953] in *Collected Philosophical Papers*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1987), 15-23 (esp. 19).

[24] Peeters, *Derrida*, 139.

[25] Peeters, *Derrida*, 140 and 173. Later still, Derrida would publish his funeral oration for Lévinas, spoken on December 27, 1995. Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Lévinas*. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999 [Original 1997]). In his presentation, among other things, Derrida appreciates the ways in which Lévinas helped him think about the meaning of "oeuvre" and "work" (3).

[26] Jacques Derrida, *Heidegger: The Question of Being and History*. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 226-228, 43, 87-88. Here I cite the numbers that appear at the top of each page.

polemos with *logos* in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, in his seminar Derrida distinguishes between "a violence of words that would destroy itself as speech proffering being" and "brutality, muteness and deafness."[27]

As I will outline below, the themes of violence, speech, and silence are developed in detail throughout "Violence and Metaphysics," in which a similar distinction is made between a kind of speech that defeats violence despite its own violence (117.19/172) and a denial of discourse that risks the worst violence (117.22-23/172).[28] Amidst the entanglements of *logos* and *polemos*, speech and violence, muteness and violence, Derrida suggests that there is no language without violence, but also that there is a kind of silent peace that is like "a language called

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The French edition is Jacques Derrida, *Heidegger: la question de l'Être et l'Histoire: Cours de l'ENS-Ulm* (1964-1965) (Paris: Galilée, 2013). I have cited the page numbers that appear on the outer margins of the English translation, which correspond with the French page numbers.

[27] Muteness and silence are a common theme in Derrida, *Heidegger*, 87-88. and "Violence and Metaphysics," 117. See also Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale, 2000), 65. and Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1998), 47. in which Heidegger characterizes Being as an "originary struggle" (*ursprünglicher Kampf*). For the Heidegger of 1953, *polemos* and *logos* are the same, and their "confrontation" (*Auseinandersetzung*) builds unity rather than destroying it. In his seminar, Derrida responds critically to this identification by Heidegger:

> The point is not simply to say: anyone who reproaches Heidegger with presupposing language in his question of being is also speaking and, in asking a question of Heidegger's question, in asking Heidegger where does language come from? also gives language to himself, so that the only way to destroy here or to shake up Heidegger's question would consist not simply in a violence (violence always going via language, and Heidegger would essentially link warfare to language, *polemos* to *logos* [*Einführung* . . .]), the only way to destroy or shake up Heidegger's question here would consist not simply in a violence of words that would destroy itself as speech proffering being, but in, distinguishing it from violence, what I would call the brutality, muteness and deafness of a library-burner or a thought-strangler pushing his brutish rage to the point of not knowing what a library is and that it is a library that he is burning, confusing it with a pastry shop or the Eiffel tower or something. (Derrida, *Heidegger*, 88)

[28] Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas" in *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). The English translation corresponds to Jacques Derrida, "Violence et métaphysique: Essai sur la pensée d'Emmanuel Lévinas" in *L'écriture et la difference* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967). All references to this essay are cited in text corresponding to the English translation by Alan Bass, including line number, followed by a backslash and the page number of the French version from *L'écriture et la difference*. Throughout I will also note some differences between the version included in *L'écriture et la difference* and the original two-part essay published in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*: Jacques Derrida, "Violence et métaphysique: Essai sur la pensée d'Emmanuel Lévinas (première partie)" *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 69.3 (1964): 322-354., and Jacques Derrida "Violence et métaphysique: Essai sur la pensée d'Emmanuel Lévinas (2ᵉ partie)" *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 69.4 (1964): 425-473.

outside itself by itself" (117.6/172). But this is getting ahead of the line of thinking that Derrida traces in his commentary on the work of Lévinas. To understand precisely how Derrida arrives – if it can indeed be called an arrival – at the notion that predication is the first violence, we first need to understand the shape of the extensive text of "Violence and Metaphysics."

A Commentary on Violence in "Violence and Metaphysics"

Derrida begins "Violence and Metaphysics" by identifying the death of philosophy and connecting its "agony" with the "violent [*violemment*] way it [philosophy] opens history by opposing itself to nonphilosophy, which is its past and its concern, its death and its wellspring…" (79.8/117). For Derrida, the death of philosophy is something that happens within its history, resisting its own claim to be perennial, and opening unto a future for thinking that is yet to come (*à venir*) – a real future that brings with it the possibility of something new so that "thought still has a future" (79.12/117). For Derrida, the future must not be foreclosed by the tendency within philosophy to solve its problems and answer its questions in ways that prohibit or limit future questioning and problematization. There is something about philosophy that attempts to contain and even feed off its own agonistic undoing, and for Derrida philosophy can remain open to its future only by concerning itself with unanswerable questions and irresolvable problems (79.15-18/118).[29]

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[29] Derrida's early concern for the problems of philosophy, rather than for only those of language, is pointed out in Geoffrey Bennington, "Derridabase," in Bennington and Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993), 27 and 50. However, Michael Naas identifies a distinctive turn toward questions of language within the text of "Violence and Metaphysics." Michael Naas, *Taking on the Tradition: Jacques Derrida and the Legacies of Deconstruction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 97. More generally, Derrida's concern for philosophy and his approach to the problems of particularity and universality are examined in Dana Hollander, *Exemplarity and Chosenness: Rosenzweig and Derrida on the Nation of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), esp. Chapter 2.

Although the problems and questions initially identified by Derrida – the positioning of philosophy against its other, the violent opening of history by philosophy, its "dying nature" (79.11/117) – are important, he notes that they do not essentially belong to something called "philosophy," but rather they are the founding questions of the community "of those who are still called philosophers" (79.23/118). This community remains a diaspora that is diverse in its language, institutional identity, public presence, and techniques, but nonetheless gathers as a "community of the question" (80.1/118), seeking to found itself decisively on answers, but making this attempt under threatening conditions, and in ways that call into question the possibility and legitimacy of its own questioning activity (80.8/118). For Derrida, the community of philosophers is one "of decision, of initiative, of absolute initiality" (80.5-6/118), but this community is also troubled by the questionable nature of its task of questioning. Here Derrida draws out a tension in philosophy: it has the duty and responsibility to be decisive and seek to secure its history, but at the same time it must keep its constitutive questions open through "the liberty *of the question* (double genitive)" (80.19/119).

In a way, the task of philosophy seems to be impossible, given its presumption to speak to "the totality of beings, objects and determinations" (80.13/119). But in another way, this impossible act has already occurred (80.12/119), leaving philosophy responsible before its own "unbreachable dignity" and "duty of decision" (80.10/119). The impossible tradition of philosophy, according to Derrida, is founded on an injunction: "the question must be maintained. As a question." (80.23-24/119). This is to say that the question of philosophy and the questions that philosophy asks must remain open questions, rather than being temporally foreclosed or spatially enclosed. Derrida states further that "the liberty *of the question* (double genitive) must be stated and protected" (80.24/119). For Derrida, the community of philosophers requires that

its questioning activity remain in a state of both liberty and protection. But how can these two impulses – the one protective and conserving and the other freeing and liberating – be sustained concurrently? For the time being we will keep this important question open, for several answers to it will arise throughout the commentary below.

For Derrida, the tradition of philosophy founds this questioning activity on both a "dwelling" that realizes tradition, and a "commandment" that authorizes all ethical law (80.26/119).[30] For Derrida, here, there is no commandment or law that is not simultaneously concerned with freedom and engaged in enclosure (80.30/119). Even though philosophy is defined by its task of questioning, the definitive nature of this task returns and redetermines philosophy in such a way that puts at risk its freedom to question. He writes that "the question is always enclosed" because its answer returns to determine it (80.31/119). Derrida sees in this reciprocal determination of question and answer both the life and death of philosophy (80.35/119), both its possibilities for reflection, speculation, and self-questioning (80.38/119), but also its closure in "objectification" and "secondary interpretation" (80.39/119).

Derrida characterizes the difference between the "question in general" and "philosophy" in violent terms, referring to it as a "combat" (81.1/119) between "philosophy as a power and adventure *of* the question itself and philosophy as a determined event or turning point *within* this adventure" (81.3/119). Although the "historian of facts, techniques, and ideas" (81.8/119) may not notice this difference between the adventurous questioning at the origin of philosophy and

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[30] This negotiation of dwelling and commandment is one way in which Derrida "takes on" the tradition without simply affirming or negating it. See Naas, *Taking on the Tradition*, xix. This kind of engagement that 'takes on' without reaffirming the structure of disjunctive opposition follows Derrida's approach that is made more explicit later in "Violence and Metaphysics" (90.35-36/134-135).

determinate turning points within the tradition, for Derrida it is "perhaps the most deeply inscribed characteristic of our age" (81.9/119).

In order to better understand this difference, Derrida turns to the traditions of ontology in Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger, focusing on the latter two as the "two great voices who have ordered us to this total repetition" of the appeal to tradition by ontology (81.15/120).[31] Derrida identifies three motifs that define Husserlian and Heideggerian ontology: (1) the restriction of philosophy to its Greek source, (2) the reduction of metaphysics, and (3) the dissociation of the ethical from metaphysics (81/120-121). Derrida is concerned that the Greek and European "adventure" has become such a "fundamental conceptual system" (82.6/121) that it demands total submission to its destructive language (82.11/121). He states that even though Husserl addresses the crisis of the sciences, this crisis is not crisis enough (82.12-13/121), and remains enjoined with the Kantian and Cartesian endeavor to actualize the "Greek aim: philosophy as science" (82.18/122).[32] Heidegger too attempts to return to a Greek origin of Being in the name of "knowledge and security," but Derrida resists this idea, claiming that "the knowledge and security of which we are speaking are therefore not in the world: rather, they are the possibility of our language and the nexus of our world" (82.22-23/121-122).

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[31] Although he uses the term "ontology" to describe Heidegger's thinking, in a note (Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 311) Derrida signals Heidegger's movement away from ontology and toward thinking (*Denken*) in his later work. See Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 44/32. Here – like Derrida – Heidegger is also interested in asking fundamental questions in ways that do not foreclose the questioning of preliminary and originary things. At the same time, however, Heidegger entwines his desire to return to fundamental questions with the assertion of a German *Geist* in the university, while quoting from his own Rector's Address (51-52/37-38).

[32] Derrida points to Husserl's founding of the European Spirit on Greek philosophy (*Writing and Difference*, 311-312), and the nearest reference is to Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. Trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

Enter Lévinas, who according to Derrida is more concerned with movements of "dismantling and dispossession [*d'une demotivation et d'une dépossession*]" (82.28/122) than with the knowledge and security of "Being and phenomenality" (82.27/122) – so much so that he advocates for a "dislocation" of identity and "summons" his readers to "depart" from Greek origins (82.32-33/122).[33] Lévinas departs from the philological focus of Heidegger and appeals to bare experience in a way that, according to Derrida, "seeks to liberate itself from the Greek domination of the Same and the One (other names for the light of Being and of the phenomenon) as if from oppression itself – an oppression certainly comparable to none other in the world, an ontological or transcendental oppression, but also the origin or alibi of all oppression in the world" (83.1-4/122-123).

Citing *Totality and Infinity* throughout "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida draws attention to Lévinas' desire to be free of a philosophical kind of vision that is focused on the "visage of being that shows itself in war" (Lévinas, quoted in Derrida, 83.6/123).[34] According to Derrida, this connection between metaphysics and war is a major problem for philosophy, and he presents Lévinas's dismantling of it as a "thought that calls upon the ethical relationship – a nonviolent relationship to the infinite as infinitely other, to the Other [*autrui*] – as the only one capable of opening the space of transcendence and of liberating metaphysics." (83.14-16/123).

Lévinas founds his thinking phenomenologically on the experience of the face of the other, arguing that the relationship that begins when I see the face of another person is distinctly

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[33] Later, in 1973, Lévinas also describes Derrida's deconstruction as a "dismantling." Lévinas, *Proper Names*, 57.

[34] Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 21. See also, Lévinas, "Freedom and Command," 19: "The opposition of the face, which is not the opposition of a force, is not a hostility. It is a pacific opposition, but one where peace is not a suspended war or a violence simply contained. On the contrary, violence consists in ignoring this opposition, ignoring the face of a being, avoiding the gaze, and catching sight of an angle whereby the *no* inscribed on a face by the very fact that it is a face becomes a hostile or submissive force."

ethical, and furthermore that its ethical nature must determine any subsequent metaphysical or ontological reflection.[35] The basic human experience of facing the other, according to Derrida's account of Lévinas, is "a nonviolent relationship [*rapport non-violent*] to the infinite as infinitely other, to the Other" (83.14/123). For Lévinas, this nonviolent relationship to the other that privileges the face-to-face encounter is one that attempts to keep the other different enough from the self and open enough to the future, so that the other is not captured, reduced, possessed or instrumentalized.[36]

In the context of this ethical relationship with the face and its concern for keeping the other from being reduced to the same, Derrida sees in Lévinas a "messianic eschatology" (83.23/123) that is not fully identical with theology, mysticism, dogma, or moralism (83.26-28/123). Lévinas grounds his work in the experience of the presence of others, and this experience is certainly phenomenological, but not necessarily in the way that the works of Husserl or Heidegger are phenomenological. Derrida identifies in Lévinas not only the idea that phenomenological experience is important, but more importantly the notion that the experience of others is the most "irreducible" experience in a twofold sense: the other is that part of my experience who is most resistant to reduction, but the other is also that part of my experience who is the most irreducible of all experiences (83.32/123). This "passage and departure toward the other" must remain open to question, and Derrida sees in it the hidden influence of a messianic eschatology; a "hollow space [*creux*]" that serves to keep future questioning open (83.33-37/124). Derrida further defines this hollow space of messianic eschatology, insisting that

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[35] See Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 42-43, 194-215. See also Emmanuel Lévinas, *Existence and Existents*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2001), 86, 97-99.

[36] See Emmanuel Lévinas, "Is Ontology Fundamental? [1951]," in *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*. Trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (London: Continuum, 2006), 8.

it is not merely one opening among others, but "the opening of opening, that which can be enclosed within no category or totality, that is, everything within experience which can no longer be described by traditional concepts, and which resists every philosopheme" (83.38-41/124).

Rather than seeing Lévinas' ethics of the face as merely a revision of phenomenology or new ethical orientation, Derrida understands Lévinas to be revising the conditions of philosophy itself. Derrida sees in Lévinas a liberation from the domination of the other by the self and the same, as well as a resistance to the traditional enclosures of philosophy. Lévinas opposes the oppressive and warring character of western philosophy, and in his ethics of the other the phenomenological experience of the face provides an opening for a kind of metaphysics that does not found itself on stable foundations or origins (such as a fundamental ontology), but instead upon an exemplary everyday experience: the face-to-face encounter. In itself, the experience of others maintains questionability and resists the enclosing tendencies of Greek metaphysics. But what does Derrida see in the work of Lévinas, and its messianic eschatology, that warrants his description of his ethics of the other as a nonviolent relationship?

I. The Violence of Light[37]

Derrida sees this hollow space of messianic eschatology as something that preserves the open character of Lévinas' ethics and assists him in moving beyond the restrictive origins of Greek philosophy and toward the beginning of "some strange community" (84.2/124). Describing "Violence and Metaphysics" as a "very partial reading of Lévinas's work" Derrida does not seek to "explore" or even make a "beginning," but rather provides a "commentary" that attempts to

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[37] Below I follow Derrida's headings from "Violence and Metaphysics" and his inclination toward commentary rather than summary or oppositional critique by providing one of my own (a commentary on a commentary).

"remain faithful to the themes and audacities of a thought" (84.8-11/124). Attempting to stay close to the nonviolent relationship that Lévinas sets forth, Derrida signals the problems of founding an interpretation on stable origins, while also describing his work as a kind of "reciprocal interrogation" (84.14/125).

Derrida seeks to be faithful to the history of Lévinas's thought and infers that he will allow it to reciprocally interrogate his own work, but there is much debate about to what extent Derrida critiques Lévinas in "Violence and Metaphysics." Although Derrida points out limitations in Lévinas's thought throughout "Violence and Metaphysics" such as Lévinas's problematic retention of Heideggerian categories, his appreciation of Lévinas is clear.[38]

According to Spivak, in "Violence and Metaphysics," "Derrida reads Lévinas critically, suggesting that he too is complicit with philosophy in the Greek. But about the openness of the question, the prior claim of responsibility to the trace of the other (which will be for him the possibility of 'the non-ethical opening of ethics': *Of Grammatology* p. 140), he is in

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[38] Consider the following statement on Lévinas made by Derrida in a 1984 colloquium: "Discussion" *parallax* 10.4 (2004), 64. Original: Jacques Derrida and Pierre-Jean Labarrière, *Altérités* (Paris: Osiris, 1986), 74.

> André Jacob: Yes, but I do not think that you would want to subscribe to everything in Lévinas that represents, as far as alterity is concerned, an important revolution compared to traditional moral philosophy, but at the same time tries to abandon the better aspects of morality.

> Jacques Derrida: I don't know [...] Confronted with a thought like Lévinas's, I never have any objection. I am ready to subscribe to everything he says. That does not mean that I think the same or in the same way, but here the differences become very difficult to determine: what does the difference of idiom, language, writing signify in this case? I try to put a certain number of questions to Lévinas while reading him, whether it be about his relation to the Greek *logos*, his strategy, his thought on femininity for example; but what happens here is not a question of disagreement or distance.

agreement."[39] Spivak notes both Derrida's desire to point out how Lévinas is drawn back into the traditions he resists, and how Lévinas and Derrida prioritize the openness of ethics and questions.

In keeping with his commentarial approach, Derrida sees the Lévinas of 1930 as already being hesitant to endorse the "imperialism of *theoria*" (84.39-85.1/126). Against the violent exposures of light and the difficulty of conducting a discourse against light (85.5/126), Derrida sees Lévinas as preserving something of the darkness and concealment of the face, such that the face of other is not only something exposed in "nudity" but also something that also conceals a mystery: "this epiphany of a certain non-light before which all violence is to be quieted and disarmed" (85.9/126). Praising the subtlety of Lévinas's reading of Husserl, Derrida then turns to Lévinas's 1947 work *Existence and Existents*, and he notes that here Lévinas makes a departure from the light of being toward an ethical "ex-cedence [*ex-cendance*]" that departs from Being, but does so without transcendence (85.37/127).[40] Derrida further points out that Plato's "good

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[39] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Feminism and Deconstruction Again: Negotiations" [1987] in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (London: Routledge, 1993), 307. The statement quoted above appears in a footnote to an essay in which Spivak, among other things, seeks to show "how feminism might use deconstruction," while being conscious of how "postcolonials and migrants are still coming to terms with unacknowledged complicity with the culture of imperialism, in a whole range of experiences including the failure of secularism and the Eurocentrism of economic migration" (121). I quote these lines to draw attention to the fact that Spivak is concerned with implicit complicities at the same time as she points out how Derrida argues that Lévinas is complicit with Greek philosophy and its violence. I will also note a possible typological error in Spivak's summary of "Violence and Metaphysics." In the same footnote Spivak writes that "Lévinas argues there [in "Violence and Metaphysics"] that Husserl and Heidegger, both within the Greek tradition ultimately write philosophies of oppression. Neutralizing the other, fundamental ontology and phenomenology perform the same structural operation as philosophies of knowledge, appropriating the other as object. By contrast, Lévinas suggests, the gaze toward the other must always be open, an open question, the possibility of the ethical." (307). I read Spivak's words "By contrast," to indicate that she is actually referring to Derrida in the first sentence and Lévinas in the second (meaning that there is a typo). Regardless of whether this is an error, the indeterminacy between Derrida's voice and Lévinas' that this quotation points to is a central problem in "Violence and Metaphysics" that would require another dissertation to clarify. Indeed, one dissertation attempts such a clarification, arguing that in "Violence and Metaphysics" in which Derrida "contests Lévinas's reading of the history of philosophy," "borrows the resources from philosophical tradition from which he claims to be breaking," and "does not *justify* its discursive resources" (42-43). See Andrew McGettigan, "Disputes in the 'metaphysics' of ethico-political transformation: a re-assessment of the speculative philosophies of Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Lévinas." PHD Dissertation, Middlesex University, 2006.

[40] Lévinas mentions "ex-cedence" in the preface to *Existence and Existents* (xvii), but he appears to coin the term much earlier in his 1935 essay "De l'évasion." See Emmanuel Lévinas, *On Escape*. Trans. Bettina Bergo. Ann. Jacques Rolland (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 54.

beyond being [*epekeina tea ousias*]" serves as a major reference point for Lévinas in both *Totality and Infinity* and *Existence and Existents* (85.33-35/127). Whereas in *Totality and Infinity* Lévinas seeks to move beyond light and being, in *Existence and Existents* Lévinas pointed to both the necessity and limitations of light and Being.[41] In Derrida's terms, for Lévinas "ethical excedence is not projected toward the neutrality of the good, but toward the Other, and that which (is) *epekeina tes ousias* is not essentially light but fecundity or generosity" (86.6-7/127).

Continuing his exegesis of Lévinas's early work, Derrida points out that Lévinas breaks with Husserl for many reasons, not least of which is that the distancing gesture of theoretical rationality leaves behind "the violences of mysticism and history... enthusiasm and ecstasy" (87.9-10/130). For Derrida, Lévinas's critique of Husserl is focused on "the complicity of theoretical objectivity and mystical communion" which constitute "the premetaphysical unity of one and the same violence" (87.18/130). Turning from Lévinas's critique of Husserl to his critique of Heidegger, Derrida does not see the retention of Heideggerian themes in Lévinas as a contradiction worthy of oppositional criticism, but instead he considers it to be a "displacement of concepts" (88.2, 88.6/131). Following Lévinas's displacing retention of Heideggerian ontology and historicity, Derrida sees Lévinas's "indictment" against Heidegger as a charge "made with a violence that will not cease to grow" (88.8-9/131).

What is the character of this violence? Some clues are given in Derrida's assessment of Lévinas's critique of Heidegger, especially in the way that Lévinas uses distinctions between inside and outside, and between subject and object, but nonetheless presents a metaphysics that does not necessarily divide Being into subjects and objects and inside and outside (88.37/132). While mediating between these oppositions, Lévinas opposes what Derrida calls the "domination

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[41] Compare Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 191-193. with *Existence and Existents*, 40. and *Time and the Other*, 64.

of unity" (89.7/132) and the eleatic "confine[ment of] non-Being to its relativity to Being" (89.24/133) because of their foreclosure of alterity.[42] In his revision of and departure from fundamental ontology, Lévinas converts Heidegger's ontological difference between Being and beings into a different couple: existence and existents. However, Derrida questions whether Lévinas takes up Heidegger's ontological difference in a way that contradicts Heidegger's intentions and misreads his *es gibt* (90.3-5/133).[43]

Derrida then turns to the collectivity and community that are supposed to characterize *Mitsein*, identifying that the face-to-face encounter in Lévinas is something that lies "beneath solidarity, beneath companionship, before *Mitsein*" constituting an "original relation with the other" (90.24/134).[44] Not yet communal, Lévinas's original face-to-face encounter is something that Derrida describes as "neither mediate nor immediate" (90.28/134), for both terms imply the sort of distinction between inside and outside, subject and object, that Lévinas revises. Although Derrida sees this original encounter with the face of the other as something "to which the traditional *logos* is forever inhospitable" (90.29/134), he does understand Lévinas's critique of the Greek *logos* to at least partially avoid capitulation to that *logos* by "masterfully progressing

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[42] Naas interprets this section in the following way: "Derrida asks, in short, whether one can be welcomed or taken in by the Greek language, the language of philosophy, without oneself becoming in some sense Greek, without giving oneself over to Greek terms, concepts, and oppositions – for example, the oppositions between inside and out, same and other, master and disciple, the Greek and the Stranger. Just as the Eleatic Stranger, in trying to show that nonbeing in some sense is, had to admit that nonbeing is shaped by Being, that is, in relation to it, must not the one who, like Lévinas, wishes to shake the Greek logos at its foundation do so always as a relative nonstranger, that is, only after having accepted a certain Greek hospitality, with all its rites and reciprocal obligations – including, to borrow a word from the Eleatic Stranger, being put to the test of questioning?" *Taking on the Tradition*, 96. See also Lévinas, *Time and the Other*, 42-43. See also, Plato, *Sophist*, 237-239.

[43] Naas writes further: "it could be argued that Derrida sees Lévinas's attempt to dislodge his thinking from Greek thought all the while relying on Greek concepts and terms as a sort of deconstruction." *Taking on the Tradition*, 99.

[44] Cf. Lévinas, *Time and the Other*, 40.

by negations, and by negations against negation... not that of an 'entirely this... or that [*ou bien… ou bien…*],' but of a 'neither this... nor that [*ni… non plus*].'" (90.35-36/135).[45]

Derrida praises Lévinas's non-universalizing mediation by negation and suggests that he resists the ways that solipsistic reason disregards the other and seeks to "repress ethical transcendence" (91.28-29/136). Aligning with Lévinas, the problem here for Derrida is one of disregard, solipsism, and lack of respect – problems that lead Derrida to suggest that "phenomenology and ontology would be philosophies of violence" (91.35/136). Concerning the violence of phenomenology and ontology, Derrida states that "Through them the entire philosophical tradition, in its meaning and at bottom, would make common cause with oppression and with the totalitarianism of the same" (91.36-37/136).

Derrida understands this oppressive and totalitarian violence to be connected to the "clandestine friendship between light and power" (91.37/136), and, with Lévinas, the kind of possessive knowledge that seizes the other in such a way that makes the other the same (91.39/337). This kind of light is oppressive and selfish, doing violence through "a displacement of technico-political oppression in the direction of philosophical discourse." (92.5/136-137). The inescapable and fundamental image of light is something that Derrida consistently associates with violence throughout "Violence and Metaphysics," and he argues that Lévinas's phenomenology of the face cannot fully escape this violence, although it is an open question at this stage whether this constitutes a direct criticism of Lévinas by Derrida or an admission of the inescapable problem of light for all such articulations.

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[45] Cf. Derrida, *Positions*, 41.

II. Phenomenology, Ontology, Metaphysics

In the second section of "Violence and Metaphysics" Derrida turns to the question of desire and comments further on Lévinas's ethics of alterity in *Totality and Infinity*. Derrida describes how the ethical transcendence that Lévinas pursues is defined by a kind of desire that refuses to enclose itself. He writes that neither intention nor affect are exhausted by this desire, despite that they "have as their meaning and end their own accomplishment, their own fulfilment and satisfaction within the totality and identity of the same" (93.9/138). Derrida describes desire in Lévinas as something excessive yet inadequate – a desire that must keep on desiring, rather than achieving self-reconciliation or making a return to self (93.17/138), meaning that although it may be governed by an infinite or transcendent referent, desire can never be fully appeased (93.19/138).[46]

Here in Lévinas' attempt to cultivate noncoercive vision, Derrida identifies yet another kind of violence and he returns to the question of eschatology, asking: "What, then, is this encounter with the absolutely-other? Neither representation, nor limitation, nor conceptual relation to the same. The ego and the other do not permit themselves to be dominated or made into totalities by a concept of relationship." (95.1-4/141). Derrida writes that language is something that is always given to the other but cannot capture the other (95.5/141) and writes of the open character of language that: "the dative or vocative dimension which opens the original direction of language cannot lend itself to inclusion in and modification by the accusative or attributive dimension of the object without violence. Language, therefore, cannot make its own possibility a totality and *include* within itself its own origin or its own end." (95.8-9/141).

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[46] See Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 62-63 and 254-255. See also the earlier accounts of desire, pleasure, and need in Lévinas, *Existence and Existents*, 37; and Lévinas, *On Escape*, 58-63.

As "Violence and Metaphysics" progresses, this vocative dimension of language will become more important, not only because it resonates with the call of the face of the other in Lévinas, but also because – as Derrida suggests later – invocation is a way of resisting the violence of predication. The notion that language cannot contain its own origin and end will also become more important in the comparison between Derrida, Mennonite philosophical theologians, and Jantzen, especially because of how the latter two sources consider violence to violate certain circumscribed ways of ordering origins, essences, and ends.

Derrida's statement on the vocative resistance of violence within language sets the stage for his association of violence with predication later in the essay. Here, before his widely interpreted statement "predication is the first violence [*La prédication est la première violence.*]" (147.18/188), however, Derrida sees something in language that can never be reduced to or successfully contain either its origin or end. Like language, the encounter with the other cannot be fully circumscribed. The encounter with the other is impossible to conceptualize, being both "resistant," and "unforeseeable" (95.20-21/141). Although Derrida understands concepts to be materials of language (95.4/141), he challenges Lévinas when he states that "The infinitely-other cannot be bound by a concept" (95.22-23/141). Attempting to think apart from oppositional categories rather than against them in ways that remain within their bounds, Derrida engages in the task of "liberating thought and its language for the encounter occurring beyond these alternatives" (95.29-31/141). To enter this liberating space, Derrida suggests further (with Lévinas) that "this encounter of the unforeseeable *itself* is the only possible opening of time, the only pure future, the only pure expenditure *beyond* history as economy" (95.33-34/142).

Keeping the future unforeseeable and not subject to economy is essential for the preservation of the open character of language and the encounter with the other – both of which

Derrida is interested in maintaining in his revision of philosophical thinking. As a part of his effort to keep the future open, Derrida critiques presence. Instead of a "total presence" he sees presence as a trace (95.35-36/142), suggesting that if presence and the present do not form a totalized identity that forecloses the future, but are rather traces that always slip away, then "experience itself is eschatological at its origin and in each of its aspects" (95.37-38/142). Derrida notes that for Lévinas this eschatological experience of the face-to-face encounter is what makes religion religious and what opens the space of ethics (96.1-2/142). For Derrida this gestural and linguistic encounter with the face of the other, and its refusal of enclosing totalities and communities, is a kind of "interrogation" (96.5/342). Derrida sees in this term not a kind of torture for information, but rather "a total question, a distress and denuding, a supplication, a demanding prayer addressed to a freedom, that is, to a commandment: the only possible ethical imperative, the only incarnated nonviolence in that it is respect for the other" (96.6-8/142).

For Derrida on Lévinas, regard and respect for the other "does not pass through the neutral element of the universal" in the Kantian sense of a categorical imperative (96.11/142). Instead of an abstract neutrality or universality that would seek to absolve itself of its expression through particularity, Lévinas's respectful vision of the face-to-face encounter "permits the known to be" (96.16-17/143). Rather than engaging in a kind of reason, reasoning, or reasoned discourse that neutralizes the other with the tautological ego (96.35-36/143-144), Derrida points out that Lévinas's critique of ontology allows itself to be questioned by ethics. In terms still set by Heidegger's ontological difference, Lévinas's metaphysical critique of ontology rejects powerful ways that "the neutral thought of Being neutralizes the other as a being" (97.13/144).

Derrida sees in Lévinas a critique of "oppressive and possessive" powers in Heidegger's thought (97.20/144). Making further reference to *Totality and Infinity*, Derrida seems to suggest

that Lévinas still grounds his critique of ontology on an *arche* while seeking to hold those whom he critiques to account before ethical principles (97.26-28/145).[47] Accusing Lévinas of using Heideggerian and Husserlian strategies to critique each other, Derrida nonetheless seems to affirm certain statements made by Lévinas, especially the notion that ethics is metaphysics, and the idea that the true representation of the infinite is found in the face of the other rather than in Platonic or Cartesian objectivity (98.34/146).

Moving closer still to the problem of violence, Derrida states that for Lévinas the neutralization of desire is "the first violence" (99.30/147)[48] – a title that he will bestow upon predication in something closer to his own voice later in the essay (147.18/188). Implying that the glance is what makes the face what it is, here Derrida claims that violence "would be the solitude of a mute glance, of a face without speech, *the abstraction* of seeing" (99.31-33/147). The glance alone does not respect the other, and according to Derrida's reading of Lévinas, even when the glance becomes respectful, respect can only take the form of open-ended desire, rather than a quasi-Hegelian desire for consumption (99.36/147). While for Lévinas, sound is above light (99.37/147) and hearing is above seeing (100.2/148), Derrida points out that "the face-to-face eludes every category" because it is both expression and speech and has a kind of "original unity of glance and speech, eyes and mouth" (100.30-32/148). However much the face excludes categories and possesses an original unity, for Derrida, "the face does not *signify*" (100.37/149), nor does it "incarnate, envelop, or signal anything other than self, soul, subjectivity, etc." (100.37-38/149). Rather than signifying, "the face is presence, *ousia*" (101.9/149)[49] – but instead

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[47] See Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46.

[48] Pages 147-149 of *L'écriture et la difference* are later additions by Derrida that do not appear in the original article (and these correspond to pages 99 and 100 of the English translation).

[49] This line is a later addition.

of being a metaphorical or figural presence (101.10/149) the face "expresses itself… in person" and does so from "*behind* the sign" (101.22-23/150).

Here Derrida accuses Lévinas of missing how writing is an essential part of the resemblance between humans and God that is expressed in the face (102.4-6/150). For Derrida, writing "*has time* and freedom" in a way that better escapes "empirical urgencies" than speech (102.8/150). Prioritizing writing over speech in a way that resonates with his work in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida questions whether "the writer more effectively renounces violence" by "depriving himself of the *enjoyments* and effects of his signs" (102.12-13/151). The desire of the writer to "multiply his signs to infinity" however, reflects a forgetting of "the infinitely other as death" and Derrida calls this both a deferral and an "economy of death" (102.16/151).[50]

Derrida then writes that "the limit between violence and nonviolence is perhaps not between speech and writing but within each of them" (102.16-17/151). Citing what he considers to be Lévinas' desire to place the letter before the spirit, or the Torah before God, Derrida again refers to the messianic eschatology of Lévinas (103.7/152). Here Derrida seems to say that Lévinas resists the subordination of language to thought through "a schema that seems to us to support the entirety of Lévinas' thought: the other is the other only if his alterity is absolutely irreducible, that is, infinitely irreducible; and the infinitely Other can only be Infinity." (104.18-20/154). This is because the face is something that expresses speech (and therefore language) but also exceeds totality and totalization by being infinitely other. Derrida echoes Lévinas when he says that the face exceeds totality, and "marks the limit of all power, of all violence, and the

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[50] This line is a later addition. As well, the keeping of an archive and the preservation of his own writing as an enduring testimony that would live on after his death are also recurring themes in Derrida's biography. See Peeters, *Derrida*, 4-5, 14, 24, 424-425, 429.

origin of the ethical" (104.22-23/154), for in Lévinas the true approach to the face will engender resistance for those who would attempt to murder.[51]

While looking to how the face of the other resists violence, Derrida emphasizes the importance of language for Lévinas' key concept, pointing out that the other is a noun, an adjective, a pronoun, both singular and plural (105.2-7/154). Drawing out the dependency of the other upon language, Derrida points out a limitation within phenomenological accounts of the face by claiming that "no phenomenology can account for ethics, speech, and justice" (106.18-19/157). Here Derrida writes that "all justice begins with speech" but "all speech is not just" (106.20/157), and as a consequence, it seems that Derrida understands rhetoric to do violence when it leads the other onward under the guise of education (106.21-23/157).

Derrida notes that for Lévinas infinity is not violent like totality, for the latter is finite and bound to closure, while the infinite God "keeps Lévinas's world from being a world of the pure and worst violence, a world of immorality itself" (107.6-7/158).[52] Derrida writes that, for Lévinas, "in a world where the face would be fully respected (as that which is not of this world), there no longer would be war" (107.14-15/158). Derrida then further reads this connection between respect for the face and the absence of war in a way that understands God to be implicated in war because his name "is a function within the system of war, the only system whose basis permits us to speak, the only system whose language may ever be spoken" (107.18-19/158). This identification of naming and violence with the divine name of God foreshadows

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[51] See Lévinas, "Is Ontology Fundamental?," 8-9.

[52] For an articulation published in 1968 see Emmanuel Lévinas, "Totality and Totalization" and "Infinity" in *Alterity and Transcendence*. Trans. Michael B. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 39-76.

his statements on violence later in the essay, but before further explicating connections between violence and language, Derrida returns to the theological aspects of Lévinas' work.

III. Difference and Eschatology

Having demonstrated that the question of language is deeply important for Lévinas' thought – more so than Lévinas admits – Derrida extends his commentary, noting Lévinas' resistance to the "violent and premetaphysical egoisms" of subjectivism and existentialism (110.11/162) and highlighting his ethics "without law and without concept, which maintains its nonviolent purity only before being determined as concepts and laws" (111.14/164). The ethical relationship that Lévinas theorizes comes before particular laws or rules, but Derrida argues that his "Ethics of Ethics" may still retain a nomic character in the form of a "Law of laws" (111.21/164).

But Derrida does not seek to refute or denounce Lévinas by recourse to some law or rule like the law of non-contradiction, but instead he seeks to question "the necessity of lodging oneself within traditional conceptuality in order to destroy it" (111.39/165) – a question of the relation between interiority and exteriority, a relation that Derrida marks with an 'X' (112.14/165), for the crossing between inner and outer is a kind of chiastic writing that both crosses and crosses out (112.38/165). The inside-outside structure "is language itself" and "marks the original finitude of speech" (113.24-25/166). Furthermore, this inside-outside boundary is something that philosophy attempts to maintain by bestowing upon it a natural status (113.32/167), but Derrida questions the restrictiveness of this boundary claiming that the other must not be circumscribed through reference to a "positive infinity" but must "maintain within itself the negativity of the indefinite" (114.19/168). Derrida understands Lévinas' call toward the other to involve a break between thought and language (114.35/168) that is not reducible to a

break between inside and outside. This means that it is not so simple as to say that the infinitely other is beyond language, both because the division between thought and language as inside and outside is part of the problem of the face, and because the face of the mortal body refuses the dissociation of thought and language.

Derrida continues to question how one ought to think the other beyond the limits inscribed by the boundary between interiority and exteriority, and this questioning leads him again to write of the relationship between violence and language in a very important passage which I will now quote at length:

> How to think the other, if the other can be spoken only as exteriority and through exteriority, that is, nonalterity? And if the speech [*parole*] which must inaugurate and maintain absolute separation is by its essence rooted in space, which cannot conceive separation and absolute alterity? If, as Lévinas says, only discourse (and not intuitive contact) is righteous, and if, moreover, all discourse essentially retains within it space and the Same – does this not mean that discourse is originally violent [*originellement violent*]? And that the philosophical logos, the only one in which peace may be declared, is inhabited by war? The distinction between discourse and violence always will be an inaccessible horizon. Nonviolence would be the telos, and not the essence of discourse. Perhaps it will be said that something like discourse has its essence in its telos, and the presence of its present in its future. This certainly is so, but on the condition that its future and its telos be nondiscourse: peace as a *certain* silence, a certain beyond of speech, a certain possibility, a certain silent horizon of speech. And telos has always had the form of presence, be it a future presence. There is war only after the opening of discourse, and war dies out only at the end of discourse. Peace, like silence, is the strange vocation of a language called outside itself by itself. But since *finite* silence is also the medium of violence, language can only indefinitely tend toward justice by acknowledging and practicing the violence within it. Violence against violence. *Economy* of violence. An economy irreducible to what Lévinas envisions in the word. If light is the element of violence, one must combat light with a certain other light, in order to avoid the worst violence, the violence of the night which precedes or represses discourse. This *vigilance* is a violence chosen as the least violence by a philosophy which takes history, that is, finitude, seriously; a philosophy aware of itself as historical in each of its aspects (in a sense which tolerates neither finite totality, nor positive infinity), and aware of itself, as Lévinas says in another sense, as *economy*. But again, an economy which in being history, can be *at home* neither in the finite totality which Lévinas calls the Same nor in the positive presence of the Infinite. Speech is doubtless the first defeat of violence, but paradoxically, violence did not exist before the possibility of speech. The philosopher (man) *must* speak and write within this war of light, a war in which he always already knows himself to be engaged; a war which he knows is inescapable, except by denying

discourse, that is, by risking the worst violence. […] It is transcendence itself. If speech is a movement of metaphysical transcendence, it is history, and not beyond history. It is difficult to think the origin of history in a perfectly finite totality (the Same), as well as, moreover, in a perfectly positive infinity. If, in this sense, the movement of metaphysical transcendence is history, it is still violent, for – and this is the legitimate truism from which Lévinas always draws inspiration – history is violence [Cf. the notion that being is revealed to be war in history, Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 21-23]. Metaphysics is *economy*: violence against violence, light against light: philosophy (in general). About which it can be said, by transposing Claudel's intention, that everything in it "is painted on light as if with condensed light, like the air which becomes frost." This becoming is war. This polemic is language itself. Its inscription. (116-117/170-173).

I reproduce this lengthy selection here because it marks a shift away from Derrida's entangled commentary in which it is difficult (or perhaps impossible) to distinguish Derrida from Lévinas, toward something closer to his own distinct approach to the relationship between violence and language. Although the idea that we readers could cleanly separate Derrida's own voice from his commentary on Lévinas would fall prey to the dissociative and possessive logic that both Derrida and Lévinas challenge, we must also notice when Derrida moves beyond commentary and beyond the entanglement of his voice with Lévinas, and toward a contributing voice that is not indistinguishable from Lévinas. I quote the passage above to show not only the various flat statements that Derrida makes regarding violence that he distinguishes from Lévinas (e.g. "The distinction between discourse and violence always will be an inaccessible horizon."), but also to keep with the ways in which his writing resists summary and instead calls for commentary.

In the extract above, Derrida begins by asking a question to Lévinas which I will now rephrase: how should one think about the other *if* we can only think about the other by means of non-alterity (i.e., language and categorization)? For Derrida this means that *if* the kind of speech that we use to maintain separation from the other – so as not to reduce the other to the same – cannot achieve such a boundary (so as to keep the other other), *if* only discourse is righteous, but discourse also contains and proceeds by means of sameness (language), *then* discourse is

originally violent. Reducing Derrida's writing to an if/then statement governed by a logical movement from premises to conclusions is reductive, for Derrida is challenging Lévinas in a way that resists the kinds of accountability sought by those who reduce writing to relations of causal necessity and propositional verification. To understand Derrida's formulations above we must move apart from the causal linearity of if/then statements and back to the open question.

Derrida's question "does this not mean that discourse is originally violent?" (116.36-37/171) is first of all a *question*. Perhaps it is a rhetorical question, but at this stage we readers have no absolute way of knowing if Derrida is inferring that the answer is yes. If we take seriously Derrida's statements on the nature of questioning earlier in the essay, then we must read this question as an open question that could prompt a series of heterogeneous responses, and a question that may not call for or produce a final determinate answer that would bring its questioning status to a close, as in the flat statement of fact: "discourse is originally violent."

Furthermore, Derrida's question "does this not mean that discourse is originally violent?" is a question for Lévinas – an "interrogation" that in some way calls for a response from Lévinas that would account for at least a tension between the desire for a righteous discourse that would be free from violence, and the idea that all discourse contains within itself and puts to use a kind of sameness (a sameness that we may want to contrast with the spatial differing and temporal deferring of *différance*). Derrida's question "does this not mean that discourse is originally violent?" is followed by another question that asks whether "the philosophical *logos*, the only one in which peace may be declared, is inhabited by war?" (116.38/171). As if to provide one opening answer to his own question, Derrida states that "the distinction between discourse and violence always will be an inaccessible horizon" (116.38-39/171).

Here, after the term "violence," appears a footnote in which Derrida discusses how Lévinas and Éric Weil distinguish between violence and discourse in different ways. Whereas Weil understands ontology to be a nonviolent discourse in which harmony is achieved by discussion of what is, Lévinas understands ontology to possess a coherence that is absolute and violent. Derrida, for his part, points out a distinction between Lévinas and Weil: for Lévinas discourse is peaceful when the separation between self and other is respected, but for Weil discourse is peaceful when this distance is bridged by a concern for what is (315/171-172).[53]

Following his questions for Lévinas in the selection quoted above, Derrida questions the framing of otherness by the division between inside and outside, and then questions any reliance upon the spatial separation of speech and writing. Turning to writing, Derrida challenges Lévinas' identification of discourse and righteousness and suggests instead that – under the conditions Lévinas himself establishes – discourse is violent, and war inheres in the very philosophical *logos* that is used to oppose violence. Derrida further contends that under these conditions, nonviolence is the *telos* of discourse rather than its essence, and then he anticipates a rejoinder that would claim that the presence and present of discourse are cast forward into the future, and that discourse might then have a *telos* for an essence. Affirming this, Derrida quickly qualifies the statement, suggesting that the essence of discourse is in its *telos* only if that *telos* is non-discourse and silence. Continuing to invoke the image of a horizon, so connected to both the legacies of both phenomenology and philosophical hermeneutics, Derrida claims that where there is war there is discourse, and where there is not discourse there is not war. Peace is like silence, for both are drawn outside of themselves from themselves. Acknowledging that a certain

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[53] See Éric Weil, *Logique de la philosophie* (Paris: Vrin, 1950), 24-28. Compare with Emanuel Lévinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*. Trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) 6-7. See also the later comments on Weil made in Lévinas, "Violence of the Face" in *Alterity and Transcendence*, 175-176.

kind of finite silence is also violent, Derrida states that language can only be just through the acknowledgment and practice of its constitutive violence. However, this opposition of violence to and by violence takes the form of an economy that is "irreducible to what Lévinas envisions in the world," for it trades the violence of light to avoid the worst violence of night (117.10/172).

For Derrida there is a kind of light that is identified with violence, and another kind of light that can prevent it, but both are violent. With speech comes violence, and the speaker is already caught within the finitude of language and cannot escape its violence. Returning to the theme with which the essay began, Derrida suggests that the philosopher is always engaged in this war of light against light, violence against violence, and this is no more evident than in the idea that history is violence, and so too is language, for there is no history without it. If the philosopher denies discourse, the philosopher is "risking the worst violence" (117.23/172), but at the same time the philosopher is caught in a paradox not unlike the one identified by Murphy: on one hand, speech is the only way to oppose the violence of certain kinds of silence, while on the other hand, "violence did not exist before the possibility of speech" (117.19-20/173).

Derrida confronts his reader with this paradox and then connects violence with history, metaphysics, economy, and philosophy – all under the heading of an inescapable "light against light" (117.37/173). Following this admission of the inescapable history of light, Derrida returns to Lévinas' revision of phenomenology and its concepts of intention and experience, finding within it both problems and prospects. For Derrida, phenomenology has a characteristic opening toward respect, even though it neutralizes the commandment that would make respect a law (121.18/178).[54] Rather than accusing phenomenology of being incapable of giving values,

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[54] This line is a later addition.

Derrida sees in it a refusal of subordination to transcendence or neutralization (122.15/179).[55]

Careful not to equivocate the position of Husserl with that of Lévinas, Derrida points out the

problem of subsuming the other into the ego in Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*,[56] and points to

Lévinas' refusal to "make the other an alter ego" (123.12/180). Although Lévinas and Husserl

differ on their accounts of the mediation between inner ego and outer other, Derrida understands

the two thinkers to be close on the question of the infinitely other (125.3-6/184). Derrida then

returns to the violence of both phenomenality itself and its access by language (125.19/184) and

sees both Lévinas and Husserl acknowledge the other as other by refusing to transform the other

into the egoic same (125.22-25/184). Uniting Husserl and Lévinas on this point, Derrida states

that "If the other were not recognized as a transcendental alter *ego*, it would be entirely in the

world and not, as ego, the origin of the world. To refuse to see in it an ego in this sense is, within

the ethical order, the very gesture of all violence. If the other was not recognized as ego, its

entire alterity would collapse" (125.27-30/184).

There is an economy in the essential dissymmetry required for the other to remain other,

such that the self that says "I" must recognize its own status as other for the other (126.12/185).

Not only that, but Derrida points out that the infinitely or absolutely other "cannot be stated and

thought simultaneously" because making the other absolutely exterior to the same absolves it of

a relation to the self that is essential to its otherness (126.33/185). The other is no longer the

other when its absolute alterity becomes the same, or when its alterity becomes absolute

(127.41/187). This reduction of the other to the same is what Derrida calls violence (128.12/187),

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[55] This line is a later addition.

[56] Derrida quotes from Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*. Trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960) §42, 122.

and its counterpart is found in "the most peaceful gesture possible," that of accessing something of the alter ego (128.14/188). Derrida stresses that this kind of access to the other, however peaceful, is not "absolutely peaceful" but "economical" (128.14/188). The "preethical violence" of "transcendental origin" is both a kind of violence because it structures finite relations, and a kind of nonviolence because it "opens the relation to the other" (128.41-129.1/188). This simultaneous violence and nonviolence takes the form of an economy that opens the relation to the other and permits access to the other (129.1-3/189).[57] For Derrida this violent economy is "the origin of meaning and of discourse in the reign of finitude" (129.12-13/189), while for Lévinas, according to Derrida, it is "the dissimulation or oppression of the other by the same" (129.4-5/189).

Herein lies one key difference between Derrida's understanding of violence and Lévinas's. Whereas for Lévinas the oppressive alteration of the same by the other is violence, for Derrida the structure that makes the other depend on the same is violent. Unlike Lévinas's staging of violence between the same and the other, Derrida understands violence to appear on an infinite horizon in which the difference between sameness and otherness would "no longer be valid" (129.19/190). Although it is an addition that is not in the original 1964 text, here, for the first time in "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida mentions *différance*, and identifies it with the violent reign of the difference between the same and the other (129.19/190).[58]

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[57] This line is a later addition.

[58] Compare the English translation of the 1972 edition of *L'écriture et la différence* in which Derrida writes that peace would not have meaning without the difference between the same and the other that constitutes *différance* (129.19/190), with the French original which does not include the term *différance*. "Violence et Métaphysique," 445 (part 2).

With reference to Hegel, Derrida writes that war "is the very emergence of speech and of appearing" (129.41/190),[59] and he claims further that "discourse, therefore, if it is originally violent, can only *do itself violence*, can only negate itself in order to affirm itself, make war upon the war which institutes it without ever *being able* to reappropriate this negativity, to the extent that it is discourse" (130.6-9/190). The violence that characterizes discourse, for Derrida, is not only a characteristic, but an antagonism in which the "unimaginable night" (130.13/191) of the "worst violence as previolence" (130.10/191) is opposed by the violence of discourse.

For Derrida, the worst violence is a nihilistic silence that seems to differ from the peaceful silence he alludes to earlier in the essay, whereas the violence that opposes such silence is constitutive of discourse, and also connected to the messianic promise (130.18/191). But, for Derrida, the messianic promise has not been fulfilled and its triumph has not yet been reached. Derrida considers that, for Lévinas, the messianic triumph "could abolish violence only by suspending the difference (conjunction or opposition) between the same and the other, that is, by suspending the *idea* of peace" (130.24/191), but for Derrida even this messianic intervention is not possible without the violent *logos*, for "eschato*logy* is not possible, except *through violence*" (130.26/191).

For Derrida, philosophy sits in between "original tragedy and messianic triumph" (131.11/191), perhaps corresponding with the differences between the Hebraic and Hellenic influences mentioned in the epigraph to the essay. Philosophy, being in-between, is a place where "violence is returned against violence" (131.12/191), and the messianic resonances of the term "return" should strike us here. Following the invocation of this term, Derrida turns again to the concern for philosophy with which he began, stating that the opening of the philosophical

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[59] This line is a later addition.

question "why?" is constitutive of philosophy and imperative within philosophy, for philosophy is composed of this question, but must always allow itself to be questioned (131.28/191).

Suggesting that Lévinas' metaphysics rests on the very phenomenological ground that it seeks to question (133.18/195), Derrida argues that conceiving of violence as a disrespect of the other that makes the other appear as what it is not, means subjecting the other to dissimulation even in an attempt to free it or respect it (133.3-6/195). In the "living present" and its time, time itself is violent, and violence is done in the attempt to free "absolute alterity" by making it the "absolute same" (133.6/195). Derrida argues that if we acknowledge the living present as that which opens time to the other, under the auspices of the ego, then "the present, and the present of presence, are all originally and forever violent" (133.11/195), and this eternal and original violence is further evident in the finite, historical, and deathly, "living present" (133.13/195).

An important moment in Derrida's challenge to Lévinas appears here when he says: "Lévinas's metaphysics in a sense presupposes – at least we have attempted to show this – the transcendental phenomenology that it seeks to put into question." (133.22-23/195). Derrida furthers his argument with a question:

> Upon what basis does one ask questions about finitude as violence? Upon what basis does the original violence of discourse permit itself to be commanded to be returned against itself, to be always, as language, the return against itself that recognizes the other as other? (133.26-27/195)

Derrida does not think that this question can be answered by a return to infinity, or without language, or by avoiding "a new discourse which once more will seek to justify transcendental phenomenology" (133.30-31/195), but he does think that the question of the basis of violence remains open, especially when philosophy itself is questioned by a silent affect of speech that is outside of Greek logics. Here Derrida is resisting something in Lévinas without seeking to refute him, and he is calling for a "strange dialogue of speech and silence" between violent

phenomenology and messianic eschatology resonant with the strange community that he invokes at the beginning of the essay (133.38/196).

Citing Lévinas' claim that ontology is a philosophy of power, Derrida contends that Being is not reducible to ontology, first philosophy, or power (137.12/201), and he questions any relationship of domination between Being and the existent (138.34/203). Derrida then refers to Lévinas' claim that undetermined Being is what provides the other for our understanding, and he argues that rather than being an abstract predicate, Being is what "authorizes all predication" (140.19/205) and further "permits the emergence of every possible difference" (140.21/205). For Derrida, "every determination, in effect, presupposes the thought of Being" (140.39/206). However, to understand Being, one must let it be, for "Being always concerns alterity" (141.4/207) and the other cannot be other unless it is let (to) be, such that "the thinking of Being does not make of the other a species of the genre of Being" (141.11-12/207). Disidentifying Being from both infinite and finite totality (141.14-15/207), Derrida argues that "Being itself commands nothing or no one" and suggests that "the best liberation from violence is a certain putting into question, which makes the search for an *archia* tremble" (141.24-25/208).

If philosophy is defined by its problematizing and questioning activity, then Derrida considers philosophy to be "the best liberation from violence" (141.24/208). When Derrida asks "Upon what basis does the original violence of discourse permit itself to be commanded" (133.26/195) and when he argues that "Being itself commands nothing or no one" (141.24/208) he is responding to Lévinas' argument in the essay "Freedom and Command" that true speech is essentially a command.[60] In the same essay, Lévinas conceives of violent action as an action that

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[60] Lévinas, "Freedom and Command," 23.

acts as if it were alone, and without thought of its reception.[61] Here, for Lévinas, "what characterizes violent action, what characterizes tyranny, is that one does not face what the action is being applied to. To put it more precisely: it is that one does not see the face in the other…"[62] The "pacific opposition" that the face of the other presents, for Lévinas, is met with violence when this opposition is avoided or ignored – a kind of dominance by the aversion of attention and gaze.[63] The metaphysical relationship with the other is conceived of ethically by Lévinas, and he argues at the end of "Freedom and Command" that relating to the face means relating with "a being in itself" in such a way that is "without violence" and "of creation."[64] Here in this essay, which Bernasconi argues is the more central text for Derrida in "Violence and Metaphysics" than *Totality and Infinity*, Lévinas argues that one can escape violence. But Derrida differs on this question.

In a sentence added in 1967 Derrida states: "One never escapes the *economy of war*" (148.21-22/220).[65] In these final pages of "Violence and Metaphysics" Derrida's challenge to Lévinas is most clearly expressed. Given that there is much debate about whether and how Derrida critiques Lévinas in "Violence and Metaphysics" I will refer to Derrida's "challenge" to Lévinas in order to leave open the question – in keeping with the importance of leaving questions open for Derrida – of whether his critique is oppositional or not.[66] Following from his comments

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[61] Ibid, 18.

[62] Ibid, 19.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid, 22.

[65] Compare Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics" 148.21-22, which reflects the 1967 French edition of *Writing and Difference* with Derrida, "Violence et Métaphysique," (Part 2), 467. This addition is pointed out in Bernasconi, "The Violence of the Face," 87. Cf. Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence*, 220.

[66] In addition to Spivak and McGettigan, others have spent time attempting to understand whether and how Derrida critiques Lévinas. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley suggest that rather than a critique that "would claim to

on Lévinas' "Freedom and Command" and further challenging Lévinas' complicity with Being, Derrida further questions the inversion of ontology and metaphysics in *Totality and Infinity* (143.19/211). He states that "implied by the discourse of *Totality and Infinity*, alone permitting to *let* be others in their truth, freeing dialogue and the face to face, the thought of Being is thus as close as possible to nonviolence" (146.38/218). However, Derrida does not speak of pure nonviolence, for "like pure violence, pure nonviolence is a contradictory concept" (146.39/218). Derrida suggests that pure violence would be "a relationship between beings without face" and pure nonviolence would be "the nonrelation of the same to the other (in the sense understood by Lévinas)" – and these invert: pure nonviolence is pure violence (146.41-147.1/218).

Derrida's challenge continues as he points out that for Lévinas the face both arrests and provokes violence (147.1-2/218), and the thought of Being that the face reveals is all that stands in the way of the alternatives of pure violence and pure nonviolence (147.4-5/218). Derrida resists Lévinas' notion that violence could be resisted by being,[67] asserting that violence is always within the thought of Being that is unveiled in the face-to-face encounter, making violence closer to Lévinas than he admits. Derrida writes:

> A Being without violence would be a Being which would occur outside the existent: nothing; nonhistory; nonoccurrence; nonphenomenality. A speech produced without the

follow Derrida by arguing that because the ethical relation to the other is based on discourse, it presupposes the very ontological language that Lévinas claims it overcomes" a more sensitive reading would see that Derrida performs a deconstructive "double reading" in which there is an undecidable relationship between the necessity and impossibility of escaping the logocentrism that Derrida is concerned with. See Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley, "Editor's Introduction," in *Re-Reading Lévinas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), xii.

[67] Lévinas writes: "But violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action." (*Totality and Infinity*, 21), and later "Concretely our effort consists in maintaining, within anonymous community, the society of the I with the Other-language and goodness. This relation is not prephilosophical, for it does not do violence to the I, is not imposed upon it brutally from the outside, despite itself, or unbeknown to it, as an opinion; more exactly, it is imposed upon the I beyond all violence by a violence that calls it entirely into question. The ethical relation, opposed to first philosophy which identifies freedom and power, is not contrary to truth; it goes unto being in its absolute exteriority, and accomplishes the very intention that animates the movement unto truth." (*Totality and Infinity*, 47).

least violence would determine nothing, would say nothing, would offer nothing to the other; it would not be *history*, and it would *show* nothing: in every sense of the word, and first of all the Greek sense, it would be a speech without *phrase*.

In the last analysis, according to Lévinas, nonviolent language would be a language without the verb *to be*, that is, without predication. Predication is the first violence. Since the verb *to be* and the predicative act are implied in every other verb, and every common noun, nonviolent language, in the last analysis, would be a language of pure invocation, pure adoration, proffering only proper nouns in order to call to the other from afar. In effect, such a language would be purified of all *rhetoric*, which is what Lévinas explicitly desires; and purified of the first sense of rhetoric, which we can invoke without artifice, that is, purified of every verb. Would such a language still deserve its name? Is a language free from all rhetoric possible? (147.10-25/218)

Presumably the first paragraph quoted above is an interpretive description by Derrida of Lévinas' position, through which Derrida seeks to point out that to rid speech of violence one would need to conceive of a speech that is without any existence, history, occurrence, phenomenality, showing, or phrasing – each of which are violent. Derrida states that according to Lévinas any language consisting of verbs and/or nouns contains violence within it. Here, before the key statement that Mennonite philosophical theologians and Jantzen will critique, Derrida is seeking to point out to Lévinas just how deeply language is imbricated with violence – potentially in ways that Lévinas has not fully admitted.

In the first two lines of the paragraph quoted above, Derrida makes a claim about what is the case "for Lévinas" and then, in a separate sentence, without the words "for Lévinas," he states flatly "Predication is the first violence." What are we to make of the relationship between Derrida's challenge to Lévinas, in which Derrida seeks to hold Lévinas to account for the ways that violence cannot be separated from even the copula, and Derrida's statement "Predication is the first violence"? Is the phrase "Predication is the first violence" merely a descriptive addition to the previous sentence, or is it an assertion by Derrida that is essential to the challenge he poses to Lévinas when he seeks to hold Lévinas to account for how his solutions (the "thought of being") are still caught within the problems he seeks to oppose?

I argue that the latter is the case. When Derrida writes that "Predication is the first violence" he is making an assertion upon which his entire challenge to Lévinas rests. Derrida challenges Lévinas by arguing that the peace that Lévinas seeks by means of the thought of Being that occurs in the face-to-face encounter cannot be a pure nonviolence. Responding to Lévinas' desire to rescue discourse from rhetoric in *Totality and Infinity*,[68] Derrida insists that there can be no language without rhetoric. This is his argument when he asserts that "Predication is the first violence." However, this claim is inseparable from his response to Lévinas because separating it from its context would be a kind of violence and would close down what Derrida wants to keep open: the problem, the question, language, the future, the other, and difference.

Derrida continues his argument with several further identifications: "Being is history," "Being dissimulates itself in its occurrence," and Being "originally does violence to itself in order to be stated and in order to appear" (147.9-10/218). Refusing the notion that one could achieve peace in a pure way, he writes that "a Being without violence would be a Being which would occur outside the existent," meaning that it would not be historical, occurring, phenomenal, speaking, showing, or determining (147.11/218). Derrida then states that,

> nonviolent language would be a language that would do without the verb *to be*, that is, without predication. Predication is the first violence. Since the verb *to be* and the predicative act are implied in every other verb, and in every common noun, nonviolent language, in the last analysis, would be a language of pure invocation, pure adoration, proffering only proper nouns in order to call the other from afar (147.16-21/218-219).[69]

This much is 'for Lévinas,' while Derrida writes in more or less his own voice, stating "there is no phrase which is indeterminate, that is, which does not pass through the violence of the

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[68] Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 70.

[69] Later, in 1974, Derrida will further associate violence with language in his commentary on Hegel's mutual recognition, stating that the war in language is conducted with names and not signifiers. See Jacques Derrida, *Glas*. Trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 137-138. Left column.

concept" (147.41/219). He writes: "Violence appears with *articulation*" (147.42-148.1/219).[70]

But Derrida continues, again commenting on Lévinas, stating that for him a nonviolent

metaphysics means that although each concept carries with it a kind of violence, it is only in its

historical expression – its articulation – that it becomes violent (148.8/219).

The basic articulation of history, which began the essay, reemerges at its end with the

influences of Hebraism and Hellenism,[71] and the question "Are we Greeks? Are we Jews?"

(153.13/227). For Derrida the unity of these two identities and questions constitutes history, in

all of its hypocrisy (153.14/227), forming a strange dialogue that often attempts to find peace by

a reconciliation of heterologies, but is always troubled by the irreducible expanse that separates

extremes. The essay ends with an answer to his previous question, written in the words of "the

most Hegelian of modern novelists," Joyce (from *Ulysses*): "Jewgreek is Greekjew. Extremes

meet." (153.29/228). However, in line with Derrida's general critique of philosophical

oppositions, we can observe, with John Llewelyn, that "if Derrida subscribes to the idea that

extremes meet, he certainly does not subscribe to the idea that they meet in some neutral middle

ground."[72] No neutral escape from the economy of war, says Derrida. For Derrida, the violence

of historical articulation is unavoidable, especially by Hegelian efforts to make extremes meet in

synthetic, dialectical, or systematic ways. Instead of abstraction, Derrida concludes "Violence

and Metaphysics" with extremes in the predicative joining of the names "Jew" and "Greek."

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[70] This line is a later addition.

[71] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*. Ed. J. D. Wilson (London: Cambridge University Press, 1932), Ch. 4.

[72] John Llewelyn, "Jewgreek or Greekjew" in *The Collegium Phaenomenologicum: The First Ten Years*. Ed. John C. Sallis, Giuseppina Moneta, and Jacques Taminiaux (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988), 273. Although Llewelyn concerns himself with parts of Derrida's "Violence and Metaphysics" that directly pertain to violence, and although he places Derrida's notion of violence in the context of the "polemic between the Jewgreek and the Greekjew" (283), he does not focus on the meaning of the term in Derrida's essay.

Reading Derrida's "Violence and Metaphysics" with "*Préjuges*" and "Force of Law"

Throughout his career following the publication of "Violence and Metaphysics" Derrida returned to the problem of violence in works devoted to hospitality, justice, and the question of law. To give a more comprehensive picture of Derrida's thought and his enduring concern for the problem of violence, below I examine two texts that exemplify Derrida's later approach to the relationship between violence, force, and law. The first is from a 1982 colloquium on the work of Jean-Francois Lyotard, and the second is from a 1989 Cardozo Law School conference in which Derrida provides a reading of Walter Benjamin."[73] Following a brief tour of these two important texts, I will close the chapter by showing how they inform the reading of "Violence and Metaphysics" provided above and contribute to a clearer understanding of what violence means for Derrida.

"Before the Law (*Préjuges*)" (1982)

In his response to Lyotard in "Before the Law (*Préjuges*)" – for Derrida always wrote in response to particular thinkers and their texts, just as in "Violence and Metaphysics" – Derrida addresses the problem of judgment. Although the place of *Préjuges* within Derrida's corpus has been assessed by Rodolphe Gasché in his essay "Have We Done with the Empire of Judgment?" it arrived relatively late in complete English translation, despite its key place in Derrida's thinking on law and violence.[74]

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[73] Jacques Derrida, *Before the Law: The Complete Text of* Préjuges. Trans. Sandra Van Reenen and Jacques de Ville (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2018). Citations to follow in text, restricted to this section.

[74] Rodolphe Gasché, "Have We Done with the Empire of Judgment?" in *Deconstruction, Its Force, Its Violence: together with "Have We Done with the Empire of Judgment?"* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016).

The untranslatable title "*Préjuges*" is translated into English by Sandra van Reene and Jacques de Ville as "Before the Law." This translation renders the prefix of the original title in such a way that implies that the author is concerned with what happens before the law in the temporal sense (before the law has been invoked) while also implying a concern with what terms might be given more importance than the law, preceding it in emphasis or value. The resonances of the French title are deeper still, referring to prejudice, the suspension of judgment, and the kind of prejudgment that precedes subsequent forms of judging. Throughout the text Derrida is judicious in his exploration of these many readings of the title – judicious in the sense of being concerned with precedents and precedence and connecting the linguistic and literary work of Lyotard with legal thinking.

Derrida begins his judgment of Lyotard with a "line of approach [*attaque*]" posed as a question – for questioning is an enduring value for Derrida, perhaps more than providing answers that foreclose further questioning – "How to judge–Jean-Francois Lyotard?" (3). Commenting on Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, Derrida questions his own question, asking whether he is "calling for a categorical reply" that would involve Lyotard in a kind of trial (7). Here the translators point out that the prefix of *préjuges* points to something not only preceding judgement, but also something that comes before categories (7). As such, Derrida considers *préjuges* to be both a noun and adjective, while also evading categorization by either (8). We who are "prejudged beings" also find ourselves to be prejudged by others (9), and this doubling effect – or sophistic *dissoi logoi* – is something that Derrida finds in Lyotard's work. Plural, *préjuges* does not only name something "judged in advance" but also something that "is *not yet* a category or a predicate" (11). *Préjuges* says "not yet" in two ways, both being a part of what it precedes or being a negation of it: "either implicit presupposition or denial, which itself

can be put forward either as a categorical denial or as a denial *of the* categorical." (11-12). This "not yet" and denial of categorization show a resistance to enclosure and totalization that seems similar to the messianic eschatology that Derrida finds in Lévinas's work.

In order to understand what precedes judgment, Derrida asks: "what is it that we call judging?" – a question that he rightly identifies as something that calls for the prejudgment of judgment itself (13). He calls this a paradox because it "undermines the certainty of a *doxa*" in a way that has ontological consequences (13). Derrida wants to ask, "How to judge?" first, rather than prioritize the question "What is?" because this latter question is a part of the prejudgment that the "ontological prerogative" demands in its search for essences (13). I note here that Derrida understands the ontological desire to find the singular essence of judgement to be expressed in the predicative identification "S is P" (13). By prioritizing the question of "how?" rather than "what?" Derrida wants to resist the ontological prerogative that "predetermines, or predestines the very essence of judgment and, we could even say, the essence of essence, by submitting it to the question 'What is?'" (14). He prefers the question "How to judge?" because it disrupts the prejudgment of judgment that constitutes the ontological question, refusing the "structure that decides in advance [*préjuge*] that one must be able to make a judgment about what judgment *is* before deciding on the *way* in which judgment should be made, etc." (14). This means that, for Derrida, the problem of prejudging judgment is encountered in an undecidable double bind that asks both "can I avoid judging?" and if I cannot, "how then to judge?" (14).

This leads Derrida to law. The absence of criteria that would immediately and clearly guide one to an answer to the question "how to judge?" is, for Derrida, a constituent part of law. His reasoning is such that "If the criteria were simply available, if the law was present, there, in front of us, there would be no judgment." (15). The law requires judgment and calls for the

exercise of judgment, and Derrida points to the paradox at the heart of law, that it must dispense with itself "in this situation of law being outside-the-law [*hors-la-loi de la loi*]" (16).

For Derrida, within this paradox, we must answer for ourselves before the law as those who prejudge and who are prejudged. Overcoming his own prejudgments and his desire to avoid the topic of judgment, Derrida turns to his own concepts and admits that "the whole discourse on *différance*, on undecidability, etc., can also be considered as a means of keeping one's distance from judgment in all its forms (predicative, prescriptive; always decisive)." (17). There is something about judgment that is more decisive than the undecidability that is at the heart of *différance*. Decision is central to judgment, and for Derrida it is a moot point whether judgment is founded on itself or some other fundament. The point remains that judgment in postmodernity has demanded recourse to "another authority" than itself (19). Derrida connects this critique of judgment with Lyotard's notion of the postmodern as the collapse of *grand récits*, emphasizing that there is no way to do away with judgment in postmodernity (for example, by saying "who am I to judge?") (19-20). Derrida sees in Lyotard,

> a pagan preacher or a sophist who knows neither the law nor the prophets because he knows them too well. He calls us back ceaselessly to a judgment that, although it is not founded, although therefore it is neither the first nor the last, is nonetheless in progress, speaking in us before we speak, permanent like a court that is continuously in session and that would be sitting even when no one is present. (20)

Because we are never done with judgment, Derrida keeps asking "how to judge?' and turns to Kafka's short story "*Vor dem Gesetz*" in which the doorkeeper stands before the law, confronting the man from the country who seeks admittance. The doorkeeper denies the man's request to cross the threshold not with physical force, but with the threat of law and the entire legal bureaucracy behind him. Part of this threat is not just the invocation of the other more powerful law-givers and law-keepers, but instead the persuasive aspect of his power is his constant

deferral of access, such that the man expects to be granted access to the law at some later date and waits at the door, querying the doorkeeper until he is on the edge of death. Having sacrificed everything before the law, the man asks the doorkeeper why no one else has sought admittance, and the doorkeeper responds: "this gate was made only for you. I am now going to shut it." (25).

Kafka's narrative is fertile ground for Derrida's reflections, and he questions the criteria for judgment that the text suggests as well as the literary status of the text itself. For Derrida, Kafka's story has a singular author and status as a narrative (25-27), making it literary – but even these judgments of what constitutes literature do not escape the aforementioned paradoxes of judgment (28-29). Later in *Préjuges*, in the context of Freud's grand narrative, Derrida returns to law again in explicit terms, stating that "Law is intolerant with regard to its own history, it intervenes like an order that presents itself as an absolute, absolute and detached from any origin." (39). Later still, Derrida writes of law as a prohibiting "imperative constraint" that is itself a différance (50), for just like the doorkeeper, the law engages in acts of deferral that forces those before the law to force themselves to be under the law (51). With reference to the seventh chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans, Derrida reads the man in Kafka's story as being "neither under the law nor in the law" because permission to enter is simultaneously given and postponed (53). Derrida goes so far as to say that *différance* – its differing and deferring – are a part of the power that law has because it does not only say 'no' but also, 'not yet.' This is one way in which Derrida demonstrates the impossibility of arriving at a stable essence of law and judgment (53). In Kafka's story "judgment never arrives [*n'arrive pas*]" (54). This means that for Derrida, the one before the law is not just prejudging and prejudged but is furthermore situated "in advance of a judgment that is always in preparation and always delayed" (55). The notion that law functions by means of negation ('no') and deferral ('not yet') will resonate with the work of Mennonite

philosophical theologians which we will examine below in Chapter 2 – particularly the work of Blum who applies undecidability and its distance from judgment to nonviolence.

In Derrida's *Préjuges*, the authority and power of the doorkeeper is not demonstrated by an exercise of physical force or corporeal power, but instead it is authorized and legitimated by something far more mystical – something that connects the violence of law in prejudgment with the violence of predication – and this key question of authority will be taken up again, seven years later, by Derrida in "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'."

"Force of Law" (1989)[75]

Part 1. "Of the Right to Justice/From Law to Justice" (*Du droit à la justice*)

"Force of Law" addresses similar questions to those found in "Before the Law," beginning with an examination of the empty and mysterious foundations of legal authority, and then providing a reading of Walter Benjamin's "*Zur Kritik der Gewalt*." In the essay, Derrida addresses his audience in English, asking a version of the question posed to him as the keynote speaker: "Does deconstruction ensure, permit, authorize the possibility of justice?" (231). Although later he will state that "deconstruction is justice" (243), he begins by asking, again, the question of what permits judgment. Derrida sees continuities between deconstruction, justice, and law, noting that deconstruction suffers from "the absence of rules, of norms, and definitive criteria to distinguish in an unequivocal manner between law and justice." (231). Beyond criteria again, Derrida considers the "matter of judging what permits judgment," and suggests that inasmuch as the title

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[75] Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law," in *Acts of Religion*. Ed. Gil Anidjar (London: Routledge, 2002). Citations to follow in-text. Citations to follow in text, restricted to this section.

of his work implies a disjunctive choice between "either/or" or "yes or no" it is "virtually violent, polemical, inquisitorial" and torturous (231).

Obliging himself to speak the dominant language of English – a language that he associates with colonial violence in *Of Grammatology*[76] – Derrida reflects on common expressions regarding law in the English language, beginning with: "to enforce the law," which he understands as a reminder that "law is always an authorized force, a force that justifies itself or is justified in applying itself" (233). Derrida is interested in the maintaining the possibility that justice and law (*loi*) could "exceed," "contradict," or have "no relation to right [*droit*]" (233).[77] The "force of law [*force de loi*]" for Derrida is constituted by its constant underlying enforceability – an enforceability that proceeds by force "whether this force be direct or indirect, physical or symbolic, exterior or interior, brutal or subtly discursive – even hermeneutic – coercive or regulative, and so forth." (233).

The key question here, for Derrida, is how to distinguish between the force of law and the unjust force that we may want to call violence. He asks, "What is a just force or a nonviolent force?" (234). Turning to Walter Benjamin's "*Zur Kritik der Gewalt*," Derrida attempts to do greater justice to the translation of *Gewalt* into French and English as "violence," reminding his listeners that in addition to violence, in German *Gewalt* refers to "legitimate power, authority, public force" and the legislative and spiritual powers of church and state (234). He asks again:

> How to distinguish between the force of law [*loi*] of a legitimate power and the allegedly originary violence that must have established this authority and that could not itself have authorized itself by any anterior legitimacy, so that, in this initial moment, it is neither legal nor illegal – as others would quickly say, neither just nor unjust? (234).

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[76] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 112. Derrida, *De La Grammatologie*, 161.

[77] Translation amended. For the original French, in which the distinction between *loi* and *droit* is clear, see Jacques Derrida, *Force de loi: Le Fondement mystique de l'autorité* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), 17.

Referring to Heidegger's comments on Heraclitus, and his identification of *dikē* (justice and right) and *eris* (polemical conflict), Derrida returns to the question of the relationship between deconstruction and justice, attending to its differential force in *différance* which is always a matter of "the relation between force and form, between force and signification," performance, and the persuasive force of rhetoric (235). Considering his notion of *différance* to be a "displacement" of the "oppositional logic" of Benjamin's distinctions between positive and natural law, Derrida then addresses the North American legal tradition by developing a rapport between Critical Legal Studies and deconstruction (235-237).

Concerning himself with the original force that underpins western law, Derrida points to the "exercise of force in language itself," and quotes Blaise Pascal's statement "*La justice sans la force est impuissante*," which he translates as "Justice without force is powerless" (238). Quoting further from Pascal's *pensée* 293, Derrida arrives at the subtitle of the essay "the mystical foundation of authority," emphasizing the link between the acceptance of custom, the mysterious founding of authority (drawn from Montaigne), and the notion that "Whoever carries it back to first principles destroys it" (239). Considering the foundations of law to be mysterious, rather than essentially knowable – as in the earlier essay on Lyotard – Derrida adopts Montaigne's distinction between law (*droit*) and laws (*lois*), arguing that justice is not reducible to law, and "laws are not just inasmuch as they are laws" (240). Laws are authoritative, for Derrida, because they rest on a mystical and mysterious "credit" – a kind of *croire* or *credere* that requires a kind of faith and trust (240). Law is authoritative not because it is inherently just, but because it is credible: because we believe in it. The "justifying moment of law" involves what Derrida calls "a call to faith [*un appel à la croyance*]" that points further to a complex interrelation between law, force, power, and violence – one not reducible to the idea that law simply serves force (241).

For Derrida, the mystical foundation of authority refers to the fact that the foundations of law rest only on themselves and are therefore "a violence without ground [*sans fondement*]" (242). Not disputing the just or legitimate status of law or laws, Derrida is instead interested in the deconstructible nature of law – deconstructible because it does not have recourse to a stable fundament. There is a chiastic structure, for Derrida, between the deconstructible character of law and the undeconstructible status of justice. Where law can be deconstructed through revelations of its groundlessness, justice is "outside or beyond law" and therefore cannot be deconstructed (243). The entwining of the "deconstructibility of law" and the "undeconstructibility of justice" – alongside Derrida's statement "*Deconstruction is justice*" – leads Derrida to a "consequence," that deconstruction is located at the interval between the "deconstructibility of law" and the "undeconstructibility of justice" (243). Admitting that this consequence is unclear, Derrida attempts to clarify this intermediary place of deconstruction between the constructible character of law, and the place of justice beyond construction and deconstruction, possibility and impossibility (243). Where law is constructed and calculable (and therefore deconstructible), justice is incalculable because it "demands that one calculate with the incalculable" in the face of "aporetic experiences" (244). Justice demands a kind of judgment that is not reducible to clear calculation. Instead, the judgments of justice decide between the just and the unjust without the comfort of clear and simple rules (244).

Deconstruction – between the calculations and constructions of law, and the incalculable judgments of justice – calls for what Derrida titles, "a responsibility without limits" that itself is excessive and not subject to calculation (247), as well as a "responsibility before memory" (248). In his ensuing reflections Derrida draws close to Lévinas for a moment – joining justice and the relation to the infinite equity of the other – but he quickly backs away, citing his own "difficult

questions about Lévinas' difficult discourse" (250). For Derrida, deconstruction moves between two poles in an aporetic and paradoxical manner: on one hand the claim made by the law that it acts in the name of justice, and on the other hand, the demand made by justice that it be established in the name of the law (251). Derrida further explores these aporias and distinguishes between the "epokhē of the rule" and the "haunting of the undecidable" (251, 252).

In the former case, the aporia is such that the necessity of freedom for justice contradicts the unfreedom of following a law. Here, free action must be more than applying rules in order to remain free, and the judgment of justice must also be more than following laws but must also confirm the just nature of those laws. The judgment of justice is then, not reducible to law because it rests on a "unique interpretation" that cannot be guaranteed by a rule (251). In the latter case, the aporia is one of decision. The judgments required for justice are by nature decisive, requiring a cut (252). Although calculation is calculable, for Derrida the decision to calculate (according to law) is by nature incalculable (252). This is the nature of what Derrida calls the undecidable: that to be a truly free decision, there must be a real possibility of deciding otherwise. This means that we cannot call a legal act a decision if it is merely the dutiful and calculated application of a rule (252). The undecidable is a necessary "test and ordeal" that the judgment of justice and its laws must pass through in order to truly constitute a decision rather than an inevitable or pre-decided outcome (253). This is the undecidability of justice, for a decision cannot be decisively evaluated as just in one single moment (253). No decision worthy of the name can be guaranteed beforehand, and this undecidability is an "essential ghost" that must haunt decisions that claim to be just (253).

Deconstructing justice means being haunted by the persistent return of these aporias, and according to Derrida this aporetic mysticism is as much a part of deconstruction as it is the desire

for justice (254). Derrida concludes the first half of "Force of Law" with a third aporia: the urgency of justice, the idea that justice "does not wait" and "must not wait" (255). Justice calls for immediate decisions – that is, decisions without mediating delays of time. At the same time, just decisions need time. But even if decisions take the requisite time they need, the moment of just decision itself is an interruptive instant "that must rend time and defy dialectics" (255). Derrida writes that "Even if time and prudence, the patience of knowledge and the mastery of conditions were hypothetically unlimited, the decision would be structurally finite…" (255).

For Derrida, at the end of the first half of "Force of Law" (following Lévinas, but only so far), the performative utterances of justice retain a violent and symmetrical character because they presuppose their own just nature and foreclose the open nature of the future to come (256). Derrida wants to avoid messianic and regulative horizons of expectation for justice, and instead – as he expresses in germinal form in "Violence and Metaphysics" – he conceives of justice as requiring not only an open future to come (*a venir*), but an open future defined by the coming of the other. The future will remain a circumscribed set of reasonable expectations – and therefore no future at all – unless it involves the coming of someone or something that is truly other, truly different than the same. Undecidability requires that the decision could be otherwise, and Derrida's future requires that something new could actually occur. In both cases, decision and future cannot be true to their names unless they can be otherwise, and unless there can be difference. For Derrida, the "excess of justice over law and calculation" is part of his effort to keep decisions indecisive enough to be decisions when they happen, and part of his effort to keep the future open enough to be a future rather than a repetition of the same old past (257).

Part 2. "First Name of Benjamin" (*Prénom de Benjamin*)

Having problematized relationships between patience, urgency, and justice, and having self-avowedly exhausted the patience of his readers and listeners (262), Derrida continues, in the second part of "Force of Law," by reading Benjamin's essay that subjects *Gewalt* to critical judgment. Derrida begins his interpretation of Benjamin with three points:

(1.) Rather than applying deconstruction to Benjamin as one would apply a method from the outside by imposing its structures on its object, Derrida instead looks for how deconstruction may already be at work in Benjamin's text and its central distinctions (264). Noting Benjamin's key distinction between law-making and law-preserving violence, Derrida considers the former to be an instituting and founding force, and the latter to be a maintaining, confirming, and ensuring force. (2.) Derrida then distinguishes between Benjamin's mythical law-making violence, which Derrida considers to be Greek, and the "destructive violence that annihilates law," which Derrida considers to be Jewish (265). (3.) Looking further into Benjamin's essay, Derrida notices a distinction between divinely and teleologically positioned justice (*Gerechtigkeit*) and mythically and nomically posited power (*Macht*).

Following these three distinctions, Derrida points to the essential connection between the judgment of violence and the criteria for judgment in law, justice, and "moral relations (*sittliche Verhältinisse*)" (265). Because violence is only as violence is judged, for Derrida "there is no natural or physical violence" but only violence in relation to judgment and justice (265). This means that, for Derrida, the natural world and its diseases and disasters cannot immediately be called violent – that is, without the mediation of a human judgment about justice and law. Distinguishing, with Benjamin, between the judgment of violence itself and the judgment of the use of violence, Derrida rejects the ways in which the natural law tradition naturalizes violence

(265-266). Concerning Benjamin's example of the general strike and its condemnation by the state and its law, Derrida sees "violence as the exercise of law and law as the exercise of violence" (268). This contradiction arises from Derrida's identification of violence with the ordering powers of law, such that,

> Violence does not consist essentially in exerting its power or a brutal force to obtain this or that result but in threatening or destroying an order of given law and precisely, in this case, the order of state law that was to accord this right to violence, for example the right to strike. (268)

On account of this definition, which follows Benjamin's law-destroying violence, violence is not merely a powerful means that forces an end, it is a force that undercuts the legal order that ordinarily monopolizes violence. The state, on this account, is not afraid of transgressions of existing laws, but instead of "*founding* violence" that justifies, legitimates, and transforms legal relations (268). The interruption of law to found another law – potentially one that could retroactively validate presently illegal acts – is the true threat to law (269).

Referring back to his previous work in "Before the Law," Derrida extends the following hypothesis: "the law [*loi*] is transcendent, violent and nonviolent, because it depends only on who is before it (and so prior to it), on who produces it, founds it, authorizes it in an absolute performative whose presence always escapes him. The law is transcendent and theological, and so always to come, always promised, because it is immanent, finite, and thus already past." (270). Departing from commentary on Benjamin, Derrida states that the law only becomes interpretable and intelligible in light of the "to-come" (*avenir*) (270).

Derrida concerns himself for the rest of the essay with deconstructing Benjamin's oppositions and revealing further paradoxes of violence, considering violence to be something that can be committed in the act of reading despite its own "unreadability" (271). Distancing himself from the notion of "symbolic violence" (271), Derrida reads Benjamin's oppositions and

finds them deconstructing themselves. He argues, beyond Benjamin, that law-founding violence "envelops" law-preserving violence because the fundamental nature of law-founding violence involves a promise whose reiteration continues to re-found the law in all cases of law-preserving violence as well (272). Identifying war as an internal contradiction in law – something that law both seeks the end of and uses for its own ends – Derrida refuses to found or preserve the distinction between law-founding and law-preserving violence (274). Against the "forced use of force" in militarism, despite the ways in which military violence protects and legitimates itself by putting to use its legal status, Derrida then identifies a double bind: criticizing founding violence seems easier because it is so obviously without foundation, but at the same time criticizing founding violence lacks criteria for condemning violence (274). The implications of the "coimplication of violence and law" make law something that is both threatening and threatened (275), expressed in the double genitive: "threat *of law*" (276).

Extending his critique of Benjamin – in brief, that Benjamin cannot contain or maintain his distinctions because their content exceeds the boundaries of his concepts – Derrida turns to the most obvious manifestation of the force of law: the police (278). Police violence – both law-founding and law-preserving – is exemplary, for Derrida, not only of deep problems with liberal democracies, but also of the spectral, mystical, and spiritual foundations of authority (280). For Derrida, police violence proves that "there is not yet any democracy worthy of this name" but only the promise of a democracy that "remains to come" (281). While "remains" points backward in time, and "to come" points forward, Derrida's democracy is threatened because of the ways in which all law is founded on the threat of violence (282).

This does not mean, however, that Derrida does not see a role for nonviolence as a way of responding to conflict. For Derrida, "the thought of nonviolence must exceed the order of

public law" in a way that does not forget the heart (283). Critiquing the means of violence, Derrida holds together "the violence of language" with the "advent of nonviolence through a certain language" (284). Derrida seems to follow Benjamin's inclination that, at least in the private sphere, nonviolence can eliminate conflict through a "culture of the heart, cordial courtesy, sympathy, love of peace, trust, friendship" (284). At the same time, however, Derrida thinks that nonviolent arbitrations that place themselves beyond the violence of law still harbor within them an "affinity to pure violence" (285). Concluding with an analysis of the undecidable and enigmatic character of Benjamin's divine violence – neither a distribution nor retribution – Derrida names the ambiguity of violence in between Jew and Greek that "expiates" (287) in bloodless sacrifices of the living (288).

However, the most important paradox of violence comes at the end. The critical attitude that "takes a position" that decides and discriminates (289) stands in contrast to the undecidability that Derrida identifies with divine violence (290). Law-making and law-preserving violence remain in an undecidable and entangled relationship, for Derrida, because both reiterate and re-found their founding violence by repeating their origin as a means to an end. Here the undecidable relationship is between the "decision without decidable certainty" and the "certainty of the undecidable but without decision" – with the undecidable on both sides, composing the "violent condition of knowledge or action, but knowledge and action are always dissociated" (291). And with concluding remarks, Derrida closes his commentary on Benjamin.

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Throughout the rest of his career Derrida continued to make connections between deconstruction and justice, occasionally concerning himself with the problems of violence and the aporias he examined in "Force of Law." Derrida concludes *Of Spirit* (1987) by returning to the question of the ghost (*revenant*) and the question of returning itself,[78] and in *Given Time* (1991) Derrida places the gift beyond reciprocity and symmetry, insisting that "the gift must remain *aneconomic.*"[79] *Specters of Marx* (1993) sees Derrida make further connections between spectrality and justice,[80] and in *The Politics of Friendship* (1994) Derrida challenges both the confluence of fraternity, democracy, and patriarchy and the violence of their enforcement by Schmittian friend-enemy distinctions. Instead, Derrida advocates for a kind of friendship that says, with Aristotle, "O my friends, there is no friend," both taking and giving time, keeping memory and anticipating, and breaking with calculation in order to remain undecidable and "endure the test of time."[81] Spectrality, the gift, and friendship come together under the banner of deconstruction because each, in their own way, refuse simple distinctions between visibility and invisibility, calculated exchange and free giving, and friendship and enmity.

In his late work as well, Derrida would again take up the democratic question, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (1997) of the violence of the world, referring back to Benjamin's critique of violence, and extending his ethics of responsibility further in his

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[78] Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 113.

[79] Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 7.

[80] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (London: Routledge, 2006).

[81] Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship.* Trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 2006), 1, 14-16.

impossible and undecidable statement: "forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable."[82] Like the

gift that must remain beyond economy, forgiveness must remain beyond the measurements and

calculations of law, refusing to be normalized or normalizing, and remaining impossible.[83] For

the Derrida of 1997, "*All* Nation States are born and found themselves on violence" that is not

only colonial and hidden, but "outside the law."[84] Forgiveness, for Derrida, addresses these kinds

of violence, but not within the conditions of sovereignty, but in the "*unconditional but without*

sovereignty."[85]

Around the same time, in his seminar of January 1996, published with accompanying

questions by Anne Dufourmantelle as *Of Hospitality*, Derrida took up the questions of

cosmopolitanism and forgiveness, asking "how can the unforgivable be forgiven?"[86] Hospitality,

for Derrida, stands against the violence that violates home.[87] Hospitality traditionally entails

sovereignty over the self and the home, such that the sovereign of the household economy could

invite in and host an outsider, but for Derrida this kind of hospitality is distorted by the force of

law and the misconstrued notion that hospitality can be a matter of rights.[88] Those who are

displaced, in exile, and on pilgrimage in this world – those who desire home and consider

language to be their home – are technologically dislocated and call out for a different kind of

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[82] Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*. Trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London: Routledge, 2001), 5, 14, 32.

[83] Ibid, 27, 32-33.

[84] Ibid, 57.

[85] Ibid, 59.

[86] Jacques Derrida and Anne Defourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*. Trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 39.

[87] Ibid, 65.

[88] Ibid, 55.

hospitality that is made up of an undecidable relationship between guest and host, an incalculable timing, and a language that hosts in ways that oppose the patriarchal and "familial despot" who is the master of the house and its laws.[89]

Here again, Derrida points to the place of violence in traditional expressions of hospitality while opposing it in undecidable ways that attempt to avoid being drawn back into the oppositions that they aim to deconstruct. This critique of oppositional thinking – in which the critic attempts to resist a disjunctive set of oppositions without allowing their critique to become swallowed back into that which it seeks to oppose – brings us full-circle, back to the beginning of "Violence and Metaphysics" where Derrida resists classical philosophical oppositions with a refusal that is structured as a "neither-nor" rather than an "either-or." This critique of oppositional thinking will also bring Derrida close to the values of certain Mennonite philosophical theologians analyzed below in Chapter 2, and it will serve as a distinctive affinity with the work of Jantzen, despite her critique of his readiness to associate violence with language, as we will see in Chapter 3. But here I will pause to recollect and interpret material gathered in the commentaries above in order to better situate the place of violence in Derrida's work.

Situating Violence in Derrida

Appropriate to Derrida's refusal of the tendency in philosophy to abstract rather than name, it would be very difficult – perhaps impossible, even in Derrida's sense of the term – to make a general statement about what Derrida thinks violence is by beginning from a pre-decided concept of violence, for that would be antithetical to the ways that resists what he calls the violence of

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[89] Ibid, 87, 89, 91, 125, 127, 135, 149.

generalization, abstraction, decontextualization, and neutralization. Initially we can only name very specific ways that Derrida uses the term in contexts in which he is engaged in commentary, as we have done above by commenting on three of his essays.

Derrida calls "Violence and Metaphysics" a "commentary" that commences a partial but faithful reading of Lévinas (84.8-11/124), and yet he never engages in commentary without playing with and twisting the categories of the one who he comments on. In his reading of Lévinas in "Violence and Metaphysics," his reading of Lyotard in "Before the Law," and his reading of Benjamin in "Force of Law," Derrida consistently uses the form of commentary to ask questions and pose problems, while at the same time showing how deconstruction is always already at work in the writings of those whom he comments on. Below I show how Derrida uses this deconstructive mode of commentary throughout the three texts examined above, while drawing together the themes of each essay in order to come to some understanding of the place of violence in Derrida's oeuvre.

In "Violence and Metaphysics" Derrida sees Lévinas both retaining and transforming Platonic and Heideggerian categories (88-89/131-132) in a way that avoids the problems of philosophical opposition that Derrida identified at the beginning of "Violence and Metaphysics" (90.35-36/135) and in his interviews in *Positions*. Derrida sees Lévinas as one who reveals the cracks in the surface of philosophy by using the light of philosophy, not to close down or over-expose, but to open and reveal truth (90.35/135). He writes that "it is in the nature of Lévinas's writing, at its decisive moments, to move along these cracks, masterfully progressing by negations, and by negation against negation. Its proper route is not that of an 'either this… or that,' but of a 'neither this… nor that.'" (90.35-37/135).

Here Derrida is attributing to Lévinas's writing the very same remediating approach to the violent philosophical oppositions that he mentioned at the beginning of "Violence and Metaphysics" – the approach that seeks to move away from either/or disjunctions and toward neither/nor negations. In addition to praising Lévinas's "negation against negation" (90.35-37/135) Derrida also calls Lévinas's use of light "A light before neutral light" (117.37/173), thereby distinguishing Lévinas's work from the violent light that he refers to in the first section of "Violence and Metaphysics." The commentarial approach that Derrida uses to draw out Lévinas's resistance to the violence of light is repeated with a difference in his later work in "Before the Law" and "Force of Law."

In "Before the Law," Derrida comments on Lyotard. Concerned with law and judgement, Derrida shows how Lyotard enjoins his readers to judge and realize that they are already engaged in various forms of prejudgment (*Before the Law*, 19-20), but at the same time Derrida judges Lyotard's work in such a way that both evaluates it and uses it to occasion reflection on what criteria for evaluation the judgment of his work should proceed under. Like "Violence and Metaphysics," "Before the Law" sees Derrida working within and transforming the categories of the writer and texts under consideration. Through his examination of Kafka's *Vor dem Gesetz*, Derrida's analysis anticipates his later work on Benjamin in "Force of Law." In "Before the Law" Derrida understands judgment to be that which is radically deferred ("not yet"), something not yet predicated, something that denies categorical thinking, something that does not yet predicate, and something that denies the desire to predetermine (*Before the Law*, 11-13).

The connections between "Before the Law" and "Violence and Metaphysics" should begin to come clear here. If predication is the original violence, and if part of judgment is a "pre" judgment that judges beforehand, then judgment is connected to the problems of language,

violence, and closure that Derrida is concerned with when he writes "Predication is the first violence" in "Violence and Metaphysics" (147.18/188). Predication gives criteria, but for Derrida the criteria of law are not simply available for instrumental use. Law is about more than the application of rules. Law requires judgment, and judgment precedes criteria and predication. Before something is predicated, and before criteria are provided, judgment waits.

In "Before the Law" Derrida speaks of judgment in temporal terms, saying in reference to Kafka that "judgment never arrives" (*Before the Law*, 54), and pointing to Kafka's doorkeeper whose exercise of law rests on a temporal deferral of permission to enter by means of simultaneous givenness and postponement (*Before the Law*, 53). The powerful periodizing prefix 'pre' in "prejudgment" points to what Derrida calls "undecidability." He writes, "At bottom, the whole discourse on *différance*, on undecidability, etc., can also be considered as a means of keeping one's distance from judgment in all its forms (predicative, prescriptive; always decisive)." (*Before the Law*, 17).[90] This accords with the other terms that Derrida connects with judgment in "Before the Law" because predication and prescription both imply that in some sense one has decided or judged beforehand, rather than remaining open to a future, an other, or a difference, that could not be categorized, predicated, or decided upon in advance. To keep the other, the future, and difference open and not circumscribed, Derrida consistently questions, problematizes, and deconstructs the categories he encounters in those who he comments on.

In "Force of Law" Derrida's often implicit critique of the violence of classical philosophical oppositions resurfaces. Just as he did in "Violence and Metaphysics" and "Before the Law," in "Force of Law" Derrida works with the key distinctions of the text he comments on

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[90] Derrida's discussion of the groundlessness of law and justice brings him close to Lyotard, who insists that he judges "without criteria." See Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming*. Trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1985), 14. Original: *Au Juste* (Christian Bourgois, 1979).

and ultimately shows how they deconstruct themselves – in this case challenging Benjamin's distinctions between means and ends by using his own notion of undecidability ("Force of Law," 285). Like his valuing of questions and problems over answers and solutions at the beginning of "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida begins "Force of Law" by questioning the relationship between deconstruction and justice.

Whereas "Violence and Metaphysics" moves from the question for Lévinas "does this not mean that discourse is originally violent?" (116.36-37/171) to the statement "predication is the first violence" (147.18/188), "Force of Law" moves from the question "Does deconstruction ensure, permit, authorize the possibility of justice?" ("Force of Law," 231) to the statement "*Deconstruction is justice*" ("Force of Law," 243). Although they are presented here as question and answer, what matters for Derrida is what happens between and beyond question and answer, and what keeps questions open such that different future and contradictory answers could arise without positing themselves and complete and final. Again, Derrida values openness and resists movements of closure, finality, and totalization.

Like "Violence and Metaphysics" and "Before the Law," in "Force of Law" Derrida critiques the disjunctive thinking that would structure philosophical oppositions with an either/or, calling this structure violent, polemical, inquisitorial, and torturous ("Force of Law," 231). Considering law to be forcible in its attempts at self-justification, Derrida points to both the coercive and threatening foundation of legal authority and the mystical foundation of law that calls those under it to have faith in its legitimacy. Here in Derrida's exploration of law as a "violence without ground" ("Force of Law," 242) is a connection with his concept of violence in "Violence and Metaphysics." Derrida's claim in "Force of Law" that law is violent and rests on mystery bears a striking similarity to his claim in "Violence and Metaphysics" that

phenomenology is violent because it violates the mystery of the face by over-exposing it to the all-seeing eyes of Enlightenment light (85.10-11, 86.13/127). Derrida is not advocating for mysticism in "Violence and Metaphysics," for he refers to the two violences resisted by Lévinas as "theoretical objectivity and mystical communion" (87.17/127), but he does want to say that violence is done when a certain kind of light threatens something that should retain a mysterious character (like the future, the other, the face, or language). For Derrida, light that seeks to expose all things and do away with all mystery is violent. This is why he praises Lévinas's subversion of the light of philosophy (90.35-36/119), speaks of the difficulty of a "philosophical discourse against light" (85.5/126), and suggests the possibility of an "epiphany of a certain non-light before which all violence is to be quieted and disarmed" (85.8-9/126). Indeed, Derrida looks to Lévinas because he considers classical phenomenology and ontology to be violent since they are "[i]ncapable of respecting the Being and meaning of the other" (91.35/136).

In both "Violence and Metaphysics" and "Force of Law" Derrida uses the term violence to refer to reductive ways of thinking that seek to demystify the world by means of oppositional "either/or" structures of disjunction. Forming a hinge between "Violence and Metaphysics" and "Force of Law," "Before the Law" develops Derrida's thinking about judgment as that which attempts to understand the foundations of authority, justice, and law. For Derrida, in "Force of Law," "There is no natural or physical violence." ("Force of Law," 265). Instead, "The concept of violence belongs to the symbolic order of law, politics, and morals – of all forms of *authority* and *authorization*, of claim to authority, at least." ("Force of Law," 265). Derrida ties together violence (here understood in relation to Benjamin's *Gewalt*) and the foundations of authority – foundations that he calls "mystical." Derrida draws this connection between violence and

authority in the context of his deconstruction of Benjamin's famous essay "Zur Kritik der

Gewalt," and points out a contradiction:

> Violence is not exterior to the order of law. It threatens law from within law. Violence does not consist essentially in exerting its power or a brutal force to obtain this or that result but in threatening or destroying an order of given law and precisely, in this case [of Benjamin on the illegal workers strike], the order of state law that was to accord this right to violence, for example the right to strike. ("Force of Law," 268)

It seems that for Derrida violence only exists in relation to judgement. And yet, violence is what

threatens the judicial and judicious standards by which we would seek to judge authoritatively.

There is a paradox here, such that violence is defined as that which challenges legal order (as

Arendt understood), but we also require certain kinds of judgment to identify violence.

It seems that violence, like justice, is haunted by undecidability because its foundations

are mysterious. Both justice and violence require criteria for judgment, otherwise we would not

be able to identify justice or violence. But at the same time, both justice and violence rest on

foundations that, once they are illuminated by a certain violent kind of light, reveal themselves to

be mysterious. Deciding beforehand what justice is and what violence is would violate the

principles by which Derrida proceeds: his consistent desire to ask questions without positing

final answers, demonstrate problems without suggesting final solutions, respect others without

subsuming the other into the same, and keep the future open such that something new could

come to pass.

Commensurate with Derrida's preference for commentary, this chapter has provided an

extended commentary on "Violence and Metaphysics" with specific attention to how Derrida

uses the term "violence." Violence is a term that Derrida considers important enough for the title

of his essay, but it is not a term that he uses in a precise or technical sense (as he does with "the

trace" or "*différance*"). Instead, Derrida tends to employ the term "violence" when he thinks that

the other is being subsumed by the same, when his own work is being reduced to a totalized and singularized identity, when the future is being foreclosed by the present, and when philosophical oppositions impose 'either-or' disjunctions onto a reality that does not admit to them.

In spite of the radically contextual and commentarial nature of Derrida's work, I contend that by examining these specific contexts in which Derrida uses the term "violence," we can still discover several recurring senses of the term that have representative connections with his broader thought, and which are taken up by his readers and critics. These general statements on violence – the most conspicuous being "predication is the first violence" (147.18/188) – have been diversely interpreted, challenged, and accepted by the Mennonite thinkers who will be addressed below in Chapter 2, and in the late work of Grace Jantzen that will be analyzed in Chapter 3. However, in order to assess this reception, we must first gain an overall and representative sense of how violence works (what work it does) in Derrida's "Violence and Metaphysics." Only then can we see clearly how reconstructing a dialogue between Derrida, Jantzen, and certain Mennonite philosophical theologians can help to understand the ontological and epistemological statuses of violence, and the violence within ontology and epistemology.

In the introduction above we began by asking "what is violence?" and observing that the many answers to this question are not reducible to oppositions between injury and harm, mind and body, or textuality and corporeality. For example, Williams identified not only the notion that violence is more than or other than solely physical, but he also suggested that one could do violence by wrenching a term from its meaning. For Derrida, this notion that violence appears in the displacement of words and meanings is much more complex than it is in the brief entry provided by Williams. In the introduction we observed that the term "violence" is used in ways other than to name easily identifiable physical violations of the body and human life such as

warfare or killing. Violence is a term that is often applied to the world (such as in the statement: "we live in a violent world") in an ontological manner, and to knowledge of the world (such as in the statement: "he spoke to me violently") in an epistemological manner. But is the world violently ordered? Can I know the world or speak of it without violence? Derrida's answers to these questions – when he risks moving from question to answer in his mode of commentary and his paradoxical desire to preserve openness – are complex.

For one, Derrida does not understand the world to be ordered in a way that could be straightforwardly understood or comprehensively comprehended through the use of an architectonic system, for that would constitute the kind of over-exposure to light that he calls violent in the first section of "Violence and Metaphysics." Second, Derrida does not suggest that we can come to knowledge of the world as one comes to possess an object or enclose a concept with fixed boundaries (for example, by answering its questions, solving it problems, or securing its future). Nonetheless, there is an important sense in which Derrida suggests that we live in a violent world, and a sense in which he thinks that we can never come to know anything about the world without some predication, some economy, some history, and therefore some violence.

What violence means for him, and what precisely is violated when violence is done, are deeper questions which we will now explore, following from the notion (outlined in the introduction) that to understand violence requires not only inquiry into what is violated when violence is done, but also inquiry into how disputes over the nature of violence are imagined, for charges of violence are always a form of critique that claim that something ought not to be the case (even if these accounts are accompanied by tragic justifications or naturalizations). Violence is contextual, and the conceptualization of the boundaries that are transgressed when violence is said to be done depends upon values that often remain implicit. Each time Derrida uses the term

"violence" he engages in a kind of valuation that makes both normative and descriptive claims about the world, and often about the works of those who he is commenting upon. To understand Derrida's use of the term diagnostically I will now recapitulate the commentary above.

Derrida considers systematization to be an expression of violence, and he consistently resists any attempt to subject his work to an organized structure, even resisting its representation by the name "deconstruction." In the words of Rodolphe Gasché, "By not speaking about deconstruction, it is as if Derrida resists naming his way of thinking and thus protects it from the unifying, homogenizing, and essentializing effect of a catchword."[91] For Derrida, the kind of systematizing desire to gather his own thinking under one unifying name is itself a violence that stems from a greater violence on the part of the tradition of western metaphysics. Derrida opposes the binary oppositions of the metaphysics of presence but attempts to do so without falling back under their spell. Indeed, he faults Lévinas at several points for attempting to resist violence from within those categories he critiques (133.18/195) and praises him when he believes that he is successful at evading capture by oppositional thinking (90.35-37/135).

For Derrida, metaphysics is characterized by violent hierarchies, not peaceful coexistence wherein things exist side by side or face to face, and he meets this violence with the resisting disorganization of undecidability rather than an oppositional critique that would be "against" what it critiques, or "for" a simple disjunctive alternative. Derrida is at pains to resist the re-inscription of the violent oppositions of western metaphysics into the critique of that metaphysics, and this means that his resistance to classical philosophical oppositions does not take the form of either rejection or affirmation. Instead, Derrida identifies a further problem with critiques that say "neither-this-nor-that" because this negation still operates decisively, thereby

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[91] Gasché, *Deconstruction, Its Force, Its Violence*, xi.

implicitly accepting the "either-this-or-that" structure of western metaphysics.[92] Against

disjunction, Derrida invokes "undecidability" – a term that names a refusal to take up a third

position that would transcend the two terms being judged in a way that judges beforehand,

alongside an effort to maintain the option for either and keep open the possibility of deciding.

Under these terms, Derrida uses figures like erasure and chiasmus rather than the economizing

judgment or synthetic reconciliation of binary distinctions or philosophical oppositions.

At the beginning of "Violence and Metaphysics" Derrida concerns himself with

philosophy and its violent opening of its own history. For Derrida, philosophy is still caught in

the oppositional framework that would seek to judge with finality both the status of itself and

what it is not. At the end of "Violence and Metaphysics," as a part of his challenge to Lévinas,

Derrida characterizes the "nonphilosophy" which he mentions at the beginning of the essay

(79.9/117) as the empirically and phenomenologically oriented other of philosophy – an other

that "contests the resolution and coherence of the *logos* (philosophy)" (152.17-18/226).

If "Violence and Metaphysics" is oriented in relation to its beginning and end, then one

clue to its meaning is found in the confluence of philosophical nationalities (which are names,

rather than categories) that are signaled by both the epigraph from Matthew Arnold and the final

quotation from James Joyce. The figures of the Jew and the Greek are in confrontation here, and

Derrida reminds his reader on the final page of the essay that "Greece is not neutral, provisional

territory, beyond borders" (153.1-2). In *Exemplarity and Chosenness*, Dana Hollander writes of

this critical, national, confluence in "Violence and Metaphysics,"

> Derrida builds and comments on Lévinas's own efforts to take account of the tension and
> relationship between the biblical and the Greek-philosophical traditions — the
> relationship between fundamental insights into the ethical (Lévinas being known as the
> thinker of an ethics of the "face-to-face") and their articulation in biblical "names"

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[92] Compare Derrida, *Positions*, 41 with "Violence and Metaphysics," 90.35-36. (and with "Before the Law," 53).

> ("Sinai"). But the issue of translatability and philosophical language cannot simply be described as an abstract philosophical problem. What makes Derrida's presentation effective is that it does not itself take recourse to a philosophical language that purports to articulate generalities in an abstract way. Rather, by presenting the problem as one of names, as one of interpreting hospitality "in the name of Lévinas" — and thus in the name of the names to which Lévinas refers his readers — Derrida conveys that the problem of translatability and philosophical language is one that we inhabit, as philosophers.[93]

As Hollander points out, the proper names that Derrida uses are never subordinated to an abstract rule that would seek to govern their legitimacy or authenticity. Instead, Derrida stages an encounter between the Greek *logos* and the Jewish law, foreshadowing his later engagement with judgment in works such as "Before the Law" and "Force of Law." In addition to being a commentary on Lévinas, "Violence and Metaphysics" constitutes a kind of philosophical intervention that seeks to bring philosophy and its strange community of philosophers into contact with the other of philosophy, with nonphilosophy, with Eleatic strangers who hold together being and nonbeing, with Jewish law, with Greek metaphysics, and with the legacies of phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger.

For Derrida, philosophy has a paradoxical duty to make decisions and provide answers while also remaining open to the future and maintaining its indecisive questioning. But how can one both conserve and liberate the activity of questioning at the same time while maintaining tension between freedom and enclosure, and between questions and answers? This problem is central to Derrida's work. Derrida calls for a protection of the open character of questions by resisting the closure of questions by final answers, and he even describes this tension as a kind of agonistic *combat* between philosophical questioning and philosophical enclosure. More generally, the restriction of philosophy to its Greek source, the reduction of metaphysics, and the

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[93] Hollander, *Exemplarity and Chosenness*, 2.

dissociation of ethics from metaphysics are each at issue for Derrida in this struggle. Against a Heideggerian desire for secure knowledge that would identify *polemos* with *logos* in order to seek that security through competitive agonism, Derrida sees in Lévinas a call to dismantle and dispossess, to dislocate and depart from Greek metaphysics. Lévinas moves away from sameness, oneness, and light, for these are alibis of oppression. Instead, Derrida points to Lévinas as one who wants to address the war in metaphysics by remediating the dissociation of ethics from metaphysics by calling on an ethical relationship that could liberate metaphysics through a nonviolent relationship with the other. For Derrida, philosophy must preserve the open character of its questioning by naming names rather than abstracting into concepts, and for Lévinas the other must remain other and not be subjected to the reduction to the same, and for both Derrida and Lévinas the other must remain other and the future must remain open.

However, it seems that in some way both Derrida and Lévinas are trying to preserve what cannot be preserved and keep what cannot be kept: the otherness of the other, the problematic status of the problem, the ongoing questioning of the question, and the openness of the future. Derrida points to Lévinas' messianic eschatology as that which keeps the other other and the future open, for the other resists reduction to the same despite the many ways that difference is reduced to sameness. Lévinas resists the western metaphysics of presence by not founding his work on stable foundations (in space) or origins (in time), but instead maintaining difference and questionability – and in this way he is in affinity with Derrida. But a paradox common to both is the preservation of openness or the keeping of otherness. The problem of desire returns here, for Derrida desires to keep the question a question, and the future open, and Lévinas desires to keep the other other, but this desire is always vulnerable to a possessive defeat that would repeat what it attempts to prevent by allowing the conservative resonance of the terms "preserve" and "keep"

to overdetermine the openness it seeks. We will return to this problem below, and especially in conclusion in relation to the problem of displacement.

Derrida is careful and attentive to these sorts of problems, in both his refusal to engage in oppositional thinking and his resistance to ways of critique that would seek to refute. In some ways "Violence and Metaphysics" subjects Lévinas to some measure of critique, even though Derrida sees himself as a commentator who does not make a beginning but stays faithful to Lévinas. True to form, Derrida's challenge to Lévinas points out the various ways in which Lévinas is drawn back into the structures he seeks to challenge – whether the founding of thought on origins, the retention of Heideggerian categories, the division between inside and outside, or the re-inscription of a warring logos into the supposed righteousness of dialogue.

Derrida claims that "Language, therefore, cannot make its own possibility a totality and include within itself its own origin or its own end." (95.9/141), and he rejects any movement that would absolutize and abstract first principles by attempting to enclose origin and end within a system. Although Derrida does not subject Lévinas's work to a test of systematic coherence, he does critique Lévinas by pointing out that his ethics of the face has not sufficiently accounted for the problems of light and illumination. For Derrida, there is something about light that over-exposes, violating something that darkness and concealment maintain the dignity of. The face reveals and conceals, calling to account but also containing and maintaining a mystery. Lévinas does not distance himself from the other by neutrality or abstraction, but draws closer to the other in a generosity and mystical ecstasy that obscures, illuminates, conceals, and reveals.

Derrida thinks that Lévinas both displaces and retains Heideggerian ontology and historicity, calling Lévinas's resistance to Heidegger violent, and resisting the domination of nonbeing by being in Plato. Derrida sees in Lévinas a critique of distinctions between subject and

object, inside and outside, especially when he attempts to replace the structure "either this or that" with "neither this nor that." For Derrida, it is in and through the disjunctive logic of "either this or that" that phenomenology and ontology become violent, oppressive, and totalitarian, and fall into disregard, solipsism, and lack of respect. In addition to its manifestation in either-or thinking, violence also appears in the deep connection between light with power. The violence of light desires completion, and in seeking comprehensive and systematic knowledge, the violence of light displaces and perhaps violates something delicate. However, not all light is violent, for the blinding light of illumination is different than other forms of noncoercive vision that understand the encounter with the other as something eschatological, messianic, or revelatory.

Derrida's challenge to Lévinas suggests that language is always given to the other but cannot capture the other. The predicative function of language always involves some violence, but language also contains possibilities for resisting violence because it cannot successfully contain its own origin and end. Both language and the encounter with the other cannot be circumscribed, for both resist categorization in space and foreseeability in time. Manifested in language and the encounter with the other, the un-foreseeability of the future is something beyond both history and economy – and Derrida's insistence on keeping the future open is connected to his phenomenological conviction that experience itself is eschatological.

Yet again, there is a deep paradox here in the idea that one can "keep" the future open, or "keep" language open, or "keep" the other other, but the paradox of preserving and liberating openness is something that Derrida's writing performs rather than resists in a way that would allow disjunctive "either-or" thinking the last word. Rather than there being a definitive last word that would answer a question or solve a problem, Derrida understands philosophy to be

defined by interrogative questioning that respects the other enough to allow the other to remain a question and a problem, rather than be reduced to an answer or solution.

In the most general terms, Derrida uses the term "violence" to name the reduction of difference to sameness (the other, the future, the question, the problem, desire, language), and he contends that access to the other involves a kind of economy that can be peaceful, but never absolutely or purely peaceful, for absoluteness and purity are violent conditions to place upon peace. Unconditional, without criteria – and the resonances with his later work on judgment should strike us here – Derrida's resistance to violence takes the same form as his resistance to the classical oppositions of western metaphysics: a resistance that refuses (as best it can) to reaffirm oppositional thinking, for the simplistic opposing of terms remains subservient to an economy of violence. This is why Derrida does not seek to refute or denounce Lévinas by making recourse to some law or rule, but instead he questions "the necessity of lodging oneself within traditional conceptuality in order to destroy it" (111.39/165), and keeps this question a question.

Against the worst violence – a kind of silence and night – Derrida proposes light against light, violence against violence as remedial strategies for opposing violence without being free from violence. For Derrida, philosophy is always between Hebraism and Hellenism, returning violence for violence, between original tragedy and messianic triumph. Under these mediating conditions, it would be violent to totalize either the temporal present and spatial presence by attempting to found them beyond their finite locations within space and time. Against making the other subservient to an absolute ontological term like Being that would universalize spatiality and temporality, Derrida suggests that liberation from violence requires radically questioning such foundations in ways that are still philosophical.

For Derrida, we can only get close to nonviolence through free and open discourses of questioning and problematization, but we can never possess a pure nonviolence. No pure violence, no pure nonviolence – purity is the problem, for the notion that one could possess a pure predicate or make an absolute identification is the first violence. This entails, for Derrida, that a language without violence would need to be invocative, adoring, and calling by name, because these acts keep the questioning status of the question, keep the problematic status of the problem, keep the future open, and keep the otherness of the other – but without the possessive resonances of the term "keeping."

As such, Derrida's notion of violence cannot be defined, if defining it means lifting it from text and context or abstracting it so that it can be put to use for another project or rejecting it by subjecting it to a test of logical coherence. Instead, Derrida's use of the term "violence" lacks the structured definition that such readings seek, and calls for commentary and questioning, invocation and calling. This can only bring Derrida's ideas about violence into harsh contact with the definition of violence set out in the introduction above. On one hand, it would not be adequate or appropriate to Derrida's thought to subject his "claims" to a set of outside distinctions. On the other hand, coming into contact with an other – even a structured and abstracting other – is a constituent part of Derrida's commentary on Lévinas. Because the encounter with the other is an essential part of Derrida's comments on violence and metaphysics, it is not inappropriate to stage an encounter between his work and the otherness of the definition of violence I provided in the introduction.

If the key question for violence is "what is violated?," and if we use this definition of violence in its capacity as a diagnostic concept to ask what exactly Derrida thinks is violated when violence is done, then then the answer is difference. In each term that Derrida wants to

keep open – the other, the future, the question, the problem, language, philosophy – the problem appears when difference is collapsed into sameness: when the other is made the same, when the future is foreclosed under terms set by presence and the present, when the problem is definitively solved, when the question is answered in a way that prohibits further questioning, when language is reduced to a structured and knowable relationship between a signifier and its corresponding signified, and when philosophy loses its questioning and problematizing qualities. At issue for Derrida, in his challenge to Lévinas' peaceful discourse, as indicated by his uses of the term "violence," is the question of whether discourse and its articulations could ever be without violence and achieve peace. As shown above, Derrida's answer to this question is negative.

In the following chapter I turn to the Mennonite reception of Derrida while asking how philosophically informed theologians in this pacifist tradition stand in relation to this question. For Mennonite philosophical theologian Peter C. Blum, Derrida's "no" to the question of whether we can be without violence provides resources for his own "no" to violence, as it is articulated within the Mennonite tradition's attempt to imitate and follow the peace of Jesus Christ. For Blum, Derrida's work informs a philosophically inflected Mennonite pacifism by reminding the peace church tradition that pure peace may be impossible. Similarly, for Mennonite philosophical theologian Chris K. Huebner, peace cannot be decisively secured or possessed. Blum's ontology of peace emphasizes the impossibility of peace in the Derridean sense of the term, and Huebner's pacifist epistemology emphasizes the precarious character of peace by resisting all attempts to secure it. However, both of these articulations are positioned in in relation to John Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy in which an "ontology of peace" points to a relationship between origins, essences, and ends that is known with certainty and secured by violent, forcible, coercive, and rhetorically persuasive means.

Below I narrate the rapport between Mennonite "Radical Reformation" approaches and Milbank's "Radical Orthodoxy" to show how these two perspectives are more divergent than they first appear. In doing so I demonstrate how, despite their hesitation to endorse his supposed "ontology of violence," and despite their apparent affinities with Milbank, the Mennonite rejection of violence and coercion, and refusal of disjunctive either-or thinking, are much closer to Derrida's work than they initially appear to be because of the shared values and priorities that underpin their respective ontologies of violence.

CHAPTER 2

Mennonite Pacifist Epistemology and Ontological Peace

This chapter addresses engagements with the work of Jacques Derrida amidst dialogues between Mennonite philosophical theologians and the Anglican theologian John Milbank during the 2000s and 2010s.[1] These exchanges between Mennonites and Milbank, or the "Radical Reformation" position and the school of thought called "Radical Orthodoxy" (respectively), occasioned several Mennonite interpretations of Derrida that uniquely conjugate Mennonite peace theology with epistemological and ontological approaches to the problem of violence.

In order to place the Mennonite engagement with Derrida in context, below I survey the dialogue between the Radical Reformation approach and the school of Radical Orthodoxy. I begin by outlining the general contours of the two traditions before focusing on how they are represented in the works of John Milbank (Radical Orthodoxy), and Mennonite theologians Peter C. Blum and Chris K. Huebner (Radical Reformation). In the second half of the chapter, I turn to the works of Blum and Huebner, both of whom see Milbank and Derrida as important dialogue partners, and who situate their work in relation to a "pacifist epistemology," an "ontology of violence," and an "ontology of peace." Clarifying these contested terms will be a major task of this chapter. Although both Milbank and Mennonite philosophical theologians articulate ontologies of peace in relation to Derrida, their approaches differ in ways I demonstrate below.

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[1] Major landmarks in this exchange include an early essay by Paul G. Doerksen, "For and Against Milbank: A Critical Discussion of John Milbank's Construal of Ontological Peace," *Conrad Grebel Review* 18.1 (Winter 2000), a special issue and roundtable discussion between Milbank and several Mennonite respondents in the *Conrad Grebel Review* 23.2 (Spring 2005), key references in Harry Huebner, "The Church Made Strange for the Nations" in *Echoes of the Word: Theological Ethics as Rhetorical Practice* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2005), and the anthology, *The Gift of Difference: Radical Orthodoxy, Radical Reformation*, Ed. Chris Huebner and Tripp York; Foreword by John Milbank (Winnipeg: Canadian Mennonite University Press, 2010). For a more recent Mennonite critique of Milbank see Kyle Gingerich Hiebert, *The Architectonics of Hope: Violence, Apocalyptic, and the Transformation of Political Theology*. Theopolitical Visions 21 (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), esp. 95-98.

While showing how philosophically informed Mennonite theologians have engaged with Derrida amidst their rapport with Milbank, my argument in this chapter is that the stated priorities of the Mennonite representatives (Blum and Huebner) are far more opposed to Milbank and much closer to Derrida than initially appears to be the case. Much of the Mennonite engagement with Milbank is mediated by language of the "gift," and Mennonite theologians like Huebner describe their responses to Milbank as a form of "counter-gift" or "gift exchange."[2] However, as I will show below, the use of these images and the Mennonite reticence to sharply critique Radical Orthodoxy both obscure serious differences between their own stated positions, and underplay the major differences between the greater traditions of "Radical Reformation" and "Radical Orthodoxy" that are represented in these dialogues.

I further suggest that major Mennonite affinities with Derrida – such as the rejection of the notion that one can know and possess the origins and ends that define language and history, and the prioritization of the opening of discourse rather than its closure – are revealed following a clearer presentation of the deep differences between the Radical Reformation and Radical Orthodoxy. To demonstrate this, I begin with a summary presentation of the two traditions that focuses on their understanding of radicality and the categories and metanarratives they each use to understand their histories. To understand how Milbank, Huebner, and Blum each represent their traditions I survey the trajectories of the "Radical Reformation" and "Radical Orthodoxy," guided by the following two questions: "How do these traditions conceive of their own radicality?" and "How do these traditions imagine and mediate between opposed positions?"

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[2] Chris Huebner, "Radical Orthodoxy, Radical Reformation: What Might Milbank and Mennonites Learn from Each Other?," *The Gift of Difference*, 207.

Radical Reformation

Several major Mennonite historians have understood their sixteenth century Anabaptist

forbearers as being "neither Catholic nor Protestant,"[3] and others have referred to the Anabaptist

groups as being "both Catholic and Protestant."[4] Although the notion that the Anabaptists were

neither Catholic nor Protestant has become less influential in the recent social history of

Anabaptism (notably absent from the Brill *Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism*),

formulations that construe the sixteenth century Anabaptist groups as mediating between

Catholicism and Protestantism by refusing capture by either and retaining elements of both

persist in expressions of Mennonite theological and historical self-understanding.[5]

At the beginning of his history of the Anabaptists, Hans-Jürgen Goertz writes that rather

than being defined by the retention of a Protestant character or by remaining traces of Catholic

piety, it would "be more correct to describe Anabaptism as 'neither Catholic nor Protestant'."[6] –

after which he cites Walter Klaassen's landmark book *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor*

Protestant. Similarly, at the beginning of his attempt to sort through both the Catholic and

Protestant influences on the early Anabaptist figure Michael Sattler, Arnold Snyder writes that

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[3] This formulation originates from Walter Klaassen, *Neither Catholic nor Protestant*. Rev. Ed. (Waterloo: Conrad Press, 1981 [Original 1973]), 71. See also the author's response to critiques of the book in Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Both Positive and Negative* (Waterloo, ON: Conrad Press, 1975). The formulation "neither Catholic nor Protestant" has been taken up and used in a variety of contexts, including theological and sociological accounts of Mennonite thought and history. For example, in his sociological account of Mennonite society, Calvin Redekop writes that "Anabaptism has increasingly been considered as neither Catholic nor Protestant." Calvin Redekop, *Mennonite Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 35.

[4] Sjouke Voolstra, quoted in C. Arnold Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ: The Anabaptist Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 27.

[5] For recent historical work on Anabaptist groups see *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism*, 1521-1700. Ed. John D. Roth and James Stayer (Leiden: Brill, 2011). For a combined theological and historical use of the category of the "third way" see John D. Roth, "An Anabaptist Church: A Third Way Emerges" in *Stories: How Mennonites Came to Be* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006).

[6] Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *The Anabaptists*. Trans. Trevor Johnson. (London: Routledge, 1996), 6. Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *Die Täufer: Geschichte und Deutung* (München: Beck, 1980), 11.

"We have long known that the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century were neither Roman Catholic nor Protestant in their identity."[7] Being a part of a generation of scholars who sought to move beyond the notion that the Anabaptist groups had a single origin, and further beyond the notion that the multiple origins of the movement prohibit speaking of it in general terms,[8] Snyder wrote of the "*sui generis* nature of Anabaptism."[9] In his later book on Anabaptist spirituality, Snyder extends his previous affirmation of Anabaptism as "neither Catholic nor Protestant" to include the characterization "both Catholic and Protestant,"[10] sourcing the former formulation in the work of Klaassen and attributing the latter to Sjouke Voolstra.[11]

Connected with this "neither-nor" and "both-and" characterization of historical Anabaptist groups by contemporary Mennonite historians, the desires to navigate a radical "third way" or a moderate "middle way" between extremes have also been important for theologians in the Mennonite pacifist tradition.[12] For example, in their introduction to a collection of writings

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[7] C. Arnold Snyder, *The Life and Thought of Michael Sattler.* Studies in Anabaptist Mennonite History 27 (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1984), 13. This book is a revision of Snyder's 1981 doctoral dissertation of the same name, completed under the supervision of Gerard Vallee in the Department of Religious Studies at McMaster University.

[8] Arnold Snyder, "Beyond Polygenesis: Recovering the Unity and Diversity of Anabaptist Theology," in *Essays in Anabaptist Theology*. Ed. H. Wayne Pipkin (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994).

[9] Snyder, *The Life and Thought of Michael Sattler*, 13.

[10] Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ*, 27

[11] The essay Snyder cites, "Hetzelfde, maar anders: Het verlangen narr volkomen vroomheid als drijfveer van de Morderne Devotie en van de doperse reformatie," [original 1988] is collected in Sjouke Voolstra, *Beeldenstormer uit bewogenheid: verzamelde opstellen van Sjouke Voolstra*. Ed. Anna Voolstra, A.G. Hoekema, Piet Visser. (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2005), 33-46.

[12] For a theological expression see J. Lawrence Burkholder, "A Third Way" in *Mennonite Ethics: From Isolation to Engagement*. Ed. Lauren Friesen (Victoria, BC: Friesen Press, 2018) [Original 1969]), esp. 603. Between the 1920s and 1940s, Harold S. Bender undertook a revisionist recovery of what he considered to be the original Anabaptist vision, part of which involved (in the words of Cornelius J. Dyck) efforts "to make Anabaptism a new third way between the polarizing influences of theological liberalism and fundamentalism." Cornelius J. Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History*. 3rd. Ed. (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 34. This image of the "third way" would also be taken up later by Mennonites in the 1970s and 1980s who sought to chart a path apart from

on Anabaptism and economics, editors Calvin Redekop, Victor Krahn, and Sam Steiner open with the sentence: "The Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition has for four and three-quarter centuries promoted a 'third way' in the understanding of Christianity."[13] Their placement of contemporary Mennonites in continuity with historical Anabaptist attempts to articulate a third way is significant because it follows a pattern of Mennonite identity-formation that draws from a usable Anabaptist past. The Mennonite tradition takes up its Anabaptist history through mediating gestures that negotiate and discern between oppositions (Catholic/Protestant, State/Church, Church/World, etc.), and Mennonites often construe these oppositions as polarized extremes that call for neutrality, separation, mediation, or refusal. In various ways, contemporary Mennonite theologians articulate their pacifist, nonviolent, and nonresistant values by negating both quietist passivity and violent action, and asserting "third ways" or "middle ways" beyond or apart from forcible assertion and quietist withdrawal.

Although Mennonite theologies are plural and diverse,[14] the notion that the sixteenth century Anabaptists mediated between Catholicism and Protestantism by being "both" and "neither," and the related notion that contemporary Mennonites ought to mediate between passivity and violence by charting a "third way" or "middle way" that follows and imitates Jesus Christ as a pacifist figure, are each helpful images for thinking about the general contours of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. However, this is not to say that the Anabaptists of the sixteenth

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fundamentalism and evangelicalism. See Paul M. Lederach, *A Third Way: Conversations About Anabaptist/Mennonite Faith* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980), 13-14.

[13] Calvin Redekop, Victor Krahn, and Sam Steiner, "Preface" in *Anabaptist/Mennonite Faith and Economics*. Ed. Calvin Redekop, Victor Krahn, and Sam Steiner (New York: University Press of America, 1994), vii.

[14] For one account of the pluralistic and diverse character of Mennonite identities see Rodney J. Sawatsky, "The One and the Many: The Recovery of Mennonite Pluralism" in *Anabaptism Revisited*. Ed. Walter Klaassen (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), 141-152.

century or the Mennonites of the present have successfully achieved some uniform mediation between opposed perspectives in their pursuit of middle ways and third ways; only that this aspiration is a key part of Anabaptist Mennonite identity.

As mentioned above, Anabaptist history and theology have evolved in close connection with each other, and a major pattern in many Mennonite theologies is the use of Anabaptist history for present purposes of identity formation.[15] The category of the "Radical Reformation" plays a key role in this history in ways that intersect with the mediations described above. By tracing the categories that historians and theologians have used to characterize the Anabaptist groups of the sixteenth century, we can gain insight into the approaches to mediation and categorization that constitute the "Radical Reformation" position that is now used by Mennonite philosophical theologians in their articulation of "pacifist epistemology" and "ontological peace." For example, Huebner takes up a "Radical Reformation" approach in his response to Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy. But to understand the relationship between Huebner's "Radical Reformation" approach and the Radical Reformation of the sixteenth century, we must examine the historiography of the Anabaptist groups and the polemical and value-laden categories that historians and theologians have used both inside and outside of the Mennonite tradition.

The category or name "Anabaptist" has a long polemical history since its original use as a term of abuse in the sixteenth century. Rather than being a neutral and descriptive term at its point of origin, in the words of John D. Roth "To be called an Anabaptist in the sixteenth century

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[15] See Rodney James Sawatsky, *History and Ideology: American Mennonite Identity Definition Through History* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2005), 119-135. See also Paul Martens, "Challenge and Opportunity: The Quest for Anabaptist Theology Today" *Recovering from the Anabaptist Vision: New Essays in Anabaptist Identity and Theological Method*. Ed. Laura Schmidt Roberts, Paul Martens, and Myron A. Penner. T&T Clark Studies in Anabaptist Theology and Ethics no.1 (London: T&T Clark, 2020).

had all of the modern connotations of the word 'jihadist'."[16] Although this parallel is not without

some problematic anachronism, it does point toward the normative and polemical core of the

term "Anabaptist" by exposing the real mortal threats and violent persecution resulting from

contestations about the legitimacy of baptism. The German term *Wiedertäufer* (Anabaptist)

means to baptize again, and it names one common feature of the various sixteenth century

Anabaptist movements: their insistence on the voluntary decision to confess faith in Jesus Christ

and receive baptism as an adult. As Roth also notes, *Wiedertäufer* is doubly polemical because it

means not only to baptize again, but (for the Anabaptists) to baptize correctly for the first time,

thereby rendering the first (child) baptism invalid and challenging the Catholic establishment.[17]

The development of the historiography of Anabaptism is defined by a movement from

the acceptance of these polemical terms up to the 1950s, to the recovery of "Anabaptism" as a

positive term for Mennonite use by Harold S. Bender and the "Goshen School" in the 1950s and

1960s, to the complications following the acknowledgment of Anabaptism's plural origins in the

movement from "monogenesis" to "polygenesis" during the 1970s and 1980s.[18] These revisions

developed concurrently with a movement from a typological approach to the Anabaptist "Radical

Reformation" that stratified the movement by dividing it into various streams, toward an

acknowledgement on the part of theologians and historians of its complex and diverse

character.[19] Part of the 1980s revisionist school, Klaus Deppermann writes of confessional

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[16] John D. Roth, "Future Directions in Anabaptist Studies" in *Grenzen des Täufertums / Goundaires of Anabaptism: Neue Forschungen*. Hsg. Anselm Schubert, Astrid von Schlachta, Michael Driedger (Göttingen: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009), 406.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Klaus Deppermann, Werner O. Packull, and James M. Stayer, "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 49 (1975): 83-121.

[19] See Harold S. Bender and John S. Oyer. "Historiography: Anabaptist." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. (Original 1956, Update 1989).

efforts to recover Anabaptism as a strictly peaceful movement, stating "this highly evaluative style of historiography was bound up with the typological method of the sociology of religion that had been developed by Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch."[20]

In his discussion of asceticism and the "Baptists Sects" Weber distinguished the Anabaptist movements from Protestantism and Catholicism, using the terms "believer's Church" and "sect."[21] Weber drew on the sociological distinction, made by Troeltsch, between the Church (defined by its conservatism and desire for universality) and the sects (defined by their more secular character and their lack of desire for control of the social order).[22] These distinctions made by Troeltsch and Weber serve as one important beginning point of the idea that in the sixteenth century the Anabaptist groups constituted a new and unique social, political, and religious movement that was not Protestant and not Catholic, but influenced by and critical of both. However, historians of the Anabaptist groups struggled to find terminological and categorical ways of communicating the complexity of the "neither-nor" negations and "both-and" mediations that the Anabaptist groups performed.

Prior to the formulation of Anabaptism as "neither Catholic nor Protestant" one early designation of the Anabaptist groups was "The Left Wing of the Reformation" – a political characterization that implies a relatively stable center in relation to which divergent "wings" can

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(https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Historiography:_Anabaptist&oldid=166257. For a more recent outline of the historiography of Anabaptism see Michael Driedger, "Anabaptism and Religious Radicalism" in *The European Reformations*. Ed. Alec Ryrie (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 212-231

[20] Klaus Deppermann, *Melchior Hoffman: Social Unrest and Apocalyptic Visions in the Age of Reformation*. Trans. Malcom Wren. Ed. Benjamin Drewery (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 3. [Original 1979].

[21] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Scribner's, 1958), 144-145. [Original 1905].

[22] Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*. Trans. Olive Wyons (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931), 331-332. [Original 1911].

be situated. In 1941, Roland Bainton pointed to the diversity of the sixteenth century Protestant movements and wrote that "If one speaks of a right and a left wing of the Reformation, the question at once arises as to the location of the body to which the wings are attached."[23] But rather than being defined in relation to a single stable center, Bainton used the term "Left Wing of the Reformation" to describe the Anabaptist groups by situating these wings in relation to their approach to the sacraments, their doctrines, and their position on church and state. Later, in 1962, Heinold Fast used the same term, the "Left Wing of the Reformation," to describe the Anabaptist groups, while further subdividing them into: *Täufer* (Baptists), *Spiritualisten* (Spiritualists), *Schwärmer* (Enthusiasts, Fanatics, literally: 'swarmers'), and *Antitrinitarier* (Anti-Trinitarians).[24] Amidst his typological ordering of these groups, Fast refers to the work of George H. Williams, whose work on the "Radical Reformation" would come to define the historical study of the Anabaptist groups.[25]

In his source collection and later study of the topic, Williams used the category of the "Radical Reformation" to designate three groups: Anabaptists, Spiritualists, and Evangelical Rationalists.[26] These groups, for Williams, were distinct from the magisterial Protestant

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[23] Roland Bainton, "The Left Wing of the Reformation" *Journal of Religion* 21 (1941), 125.

[24] Heinold Fast (Ed.), *Der linke Flügel der Reformation: Glaubenszeugnisse der Täufer, Spiritualisten, Schwärmer und Antitrinitarier* (Bremen: Carl Schünemann Verlag, 1962).

[25] Also rejecting the category of "The Left Wing of the Reformation," Leonard Verduin called the Radical Reformation groups "stepchildren" (*Stiefkinder*) of the Reformation, further dividing them into eight groups, the titles of which were each used as terms of abuse: *Donatisten* (Donatists), *Stäbler* (Staff-carriers, rather than sword-carriers), *Catharer* (Cathars, here used as a general term for a heretic), *Sacramentschwärmer* (Sacramentarians), *Winckler* (those who gather in secluded places), *Wiedertäufer* (those who baptize again), *Kommunisten* (Communists, given their desire to hold all things in common), and *Rottengeister* (factions of agitators). See Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964).

[26] George Huntston Williams (Ed.), "Introduction," in *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers: Documents Illustrative of the Radical Reformation*. Library of Christian Classics XXV (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), 19-20.

Reformers (Lutheran, Reformed) and the papal Catholic counter-reformers by virtue of both their resistance to the unity of church and state, and their use of history.[27] He writes:

> The Radical Reformation broke on principle with the Catholic-Protestant *corpus christianum* and stressed the *corpus Christi* of committed believers. Moreover, in looking both to the apostolic past and the apocalyptic future, the Radical Reformation induced currents in history and the interpretation therof which pulsate today in diverse conceptions of history ranging from explicitly Christian theologies of history, through democratic progressivism, to Marxism.[28]

For Williams, the category of the "Radical Reformation" names radical groups who situated themselves in between past and future, and apart from Catholicism and Protestantism, amidst the throes of violent persecution. He writes of the motivation for this persecution and the history of the term "Anabaptist," stating that "up until the nineteenth century 'Anabaptist' was synonymous with 'Münsterite' or 'Müntzerite,' i.e., seditious, polygamous, licentious, tyrannical."[29] These associations come from the 1534 uprising during which Anabaptists took over the city of Münster and installed their own government and laws (including forms of collective ownership and polygamy).[30] Against the negative associations that the term "Anabaptist" had taken on because of the Münster uprising, the Mennonite recovery of the Anabaptist vision by the "Bender School" or "Goshen School" during the 1960s sought to restore the dignity and usability of the Anabaptist name for Mennonites.

However, as historian Michael Driedger writes, "While the supporters of the Goshen School of historiography focused on ethical ideals they felt spread from Zurich throughout

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[27] Ibid, 202-21.

[28] Ibid, 25.

[29] Ibid, 26.

[30] For a first-hand account of these events written by an enemy of the Anabaptists, see Hermann von Kerssenbrock, *Narrative of the Anabaptist Madness: The Overthrow of the City of Münster, the Famous Metropolis of Westphalia*. Trans. Christopher S. Mackay (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

German-speaking and Dutch lands, Williams' Anabaptists were part of a much more diffuse

historical movement which reached from Spain to Eastern Europe and from the British Isles to

the Italian peninsula."[31] Instead of using Bainton's category of the "Left Wing of the

Reformation," Williams considered the Radical Reformation to be quite a bit more diverse and

"equally distant from classical (magisterial) Protestantism and Tridentine Catholicism."[32] He

accounts for some of this distance by distinguishing between two different uses of history.

According to Williams, whereas the Protestant and Catholic traditions were pursuing different

kinds of *reformatio*, the Radical Reformers "labored under the more radical slogan *restitutio*"[33] –

meaning to return to a better past and bring aspects of it forth to the present in a way that

"restores all things" (*apocatastasis panton*, or *restitutio omnium*).[34] This restitution and

restoration were performed and imagined by the Radical Reformers in tandem with their

normative reading of the life of Jesus Christ. For some Mennonite theologians, such as John

Howard Yoder, the "Radical Reformation" names a radical return to the root (*radix*) defined by

the desire to follow Jesus and restore the integrity of the New Testament church in the present.

The three movements of history in the restitutionist model are the original normative state

of the church, the "Fall" (for Mennonites, the reign of Constantine in which Christianity was

made a state religion), and the radical renewal which seeks to return to the original state that also

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[31] Driedger, "Anabaptism and Religious Radicalism," 216-217.

[32] George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), xxvi.

[33] Ibid.

[34] See Christian Neff, Ernst Crous, Robert Friedmann and Dennis D. Martin. "Restitutionism." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. (Original 1959. Update 1990). (https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Restitutionism&oldid=144574). For a detailed account of the restitutionist use of history in the Radical Reformation see Geoffrey Dipple, *"Just as in the Time of the Apostles": Uses of History in the Radical Reformation* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 2005).

seeks the end or culmination of all things.[35] This restitutionist pattern is one way that the

"Radical Reformation" is defined by uses of history that narrate a past, present, and future by

periodizing time and history by means of theopolitical divisions between origins, essences, and

ends. The tradition of Radical Orthodoxy also uses metanarrative strategies to order and enforce

a particular relationship between origins, essences, and ends, in ways that stand in sharp contrast

with the Radical Reformation – a juxtaposition that we will return to below and extend in

Chapter 3 through an examination of Grace Jantzen's narration of the history of violence.

Although his categories would be deeply challenged by the "polygenesis" historians of

the 1970s and 1980s (especially that of "Evangelical Rationalists"[36]), Williams' term "Radical

Reformation" remained influential in the interpretation of the Anabaptist groups and intersected

with Mennonite categories like the "third way" or "middle way," as well as designations of

Anabaptist groups as "neither Catholic nor Protestant."[37] At the same time, the mediations

characteristic of the Radical Reformation, as described above, have also become part of how the

Mennonite theological tradition understands the normative status of Jesus.

For the Mennonite heirs of the Radical Reformation, Jesus Christ is a pacifist figure who

presents a "third way" that mediates between, but is radically apart from, the two options of

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[35] See John Howard Yoder, "Anabaptism and History" in *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 124. For critical overviews of this restitutionist pattern see Jennifer Otto, "The Church that Never Fell: Reconsidering the Narrative of the Church, 100-400 CE" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 91.1 (January 2017). Jennifer Otto, "Were the Early Christians Pacifists? Does It Matter?" *Conrad Grebel Review* 35.3 (Fall 2017): 267-279.

[36] See James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1972). A second edition with "Reflections and Retractions" was published in 2002.

[37] Williams characterizes the Spiritualist Caspar Schwenckfeld as taking a "middle way" in his sacramental theology, and also describes the Evangelical Rationalists as a "Third-Church" that was "neither Protestant nor Catholic." Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, xxviii-xxix.

passivity and violence.[38] The Mennonite-related characterization of Jesus as providing a third way apart from two extremes has taken several forms, the most popular of which is found in Donald Kraybill's book *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, where Kraybill partly relies upon the work of Methodist theologian Walter Wink. Both Kraybill and Wink consider the task of following and imitating Jesus Christ to require choosing a "third way" that challenges the "myth of redemptive violence" wherein counter-violence is considered to be a legitimate and effective strategy for addressing violence.[39] Following this resistance to retaliatory approaches that return violence for violence, Mennonites involved in Peace and Conflict Studies historically and presently emphasize approaches to conflict mediation that seek to transform the field of conflict by challenging its oppositional structure and the normative status of enmity.[40]

The impetus to pursue transformative mediations rather than antagonistic oppositions remains an important part of Mennonite theological and historical self-understanding, from the "neither-nor" and "both-and" mediations of historical Anabaptism, to the "third way" and "middle way" mediations of contemporary Mennonite theology and peace work. However, the normative category of the "Radical Reformation" remains contested in the discourse, and the relationship between radicality and the aforementioned mediations is still unclear.

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[38] This is the argument in Walter Wink, *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Doubleday, 1998). He writes that Jesus "is urging us to transcend both passivity and violence by finding a third way, one that is at once assertive and yet nonviolent" (p. 99). This text became influential for Mennonites, especially through the popular work: Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom*. Updated Edition (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2011) [Original 1978].

[39] Wink, *The Powers that Be*, 100-101. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, 181-182.

[40] See John Paul Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003) and Janna Hunter Bowman, "From Resolution to Transformation," in *From Suffering to Solidarity: The Historical Seeds of Mennonite Interreligious, Interethnic, and International Peacebuilding*. Ed. Andrew P. Klager (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2016), 115-139.

If part of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition is defined by mediations that seek to be between but also to move beyond antagonistic oppositions, how do these mediations constitute a kind of radicality? Conciliatory mediations that attempt to find a neutral middle ground between opposed terms hardly seem radical, but third ways that negate the legitimacy of a naturalized set of two options seem to be closer to radicality. To see how the "Radical Reformation" position sustains both kinds of mediation – one conciliatory and neutralizing, the other negating and exceeding – alongside a commitment to radicality, even when they stand in contradiction to each other, we must turn to thinkers who show how the historical category of the "Radical Reformation" is normatively and forcibly defined by an extreme position situated in relation to a stable center. Only after we consider how the term "Radical Reformation" both implicitly accepts and seeks to reject the positioning of a radical extreme in relation to a stable center can we properly situate the mediations performed by "Radical Reformation" theologians.

Although the term "Radical Reformation" is still used today by both historians and theologians to designate the Anabaptist groups, recent historical work has challenged the descriptive usefulness of the term by emphasizing its normative and polemical roots – in short, suggesting that there is no singular, neutral, or stable center against which a "radical" extreme can be positioned. In one way, the Radical Reformation tradition has proceeded by standing between and moving beyond two given options, but in another way the tradition challenges two-option structures that would force a decision, for example, between Catholicism and Protestant or Church and State. But recently, historians of the tradition have challenged the notion that the sixteenth century Anabaptist groups are stably situated by such distinctions. This challenge to the stability of the term "Radical Reformation" is part of a recent turn in the historiography of Anabaptism away from origins and essences, and toward complexity and multiplicity.

In his introduction to an important source collection on the topic, Michael G. Baylor writes that "Recently it has been suggested that while there were Reformation radicals – a heterogeneous group of internal critics and dissenters – there was no 'Radical Reformation' in the sense of a positive movement with any cohesiveness of thought and action."[41]Against the notion that typologies like those of Williams or Fast can account for the complexity, plurality, and fluidity of the Anabaptist movements, Baylor suggested thinking of the Radical Reformation "as a political movement rather than an institution" that sought to bring about radical change "through direct action from below."[42] For Baylor, a definitive aspect of the Radical Reformation was its rejection of "a hierarchical conception of politics in which legitimate authority, whether secular or ecclesiastical, devolved from the top down" rather than in "local autonomy and community control."[43] It is appropriate, then, that historians have challenged the use of hierarchical and normative terms (the "Radical Reformation") to describe the Anabaptist groups.

In his recent work, historian Michael Driedger shows the limitations of the term "Radical Reformation" for characterizing the Anabaptist movement.[44] Arguing that the category of the "Radical Reformation" is an "historiographical cage" that rests on polemical and heresy-making literature from the early modern period, Driedger suggests that using the term "Radical

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[41] Michael G. Baylor, "Introduction" in *The Radical Reformation*. Ed. and Trans. Michael G. Baylor (London: Cambridge University Press, 1991), xiii-xiv.

[42] Ibid, xv.

[43] Ibid, xvi.

[44] See Michael Driedger, "Against 'the Radical Reformation': On the Continuity between Early Modern Heresy-Making and Modern Historiography," *Radicalism and Dissent in the World of Protestant Reform*. Ed. Bridget Heal and Anorthe Kremers (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 139-161. See also Michael Driedger, "Thinking Inside the Cages: Norman Cohn, Anabaptist Münster, and Polemically Inspired Assumptions about Apocalyptic Violence" *Nova Religio* 21.4 (2018): 38-62.

Reformation" without attention to its normative and polemical origins constitutes an implicit acceptance of a typological distinction between "the true church" and "deviant believers."[45]

Although Driedger's aim is to help historians to avoid the caged interpretations that result from accepting these problematic distinctions, his opposition to the category of the Radical Reformation helpfully points to how its radicality is defined in relation to a stable point of orthodoxy against which the Anabaptist groups were forcibly positioned by their enemies. Driedger suggests in conclusion that escaping the interpretive cage of the Radical Reformation requires attention to the ways that "'the Radical Reformation' and similar categories are not historical reality but a framework borrowed from early modern heresy-making literature – that is, they are a discursive choice characteristic of a long-past cultural moment."[46] A similar historiographical critique that emphasizes the relative position of radicality in relation to a stable normative center is articulated by historian Astrid von Schlachta, who writes in her history of the Anabaptists, that both the term "radical" in "Radical Reformation" and the term "left" in "The Left Wing of the Reformation" represent time-bound and politically-laden classifications that should be regularly questioned.[47]

So, it seems that there is no "Radical Reformation" position without the powerful and potentially violent use of language and categorization to place some positions in the mainstream or at the center, while situating others at the wing or in "radical" or "extreme" positions. Whereas radicality that returns to the root performs an historical mediation between a normative past, a period of fallenness, and a present that calls for a return, those radicals who are positioned

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[45] Driedger, "Against 'the Radical Reformation'," 157.

[46] Ibid, 161.

[47] Astrid von Schlachta, *Täufer: Von der Reformation ins 21. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto Verlag, 2020), 11.

by their enemies are faced with the choice between mediating between opposed positions by standing between them in conciliatory and neutralizing ways, or refusing the terms of the opposition by taking up third positions that stand apart from them. These problems – neutrality and polarization – reappear in the exchanges between Milbank and the Mennonites.

The historical term "Radical Reformation" that is taken up and used by contemporary Mennonite theologians in their responses to Radical Orthodoxy represents a complex mediation between a series of opposed categories: an Anabaptist past and Mennonite present, Catholic and Protestant influences, a stable center and radical margin, normativity and description, and more. Above I have shown how the "Radical Reformation" names an approach that mediates between oppositions, sometimes by seeking to *include* aspects of both sides ("both Catholic and Protestant"), sometimes by seeking to *negate* their oppositional structure ("neither Catholic nor Protestant"), sometimes by seeking to navigate *between* them ("a middle way"), sometimes seeking to exceed or be *apart* from them ("a third way"), but rarely – if ever – self-consciously residing within an oppositional structure by taking sides or accepting relations of enmity.

I highlight these defining characteristics here not only because they are distinct from the oppositional radicality of Radical Orthodoxy (as I will outline below) but also because these mediations bear a structural resemblance to Derrida's "neither-nor" approach to classical philosophical oppositions as explored above in Chapter 1. As I will show below, the mediations characteristic of the Radical Reformation position will also feature in the approach that Mennonite theologians Blum and Huebner take toward the contradictions between Milbank's "ontology of peace" and Derrida's so-called "ontology of violence." But first I will provide an outline of the tradition of Radical Orthodoxy focusing on how it conceives of its own radicality and relationship with oppositions.

Radical Orthodoxy

Radical Orthodoxy, by contrast with the Radical Reformation, is a much younger tradition. Beginning in the 1990s in Cambridge, the largely British and Anglican theological movement originated with the works of John Milbank, Catharine Pickstock, Graham Ward, Connor Cunningham, Philip Blond, and others. Like most theological movements, Radical Orthodoxy features internal tensions amidst those who take up its name. However, the movement is characterized by several underlying characteristics and developments. As with the account of the Radical Reformation above, my focusing questions for the tradition of Radical Orthodoxy will concern its account of radicality and its approach to oppositions. If Radical Orthodoxy is "radical," to what root does it return and how does it imagine and respond to those who stand in the way of that return? Does Radical Orthodoxy consider its radicalism to be an extreme option in relation to a stable center, or does it position itself using different spatial and temporal terms?

According to D. Stephen Long, Radical Orthodoxy began with "John Milbank's dissatisfaction with modern theology's acceptance of its fate (implicit and explicit) as innocuous and irrelevant because it allowed theology to be positioned by philosophical transcendentalism."[48] Milbank's project begins with the rejection of what he perceives to be a hostile secularism that desires to position and therefore relativize the claims of Christian theology. Although Milbank's 1990 book *Theology and Social Theory* is often heralded as the beginning of Radical Orthodoxy, the themes developed in it were already being developed in the years preceding its publication by theologians like Catharine Pickstock and Graham Ward.[49]

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[48] D. Stephen Long, "Radical Orthodoxy" in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*. Ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 130.

[49] James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-secular Theology*. Foreword by John Milbank (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 34.

Radical Orthodoxy originated in the early 1990s in British Anglican circles, and then began to influence theological discourses in Europe and North America. In his critical introduction to the movement, James K. A. Smith summarizes Radical Orthodoxy, suggesting that it is defined by: a critique of modernity and liberalism, a postsecular approach that questions the dualisms of modernity, an emphasis on participation and materiality that refuses to cede the material to meaninglessness, a sacramental and liturgical aesthetics and ontology, and a cultural critique that mobilizes it participatory ontology for the purposes of reforming the world.[50]

Smith's cartography of Radical Orthodoxy maps its reception and influence in relation to major theological movements, including the liberal theologies of Rudolph Bultmann, Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, and David Tracy (Tübingen, Chicago), the Barth-influenced "Yale School" of Hans Frei and George Lindbeck (Basel, New Haven), the "Duke School" of Stanley Hauerwas (Durham, NC) – which was also influenced by Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder (Goshen, IN).[51] Smith situates Radical Orthodoxy in sharp contrast with liberal theologies that "correlate the claims of Christian revelation with the structures of a given culture or politico-economic system such that both, in some sense, function as a normative source for the theological project."[52] Whereas Radical Orthodoxy is premised on the need for Christian theology to distinguish itself from secularity and philosophy, what Smith calls "liberal theology" desires to correlate Christian theology with cultural, philosophical, and secular languages and projects, understanding both to be legitimate sources for Christian theology.

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[50] Smith, *Radical Orthodoxy*, 70-80.

[51] Ibid, 34-40.

[52] Ibid, 35.

Radical Orthodoxy's rejection of the perceived positioning of Christian theology by secularism resonates deeply, according to Smith, with the Yale School and the works of Hauerwas and Yoder, because each, albeit in different ways, resist attempts to correlate Christian theology with the secular.[53] This means that when Radical Orthodoxy is described by both its proponents and critics as a "postsecular" movement, the prefix "post' implies not only a temporal succession, but also a normative movement of overcoming. Whereas the liberal theologies of the Tübingen and Chicago schools did not see a fundamental opposition between Christian theology and the secular world, proponents of Radical Orthodoxy certainly do.

Confusion may arise, however, because of the diverse uses of the term "postsecular." It is important to note that users of the term "postsecular" do not all necessarily agree on whether the prefix "post" ought to name a theological resistance to the secular, or a departure from the notion that the secular can achieve value-neutrality, or something else entirely.[54] The characterization of Radical Orthodoxy as a postsecular movement is only meaningful in the context of its desire to overcome conventional philosophy and secularism with a radical reassertion of Christian theology – such that the prefix "post" indicates a movement of displacement.[55]

Radical Orthodoxy is defined by a movement away from both fundamentalism and positivism that does not assert a singular orthodoxy, but nonetheless proceeds with a

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[53] Ibid, 39.

[54] For two contrasting uses of the term "postsecular" compare the theological assertions of Phillip Blond, "Introduction: Theology before Philosophy" in *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*. Ed. Phillip Blond (London: Routledge, 1998) with the critical comments in Anthony Paul Smith and Daniel Whistler, "Editor's Introduction: What is Continental Philosophy of Religion Now?" in *After the Postsecular and the Postmodern: New Essays in Continental Philosophy of Religion*. Ed. Anthony Paul Smith and Daniel Whistler (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2010).

[55] For a critique of movements of overcoming implied in the prefix 'post' that precedes the postsecular, see my *Postsecular History: Political Theology and the Politics of Time* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

characteristic style or approach. Its major figures – Milbank, Pickstock, and Ward – have each expressed hesitation about exclusive or centralized definitions of Radical Orthodoxy.[56] That said, its self-understanding as "orthodox" is meaningful. Smith suggests that the methodology of Radical Orthodoxy is at least partly characterized by its engagement with continental philosophy, and for him the task of Radical Orthodoxy is to "retrieve the deep theological resources of the Christian tradition – particularly premodern resources in the fathers and medieval – to let them speak *to* postmodernism."[57] Although Radical Orthodoxy defines itself against what it considers to be postmodern relativism (and ultimately nihilism), those within the movement engage heavily with postmodern thinkers and often read them together with patristic figures.

Although the Radical Reformation approach of the Mennonites also seeks to radically return to the root sources of an authentic Christian past, and also engages with continental philosophers (as we will see below), the structure of the two traditions' movements of radical retrieval differ greatly. Although Radical Orthodoxy and Radical Reformation are both radical because they perform a return to the root (the root of Christianity before secularism for Radical Orthodoxy, the root of original pacifist Christianity for Radical Reformation), the way that they seek to return to roots is markedly different.

Radical Orthodoxy's radicalism desires a return to Christian theology before its positioning by "secularism" – a term that major voices in Radical Orthodoxy use to name ways of thinking that are strictly antagonistic toward religion. By contrast, the Radical Reformation restitution of original pacifist Christianity is defined not by powerful assertions of superiority against those who forcibly position them, but by various mediations ("neither Catholic nor

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[56] Smith, *Radical Orthodoxy*, 66.

[57] Ibid, 68.

Protestant," "both Catholic and Protestant," "a middle way," "a third way") that challenge the use of violent or coercive power against enemies. The historiography of Anabaptism also follows a similar critique of power when Schlachta and Driedger show the normative and power-laden history of the term "Radical Reformation" and challenge its usefulness in the present.

Although according to Smith it is "not a clearly delineated 'school' or 'movement' whose doctrines can be neatly listed but rather a 'sensibility' or a 'spirit' energized by common practices and commitments,"[58] one common thread in Radical Orthodoxy's articulation of the problems of modernity and postmodernity is its radical reassertion of Christian truth against what it perceives to be attacks from secularism. This reassertion of Christian truth against perceived attacks is a common thread in both the 1999 and 2009 Radical Orthodoxy anthologies. In the 1999 anthology, editors Milbank, Pickstock, and Ward begin by suggesting that "For several centuries now, secularism has been defining and constructing the world" in ways that privatize or discredit Christian theology.[59] Equating the "logic of secularism" with a "soulless, aggressive, nonchalant" nihilism, the editors position these early essays as "attempts to reclaim the world by situating its concerns within a theological framework."[60] Ward, Pickstock, and Milbank accuse secularism of lacking values and meaning, while asserting an orthodox "commitment to credal Christianity and the exemplarity of its patristic matrix" that is radical "in the sense of its return to patristic and medieval roots, and especially to the Augustinian vision of all knowledge as divine illumination – a notion that transcends the modern bastard dualisms of faith and reason, grace

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[58] Smith, *Radical Orthodoxy*, 70.

[59] John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catharine Pickstock "Introduction: Suspending the Material: The Turn of Radical Orthodoxy" in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999), 1.

[60] Ibid.

and nature."[61] The editors furthermore suggest that the radicality of Radical Orthodoxy is "more mediating, but less accommodating" on matters of reason and revelation.[62] But what is the character of this mediation? In contrast to the "neither," "both," "middle way," and "third way" mediations of the Radical Reformation stance, Radical Orthodoxy mediates between opposed terms (what Milbank calls "modern bastard dualisms") on its own theological terms without ceding any ground to its perceived enemy of secularism.

For the editors of the 1999 Radical Orthodoxy reader, secularism is not only threatening in its attempt to position and depose Christian theology, it is also structured by a nihilistic ontology of violence that is exemplified by "Derrida *et al.*," for whom "the essential structure is itself the moment of a delusory and contradictory concealment of the void."[63] In response to this "postmodern" ontology of violence, Milbank, Pickstock, and Ward suggest that "every discipline must be framed by a theological perspective; otherwise these disciplines will define a zone apart from God, grounded literally in nothing."[64] In some way, Radical Orthodoxy considers itself to be mediating between opposed perspectives by showing them to be false dilemmas – for example, the opposition between spiritualism and materialism – but in other ways the radical assertion of Christian orthodoxy that Radical Orthodoxy performs is premised on a hard distinction between a threatening secularism and a saving Christian orthodoxy.

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[61] Ibid, 2.

[62] Ibid. This sentence comes from John Milbank, "Knowledge: The Theological Critique of Philosophy" in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, 23.

[63] Ibid, 3.

[64] Ibid. See also John Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics" in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (London: Blackwell, 1997). Here Milbank argues that Jean-Luc Marion's appropriation of the phenomenological tradition does not go far enough in usurping philosophy and claims that "to receive the gift as love one must further *evacuate* all philosophy, leaving it merely as the empty science of formally possible perspectives and barren *aporias*." (49). Compare this with the more positive disposition toward secularity and philosophy in the Mennonite thinkers analyzed below.

However, it bears noting here that there is little evidence in the current sociology of religion that secularity or nonreligion threatens Christianity in a clearly oppositional way. Indeed, there are many kinds of social and philosophical secularism that do not seek to dominate Christianity.[65] Furthermore, narratives of linear secularization or religious privatization are now considered to be inadequate to the complex social differentiations, de-Christianizations, and accompanying recoils that characterize historical and present relationships between religiosity and secularity.[66] But despite these changes in the sociology of religion since the secularization thesis was repudiated by its own originators,[67] Radical Orthodoxy persists in its oppositional response to a threatening secularism.

In the 2009 anthology *The Radical Orthodoxy Reader*, co-editor Simon Oliver introduces Radical Orthodoxy in much the same way as the editors of the 1999 collection do when he emphasizes the decline of traditional Christian faith on account of its privatization and the growing separation of politics and religion.[68] Narrating the transition from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment using images like the "rise of the secular" and the "retreat of religion and theology," Oliver describes Radical Orthodoxy's postsecular critique of the notion that secularity is a neutral bedrock beneath the illusions of theology and religion.[69] As with the 1999 anthology, part of Oliver's narrative is the notion that secularity is premised upon an ontology wherein

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[65] See the consideration of religiosity and secularity as "complementary learning processes" in Jürgen Habermas, "Notes on a post-secular society" *Sign & Sight* (2008). (http://www.signandsight.com/features/1714.html)

[66] See David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards A Revised General Theory* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2005), 3.

[67] See Charles T. Mathewes, "An Interview with Peter Berger," *The Hedgehog Review* (Spring & Summer 2006).

[68] Simon Oliver, "Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: From Participation to Late Modernity" in *The Radical Orthodoxy Reader*. Ed. John Milbank and Simon Oliver (London: Routledge, 2009), 4.

[69] Ibid, 5.

"society and nature are understood to be characterized by an essential *violence* which must be controlled and tamed by the exercise of power."[70] This opposition between the "original violence" of secularism-nihilism-postmodernism and the "original peace" of radically orthodox Christianity owes much to Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory*, which I return to below.

How does Radical Orthodoxy conceive of radicality and opposition? A central part of the metanarrative of Radical Orthodoxy is the notion that there was a time before "secularism" constructed the world when Christian thought rightfully dominated the social order. In this pre-secular period, nature was not conceived of as an antagonistic clash of violent powers but as a participatory and harmonious creation. For proponents of Radical Orthodoxy, in the movement from the Enlightenment to Modernity, the notion that there is a value-neutral and objective Reason grew, and then became radically questionable in postmodernity. However, in the postmodern shift the hold that secular modernity and its supposedly objective reason had on the public sphere was weakened enough for Radical Orthodoxy to reassert its Christian truth. For Radical Orthodoxy, although premodern Christian thought was defined by a participatory ontology wherein the immanent relied upon the transcendent, in secular modernity this relation became levelled by a neutral rationality that sought to overcome the Christian ontology of peace with a nihilistic and secular ontology of violence.[71] By taking advantage of the postmodern turn in which truth came to be understood as relative to subject-position, Radical Orthodoxy has sought to re-narrate Christian theology against secularism.[72]

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[70] Ibid, 7.

[71] See the summary of Radical Orthodoxy's story in Smith, *Radical Orthodoxy*, 87-89.

[72] For Milbank, narrative is more important than explanation. See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. 2nd Ed. (London: Blackwell, 2006), 267.

Against what it perceives to be a nihilistic ontology of violence characteristic of postmodernism, Radical Orthodoxy positions itself as the salvific bearer of a metanarrative capable of providing a nonviolent alternative to the regulation of violence by means of violence that it attributes to secular liberalism. In an appreciative essay on Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory*, Stanley Hauerwas writes that "What drives Milbank's display of the ontological relationship between nonviolence and narrative is not the epistemology and ontology of postmodernism. Rather it is Jesus Christ, through whom we learn of God as Trinity, who is the fundamental ontological claim that must shape all other claims."[73] Hauerwas points out that Milbank seeks to "out-narrate liberalism," and then provides his own suggestion that "If the church is about 'out-narrating,' it can do so only to the extent that it can 'out-sing' the world."[74] Hauerwas goes on to argue that Christians should "challenge the narratives of liberalism because they fail to acknowledge their own violence. Of course, the confrontation between theology and 'the secular' cannot be other than conflictual, as hegemonic narratives, when confronted by their hegemony, always attempt to claim that 'peace' is being threatened."[75]

Although Hauerwas's work is distinct from Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy in many significant respects,[76] common to the Radical Orthodoxy metanarrative and Hauerwas's affirmations in this essay is a competitive and antagonistic way of imagining the field upon which narratives and counternarratives play out, especially the tensions between Christian

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[73] Stanley Hauerwas, "Creation, Contingency, and Truthful Nonviolence" in *Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth Century Theology and Philosophy.* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 191, 193.

[74] Ibid, 190.

[75] Ibid, 194.

[76] For more on how Milbank and Hauerwas converge and diverge, and for a critique of the ontologization of the church and the ecclesiologization of ontology, see Ry O. Siggelkow, "Toward An Apocalyptic Peace Church: Christian Pacifism After Hauerwas" *Conrad Grebel Review* 31.3 (Fall 2013): 274-297.

theology and secularity. The notion in Radical Orthodoxy that the Christian narrative ought to outdo that of secularism, and the notion expressed by Hauerwas that theology and the secular will *necessarily* be in a conflictual relationship, both rest on the assumption that contradictory narratives will inevitably seek to displace or position each other – an assumption that I will return to and challenge below through a reading of Grace Jantzen's critique of displacement.

One could find evidence for the descriptive accuracy of this kind of displacement in the history of the "Radical Reformation," given how the Anabaptist groups were terminologically positioned and forcibly displaced by the dominant Catholic church and the Protestant reformers through acts of physical violence and various polemical terms that endure to the present (including "Anabaptist" and "Radical Reformation"). However, a major difference between Radical Orthodoxy and the Radical Reformation position (both historically, and as taken up by contemporary Mennonite philosophical theologians) is found in their respective responses to being positioned, opposed, and displaced.

In response to the terminological positioning of the terms "Radical Reformation" and "Anabaptist" as extreme by the Catholic church and mainline Reformers, Mennonite historians and theologians have sought to recover these terms for positive use without attempting to forcibly overcome those who positioned and deposed them. Instead, they have proceeded through "neither-nor," "both-and," "middle way," and "third way" mediations that challenge the normative status of opposition, conflict, and enmity. This is not to say that all contemporary Mennonites and historical Anabaptists successfully avoid dualistic and oppositional thinking, but

it is to say that few Anabaptist or Mennonite theologians would defend violent opposition to a perceived threat or the structures by which one would have enemies in the first place.[77]

As we will see below, Mennonite philosophical theologians like Huebner use the term "Radical Reformation" in a positive way that refuses to secure or possess its place in opposition to those who are different from it, and as we have seen above, recent historiographical criticism of the "Radical Reformation" by historians Driedger and Schlachta show how these terms rest on normative foundations that are part of heresy-making literature that distinguishes between true believers and extreme deviants. In each case, the terms "Anabaptist" and "Radical Reformation" have been forcibly positioned by others as a part of a history of persecution, but Anabaptist and Mennonite theologians have responded to this through a series of complex mediations between opposed terms that refuse to allow the descriptive fact of antagonistic opposition to become prescriptive. By contrast, when proponents of Radical Orthodoxy perceive Christian theology to be under attack by a secularism that seeks to position and depose it, they respond not by means of mediation (whether conciliatory and neutralizing, or in ways that challenge and exceed oppositions), but with assertive opposition and narrative self-positioning that entrenches an essential difference between Christian theology and secularism.

My overall aim in delineating these two traditions is to show how different the Radical Reformation tradition is from Radical Orthodoxy in terms of their theological responses to modernity, secularism, and postmodernity. Where the former mediates, the latter opposes. By now it should be clear that a major structural divergence between Radical Orthodoxy and the Radical Reformation is found in their approaches to radicality and opposition. Although both

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[77] See Hyung Jin Kim Sun, *Who Are Our Enemies and How Do We Love Them?* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2020).

traditions make claims to radicality and perform a return to a certain version of the past in the present, and although both traditions work with opposed terms and in response to oppositional interlocutors, one major difference is that Radical Orthodoxy relies upon a hard distinction between Christianity and secularism, whereas the "Radical Reformation" and its Anabaptist Mennonite expressions seek to mediate between oppositions by means of "neither-nor," "both-and," "middle way," and "third way" mediations – some of which are moderate and conciliatory, and others of which depart from the notion that there really are or ought to be two sides.

The "beyond" in Radical Orthodoxy's "Beyond Secular Reason" and the "post" in its "postsecular" approach both name movements of overcoming wherein a salvific Christian theology seeks to forcibly replace and displace a supposedly threatening secularism that it charges with nihilism. By contrast, the "neither" in "neither Catholic nor Protestant," the "both" in "both Catholic and Protestant," the "middle" and "third" options between passivity and violent action that each constitute the "Radical Reformation," are defined by mediating gestures that, while they accept the reality of certain oppositions, nonetheless seek to negate, include, moderate, neutralize, and radically depart from their conflictual and oppositional structure.

In short, the "Radical" in "Radical Orthodoxy" is radically oppositional (where to be "radical" is to be "against"), whereas the "Radical" in "Radical Reformation" is radically mediating (where to be "radical" is to be "between" or "beyond" oppositions). Below I will show how this key difference illuminates important differences between the stated values of Mennonite theologians and John Milbank – differences that are concealed by terminology of the "gift," and differences that conceal the deep affinities between Derrida's "ontology of violence" and Mennonite commitments to peace.

For both Mennonites and Milbank an "ontology of violence" refers to the idea that the ontological structure of the world is violently ordered, and an "ontology of peace" refers to the notion that the ontological structure of the world is peacefully ordered – but by what means that order ought to be conceived of or achieved is not immediately clear. Much depends on how these ontologies of violence and peace are situated in relation to metaphysical categories of time and space, and in relation to the political expediencies of power and coercion. In part, it is the place of violence in relation to a narrative of origins, essences, and ends that is contested when Milbank sets his theological project against Derrida and other thinkers who he reductively categorizes as postmodern historicists of difference.[78]

Mennonites intervene at this juncture in metaphysical and political ways by mediating between Derrida's desire to show how violence permeates language and ontology, and Milbank's desire to challenge nihilism and secularity with a reassertion of Christian truth. Although they articulate their challenges to Milbank in ways that are relativized and concealed by language of the gift, and while they are sympathetic with Milbank's ontological prioritization of peace, several philosophical theologians in the Mennonite tradition challenge the violent and coercive political means by which Milbank thinks peace ought to be pursued. Below I will outline these exchanges between Mennonites and Milbank, beginning with a survey of several of Milbank's works that focuses on how he conceives of ontological violence and ontological peace, followed by a survey of key Mennonite responses from Huebner, Blum, and others.

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[78] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 278.

John Milbank's Ontological Peace

Throughout his work, Milbank argues that Christian theology must categorically oppose the notion of an "original violence." For him, violence is by definition "a secondary willed intrusion" on the divine order.[79] Milbank rejects the notion that violence goes all the way down into the foundations and origins of language and Being, and argues instead that the world is peacefully ordered at its origin, and it is sin and evil that disorder the world in violent ways by ruining the essences of things and diverting things from their proper teleological orientation.[80] Below I trace these ideas throughout Milbank's second edition of *Theology and Social Theory* of 2006, his 2003 book *Being Reconciled*, and his 2010 foreword to the volume *The Gift of Difference*, which collects Mennonite responses to his work.

In the later sections of this chapter, I will explore the work of Huebner in contrast with the work of Blum. Whereas Huebner foregrounds his affinities with Milbank and reticently critiques his work by means of a counter-gift, Blum's approach stands in sharper contrast with Milbank's ontology of peace in part because of his positive use of Derrida's work. But before moving to the reception of Derrida's work by Mennonites, we must first gain a deeper understanding of those works by Milbank that Mennonites have responded to.

Theology and Social Theory (Original 1990, Revised Edition 2006)

In the preface to the revised edition of *Theology and Social Theory* Milbank situates his work against both liberalism and neoliberalism. Milbank's position "against" these political visions stands in contrast with Mennonite approaches to liberalism. Whereas Milbank situates his work

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[79] Ibid, 5-6.

[80] John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), 27.

against liberalism, Huebner, for example, conceives of a precarious peace that is simultaneously conservative and liberal.[81] In *Theology and Social Theory* Milbank's post-liberal and anti-positivist position reasserts Christian orthodoxy as "the most finally persuasive" approach to truth, and he rejects an ontology of violence that he associates with Nietzsche.[82] Both finality and persuasion are constituent parts of the radical assertion of orthodoxy that characterize Milbank's project, positioned as it is beyond (against) a "secular reason" that Milbank considers to be equal to a "disguised heterodoxy," a "revised paganism," and a "religious nihilism."[83]

For Milbank "dialectics" is "but a variant on liberalism in terms of a Christian Gnosticism" and "difference" is "essentially a radicalization of the positivist vision."[84] Against a nihilistic and dialectical ontology of difference that he straightforwardly attributes to Derrida and other postmodern philosophers, Milbank writes summarily: "I oppose a Catholic ontology to liberalism, positivism, dialectics and nihilism."[85] For Milbank, the movement of difference in dialectics is part of a malign mythos of primordial conflict that is fundamentally different from a truly positivist and positive Christian theology, the mythos of which is based upon the stable ground of an original peace. On his account, where the differential and dialectical model of postmodern nihilism is negative and violent, the participatory approach of radically orthodoxy Christian theology is positive and peaceful.

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[81] Compare Milbank's oppositions to liberalism in *Theology and Social Theory*, xi, 14, 324. with the both-and approach in Chris Huebner, *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006), 37.

[82] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, xi, xiv.

[83] Ibid, xiv.

[84] Ibid, xii.

[85] Ibid, xv.

The differences between these two positions are entangled with the ontological statuses of violence and peace. Milbank contrasts a secularist and nihilistic ontology of violence that considers all differences to be violent and negative, with a Christian ontology of original peace in which differences are harmonious and positive. He writes that "only Catholic Christianity can be completely 'positivist,' since it understands all evil and violence in their negativity to be privation."[86] For Milbank, this privative understanding of evil and violence "opens the possibility *of the most radical imaginable modern pluralism*: namely that positive differences, insofar as they are all instances of the good (a condition which of course will never be perfectly fulfilled in fallen time), must for that reason analogically concur in a fashion that exceeds mere liberal agreement to disagree."[87] By attributing to nihilism a "cold reason that disallows to the 'moods' of eros, anxiety, boredom, trust, poetic response, faith, hope, charity and so forth an ontologically disclosive status,"[88] and arguing that the postmodern historicists of difference are all nihilists, Milbank ensures that philosophers like Derrida fail his test of meaning.

But is this really pluralism and difference if it so readily charges others with nihilism and relies upon a conditional "insofar," a concurrence that is compelled by what "must" be, and a form of so-called difference that exists in relation to a confidently asserted standard of truth? Under the conditions of the postmodern critique of absolute truths and stable metanarratives, one could not answer "yes." But Milbank uses postmodern terms and sources to justify his retention of the genealogical method in the form of a "counter-genealogy" that narrates a history of power that includes both "the devices and victories of arbitrary power" and "the continuous and

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[86] Ibid, xvi.

[87] Ibid, xvi.

[88] Ibid, xvi.

sometimes decisive interruption of this story" by the Good and its "peaceful power."[89] Milbank

articulates this peaceful power through an "Augustinian metanarrative," which he describes in

the following terms:

> But however it is presented, nihilism is the conclusion of 'pure reason' (reason in the mood of cold regard), not just to the void or to ontological violence, but also to the ontological reign of non-sense or unreason. This indeed was Nietzsche's central tragic crux: fully honest Western reason realizes that reason itself is but a pathetic human projection. So, by contrast, it becomes possible to argue that a Catholic perspective saves not just the human bias towards peace and order, but also the human bias towards reason. Reason, for Catholic tradition, 'goes all the way down' – it is consistent with the infinite and it leaves behind no residue of chaos. For this reason a full 'rationalism' is linked with a Biblical mythos alone. It then follows that to 'choose' the Augustinian metanarrative and an Augustinian ontology of peace is also to 'elect reason', to fulfil the ineradicable bias of the human mind towards meaning (which might be just an accident of our animality) in the sense that this choice alone allows one to say that reason is ontologically ultimate – that there is, indeed, a final reason for things, a reason for being as such.[90]

Desiring to save reason from those who he thinks misuse it, Milbank uses the postmodern

challenge to reason as a means to reassert Christianity as a "universal discourse."[91] Taking

advantage of the relativizations and subjectivities of the postmodern collapse of metanarratives,

Milbank seizes the opportunity to fill the power vacuum that is left behind with the truth of his

Christian theology. For him, secular liberalism can only barely manage to sustain the peace of

suspended hostility, whereas a radical Christian orthodoxy informed by a politically coercive

Augustinian metanarrative and ontology of peace can lay claim to reason.

Milbank's ontology of peace is not a pacifist one. Unlike the Mennonite philosophical

theologians explored below, who will argue that coercive and violent power should not be taken

up in the name of peace, Milbank's ontological peace is accompanied by complex tragic

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[89] Ibid, xvi.

[90] Ibid, xvii.

[91] Ibid, xxii.

justifications of the use of force, coercion, rhetorical persuasion, and violence, as means toward peace. These tragic justifications often involve recourse to the fallen state of the world and to the compromised nature of human nature and institutions. In *Theology and Social Theory* Milbank narrates a primordial and participatory form of receptivity that positions the bearers of ontological peace as ones whose vulnerability and weakness makes them strong and authorizes force, coercion, and violence. His reasoning is that because "reception" must be active rather than passive, and because solidarity with others involves a shared kind of power that is inherently positive rather than privative, then someone who asserts the Catholic truth of the Good ought to do so powerfully.

Later, in *Being Reconciled*, Milbank will show how his affirmation of power as power constitutes a critique of passive pacifism, but here at the beginning of *Theology and Social Theory* Milbank's powerful assertion commences a "sceptical demolition" of secular social theory and its "neutral human reason," and considers persuasion to be "intrinsic to the Christian *logos* itself."[92] His reason for this demolition is that secular social science is not inherently or rationally more self-justified than Christian orthodoxy. In his attempt to recover Christianity as a meta-discourse, Milbank relies upon a notion of persuasion that asserts: "If my Christian perspective is persuasive, then this should be a persuasion intrinsic to the Christian logos itself, not the apologetic mediation of a supposedly neutral human reason."[93]

But this is not so. Milbank relies upon persuasive techniques that coerce his readers into predetermined categorical oppositions, such as his central distinction between Christian orthodoxy and secularism – an ideal distinction that conveniently avoids the many varieties of

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[92] Ibid, 1.

[93] Ibid.

secularity that do not desire to displace Christian theology (as if all secularities were nihilistic and antagonistic toward Christianity or all varieties of postmodernism were reducible to nihilism). Milbank's persuasive techniques rely upon definitional oppositions that do not adequately account for the fact that the realities named by Christianity and secularity are vast and ever shifting, and the names "Christian" and "secular" are claimed by scholarly and public voices so diverse that unifying them would be impossible. Milbank's rhetorical and persuasive strategy in his introduction is to set up a conflict between Christian theology and anti-Christian secularism, attributing a heroic victimhood to the former and a malicious desire to confine and displace to the latter. If Milbank is persuasive then this is because his readers believe the antagonism that he has set up using *ethos* and *pathos*, and not because of the inherent persuasiveness of the *logos*.

In a reactive way that anticipates attack and accepts an antagonistic account of relations between disciplines, Milbank writes: "If theology no longer seeks to position, qualify, or criticize other discourses, then it is inevitable that these discourses will position theology…"[94] This accords with the framing of the two major Radical Orthodoxy anthologies addressed above, and uses a competitive and antagonistic logic of displacement that is governed by the assumption that when contradictory or opposed positions and ideas are asserted they will necessarily exist at the expense of others – a logic that stands in contrast with "Radical Reformation" mediations (neither-nor, both-and, a middle way, a third way), and the work of Jantzen in *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*, as I shall explore in Chapter 3 below.

Against the perceived confinement of theology by secular reason, Milbank argues that "the secular is complicit with an 'ontology of violence,' a reading of the world which assumes

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[94] Ibid.

the priority of force and tells how this force is best managed and confined by counter-force."[95]

Inasmuch as he critiques a form of liberalism that uses violence to manage violence in a world

defined by negative and competitive differences, Milbank is close to Mennonite theologians who

seek to challenge redemptive and remedial uses of violence, but as we will see below, Milbank's

means toward peace and his oppositional approach set him apart from Mennonite pacifist

approaches and Radical Reformation mediations. In opposition to a secular ontology of violence,

which doubtless exists but is not exhaustively constitutive of secularity, Milbank asserts that,

> Christianity, however, recognizes no original violence. It construes the infinite not as
> chaos, but as a harmonic peace which is yet beyond the circumscribing power of any
> totalizing reason. Peace no longer depends upon the reduction to the self-identical, but is
> the sociality of harmonious difference. Violence, by contrast, is always a secondary
> willed intrusion upon this possible infinite order (which is actual for God). Such a
> Christian logic is not deconstructible by modern secular reason; rather, it is Christianity
> which exposes the non-necessity of supposing, like the Nietzscheans, that difference,
> non-totalization and indeterminacy of meaning necessarily imply arbitrariness and
> violence. To suppose that they do is merely to subscribe to a particular encoding of
> reality. Christianity, by contrast, is the coding of transcendental difference as peace.[96]

This selection shows how Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy stands in relation to peace and violence.

For Milbank, there is an original peaceable order of harmonious difference that becomes

threatened by the violent intrusion of an anti-Christian secularism. Although he prioritizes peace

and purports to oppose ways of thinking that allow violence the last word, conflictual opposition

remains central to his account of the relationship between secularity and Christianity, and the

coercive and violent means he suggests must be used toward peace nonetheless allow violence

the final word. He continues:

> As I shall finally argue, the difference that Christianity has made includes a tragic
> dimension, because its failure to sustain a 'peace beyond the law' enabled a transition
> from the antique containing of a given violence by reason, to the modern regulation of

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[95] Ibid, 4.

[96] Ibid, 5-6.

violence through greater violence. Yet the capacity of nihilism to deconstruct antiquity shows that there can be no going back; only Christian theology now offers a discourse able to position and overcome nihilism itself. This is why it is so important to reassert theology as a master discourse; theology, alone, remains the discourse of non-mastery.[97]

For Milbank, radically orthodox Christian theology must heroically but tragically overcome its enemy of secular nihilism by reasserting itself as a master discourse. However, Milbank also suggests that "theology, alone, remains the discourse of non-mastery" – a strange and incoherent attribution to theology, given that words earlier he suggested that Christian theology must "position" nihilism (the very charge that he lay against secular reason pages earlier). If it is a fault of secularism that it would seek to position and depose Christian theology, then why does Milbank position and seek to depose secularism in return? Is this not structured by the same negative relationship of violence and counterviolence that he condemns in liberalism? Even though he calls his reassertion of Christian theology a "discourse of non-mastery," Milbank does not clarify how the prefix "non" negates the term "mastery" in this context.

Milbank's theology positions itself as a "metanarrative realism" that "will replace theology mediated by social science" with theology's true form, following a demolition of secular reason, the most "virulent form" of which Milbank calls postmodern nihilism.[98] For Milbank, "human interaction in all its variety can only be narrated, and not explained/understood after the manner of natural science," but the character of this narration is important.[99] Rather than challenging the notion that one should articulate metanarratives at all, as postmodern philosophers do, Milbank seeks to out-narrate secularism by using the work of Augustine. As

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[97] Ibid, 6.

[98] Ibid, 256.

[99] Ibid, 259.

outlined above, Milbank interprets Augustine's work and draws a metanarrative from it based on a "mythos" of original peace, in contrast to a pagan and Nietzschean "mythos" in which conflict and violence are primary. In *Theology and Social Theory*, Milbank positions the "true human *telos*" of Christian orthodoxy against postmodernism, which he defines as an "absolute historicism," "ontology of difference," and "ethical nihilism," which is defined by the "malign mythology" of an "ontology of violence."[100]

For Milbank, Christianity must respond to postmodern threats to its order by means of a recovery of original peace through "forgiveness and atonement."[101] However, this remedial strategy is something that Milbank thinks can be achieved through uses of coercion and persuasion – a kind of political Augustinianism in which civic order ought to be maintained by a Christian minority through justified uses of coercion and violence. Milbank states that "the purpose of ecclesial coercion is peace, and this can only in the long-term be attained by non-coercive persuasion…"[102] Here, Milbank justifies the use of coercion, even if it risks promoting resentment, by arguing that "this risk is offset by the possibility that the recipient can later come to understand and retrospectively consent to the means taken."[103] This justification of coercion – so important for an assessment of how Milbank's work stands in relation to forms of Mennonite pacifism that explicitly reject coercion, possession, and violence – reappears in Milbank's later book *Being Reconciled*, especially its early chapters.

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[100] Ibid, 279.

[101] Ibid, 423.

[102] Ibid, 424.

[103] Ibid, 424.

Being Reconciled (2003)

Milbank's project in *Being Reconciled* is to advance a Christian vision of reconciliation that conceptualizes sin and violence as the refusal of the gifts of Creation, Grace, and Incarnation. Against Derrida and other postmodern thinkers, Milbank posits that philosophies of forgiveness and reconciliation require theological completion. Here I focus on the first two chapters of the book wherein Milbank explicitly engages with the problem of violence. Revising Christian participation in the divine and positioning the gift at the center of his thought, Milbank suggests that the true nature of things is revealed in their being gifts.

In the early chapters of *Being Reconciled*, Milbank's ontology of peace and political Augustinianism come together in his interpretation of the gift. For Milbank, the gift is a theological and transcendental category that is actualized in creation, grace, and especially incarnation. By contrast, violence and evil are defined by "the refusal of gift."[104] For Milbank, it is forgiveness, atonement, and reconciliation that define the harmonious play of differences that the Christian church offers as gifts to humanity.[105] Against social scientific conceptions of culture as production or exchange, Milbank positions an Augustinian interpretation of the gift as a free and perpetual exchange between the Father and the Son borne out in the Holy Spirit as a desire for communion that exceeds relationships between with "infinite and multiple reciprocities."[106] Again positioning his concepts against secularism, Milbank contrasts his vision of the gift as gift with the supposedly secular notion that there are "givens" (his example is "'Oh,

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[104] John Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, ix.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid, x.

there's a box,' an inert 'given'").[107] Under this model, the notion that things were created and continue to be created by God means that the true nature of all things is that they are gifts. In short, for Milbank the gift is defined by "an exchange as well as an offering without return, since it is asymmetrical reciprocity and non-identical repetition."[108]

As *Being Reconciled* unfolds, Milbank develops the gift, forgiveness, and reconciliation, in relation to the problems of evil and violence. In the context of a broken, fallen, and lapsed world, for Milbank the related problems of evil and violence must be met with the reconciling and restoring work of the gift. Although Milbank is ready to admit that the anxieties and contradictions of the fallen world are problems, he argues that underneath seeming paradoxes and aporias lies an original ontological peace toward which the movements of reconciliation and atonement return. Amidst his work on reconciliation and atonement, Milbank's opposition to postmodernism, secularism, and nihilism persists in his opposition to the "privation theory" of evil in Chapter 1 of *Being Reconciled*, and his implicit opposition to postmodern interpretations of the gift in Chapters 2 and 3 – which were first published in a volume that included an essay by Derrida on the gift.[109]

In the first chapter of *Being Reconciled*, "Evil: Darkness and Silence," Milbank opposes the "radical evil" school and argues for a revised and strengthened "privation theory" of evil, in which evil is the absence of the good and has no positive ontological status. In short, the "radical evil" perspective from Kant to Arendt responds to the problem of evil – especially following the

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[107] Ibid, xi.

[108] Ibid, xi.

[109] See John Milbank, "Forgiveness and Incarnation" and Jacques Derrida, "To Forgive: The Unforgivable and the Imprescriptible" in *Questioning God*. Ed. John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 92-128, 21-55.

Shoah – by conceiving of evil as having a substantial and active presence in the world and in human nature. By contrast, the "privation" perspective responds to the problem of evil – as well as the problem of theodicy and the theological notion that human beings were created good – by conceiving of evil as the absence or lack of the good.[110]

For Milbank, it is the lack of teleological orientation that causes the ethical aporias that he argues are characteristic of the radical evil school. In addition to defending the privation theory, Milbank blames the radical evil school for the very evil it seeks to theorize, writing that "the modern, positive theory of evil *is* in a measure responsible for the modern actuality of evil."[111] For Milbank, "European and American liberal democracy has also engendered a continuous horror almost as grave as the Holocaust, and a more troublingly sustainable mode of nihilism…"[112] These comments reflect Milbank's self-avowed equivocation between "totalitarianism" and "secular immanence," which he justifies by arguing that secularism "is totalizing and terroristic because it acknowledges no supra-human power beyond itself by which it might be measured and limited…"[113] This reductive equivocation is in keeping with his opposition to a "liberalism" that attempts to achieve peace by means of violence in a world of negative and conflicting differences than can be managed but never achieve harmony.

In his second chapter, "Violence: Double Passivity" – one of the drafts to which Mennonites responded to in the 2005 issue of the *Conrad Grebel Review* and in *The Gift of Difference* – Milbank condemns the radical evil perspective to incoherence because it conceives

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[110] See Richard J. Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation* (London: Polity, 2002).

[111] John Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 4.

[112] Ibid, 5.

[113] Ibid.

of peace in negative terms as the absence of conflict, by contrast with his revised privation theory of evil which understands peace to be "positive justice, harmony and affinity."[114] Against the notion that evil has a positive foothold in Being, and against what he considers to be the excuses that such a view permits regarding evil, Milbank defines violence as "a destruction of a substance or a turning from a *telos*."[115] Accusing the radical evil school being too focused on violence, and not discriminating enough about how violence must be judged, Milbank further defines violence by saying: "violence is only violence when it ruins an essence (how something should be) or diverts from a goal (how something should develop)."[116]

This definition of violence reflects how Milbank's metanarrative stands in relation to spatial categories like "essence" and temporal categories like "origin" and "end." By contrast, below we will see how Mennonite thinkers resist essentializing such terms in their condemnation of uses of violent and coercive force and ways of thinking that attempt to control or possess history. Furthermore, in Chapter 3 Jantzen will set forth her own distinctive approach to the problem of violence by resisting grand narratives that rely on circumscribed relationships between origins, essences, and ends. But here we will clarify how Milbank's vision of violence and critique of a caricatured pacifism proceed in *Being Reconciled*, because it is this critique that prompted several of the first Mennonite responses to his work.

Milbank's critique of what he calls "pacifism" commences in the second section of the chapter wherein he argues not only that being passive "onlookers" of violence is characteristic of pacifism, but also that pacifism's voyeurism is "at least as violent, and probably more absolutely

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[114] Ibid, 26.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Ibid, 27.

violent, than actual physically violent interventions."[117] This is the "double passivity" referred to in the chapter title: an equivocation of pacifism with the position of the voyeuristic onlooker who stands passively before violence and enjoys it because they are both unable and unwilling to intervene. Milbank argues that this spectacle-oriented pacifism is counter to both the fallen and created natures of humanity, because it opposes a given, natural desire to protect the innocent. Milbank suggests that, by consequence, pacifists ask Christians not to protect the innocent, thereby offending against the created order. However, Milbank's references to pacifism here are not at all grounded in the long tradition of Christian pacifism, many strands of which are anything but passive and voyeuristic.

In his Catholic-Mennonite response to Milbank, Gerald Schlabach writes concerning the first part of his argument that Milbank's "critique is in some ways so ill-informed it is almost not worth dignifying with a response," given that it ignores how actual pacifists engage in nonviolent direct action of various kinds.[118] Concerning the second part of Milbank's argument against pacifism, wherein Milbank argues that pacifists render the laity unable or unwilling to protect the innocent, Schlabach argues that Milbank's work becomes a kind of "Niebuhrian form of putative Augustinianism" through which peace "becomes an eschatological or teleological end, and not really a means at all; it is an ontology of peace devoid of an ethic or methodology of peace."[119] Schlabach is interested in showing how "Milbank seems to render peaceable community life, in accordance with the ontology of peace, as what Reinhold Niebuhr called 'an impossible

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[117] Ibid, 30.

[118] Gerald W. Schlabach, "Is Milbank Niebuhrian Despite Himself?" *Conrad Grebel Review* 23.2 (Spring 2005), 34.

[119] Ibid, 35.

possibility' at best."[120] He points out how, despite having an ontology of peace, Milbank temporally and historically defers the possibility of peace by placing it at the teleological and eschatological end (and, I would add, also the pure normative origin), thereby rendering various kinds of coercive violence and force tragically justifiable in the fallen interim period. This disjunction between the work of Milbank and Mennonite pacifism is, however, not foregrounded in subsequent exchanges between Radical Orthodoxy and Radical Reformation theologians.

Mennonites, Milbank, and Derrida

I suggest that the deep differences between the values of Mennonite respondents to Milbank and Milbank's vision of ontological peace are elided by the language of gift exchange. On their own account, the Mennonite theologians dealt with below are very clear that when peace is possessed and stabilized (Huebner) and made into an assured possibility (Blum), its aims are defeated. For Blum and Huebner, the possibility and stability of peace must remain in question (and here the questionable status of peace for certain Mennonite philosophical theologians is in affinity with Derrida's desire to keep the question a question). But is that not precisely what Milbank is doing when he claims that violence is defined by the offense against an essence and diversion of a *telos*, and implies that he knows what things are and where they should go? How does the methodological violence of Milbank's incredible confidence (as pointed out by Schlabach above) not garner a far more critical response from other Mennonite theologians? What accounts for the Mennonite use of conciliatory and neutralizing language of the "gift" when engaging with Milbank?

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[120] Ibid.

Some of these tensions may be accounted for by the substantial differences between the mediating approach of the Radical Reformation and the oppositional approach of Radical Orthodoxy. Whereas Milbank tends to oppose positions different than his own, Mennonite theologians are far more steeped in the mediations of the Radical Reformation tradition and are more reticent to emphasize real differences between how violent means are conceived differently by Radical Orthodoxy and the Radical Reformation tradition. Milbank's non-accommodating position stands in stark contrast with mediating Mennonite approaches to his work that risk accommodating too much and therefore overlooking real contradictions between pacifism and Milbank's political Augustinianism. For more substantial answers to these questions, however, we must turn to Milbank's vision of power in his preface to *The Gift of Difference*.

Foreword to *The Gift of Difference* (2010)

Milbank's foreword to *The Gift of Difference* volume provides further insight into his views on violence and the use of coercive and persuasive power. In these pages, Milbank argues that faithful Christianity requires the exercise of power as power. Again, turning the Mennonite identification of nonviolence with vulnerability on its head, Milbank argues in positive terms that "any exercise of violence always leaves one vulnerable," and that the "weak power" of Christianity is "the only entirely powerful power."[121] This stands in stark contrast with a longstanding emphasis in Mennonite peace theology on the weak and suffering character of Christian love, as embodied in the martyr tradition and the normative call to imitate and follow

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[121] John Milbank, "Foreword" in *The Gift of Difference: Radical Orthodoxy, Radical Reformation*. Ed. Tripp York and Chris Huebner (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2010), xiii.

Jesus Christ through the love of enemies.[122] Whereas Milbank consistently values effective

relationships between means and ends – as exemplified by his political Augustinianism and its

readiness to use force and coercion to achieve a "peaceful" order, with the hope of retroactive

consent – Mennonite theologians often resist valuing effectiveness by contrasting it with

faithfulness (a distinction traceable to Yoder).[123] Milbank furthermore suggests, in the context of

King Alfred's victory against the Danes in 871 CE, that "an unqualified coercion grounded on an

ontology of violence" could and should be superseded by "a qualified, teleological use of

coercion grounded upon an ontology and eschatology of peace."[124]

By contrast, pacifism and nonviolence (in the realm of both means and ends) have long

been key identity markers for Mennonite theologianss – from their roots in sixteenth century

Anabaptist radicalism and dissent, to their peace church resistance to the wars of the 21st century

– but in recent decades this deeply held opposition to violence has moved from outward

expressions such as opposition to war or the death penalty, to also include more inward and

discursive expressions of "pacifist epistemology" and "ontological peace."

In these newfound expressions of Mennonite theological pacifism, Derrida's critique of

violence finds an interesting and challenging reception, especially amidst the debate between the

"Radical Reformation" perspective of select Mennonite philosophical theologians and the

"Radical Orthodoxy" of Milbank. Kevin Derksen's essay in *The Gift of Difference*, "Milbank

and Violence: Against a Derridean Pacifism," stands out as a helpful entry point for inquiry into

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[122] For a helpful survey of this tradition see Jennifer Otto, "Making Martyrs Mennonite" in *Desiring Martyrs: Locating Martyrs in Space and Time*. Ed. Harry Maier and Katharina Waldner (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 193-210.

[123] For a survey of this concept see Tom Harder, "The Dichotomy between Faithfulness and Effectiveness in the Peace Theology of John Howard Yoder" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 81.2 (April 2007).

[124] Milbank, "Foreword," xvi.

the reception of Derrida by Mennonites who are concerned with the articulation of pacifist epistemology and ontological peace.[125] In this case, as in the case of other essays in the volume, the occasion of Mennonite reflection on Derrida is in relation to Milbank. Derksen begins his essay by identifying Derrida as the major target of Milbank's essay "Violence: Double Passivity" (included in *Being Reconciled*).[126] Although Milbank's programmatic essay on violence is ostensibly concerned with Christian pacifism, Derksen argues that Milbank's real concern in the essay is with the Derridean project. However, Derksen shows that, rather than concerning himself with the specifics of Derrida's works, Milbank uses the name "Derrida" as a code-word for a series of propositions and problems that he is interested in critiquing. At stake in Milbank's critique is, in Derksen's words, "not pacifism, but a logic of private possession, autonomy, and stability."[127] Before staging his argument that Milbank's identification of violence and spectatorship "is finally an account of violence as self-possession," Derksen outlines Milbank's use of the name "Derrida" as a "placeholder" for a "secular reason [that] is antithetical to theology."[128]

Milbank disagrees with Derrida's account of the gift. Although Milbank concedes that there is no gift without some measure of calculated exchange (a point that Derrida emphasizes), he places priority on the purification of the gift rather than on the admission of its impossibility. However, Derksen rightly points out that this disagreement about the gift is secondary to Milbank's greater goal, in *Theology and Social Theory*, of articulating a Christian vision of

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[125] Kevin Derksen, "Milbank and Violence: Against a Derridean Pacifism" in *The Gift of Difference*, 27-49.

[126] Ibid, 27.

[127] Ibid, 28.

[128] Ibid, 28, 32.

"ontological peace."[129] As explored above, Milbank's ontological peace is defined in direct relation to the problem of evil. But rather than the perspective of "radical evil" that would accord evil a positive ontological status, Milbank is invested in revising the privation theory which holds that evil is defined by the absence or lack of some good. For Milbank, this absence is defined by the ruination of an ontological essence and a misdirection away from a proper teleological ordering of origins and ends in what he calls an ontology of peace.

Derksen points out that Milbank opposes the name "Derrida" to a kind of Christian theology in which violence offends against Being itself – wherein Being is defined by "ordered" and "peaceful" relations in space and time that can be ruined or misdirected.[130] On Derksen's reading, the positive contribution of Milbank's response to "Derrida" is that he "suggests that violence and peace do not name stable realities that we can know (possess) fully beforehand. Peace is never stable (possess-able) because it falls under the logic of gift."[131] For Derksen, "Milbank imagines peace in terms of a harmonious play of difference, of non-identical repetition, of gift-exchange that ever refuses finality and closure."[132] (Below, we will also see how the work of Huebner resonates with this critique of possession and refusal of closure.) In a footnote, Derksen suggests that Milbank's desire to refuse closure is indebted to Derrida, "turn[ing] Derrida against himself in a quasi-Derridean fashion"[133]; but we should ask: does

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[129] Ibid, 32.

[130] Ibid, 33.

[131] Ibid, 33.

[132] Ibid, 34.

[133] Ibid.

Milbank's ordering of the world really refuse closure in a way that Derrida would recognize, especially given that their accounts of the gift are so different?

For Milbank, in his essay in the volume of responses to Derrida *Questioning God*, later reprinted in the third and fourth chapters of *Being Reconciled*, forgiveness requires mediation by the divine. In response to the aporetic character of the gift, Milbank argues that the incarnation of Christ is the only positive remedy to the problems of "negative forgiveness" (which he also calls "secular," although not exclusively so).[134] Against forms of forgiveness that are purely immanent, Milbank asserts that in response to the absence of victims who call for forgiveness, only God can forgive. Positioning Jesus Christ as a "unique sovereign victim" who forgives on behalf of humanity, Milbank points to the limits of human forgiveness.

By contrast, for Derrida, the gift and forgiveness are structured by the inevitability of non-reciprocity. Whereas for Milbank the aporetic character of the gift is resolved and reconciled by Christian Incarnation, for Derrida the paradoxical relations of *donation* are sustained. In *Given Time*, Derrida suggests that a genuine gift is one that is uncapturable by the calculative opposition between giving and receiving.[135] For Derrida, the delicate status of the gift can always be shattered by forms of reception that implicate it in exchange, whether by subtle demands for reciprocity or explicit uses of the gift as an instrumental means to an end. Only anonymous and secretive gifts given by givers who do not even know they are giving can avoid this economic exchange. In keeping with his privileging of problem and question over solution and answer, Derrida conceives of the gift as a paradox that does not call for its aporetic oppositions to be

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[134] Milbank, "Forgiveness and Incarnation," 104. Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 56.

[135] Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money.* Trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 30, 37.

reconciled. As Derrida writes in the address to which Milbank only implicitly responds, "one always takes by giving."[136] These differences between Milbank and Derrida complicate how we might approach the relationship between Mennonites and Milbank.

Here at the beginning of our inquiry into the Mennonite response to Derrida and Milbank, Derksen gives us a helpful account of the nihilistic and secular "Derrida" who Mennonites (with the notable exception of Blum) have engaged with by means of the reductive mediating position of Milbank. Late in the essay Derksen puts a fine point on his interpretation of the opposition between "Derrida" and Radical Orthodoxy, stating that Milbank's target is not traditional pacifism, but "the heresy of secular reason here embodied in Derrida."[137] Derksen's essay here exemplifies the Mennonite reticence to sharply critique Milbank. We might ask: how can Derksen accept Milbank's description of his own ontology of peace as a harmonious play of difference when, in the preface to the same volume, Milbank defends the use of force and coercion to achieve it?[138] The Mennonite rejection of force and coercion seems to play a relatively minor role in Derksen's essay, despite its major defining role in the tradition. Furthermore, how can Derksen accept and repeat Milbank's treatment of Derrida as a secular heretic when so many defining moments in the Anabaptist and Mennonite traditions – and indeed the very categories of "Anabaptism" and "Radical Reformation" – have been marked by violent persecution under charges of heresy?

For more clarity on these questions, I will turn to an earlier Mennonite engagement with Milbank's notion of ontological peace, published ten years before Derksen's essay. In one of the

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[136] Derrida, "To Forgive," 22.

[137] Derksen, "Milbank and Violence," 38, 40.

[138] John Milbank, "Foreword" in *The Gift of Difference*, xvi.

first Mennonite engagements with the work of Milbank, Paul Doerksen expresses appreciation for Milbank's "assertion of ontological peace versus nihilistic ontological violence" but also articulates several reservations that may illuminate the aforementioned discontinuities.[139] Doerksen points to Milbank's reading of Augustine as the foundation of his notion that peace is ontologically prior to violence, suggesting that the distinction between the two cities in Augustine's *City of God* is paradigmatic for Milbank's work.[140] However, for Doerksen, Milbank's reading of Augustine is most problematic when Milbank uses tragedy to justify coercion and violence by asserting that although violence and coercion are not peaceable they can be redeemed by consent received from the coerced subject after the fact.[141] Concerning Milbank's rejection of pacifism, Doerksen concludes that "an ontology of peace that includes a tragic dimension is, in the end, a peace that is more tragic than peaceable."[142]

Here is one critical juncture, also presented by Schlabach, where some Mennonites part ways with Milbank. Whereas Milbank sees violence as a tragic necessity in the fallen state of humanity, Doerksen suggests that the tragic nature of the educative and coercive uses of power that Milbank defends overwhelms any peaceable result it might produce. Milbank would doubtless respond by accusing pacifism of being too purist, separate, and unwilling to adapt to the strategies of the fallen world, but most Mennonite efforts to denounce violence and injustice stand in hard contradiction to Milbank's political Augustinianism.

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[139] Doerksen, "For and Against Milbank," 48.

[140] Ibid, 52.

[141] Ibid, 55.

[142] Ibid, 56.

In this way, a major contrast between Milbank and Mennonite philosophical theologians is located not in the affirmation of some ontological peace (which they share) but in their divergent means toward it. Although Doerksen moves closer than Derksen to the deep differences between the justifications of force and coercion in Radical Orthodoxy and the rejection of redemptive violence that characterizes the Radical Reformation perspective, he does not conclude by emphasizing this deep and abiding difference. I observe that much is at stake in the character of the "counter" in Milbank's "counter-ontology," and neither Derksen nor Doerksen see Milbank's readiness to coercively and forcibly ensure the "peaceful" ordering of society as something antithetical enough to Mennonite pacifism that it would foreclose a generally positive reception of his work.

This pattern continues in various ways in the works of other Mennonite theologians who respond to Milbank while also interpreting the works of postmodern philosophers, including Derrida. Below I briefly outline the 21st century philosophical turn in Mennonite theology in order to provide context for the discursive environment in which Huebner and Blum respond to Milbank, for it is the use of philosophy and philosophers (like Derrida) that characterizes much of the Mennonite engagement with Radical Orthodoxy and also accounts for some of the differences between how Radical Reformation perspectives and Radical Orthodoxy approach philosophical forms of secularity.

The Philosophical Turn in Mennonite Pacifism

The reception of Derrida's works has been considerable both within and beyond the domain of continental philosophy. As it became more well-known in North America, the school of thought named "deconstruction" became associated by popular writers and academics with a kind of

moral relativism and nihilism. Derrida's controversial deconstruction of the western project – his opposition to its metaphysics of presence and his attempts to refuse it without being caught in the framework of opposition – also inspired a debate on the "religious" nature of his thought. In 1997 John D. Caputo published a book called *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* which undertook a theological reading of deconstruction that would greatly influence the North American continental philosophy of religion in the early 2000s. In 2008 this way of reading Derrida was contested at its core by Martin Hägglund, whose book *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* sought to defend Derrida's work against what he considered to be its assimilation into religious projects – a defense that garnered a 93-page response from Caputo in the pages of the *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*.[143]

Despite the influence of this debate, some recent approaches to Derrida and religion have shown less interest in deciding whether his thought is religious, and become more interested in the possibilities of its ambivalence. For example, in his book *Hope in a Secular Age*, David Newheiser reads Derrida and Dionysius together in ways that rejects the approaches of both Caputo and Hägglund, arguing instead that an oppositional account of religion and secularism obscures the uncertainties and undecidabilities of Derrida's approach.[144]

Whether one considers Derrida to be a religious thinker or not – an evaluation that would require more clarity about what defines religion than I will provide here – it remains that

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[143] See John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997); Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008); John D. Caputo, "The Return of Anti-Religion: From Radical Atheism to Radical Democracy" *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 11.2 (Spring 2011): 32-125. and Martin Hägglund, "The Radical Evil of Deconstruction: A Reply to John Caputo" *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 11.2 (Spring 2011): 125-150.

[144] See the approach to Derrida and religion in David Newheiser, *Hope in a Secular Age: Deconstruction, Negative Theology, and the Future of Faith* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 10.

Derrida's reception by religious, theological, and especially Christian scholars has been considerable. This chapter concerns itself with one specific religious response to Derrida by Mennonite theologians who both position their ideas against him and use his work and name as a stand-in for larger issues. In the 2000s and 2010s, Christian theologians in the Mennonite tradition made a philosophical turn, during which they began to read their own tradition – most influentially expressed by theologian John Howard Yoder – in tandem with major continental philosophers.[145] Unlike Radical Orthodoxy, which understands Christian theology to be the fulfilment (and in some sense the overcoming) of philosophy, Mennonite theologies have had a much more uneven and diverse relationship with philosophies and philosophers, ranging from the rejection of philosophy on the grounds that it is threatening to the theological use of philosophers for the purpose of advancing a Mennonite theological perspective.[146]

The relationship between Mennonite theology and philosophy (at least in North America) began with the work of Ralph C. Kauffman, a professor of psychology at Bethel College, who in 1943 wrote an essay on the philosophical aspects of Mennonite thought, stating that "There is a certain antithesis between being philosophical and being Mennonite."[147] However, this is not necessarily the case for both historical and contemporary Mennonite thinkers. After Kauffman explicitly identified this tension between philosophy and Mennonite thought, in the 1950's

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[145] Earlier Mennonite engagements with philosophy include those of Gordon Kaufman and J. Lawrence Burkholder. Expressions of the philosophical turn by interpreters of Yoder can be found in *The New Yoder*. Ed. Peter Dula and Chris Huebner (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010).

[146] The following section summarizes and extends my work in an entry on "Philosophy" in the *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Philosophy) (April 2020), and my longer study of the topic: "Mennonite Metaphysics? Exploring the Philosophical Aspects of Mennonite Theology from Pacifist Epistemology to Ontological Peace" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 91.3 (July 2017): 403-421.

[147] Ralph C. Kauffman, "The Philosophical Aspects of Mennonitism," in *The Curricula of Mennonite Colleges: Proceedings of the Second Conference on Mennonite Cultural Problems, Goshen, Indiana, July 22-23, 1942*, ed. P. S. Goertz (Goshen: Council of Mennonite and Affiliated Colleges, 1943), 113-126.

Maynard Kaufman wrote articles in the periodical *Mennonite Life* about the existential nature of Anabaptism,[148] drawing on the theological work of the historian Robert Friedmann, whose posthumous *Theology of Anabaptism* makes an historical and theological argument for Anabaptism as an existential and lived practice, rather than a set of abstract theological doctrines.[149] In his entry on philosophy in the expansion volume of the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, J. Lawrence Burkholder not only affirms Ralph C. Kauffman's initial diagnosis that there is something contradictory about Mennonite thinking and philosophy, but also mentions that Robert Friedmann had left more than just the manuscript for *The Theology of Anabaptism* to be published after his death.[150] Another manuscript, *Design for Living*, was also left by Friedmann, and it too uniquely contributes to the history of the relationship between Mennonite theology and philosophy by combining religious and secular sources to form a humanistic and existential articulation of Anabaptist values.[151]

Following Friedmann's existential Anabaptism, the history of the relationship between Mennonite theology and philosophy continued with the contrasting attitudes toward philosophy expressed in the works of John Howard Yoder and A. James Reimer. Whereas Reimer called for metaphysical and ontological reflection in his interpretations of the wider tradition of Christian theologies and the creeds, Yoder's focus was on the social and political significance of the

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[148] Maynard Kaufman, "Anabaptism as an Existentialist Philosophy of Religion: The Quest for an Anabaptist Theology" *Mennonite Life* (July 1957): 139-141, and 143.; "Anabaptism As an Existentialist Philosophy of Religion II Toward an Anabaptist Epistemology" *Mennonite Life* (January 1958): 35-38.; "Anabaptism as an Existentialist Philosophy of Religion III: Ontological Dimension of Anabaptism" *Mennonite Life* (April 1958): 79-82.

[149] Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism: An Interpretation* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973).

[150] J. Lawrence Burkholder, "Philosophy." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1989.

[151] Robert Friedmann, *Design for Living: Regard, Concern, Service, and Love*. Ed. and Intro. by Maxwell Kennel (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017). For Friedmann's unique place in this history see my "Editor's Introduction."

gospels, which Reimer suggested occurred at the expense of metaphysics.[152] On one hand, Reimer engaged with the works of philosophers throughout his career (from Feuerbach in his early work to Habermas in his later work), often using philosophical insights positively and constructively in his theological writing. On the other hand, Yoder rarely engaged with or positively resourced the works of continental philosophers, although he did engage with philosophers who focus on ethics, such as Jeffrey Stout, and literary-philosophical thinkers such as René Girard. Yoder critiqued the Kantian categorical imperative with an emphasis on particularity rather than moral universality, and was in dialogue with ethicists who were philosophical, but although he acknowledges the importance of Hellenistic philosophy for early Christianity, he rejected the normative status of secularity and philosophy.[153]

Subsequently, however, the reception of Yoder's work approximately between 2000 and 2010 involved reading Yoder's work together with many different philosophers. It is in this reception of Yoder's work that Mennonite pacifism becomes more fully philosophical and begins to concern itself with the conceptual elaboration of pacifist epistemology and ontological peace. During the second generation of Yoder-reception, Mennonite theologians began to pair the work of Yoder with the works of specific philosophers, often in an effort to elucidate and advance Yoder's claims constructively in the context of Mennonite theological reflection. Whereas philosophy was initially met with suspicion by the Mennonite theologians of the 1940s and 1950s (with the notable exception of Friedmann), and where philosophy was only considered to

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[152] A. James Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2001), 162, 168, 172, 178, 201, 213, 289, 342. John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

[153] John Howard Yoder, *He Came Preaching Peace* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1985), 41; *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical.* Ed. J. Michael Cartwright (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 56-57; *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method*. Ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Alex Sider (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 107-108, 130, 140.

be useful by a small number of Mennonite thinkers from the 1960s to the 1980s (such as J. Lawrence Burkholder or Gordon Kaufmann), it is now welcome in the discourse – sometimes as an autonomous discipline, and sometimes only insofar as it serves Mennonite theological needs.

Concurrent with this pattern of reading Yoder with philosophers was the all-too gradual recognition that Yoder had engaged in a long-standing pattern of sexual abuse that he sought to theologically justify. Current critical work on the implications of Yoder's abuse for Mennonite ecclesiology has been done by Rachel Waltner-Goossen and Daniel Villegas, but more scholarly investigation is required to understand the personal, social, and epistemological role of coercion in Yoder's life and thought, especially considering how his work has been used as a part of a "pacifist epistemology" that rejects coercion and forcible expressions of persuasive power.[154]

With this brief survey of the relationship between Mennonite theology and philosophy before us, I now return to its manifestation in the conversation on "pacifist epistemology" (which concerns the possibility of knowing without violence) and "ontological peace" (which theorizes about whether the world is or should be ordered in a violent way), the former of which is represented here by Chris Huebner's precarious peace, and the latter of which is represented here by Pete Blum's impossible peace.

However, I will begin with the framing responses provided by Chris Huebner and Tripp York in *The Gift of Difference* before approaching the "Radical Reformation" responses of Chris Huebner and Pete Blum in relation to Milbank and Derrida. In the exchanges outlined below the Mennonite responses to Milbank in *The Gift of Difference* (including the key essays by Huebner

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[154] See Rachel Waltner Goossen "'Defanging the Beast' Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89 (January 2015): 7-80. and Isaac Samuel Villegas, "The Ecclesial Ethics of John Howard Yoder's Abuse" *Modern Theology* 37.1 (January 2021): 191-214.

and Blum later reproduced in their books) include appreciative affirmations of his ontological peace, and in the case of Blum, more critical articulations.

Radical Reformation Responses

In their introduction to *The Gift of Difference*, editors Tripp York and Chris Huebner begin by refusing the assumption that Christians should try to make history "turn out right," or use religion to rule over others.[155] York and Huebner want to navigate between and negate both a "Constantinian" approach that takes up force, power, and coercion in order to rule the world by ensuring that certain historical ends are achieved, and a "liberal" approach that places religion outside of the public realm by privatizing or relativizing it. In their Radical Reformation responses to Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy, York and Huebner respond in ways that resist the Constantinian impulses in Milbank's work, while embracing his critique of liberalism. However, their mediation between antiliberalism and resistance to justifications of violence emphasizes the former at the expense of the latter, as we will see below.

Citing Milbank's desire to transcend "the modern bastard dualisms of faith and reason, grace and nature" York and Huebner affirm a commonality between Radical Reformation approaches and Radical Orthodoxy in "the attempt to live as faithfully as possible during this in-between time."[156] They write further that "the one important commonality between the two [Radical Reformation and Radical Orthodoxy] revolves around how Christians are to seek to live in the here and now in light of both our past and our future."[157] But in light of the contrasting

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[155] Chris Huebner and Tripp York, "Introduction," in *The Gift of Difference*, 2.

[156] Ibid, 4.

[157] Ibid, 5.

approaches of Radical Orthodoxy and Radical Reformation toward opposition, mediation, and radicality presented in the first half of this chapter, we should ask: is it really the case that the two traditions and their representatives share a similar vision for living faithfully in between past and future? I suggest that this is not the case. In their efforts to befriend and give gifts to Milbank, York and Huebner emphasize affinities with a tradition that is explicitly interested in ruling the world and making history turn out right, as evidenced by the divergent uses of history in "Radical Reformation" (radical *restitutio* that returns to original pacifist Christianity) and "Radical Orthodoxy" (radical reassertion against secularism that returns to a time before the secular), and by Milbank's willingness to use tragically justified violence to achieve a state of ontological peace.

Stated differences between Radical Reformation and Radical Orthodoxy are also elided or avoided by other contributors to the volume in ways that I will now summarize. In "Milbank and Violence" Kevin Derksen sees Milbank's work as a "helpful corrective to what can (too easily) become an obvious and simplistic contrast between violence and peace," but he does not emphasize any correctives that Mennonites may provide to Milbank.[158] In "The Ballad of John and Anneken" Tripp York affirms how "Milbank has enabled Anabaptists to better narrate liberalism, the pathos of nihilism, the anti-theological politics that led to the creation of the nation-state, and the political theologies that, despite their best efforts, continue to reinforce the legitimacy of the nation state," but he does not provide a correlating list of benefits that his Anabaptist position could provide for Milbank, instead suggesting that Milbank's defense of violence only seems "out of place."[159] Although York argues persuasively that Milbank's way of

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[158] Kevin Derksen, "Milbank and Violence" in *The Gift of Difference*, 28.

[159] Tripp York, "The Ballad of John and Anneken" in *The Gift of Difference*, 51, 58.

thinking could be used to defend the persecution of the Anabaptists, at the conclusion of his essay he retreats, saying "Perhaps that is a terribly unfair assessment to make."[160]

Similarly, in his essay "Narrative Proclamation and Gospel Truthfulness" Craig Hovey concludes that "For those who have inherited the Radical Reformation tradition in one way or another, it may not be difficult to grasp how the Christian ability to resist sovereign power, particularly when it is abusive in it pretentious claims, will depend on the ability of Christians to persist in offering peaceful, unbounded testimony to the world," but he does not engage substantially with the sharp differences between Milbank's confident testimony and the Radical Reformation resistance to coercion and violence that he affirms.[161]

By contrast, Pete Dula's essay "Fugitive Ecclesia" takes Milbank to task for the arrogance of his claims and the lonely isolationism of his theological position.[162] But even Dula's essay concludes with a relativization of his critique wherein he suggests that Milbank's "declarations of aloneness" are really "pleas for friendship."[163] But there is little evidence in Milbank's work that he is truly interested in friendly dialogue with Mennonite theologians where "dialogue" means a reciprocal exchange where each party engages substantially with the works of the other. For example, in his foreword to *The Gift of Difference* and related work, he does not cite or quote directly from the works of any Anabaptist Mennonite theologians.[164]

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[160] Ibid, 66.

[161] Craig Hovey, "Narrative Proclamation and Gospel Truthfulness" in *The Gift of Difference*, 102-13.

[162] Pete Dula, "Fugitive Ecclesia" in *The Gift of Difference*, 128-129.

[163] Ibid, 129.

[164] The closest that Milbank comes to engaging directly and substantially with Mennonite theologians is in his preface to *The Gift of Difference* and in an op-ed from the same year that reproduces much of the same text.

John Milbank, "Power is necessary for peace: In defence of Constantine" *ABC Religion and Ethics*. October 29, 2010. (https://www.abc.net.au/religion/power-is-necessary-for-peace-in-defence-of-constantine/10101902).

In the final essay of the volume, Chris Huebner continues this pattern of conciliatory

mediation when he praises Radical Orthodoxy for its "audacious attempt to reclaim the world for

theology," suggesting that Radical Orthodoxy does not seek "mastery and control."[165] Framing

his response to Milbank as "a few critical counter-gifts," Huebner suggests that "the conception

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He writes:

> So the dilemma would seem to be this: Christianity announces and shapes a new realm of non-violence which proclaims the power of weakness, a power operating through collaboration and reconciliation. But this power is still power – indeed it is the only entirely powerful power, because any exercise of violence always leaves one vulnerable – as Jesus said, a house divided against itself cannot stand. Hence the practice of peace is not a matter of isolated individual motivation. It is rather a matter of a shared habit and an achieved practice. It is exactly because they know this so well that Mennonites and the Quakers have tended to embrace enthusiastically an ethics of virtue in recent years. However, this means that the realm of total mutual exposure, the realm of weakness within which "all defences are down," might ironically be seen as requiring defence against an exterior which refuses this exposedness. At the very least, I would suggest, the New Testament makes it quite clear that Christians are involved in paradoxical warfare: a power-struggle in which one seeks to extend the powerful reach of the very sphere of powerlessness itself. But does this mean some adoption of the coercive and utilitarian instruments of worldly power on the part of the church? Dostoevsky tends to indicate no, while [novelist Rebecca] West, as a good Augustinian, in the end says yes – we have to make a good use towards the true ends of peace of the compromised ends of the earthly city. And this is what is most precious about the Mennonite tradition: that they offer, not the path of misguided purism, not the illusion of "beautiful souls," but rather their own middle way between apoliticism and political compromise. This is because, as they rightly say, they see the church itself as the true polity and they see the possibility of "living beyond the law" in terms of a new sort of social and political practice. For all of our disagreements, I am here entirely at one with Stanley Hauerwas in recognising the specifically *Catholic* witness of the churches of the Radical Reformation and their later descendants, including the Quakers. […]
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> As a matter of fact this Mennonite "third way" remains in essential agreement with both Augustine and Dostoevsky. For the former, true human association lay within the church, while the latter desired to 'monasticise' the entire social realm. Yet even if one agrees with the Mennonite tradition that the church itself is the place where charity is combined with power of a new and more profound way, there remains the question of the relationship of this power to contaminated, compromised coercive power.
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> It is here, however, that I find the avowed anti-Constantinianism associated with the Mennonite tradition – through John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas – both politically disingenuous and theologically dangerous.

This article is almost identical to the preface to *The Gift of Difference* (pp. xiii-xv) with the exception of the last sentence quoted above, which is not included in the preface.

More recently, Milbank has argued that "the effect of the Reformation has been negative" – a further claim that puts him at odds with proponents of the Radical Reformation stance. See John Milbank, "Reformation 500: Any Cause for Celebration?" *Open Theology* 4 (2018): 607-629. Compare with the more positive and complex assessments of the Reformation in *Mennonite Life* 71 (2017). Special Issue: Why 500 Years? (https://mla.bethelks.edu/ml-archive/2017/).

[165] Chris Huebner, "Radical Orthodoxy, Radical Reformation" in *The Gift of Difference*, 205, 206.

of theological radicalism claimed by both Radical Orthodoxy and the Radical Reformation is best understood only when each of them properly receives and returns the critical gifts of the other."[166] The language of the gift and its giving and reception is a constituent part of both Milbank and Huebner's work, but here its use by Huebner elides real differences between Radical Orthodoxy and Radical Reformation, and avoids the disjunction between Milbank's defense of coercion and the dispossessive treatment of peace in Huebner's own work.

In his concluding essay Huebner argues that Milbank's counter-ontology of peace is "not reactive" because it is not primarily articulated in response to conflict and violence but is instead a theology that asserts that "Peace is ontologically prior to violence. It cannot be secured, and thus cannot flourish in a capitalist economy of self-interest, debt, scarcity, and contract. Rather, it is at home in an economy of charitable donation and thus exists only as unnecessarily given and received."[167] Suggesting further that his notion of "dialogical vulnerability" is in continuity with the radicality of the Radical Reformation, Huebner argues that "both Radical Orthodoxy and Radical Reformation name a theological style that refuses the rhetoric of spatialization or self-absolutization, and ceases to think of theology as an entity or territory that must be policed through the erection and protection of boundaries."[168]

But here, Huebner ignores the structural ways that Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy *is* reactive when it positions itself against what it perceives to be a threatening secularism. Huebner takes Milbank at his word when Milbank asserts that his theology is a non-reactive kind of non-mastery, despite the fact that anticipatory reactions and rhetorical displays of mastery are part of

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[166] Ibid, 207.

[167] Ibid, 209.

[168] Ibid, 211.

the fabric of Milbank's work, from his self-avowed desires to demolish secular reason to his relegation of disciplines other than theology to the realm of nothing. This is not to say that Huebner is entirely uncritical of Milbank, but it is to point to a major blind-spot in Huebner's essay.

Huebner's three "critical counter-gifts" for Milbank are as follows. He argues that Milbank's theology "privileges the voice of the theologian in a way that suggests a residual commitment to specialization and professionalism and a kind of reactive heroism that he otherwise calls into question as one more instance of a secular economy of security and possession."[169] Secondly, Huebner suggests that Milbank could learn from the Mennonite counter-epistemology that values patience and "seeks to hear all the relevant voices in a conversation and resists the violent tendency to silence anyone by virtue of the way the debate is constructed in advance of any actual engagement. It is an epistemology that resists closure…"[170] And lastly, Huebner argues that Milbank "differentiates a Christian counter-ontology of peace from a secular ontology of violence by means of the sharp, almost over-general, contrasts he draws between their competing logics."[171] Huebner's stated awareness of the generalizations about secularity that Milbank makes is important to note here because it shows that although Huebner is aware of these generalizations he does not consider them to prohibit a positive assessment of Milbank's theology.

I argue that referring to these three "critical counter-gifts" as "gifts" obscures how they are really far more critical than they are gifts. Although Huebner presents his criticisms in ways

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[169] Ibid, 212.

[170] Ibid, 213.

[171] Ibid, 213.

that keep with an ontology of givenness and a posture of Christian friendship, ultimately his criticisms are not "gifts" first, and are not received as such by Milbank. By naming Milbank's privileging of the theologian's voice, his need to consider the problem of closure, and his overly sharp differentiation between "a Christian counter-ontology of peace" and "a secular ontology of violence," Huebner points to real differences between the Radical Reformation position and Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy that cannot be communicated clearly in the context of gift exchange. Although he may want to articulate these differences by presenting them in the form of a gift, their substance is that of a disagreement.

However, this is not to say that Huebner is entirely uncritical of Milbank. In the final pages of his essay Huebner goes so far as to call Milbank's approach an "unrestrained rhetorical hypernarrative" which he contrasts gently with the "dialogical vulnerability" of the Radical Reformation perspective.[172] Huebner then lightly criticizes Milbank's work by arguing that "there is a lingering commitment to instrumental causality that appears in Milbank's work despite his thoroughgoing rejection of instrumentalism as one of the defining features of secular reason."[173] But what I want to highlight here is that Huebner's assessment of Milbank considers his generalizations, over-sharp divisions, and instrumental uses of violence to be aberrations that contradict the overall aims of his theology, rather than structural problems with it (as I have suggested is the case above). Huebner continues in the essay, suggesting that although Mennonite theology has not articulated its commitment to nonviolence in ways that are theological enough, this "might serve as a third lesson."[174] But this tentative acknowledgement

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[172] Ibid, 213.

[173] Ibid, 214.

[174] Ibid, 215.

that Mennonite nonviolence may be a challenge to Milbank elides the considerable differences between Milbank's stated position and Huebner's self-avowed prioritization of the precarious character of peace. Below I present a summary of Huebner's thought as it is expressed in *A Precarious Peace* in order to highlight these key differences.

Chris K. Huebner's Precarious Peace

Stanley Hauerwas begins his foreword to Chris Huebner's essay collection *A Precarious Peace*, with the claim that "Huebner inaugurates a new stage in Mennonite theology and, hopefully, a renewed reception of the work of John Howard Yoder," suggesting that a major affinity between their works is the refusal to finally know what peace is.[175] Hauerwas summarizes Huebner's work as an attempt to extend radical Christian pacifism, critique theological dualisms, and challenge assumptions that peace is something that can be possessed.

The central theme of *A Precarious Peace* is that peace is not something that can be finally known, controlled, secured, or possessed, but is instead something that ought to be considered fragile, vulnerable, and unpossessable. For Huebner, "the theologian is an essentially restless figure" who is "torn between two worlds, two cities, and is thus always and yet never entirely at home."[176] In this state of restlessness that troubles political oppositions, for Huebner the task of Christian theology is to be continuously on the move in a diasporic and exilic way, such that familiarities become defamiliarized, and boundaries are crossed in search of new conversations. On Huebner's account, the wandering explorations of the Christian theologian must have interrupting and surprising experiences not of agreement, but of disagreement, in

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[175] Stanley Hauerwas, "Foreword" in Chris Huebner, *A Precarious Peace*, 9.

[176] Huebner, *A Precarious Peace*, 17.

order to cultivate a kind of exploration that is not colonizing but "untimely and out of place."[177]
(The notion that Anabaptist Mennonite theology ought to be framed as a kind of restlessness has
more recently been taken up by Paul Doerksen, who argues that "Restlessness as theological
method resists an idolatrous grasping for control," "certitude," "stability," and "domination."[178])

Rather than move into new territory militaristically, Huebner argues that the Christian
theologian should resist the "preservationist drive for protection and security" and the desire to
capture and control territory through conquest.[179] Huebner insists that the Christian theologian
renounce the desire for control – its visual surveillance and complicity with empire – and instead
understand itself, the world, and the pursuit of peace to be precarious.[180] The precarious
character of peace, for Huebner, is a challenge to the desires for control and certainty that would
seek ownership over peace in order to protect against violence.

This puts Huebner's work profoundly at odds with Milbank's defense of coercion and
violence as means toward peace, and with Milbank's reactive and possessive desire to secure
Christianity against attack by secularism. That said, Milbank and Huebner share a concern for
the ubiquity of violence. Rather than suggesting that violence can ever be avoided entirely,
Huebner considers theological identity to be something that must be confessed with the
"recognition that it is always already implicated in some form of violence or another."[181]
Milbank makes a similar point in *Being Reconciled*, when he writes that "violence is like the

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[177] Ibid, 18.

[178] Paul Doerksen, "Restlessness as Theological Method," in *Recovering from the Anabaptist Vision*, 166-167.

[179] Huebner, *A Precarious Peace*, 19.

[180] Ibid, 19-20.

[181] Ibid, 20.

regularity of breathing that goes on all the time."[182] However, Milbank follows this identification of the ubiquity of violence with a defense of the use of violence as a coercive means toward a teleological end in the context of an "all or nothing" Christian commitment.[183] Huebner, on the other hand, does not endorse the use of violence, and instead suggests that in response to the problems that come with power Christians ought to practice a virtuous vulnerability that resists violent and militaristic desires for control.

Huebner frames *A Precarious Peace* by "reading Mennonite theology as something that resists establishment, including the establishment of something called Mennonite theology itself."[184] Rather than possessing knowledge and desiring the stability of an identity, Huebner adopts a "disestablishing, disowning, dislocating" disposition that takes up Yoder's work in order to "name a peace that is somehow divided against itself."[185] The character of that division is at stake, for Huebner, not only for those concerned with the pursuit of peace, but also for those who want to understand violence. By contrast, in his preface to *The Gift of Difference* Milbank claims (with Abraham Lincoln, and Jesus in Matthew 12:25) that "a house divided against itself cannot stand."[186]

A Precarious Peace is premised on the precarious and vulnerable status of Mennonite identity, which Huebner argues cannot be possessed if it is to be faithful to its roots in the

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[182] Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 36.

[183] Ibid, 38.

[184] Huebner, *A Precarious Peace*, 21.

[185] Ibid, 23, 30.

[186] Milbank, "Preface" in *The Gift of Difference*, xiii.

sixteenth century "Radical Reformation" and its commitments to peace and justice.[187] However, the precarious character of Mennonite identity seems to allow Huebner to avoid confrontation with the aspects of Milbank's theology that directly contradict his own. This idea of a precarious peace informs his response to Radical Orthodoxy in complex ways. In a reprint of the essay (explored above) that concludes *The Gift of Difference*, "Radical Reformation and Radical Orthodoxy," Huebner rejects the notion that Mennonite theology (or Christian theology) should be made subservient to some pre-existing concept of peace, suggesting that an obsessive focus on peace and violence as categories empties peace of meaningful theological content.[188]

Like Derksen and Doerksen, Huebner emphasizes what Mennonites can learn from Milbank, and when he does challenge Milbank, he presents his challenge as a counter-gift. However, as mentioned above, Huebner states: "Milbank develops his interpretation as a kind of unrestrained rhetorical hyper-narrative that reveals a preoccupation with speed, efficiency, and possessive mastery that he otherwise calls into question."[189] Attempting to hold Milbank accountable to his own standards, while proceeding from a "Radical Reformation" standpoint, Huebner's differences from Milbank are more clearly expressed in the essays on pacifist epistemology that follow "Radical Orthodoxy and Radical Reformation" in *A Precarious Peace*.

In his essay "Globalization, Theory, and Dialogical Vulnerability: John Howard Yoder and the Possibility of a Pacifist Epistemology," Huebner develops his notion of "dialogical vulnerability" by building on Yoder's "patience as method" and "methodological non-Constantinianism" (two concepts we will explore below in the section on Blum). Huebner's

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[187] Huebner, *A Precarious Peace*, 35-36.

[188] Ibid, 41.

[189] Ibid, 46.

notion of dialogical vulnerability refuses imperialistic and colonial desires to secure the ends of dialogue by means of a patient approach that attempts to hear all sides of a debate. For Huebner, "the message of the peace of Christ is negated when it is articulated by a medium that is somehow implicated in the expression of violence."[190] This means that a pacifist epistemology calls for attention to the ways that violence can inhere in the means by which dialogue is conducted. Against ways of approaching dialogue that desire conceptual control, and against controlling ways of conceptualizing peace, Huebner writes that "peace is beyond capture."[191]

Here the notion of dialogical vulnerability intersects with Huebner's account of the gift, which is somewhat influenced by Milbank. Huebner suggests that "the truth about God is not something that can be possessed or secured through some kind of theory of justification. It can only be witnessed, which is to say, vulnerably given and received as a contingent gift."[192] Praising Yoder's refusal of system-building and his eschewal of pure origins, Huebner sees these principles exemplified in the fact that Yoder often wrote in response to assignments.[193] Huebner also sees in Yoder a dialogical rather than monological approach that resists the violence of attempting to make one's inquiry "invulnerable to critique."[194]

Huebner's approach has remained consistent on this point. In his 2020 book *Suffering the Truth: Occasional Sermons and Reflections*, Huebner continues to advocate, here through a reading of Dante, for "a dispossessive way of seeing and being in the world which recognizes

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[190] Ibid, 97.
[191] Ibid, 97.
[192] Ibid, 100.
[193] Ibid, 101-102.

[194] Ibid, 102.

that it is not ours to control."[195] For Huebner, theology "is a discourse that does not seek to utter the last word" by "bringing discussion to a close, but rather seeks to keep the unending task of receiving the creative gifts of God going in a meaningful way."[196]

Above I have surveyed Huebner's work and located in it a way of conceptualizing peace as precarious, but also an inconsistency. On one hand, central to the paradigm of *A Precarious Peace* (and continuing in his recent work) is a notion of peace as dispossessive and delicate, and a related concept of dialogical vulnerability that resists epistemological violence by refusing to make oneself invulnerable to critique. But on the other hand, Huebner shows great appreciation for the work of Milbank and stops short of providing a sharp critique of his work despite that they fundamentally disagree about whether violence ought to be used to ensure civic order. By contrast, these differences are foregrounded in the work of Blum who also employs a form of pacifist epistemology and is also influenced by Yoder's work.

Peter C. Blum's Antifoundationalism

Like Huebner, Blum also addresses the epistemological and ontological problems of violence in dialogue with Milbank. However, in his contribution to the *Gift of Difference* anthology – an essay later collected in his book *For a Church to Come: Experiments in Postmodern Theory and Anabaptist Thought* (published in the same "Polyglossia" series as Huebner's *A Precarious Peace*) – Blum advances a critique of Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy by using the work of

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[195] Chris K. Huebner, *Suffering the Truth: Occasional Sermons and Reflections* (Winnipeg, MB: Canadian Mennonite University Press, 2020), 4.

[196] Ibid, 8.

Derrida positively.[197] Rather than accepting Milbank's critique of secular reason and his reduction of postmodernism to nihilism, Blum's argument that ontological peace is "impossible" stands in much clearer opposition to Milbank's work than Huebner's response to Milbank. Below I follow Blum's work throughout his book while focusing on how his Mennonite response to Milbank puts a finer point on the divergences between Radical Orthodoxy and Radical Reformation than Huebner's.

In his foreword to *For a Church to Come*, John D. Caputo voices his appreciation for Blum's project of "bringing Yoder and French theory face to face" in an "odd coupling" that he implies is reminiscent of Lévinas' face-to-face encounter.[198] Beginning the book by confessing his "errant postmodernism," Blum refuses the suffix "-ism" and its implication of a knowable system or theory of the postmodern. But instead of rejecting systematic thinking in an oppositional way that would powerfully oppose the hierarchical power of systems, Blum sees in articulations of postmodernism a paradoxical and ironic "systematic avoidance of system" or "theory that undermines all theories."[199] Resistant to the repetition of absolutism within particularism, he writes: "I believe that there are no absolute foundations available for human knowledge, yet I constantly fight the temptation to make of this very insight an absolute foundation."[200] In this way, by contrast with Milbank, Blum is already far more hopeful about the positive potential postmodern thought may hold for Christian theology. Rather than affirming

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[197] Peter Blum, "Two Cheers for an Ontology of Violence: Reflections on Im/Possibility," in *The Gift of Difference: Radical Orthodoxy, Radical Reformation*. Ed. Tripp York and Chris Huebner (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2010), 7-26.

[198] John D. Caputo, "Foreword: Outside the Box" in Peter C. Blum, *For a Church to Come: Experiments in Postmodern Theory and Anabaptist Thought* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2013), 9.

[199] Blum, *For a Church to Come*, 20.

[200] Ibid, 21.

a universal Cartesian doubt, Blum's doubt in universals is defined by "an unrelenting suspicion of finality and closure" that places everything in question, but not all at once.[201] Like Huebner, for whom the closure and possession of peace is a problem, Blum rejects foundationalist forms of knowledge in ways that take up Yoder's resistance to impatient and Constantinian methodologies that privilege speed and imperialistic control.

Excursus on Yoder's Patience as Method and Pacifist Epistemology

The reception of Yoder's work in Huebner's and Blum's pacifist epistemologies is complex, but both theologians make significant use of Yoder's work, especially his concept of "patience as method" and his related "methodological non-Constantinianism." In his essay "But We Do See Jesus," Yoder advanced a critique of modernity that contrasts the particularity of the incarnation of Jesus Christ with the claims to absolute truth that he sees in the modern project.[202] Understanding modernity to be a fundamental challenge to Christian witness, Yoder argues that there is no "neutral metalanguage" that can achieve universality.[203] The commitment to the epistemological authority of particularity rather than the desire for universality is something that both Blum and Huebner take up, alongside the notion that patience – rather than the desire to quickly jump to conclusions – is methodologically and theologically important.

In his essay "'Patience' as Method in Moral Reasoning: Is an Ethic of Discipleship 'Absolute'?" Yoder argued for a variety of approaches to patience, one of which is the patience

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[201] Ibid, 21-22.

[202] John Howard Yoder, *A Pacifist Way of Knowing: John Howard Yoder's Nonviolent Epistemology*. Ed. Christian Early and Ted Grimsrud (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010), 22.

[203] Ibid, 25.

of repentance.[204] For Blum, this kind of patience translates into the "crucial implication," "not only that I may be wrong, but that my conviction that I am right may be the occasion for violence, quite apart from its truth or falsity."[205] For Huebner too, Yoder's patience as method means that the "epistemological violence" of "totalizing metanarratives" as it is presented in critical theory must attend to the problem of speed.[206] For Huebner, Yoder's work inspires an "epistemological non-Constantinianism" that opposes both the totalizing scope of metanarratives and the speed of "hypernarratives." Yoder's patience further informs Huebner's values of open conversation and vulnerable practice; he writes, "Yoder patiently enters into the messy world of concrete social reality, refusing to outfit history with handles for easier, more efficient negotiation…".[207] Yoder's "patience" has been influential for other Mennonite theologians as well, up to the present. According to Paul Doerksen, Yoder's patience exemplifies "the remarkable level of seriousness with which he takes those people with whom he disagrees."[208]

Yoder's work has also been interpreted in the editorial apparatus to a posthumous collection called *A Pacifist Way of Knowing* in which the editors, Christian Early and Ted Grimsrud, extend pacifist epistemology in much clearer terms than Yoder did. Suggesting that Christian pacifists should seek to hold knowledge in ways that are not "colonial" or "imperialistic," Early and Grimsrud insist that pacifism requires more than the rejection of

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[204] Ibid, 120.

[205] Blum, *For a Church to Come*, 68.

[206] Huebner, *A Precarious Peace*, 126-127.

[207] Ibid, 127.

[208] Paul Doerksen, "The Politics of Moral Patience" *Political Theology* 15.5 (2014), 465. Compare with Hans-Jürgen Goertz, "Theologian in Contradiction: An Interview with Hans-Jürgen Goertz on John Howard Yoder's Radical Pacifism," *Conrad Grebel Review* 33.3 (Fall 2015), 376.

warfare, but also the rejection of coercion, stating that "As a way of knowing, pacifist epistemology explicitly rejects coercion of the 'other.'"[209] Taking the life of Jesus as a normative ethical model, and considering Jesus' love of neighbor to be a political standard to which it is possible for Christians to be faithful, Early and Grimsrud advocate for pacifism as a way of life and a way of knowing, stating "pacifism contributes to a better epistemology."[210]

Early and Grimsrud argue that Yoder embraced contingency and vulnerability by moving eschatologically through and beyond relativism toward the "coming world."[211] For Early and Grimsrud, Yoder's rejection of the existence of a metaphysically secure "real world" is in response to the problem of coercion, and they write: "The mistake of those who appeal to idealized worlds is that they prematurely and thus coercively move to the end characterized by universal agreement."[212] This critique of thinking through the use of idealized forms leads them to suggest that Yoder rejected two specific ways of knowing that are founded on coercion: foundationalism and imperialism.[213]

Whereas epistemological foundationalism is a Cartesian attempt to found knowledge on transcendentals and universals, epistemological imperialism attempts to establish the validity of knowledge by appeal to sovereign authorities and political establishments. For Early and Grimsrud, foundationalism and imperialism are similar because they both seek certainty and

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[209] Christian Early and Ted Grimsrud, "Prologue: Christian Pacifism in Brief" in John Howard Yoder, *A Pacifist Way of Knowing*, 1-2.

[210] Ibid.

[211] Early and Grimsrud, "Epilogue" in *A Pacifist Way of Knowing*, 136.

[212] Ibid.

[213] Ibid, 137.

avoid vulnerability or dependency on others by means of their political appeals to authority.[214]

By making the love of enemies central to their pacifist epistemology, Early and Grimsrud suggest that enemies and adversaries are essential to the process of discovering truth.[215] While trying to move beyond structures of enmity, they suggest that "One of the ways that pacifism can foster knowing is that it does not understand the quest for truth to be a zero-sum, scarcity oriented, competitive process."[216] In the words of Early and Grimsrud, pacifist epistemology is a way of thinking, knowing, and communicating that sees difference as a gift, rejects coercion of the other, and sees diversity positively. On this account, pacifist epistemology values contingency, vulnerability, anti-foundationalism, anti-imperialism, disagreement, and open conversation – all in such a way that would seek to arrive at truths without enmity. Like Early and Grimsrud, Huebner's pacifist epistemology draws heavily from Yoder's work. As well, Blum also uses Yoder's concepts of "patience as method" and "methodological non-Constantinianism" by reading them together with Derrida's *différance*.

In his essay "Patience and/with *Différance*," Blum reads Yoder and Derrida together, pairing the temporal deferral of Derrida's *différance* with Yoder's patience as method. For Blum, "deconstruction is provisional because what is being deconstructed is provisional to begin with," and this provisional approach is characteristic of Yoder's work such that both of their work can be characterized by the rejection of the violent character of system.[217] Blum concludes his essay by arguing that both Yoder and Derrida converge in their "concern for the violence that we do to

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[214] Ibid, 138.

[215] Ibid, 141, 151.

[216] Ibid, 153.

[217] Blum, *For a Church to Come*, 65-66.

the other" by making the other the same through egoic reductions.[218] For Blum, "Patience is about the primacy of the Other vis-à-vis the Truth" – a concern that also defines his Derridean response to Milbank.[219]

Peter C. Blum's Impossible Peace

In his essay "Two Cheers for an Ontology of Violence: Reflections on Im/Possibility" Blum advances his most sustained reflection on the problem of ontological violence. The essay begins with a refreshing critique of Milbank's reductive use of the term "deconstruction" as a code-word for nihilism.[220] Blum notes that both Radical Orthodoxy and Radical Reformation share an adjective while advancing very different interpretations of the relationship between radicalism and peace, and disputes Milbank's condemnation of Derrida's deconstruction as a nihilistic and anti-Christian paradigm.[221] Whereas Milbank defines violence as the privation of an original ontological peace, and situates his work against nihilism, Blum is more interested in challenging the notion that "there is a clear line of demarcation, beyond which we must refuse to go with 'the Nietzscheans'."[222] Instead of engaging in Milbank's opposition to secularism, nihilism, and postmodernism, Blum asks the following key questions about violence:

> What if nonviolence really is impossible? What if violence is not only practically unavoidable, as many people assume, but somehow radically inescapable? What if there is no place where we can make our bed, but violence is there? What if we really cannot

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[218] Ibid, 69.

[219] Ibid.

[220] Ibid, 144.

[221] Ibid, 144-145.

[222] Ibid, 145.

do other than violence? Deconstructionist thinkers want us to take seriously the idea that this may be so.[223]

Following these questions, Blum turns to Derrida's "Violence and Metaphysics" and summarizes some of its key statements with the claim that "discourse is violent" – considering this to be a fundamental challenge to the central Mennonite tenet that "nonviolence is essential to discipleship."[224] Interpreting Derrida as saying that pure nonviolence is impossible, Blum identifies Derrida's critique of Lévinas in the tension between Jewish radical otherness and Greek philosophical thematizing, suggesting that Derrida is not trying to hold Lévinas to some standard of logical consistency, but rather that Derrida is interested in drawing out the constitutive tensions of Lévinas' work.[225] Here Blum's interpretation of Derrida's essay accords with the reading that I have provided above in Chapter 1.

Turning to Derrida's later works in which he connects deconstruction and justice and develops the undecidable relationship between possibility and impossibility, Blum extends undecidability toward the question of nonviolence. He reasons that if intelligibility itself is violent then nonviolence is impossible, but then suggests that the negation "non" that prefixes nonviolence may be more complex than a simple exclusion of possibility.[226] Instead, he writes,

> it may be a matter of negating the necessary, of saying '*No*' to violence, even though this saying does not itself escape violence. It may be that there is one thing to which we must do violence, and that is violence itself. Not so much a 'nonviolence,' as a 'no *to* violence.' Actually, in keeping with a deconstructionist mood, it works a bit better to say it in French: not "*nonviolence*," but rather '*non à la violence*!'[227]

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[223] Ibid, 146.

[224] Ibid, 147.

[225] Ibid, 149.

[226] Ibid, 153.

[227] Ibid.

Blum likens his "no" to violence to Huebner's pacifist epistemology and Yoder's patient approach, and further suggests that his "no" to violence resonates with the Amish approach to drawing boundaries wherein the lines that are drawn initially appear to be arbitrary, but then lose that appearance when we realize that "the impossibility of drawing nonarbitrary boundaries is precisely what makes the drawing of boundaries possible."[228] Rather than be resigned to paralysis under the weight of an impossible task to draw nonarbitrary boundaries, Blum suggests that the Amish response to the 2006 Nickel Mines shooter (their seemingly impossible forgiveness of the perpetrator) further demonstrates that "to admit that violence may be ubiquitous and unavoidable, that there is no *hors-violence*, is not to say simplistically that everything is violence, such that nothing can be done."[229] Blum reminds his readers that pure nonviolence *and* pure violence are impossible for Derrida, and he suggests that "there is no vicious reductio ad absurdum lurking, ready to spring on us and render us unable to make any distinctions."[230] Rather than resign oneself to a "nihilistic paralysis" in the face of the ubiquity of violence, Blum suggests that one can still have meaning, even in the appearance of arbitrariness.[231] In this way, Blum's approach mediates between strong assertions of truth and nihilistic paralysis.

Blum understands the "impossibility" of nonviolence in a positive light, and he also considers it to be a critique of the exclusion of pacifism in Milbank's expression of ontological

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[228] Ibid, 154.

[229] Ibid, 155.

[230] Ibid.

[231] Ibid, 155-156.

peace.[232] Accusing Milbank of missing the active element of nonviolence, Blum suggests in conclusion that authentic nonviolence does not engage in spectatorship or the aversion of the gaze, but instead refuses to understand the impossibility of being without violence as a "finalizing" kind of "refutation."[233] Blum then faults Milbank for not being conscious of his powerful ability to judge and identify violence, and suggests that the "ineradicable risk" of saying "no" to violence means that nonviolence "cannot prevent itself from being taken *as* violence, even from *being* violence."[234] This is Blum's two cheers for an ontology of violence, for he does not think that those who are concerned with violence and nonviolence are confined to a two-option structure of either looking at violence or looking away, or of either doing violence or passively avoiding it. Blum concludes his essay provocatively, with the suggestion that "an ontology of peace… does not make the rejection of violence less impossible," but the impossibility of nonviolence may make a different kind of nonviolence possible.[235]

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Most of the reception of Derrida's work by Mennonites has taken place within the discourses on "pacifist epistemology" and "ontological peace" described above. Within this discourse the most substantial connections between Derrida and Mennonite thinking are made by Blum in his essay "Two Cheers for an Ontology of Violence." Whereas Huebner cites Derrida occasionally in *A*

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[232] Ibid, 156-157.

[233] Ibid, 158.

[234] Ibid, 159.

[235] Ibid, 159.

Precarious Peace – most notably in a favorable summary sentence of Milbank's critique of

Derrida's supposed "ontological violence,"[236] and referring to Gillian Rose's critique of Lévinas

and Derrida – he does not engage directly with Derrida's "Violence and Metaphysics." By

contrast, Blum's engagement with Derrida's approach to violence is more substantial, and he

refers to and uses concepts from Derrida's early work in "Violence and Metaphysics" and "Force

of Law." For these reasons, below I will look more closely at how Blum critiques Milbank and

how he interprets the work of Derrida.

First, Blum notes (with Huebner) that Radical Orthodoxy and the Radical Reformation

perspective share a desire for radicality but perform a return to the root in very different ways. In

keeping with the mediating tendency in Mennonite thinking, and resonating with the "neither-

nor" refusals of both Derrida and the Anabaptists, Blum helpfully refuses to oppose "a Christian

ontology of peace to a deconstructionist ontology of violence" as Milbank does.[237] Whereas

Milbank understands Christianity to admit to no "original violence" because violence is "a

secondary willed intrusion" on the divine order,[238] Blum is suspicious of such clean divisions.[239]

Taking seriously Derrida's notion that violence may inhere in everything, Blum draws from

"Violence and Metaphysics" four quotations:

> [E]very reduction of the other to a *real* moment in *my* life, its reduction to the state of
> empirical alter-ego, is an empirical possibility, or rather eventuality, which is called
> violence. (128)
>
> War, therefore, is congenital to phenomenality, is the very emergence of speech and of
> appearing (129)

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[236] Huebner, *A Precarious Peace*, 156.

[237] Blum, *For a Church to Come*, 144.

[238] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 5-6.

[239] Blum, *For a Church to Come*, 145.

> If the living present, the absolute form of the opening of time to the other in itself, is the absolute form of egological life, and if egoity is the absolute form of experience, then the present, the presence of the present, and the present of experience, are all originally and forever violent. (133)

> A Being without violence would be a Being which would occur outside the existent: nothing; nonhistory; nonoccurence; nonphenomenality. A speech produced without the least violence would determine nothing, would say nothing, would offer nothing to the other; it would not be *history*, and it would *show* nothing… [N]onviolent language would be a language which would do without the verb *to be*, that is, without predication. Predication is the first violence. (147)

Blum comments on these selections, stating that "According to this line of thought, it seems that any approach that I make to another is violent. Discourse is violent. Saying anything at all (anything that involves predication, at any rate) is violent!"[240] But is this an accurate reading of Derrida? Derrida's claim that "violence did not exist before the possibility of speech" (117.19-20/172) would seem to render Blum's reading accurate, but the analysis and commentary provided above in Chapter 1 demonstrates that things are far more complex than the representation of Derrida's thought by the phrase "saying anything at all… is violent."

It is not entirely true to say that, for Derrida, "Saying anything at all (anything that involves predication, at any rate) is violent!"[241] This is because Derrida's statement that "Predication is the first violence" is made in the context of his challenge to Lévinas – a challenge that increases in the final pages of "Violence and Metaphysics" when Derrida points to a series of inconsistencies that he believes are present in Lévinas' work. Returning to "Violence and Metaphysics" with an eye for whether Blum is right that "saying anything at all is violent," we can recall the tangle of Derrida's argument as explored in the first chapter above – the conclusion of which is that Derrida indeed considers predication to be the original violence, but that this

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[240] Ibid, 147.

[241] Ibid, 147.

claim is inseparable from the questioning character of his challenge to Lévinas, for separating it from its context would be a kind of violence for Derrida, and it would risk closing down precisely what Derrida wants to keep open: the problem, the question, language, the future, the other, and difference. With the priorities indicated by Derrida's use of the term violence in mind, we can see that it cannot be so simple as to say that Derrida's aim when he writes "Predication is the first violence" is to close down or diminish efforts to decrease violence by simply asserting that saying anything is violent.

In Blum's reading of Derrida, he points out a contradiction between Mennonite pacifism and Derrida's deconstruction: how can nonviolent discipleship that seeks to peacefully imitate Jesus Christ be squared with the complete ubiquity of violence? How can the Mennonite notion that Jesus was a pacifist who calls his followers to a life of nonviolence, be reconciled with the impossibility of being without violence that Derrida points out? But rather than see this question as a paralytic that would prevent a rapport between Derrida and Mennonite theology, or an aporia that will be resolved in the coming world, Blum makes positive use of Derrida's work and applies the notion of undecidability to the Mennonite value of nonviolence.

At stake for Blum is the question of whether we can ever be without violence, and at stake in the debate between the Mennonite perspective that resources the Radical Reformation, and the Radical Orthodoxy of John Milbank is the related question of whether an "ontology of peace" is possible and how it ought to be pursued. Blum's ontology of peace intervenes by attempting to relativize both peace and violence so as to avoid the hubris of thinking that either could be defined or achieved absolutely. When Blum mirrors Derrida's argument that forgiveness and the gift are impossible by arguing that nonviolence is impossible, he resists

Milbank's confidence in a knowable and achievable state of ontological peace.[242] Rather than a pure nonviolence – as some Mennonites have advocated for, and which Derrida explicitly refuses in "Violence and Metaphysics" (146.39) – Blum calls for a process of "negating the necessary" by saying "no" to violence "even though this saying does not itself escape violence."[243] But he clarifies that this "no" to violence, when combined with the notion that "there is no *hors-violence*," is not a kind of defeatist quietism.[244] Against Milbank's readiness to use tragically or retroactively justified exertions of force, power, and coercion to ensure that "peaceful" ends are met,[245] Blum argues for an ontology of peace wherein nonviolence is impossible (because it "does not escape violence"), but a "no" to violence is still possible.[246]

Blum's argument for a "no" to violence is in keeping with Derrida's critique of Lévinas (that there is no means to peace without the violence in language, being, and history), and it is also resonant with Lévinas' argument in "Freedom and Command" that the naked face of the other opposes violence because it is "opposition in itself" that "says *no* to me by his [sic] very expression."[247] Against Milbank's assumption that pacifism looks at violence voyeuristically and violently refrains from acting,[248] Blum argues for a kind of pacifism that is honest about the presence of violence in the world and the impossibility of purely separating from it, but is

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[242] Blum, *For a Church to Come*, 152.

[243] Ibid, 153.

[244] Ibid, 155.

[245] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 424.

[246] Blum, *For a Church to Come*, 156.

[247] Lévinas, "Freedom and Command," in *Collected Philosophical Papers*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1987), 21.

[248] Milbank, "Violence: Double Passivity," in *Being Reconciled*, 29.

nonetheless actively nonviolent in its "no" to violence (where the prefix "non" is not a total

purifying negation, but a "no" that does not imagine itself to be able to achieve pure negation).

Rather than reactively trying to insulate his position from all risk or make it invulnerable by

immunizing it against opposition, Blum points out that "a 'No' to violence cannot prevent itself

from being taken *as* violence, even from *being* violence."[249] In this way, Blum refuses to

securitize and immunize his use of the term "violence" as if he could essentially know or police

all uses of the term, and this implicitly challenges Milbank's approach in which violence is

defined by essentially and teleologically oriented terms. This notion that a "no" to violence could

be taken as violence further accords with the paradigm that I outlined in the introduction above,

namely that violence is a name for boundary violations that depend on contexts and values rather

than an absolute definition that one could promote or oppose.

As Blum's conclusion indicates again, the Radical Reformation perspective is far more at

odds with Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy than it first appears to be. Rather than being a form of

gift or counter-gift-exchange – an image that elides the real differences between how Milbank

and Mennonites conceive of the ethics and politics of force and coercion – the debate between

Mennonites and Milbank requires a set of sharper distinctions in order to clearly delineate the

substantial differences between the two positions – one offered by another response originally

published in the 2005 issue of the *Conrad Grebel Review* that collected responses to Milbank.

Derridean Violence, Mennonite Peace

In his essay "Educative Violence or Suffering Love? Radical Orthodoxy and Radical

Reformation" Travis Kroeker provides clear criteria for distinguishing between the work of

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[249] Blum, *For a Church to Come*, 159.

Milbank and the Mennonite "Radical Reformation" position when he distinguishes "educative violence" that justifies the use force to ensure the peaceful ontological order it seeks, from "suffering love" that is exemplified by a weak messianism and refuses to secure its ends by means of violence.[250]

On one hand we have Milbank who argues that violence is what distorts the true meaning of things by ruining something's essence or diverting something from its teleological end.[251] Under this definition of violence the world is peacefully ordered at its point of origin (creation) when things are in conformity with their essence and aligned with their right teleological heading. For Milbank, violence arises when the essences of things and their proper orientation toward origins and ends are disturbed or made to deviate. By contrast, Kroeker suggests that, in response to radical evil, a life of suffering love is more in keeping with the Radical Reformation approach. Here, suffering love is characterized by its rejection of the use of educative coercion and force to secure essences and ensure ends, and its way of serving and loving others that willingly suffers under the violence of the world.

Rather than conceiving of the world as originally and essentially ordered in ways that allow for possessive knowledge or require forcible and coercive ordering by Christians, the epistemological model of suffering love that Kroeker suggests is defined by its critique of the desire to possess and control, as exemplified by Jesus Christ the "suffering servant" and "slain

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[250] P. Travis Kroeker, "Educative Violence or Suffering Love? Radical Orthodoxy and Radical Reformation" *Conrad Grebel Review* 23.2 (2005): 19-24. Elsewhere, Kroeker describes his "messianic political theology" as "neither Catholic nor Protestant, neither Mennonite nor secularist, neither orthodox nor heterodox – in keeping with a Pauline economy (*oikonomia*, sometimes translated as 'commission'; 1 Cor 9:17) that inhabits the mysterious freedom of messianic slavery in order to build up (*oikodome*; 1 Cor 8:1, 10:23) the common world that is nevertheless passing away (1 Cor 7:31)." P. Travis Kroeker, "Foreword" in A. James Reimer, *Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology: Law, Order, and Civil Society*. Ed. Paul G. Doerksen (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), ix-x.

[251] Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 27.

lamb." This critique of possessive desire resonates deeply with the works of Huebner and Blum, but it is accompanied by a distinction between educative violence and suffering love that is not emphasized in the Mennonite responses to Milbank outlined above. Kroeker suggests that the Radical Reformers understood violence to be something "unleashed by unredeemed, fallen intuitions and desires when they resist the apocalyptic claims and reconciling overtures of divine love such as are displayed by the servant Christ and visibly imitated by the body of Christ in temporal existence."[252] Kroeker's characterization of an "existential Radical Reformation theology"[253] is premised not only on the suffering and sacrificial love of Jesus Christ, but also on a messianic and apocalyptic critique of possessive desire that refuses to possess knowledge of and exert control over a codified relationship between origins, essences, and ends. Construed in this way, the distinction between Mennonites and Milbank is as much about time and history as it is about peace and violence. Below in Chapter 3 I will take up this way of configuring the debate between Mennonites and Milbank by turning to the non-displacing character of Grace Jantzen's narrative in *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*. Jantzen's approach to origins and ends is distinct from the Mennonite reticence to construct grand narratives, and distinct from Milbank's desire to coerce or enforce relationships between origins, essences, and ends.

Recall that in his preface to *The Gift of Difference*, Milbank argues that "an unqualified coercion grounded on an ontology of violence" should be superseded by "a qualified, teleological use of coercion grounded upon an ontology and eschatology of peace."[254] As

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[252] Kroeker, "Educative Violence or Suffering Love?," 19. See also Kroeker, *Messianic Political Theology and Diaspora Ethics* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), Chapter 5.

[253] Kroeker, "Educative Violence or Suffering Love?," 22.

[254] Milbank, "Foreword," in *The Gift of Difference: Radical Orthodoxy, Radical Reformation*. Ed. Tripp York and Chris Huebner (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2010), xvi.

Kroeker's distinction reveals, despite the conflict-averse language that marks some Mennonite engagement with Radical Orthodoxy, Milbank's defense of coercion could not be more at odds with the self-confessed values of his interlocutors such as Huebner, whose "Radical Reformation" position explicitly rejects colonial and imperialistic ways of knowing that seek to control and possess conceptual territory, and Blum, whose "two cheers for an ontology of violence" accepts the ubiquity of violence but refuses passivity in face of it.

In more general terms, Milbank's defense of a Christian political order stands in stark contrast with the historical and contemporary rejection of force and coercion that defines much of the Mennonite tradition, as well as its 16th century Anabaptist background.[255] For most Mennonites thinkers and representatives of the "Radical Reformation," peace cannot be approached or achieved by means of violence, force, or coercion. Under the terms of Huebner and Blum's conjugation of Mennonite pacifism with ontology and epistemology, force and coercion – even in the form of rhetorical persuasion – ought to be condemned as forms of epistemological violence because they employ imperialistic and colonial means that attempt to anticipate and force certain ends (as in Huebner's suggestion that Christians should not attempt to make history turn out right, or in Early and Grimsrud's rejection of imperialistic and colonial ways of knowing).

Milbank's interest in taking hold of reality and history by narrative means is self-avowedly coercive, both rhetorically and politically (even as he resists "dialectics" as inherently violent in *Theology and Social Theory*), and his desire to ensure the achievement of certain

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[255] For one helpful and historically sensitive summary of Anabaptist and Mennonite identities see John D. Roth and Steven M. Nolt, "The Anabaptist Tradition" *Reflections* Vols. 13-14 (2011-2012): 10-27. Among other main characteristics, Roth and Nolt suggest that in addition to being distinct from the Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed churches, historical Anabaptism is characterized by "a voluntary commitment that could not be coerced" (10).

teleological ends and the maintenance of certain essences necessarily involves the possessive and controlling management of certain categories kept in relations of enmity and antagonism against others (such as in his assumption that postmodernism is nihilism, and his corresponding reaction against perceived attacks from "secularism"). Mennonite theologians are more sensitive to the problems of coercion and persuasion than Milbank, but not always in a way consistent enough to openly challenge Milbank. Whereas Derksen, Doerksen, and Huebner make some note of this difference, without emphasizing its fundamental character, Blum's positive use of Derrida in his critique of Milbank and Kroeker's distinction between educative violence and suffering love both assist us in seeing more clearly the stakes of the debate.

By now it should be clear that Derrida's work in "Violence and Metaphysics" is in a complicated relation of both continuity and discontinuity with Mennonite "pacifist epistemology" and "ontological peace," both because of the explicit ways that Mennonites like Blum have used Derrida, and because of the deep thematic continuities and discontinuities between deconstructive and pacifist treatments of violence. In the introduction I pointed to the variety of colloquial and scholarly uses of the term "violence" and surveyed several thinkers who consider it to be a keyword that tells us more than it may first appear to. The term "violence" names social problems in ways that are simultaneously descriptive and normative, and because of its twofold nature it is also a helpful diagnostic concept that tells interpreters much about the values of its users and critics. As such, uses of the term "violence" in the debate between Milbank and Mennonite philosophical theologians reveal much about the values of their users, always containing an account – implicit or explicit – of a set of value-laden and violable boundaries that ought not to be crossed, some important questions that can help us to understand violence are: What are the boundaries that are violated when violence is done? What normative

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presuppositions undergird those boundaries? What priorities and values are protected by specific uses of the term?

So far, this study has presented a detailed commentary on Derrida's "Violence and Metaphysics" and situated Derrida's various uses of the term "violence" in relation to his values and priorities with some reference to his later work in "Force of Law" and "Before the Law." In Chapter 1 I highlighted how Derrida's use of the term "violence" appears in the context of his refusal of closure, totalization, and the oppositional disjunctions of classical metaphysics. When he uses the term "violence" to negate totalizing and essentializing movements of enclosure or binaristic ways of thinking and categorizing, this reflects his stated goals: to keep questions, problems, the other, and the future open (so that answers, solutions, the same, and the present do not foreclose them). In the service of this refusal of closure in the interest of openness Derrida uses the term "violence" to name ways of thinking and knowing that provide conclusive answers to questions, final solutions to problems, subsume the other into the same, and foreclose the possibilities of the future by privileging presence and the present. In keeping with the idea that violence will point to the priorities and values of its users, Chapter 1 demonstrated that Derrida uses the word "violence" in ways that indicate his desire to – very broadly speaking – keep things open, as exemplified by his statement: "the question must be maintained. As a question." (80.24/119). Here I refer to "things" in a very broad sense, including language, beings, discourse, the other, the future, and the metanarrative strategies by which we would order and pursue certain relations between origins, essences, and ends.

This pattern is evident when we attend to significant uses of the term in and around "Violence and Metaphysics." We can observe that Derrida uses the term "violence" to describe:

(1) the inscription of hierarchies within texts that attempt to govern them from without,[256] (2) classical philosophical oppositions that are constituted hierarchically rather than as a *vis a vis*,[257] (3) writing and language that name and classify by abstraction rather than through the vocative voice and proper names,[258] (4) self-destructive words and the absence of words in muteness and deafness,[259] (5) the way philosophy opposes itself to non-philosophy (79.8), (6) light that over-exposes the face of the other (85.9), (7) phenomenology, ontology, and the philosophical tradition that identifies light with power in a totalitarian preoccupation with sameness (91.35-37), (8) totalities that attempt to subsume within themselves their own origins and ends (95.8-9), (9) a solitary and mute glance that abstracts (99.31-33), (10) discourse, economy, the *logos*, and history (116-117), (11) the present and presence (133.11), (12) the stating and appearing of Being (147.9-10), (13) the verb 'to be' and predication (147.16-21), and (14) conceptual articulation (147.41-148.1).

This list of (at least) fourteen major instances when Derrida uses the term violence is helpful because it avoids the violence of abstraction that would seek to decontextualize his use of the term so as to come to a universal concept of Derridean violence, while at the same time avoiding the neutralizing and paralyzing effects of refusing summary altogether in the name of maintaining the irreducibility of the text.[260]

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[256] Jacques Derrida, *Positions*. Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 6.

[257] Ibid, 41.

[258] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Corr. Edition. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 112.

[259] Jacques Derrida, *Heidegger: The Question of Being and History.* Trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 87.

[260] By summarily surveying Derrida's uses of the term "violence" and suggesting that this tells us about his values, I follow Rodolphe Gasché's suggestion that we can interpret Derrida in ways that gather together his thought while

After moving from Derrida in Chapter 1 to the debate between Mennonites and Milbank in Chapter 2 we can now see that for Mennonites, the term "violence" is most often used in relation to the key value and priority of peace. Mennonite philosophical theologians and Milbank both want to place priority on peace by valuing it and locating it at an origin to which they could return. However, the Radical Reformation perspective and Radical Orthodoxy diverge in how they frame their return to an original peace and seek to achieve a future state of peace. Although both parties desire to return to a peaceful origin, Milbank conceives of this return through a relationship of enmity with a hostile secularism, which is antithetical to the Mennonite commitment to the transformation of conflict by means of "neither-nor," "both-and," "middle way," and "third way" mediations. I suggest that this more mediating Radical Reformation approach is simultaneously what allows Huebner to accommodate his work to Milbank's approach, and what allows Blum to consider Derrida's work as a positive resource for thinking about peace and violence rather than an enemy who advances a rival paradigm.

This is not to say that Derrida and the Mennonite philosophical theologians examined above are the same, for Derrida intervenes in and challenges the discipline of philosophy, and Mennonite philosophical theologians surveyed above are Christian theologians who – although they will sometimes use philosophical materials positively – maintain a normative commitment to the institution of the Christian church and the imitation of Jesus Christ. Nonetheless, their shared values are revealed by attention to their uses of the term "violence." Although the conversations they intervene in and the disciplines they both submit to and disrupt are very different, Derrida and the Mennonite philosophical theologians similarly refuse closure and seek

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still accounting for his critiques of totalization. See Rodolphe Gasché, *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida* (London: Harvard University Press, 1994), 20.

to keep their concepts open: Derrida states that "the question must be maintained. As a question." (80.24/119), and Huebner's "precarious" peace and Blum's "impossible" peace both reflect similar desires to avoid the foreclosure, totalization, and possession of their desired object in the possible achievement of peace. For Huebner, it would be a problem if Mennonites thought that they finally knew with certainty what peace was. For Blum, it would be a problem if Mennonites thought that achieving a pure peace without any violence was possible. These resistances to closure and totalization resonate with Derrida's refusal to temporally foreclose and spatially enclose the real differences of the other, the question, the problem, language, and the future.

However, as I observed in Chapter 1 concerning Derrida, it is also the case for several Mennonite philosophical theologians that the desire to keep peace from being possessed as a pure possibility contributes to an interesting paradox. A certain kind of self-defeating irony occurs when the desire to keep things open (Derrida) and peace impossible (Blum) and precarious (Huebner) turns back upon itself and makes openness, impossibility, and precarity necessary or even compulsory. Epistemic force, rhetorical power, and subtle coercion are dangers that haunt the desire for openness in the works of Derrida and certain Mennonite philosophical theologians, and the notion that one could "keep" something "open" always threatens to allow possessive resonances of the term "keep" to return in reified form and overwhelm the openness of the "open." This is something that Blum is aware of when he resists the tendency to allow the rejection of absolute foundations to become an absolute itself.

At the same time, the reactive notion that would assume that deconstructive or pacifist openness are compulsory, polemical, or universally normative in all of their expressions – a position that would reject them by appeal to the notion that they will force their readers to accept

their claims – is just as problematic. Milbank's reactive approach to postmodernism, in which he assumes that postmodern relativizations of truth necessarily lead to nihilism, makes this mistake. This is because the assumption that a truth-claim will necessarily displace its supposed opposite is not a sure indicator of whether it is, or will be, articulated in a way that actually does so. Common and problematic responses to both deconstruction and pacifism rest on the expectation that they will morally universalize their claims and therefore displace others in a competitive and zero-sum relationship. However, neither Derrida nor the Mennonite philosophical theologians seek to force their readers to accept the universal status of their claims, and yet their claims are not so relativized that they lose all ability to make normative and critical distinctions. As Peter Salmon argues in his new biography, Derrida was at pains to convince his interpreters that he was not a moral relativist.[261] And, as Blum consistently shows in his response to Milbank, "there is no vicious *reductio ad absurdum* lurking, ready to spring on us and render us unable to make any distinctions."[262] Instead, Derrida's deconstruction and Mennonite pacifist epistemology and ontological peace similarly proceed from the standpoint of particularity without resigning themselves to nihilism.

How we understand Derrida's deconstruction and Mennonite pacifism in relation to this problem is very important. We can misunderstand deconstruction and pacifism as inherently argumentative or polemical perspectives that would seek to force their conclusions upon their readers, and this misunderstanding would rest on the further assumption that these approaches *necessarily* relate to each other in a discursive environment of displacement in which the claims of one will necessarily be made at the expense of another. This ontology of displacement is not

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[261] Peter Salmon, *An Event, Perhaps: A Biography of Jacques Derrida* (London: Verso, 2020).

[262] Blum, *For a Church to Come*, 155.

something that either Derrida or Mennonite philosophical theologians advocate for, and it is far too simplistic to adequately describe their works. In fact, in implicit ways, both Derrida and the Mennonite philosophical theologians challenge an ontology of displacement – Derrida by his neither/nor refusal of philosophical oppositions that displace each other by violent hierarchies rather than a peaceful *vis-a-vis*, and the Mennonite philosophical theologians by their rejection of imperialistic and colonial epistemologies and their refusal of historical and contemporary theopolitical disjunctions by means of "neither-nor" negations, "both-and" inclusions, radical "third ways," and moderate "middle ways."

In light of these key mediations and their resistance to compulsory displacement I will conclude this chapter by highlighting the work of Blum, who calls for a kind of pacifism that says "no" to violence "even though this saying does not itself escape violence."[263] For Blum, it is not possible to purify oneself of complicity with violence. But this admission of entanglement with violence, even in the mere use of language, is not a paralytic, but it leads Blum toward an ontologically inflected pacifism that says "no" to violence in ways that oppose violence while trying to avoid repeating violence in that opposition. In the next chapter I show how Jantzen does something similar when she resists the displacing effects of the western obsession with death, but does so without attempting to replace one master discourse and grand narrative with another.

By contrast with Milbank, who argues that there is an original peace from which we diverge when we do violence, Blum affirms Derrida's idea that language is almost entirely violent, suggesting that although there may be no way to be purely apart from violence, his readers ought not consign themselves to the two bad options of "counterviolence" or "the

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[263] Blum, "Two Cheers for an Ontology of Violence, 153.

abdication of responsibility."[264] Instead of understanding pacifism as either passivity or ignorance of violence, Blum mediates between these two bad options and argues that there are ways to negate and resist violence without denying the presence of violence in the world and without using violence intentionally or in an attempt to remediate violence.

Blum's mediation between counterviolence and the abdication of responsibility is similar to Derrida's refusal of the binary structure of western metaphysics – his calling it "violent" and his desire to move apart from it in ways that avoid its tendency to dissolve opposition back into its oppositional framework. Despite their hesitation to endorse his supposed "ontology of violence," and despite their apparent affinities with Milbank, Mennonite rejections of violence and coercion, and refusals of disjunctive either-or thinking, are much closer to Derrida's work than they initially appear to be because of the shared values and priorities that underpin their respective ontologies of violence. To resist structures that try to force those under them into one of two options, both Derrida and Blum similarly refuse to be contained or constrained by questions of the form: is it *x* or *y*? Derrida meets philosophical oppositions with a "neither-nor" negation, and Blum meets the oppositional terms of Milbank with a "no" to violence that is neither passive nor violent.

Although both Derrida and the Mennonite philosophical theologians similarly resist movements of closure, Derrida's deconstructive refusal of classical philosophical oppositions by means of a neither-nor refusal is in many ways divergent from Mennonite philosophical theologies. The pursuit of peace and the imitation of Jesus Christ are not Derrida's goals. Nonetheless, Derrida and the Mennonite philosophical theologians similarly resist what I have called an ontology of displacement – a concept that I develop further below in Chapter 3 and the

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[264] Ibid.

Conclusion. I contend that Grace Jantzen's late project and its non-displacing approach to violence and history can clarify the ways that Derrida and certain Mennonite philosophical theologians refuse closure because of the unique way she attends to structural connections between the problems of displacement and violence. In the following chapter I will demonstrate how Jantzen shares with Derrida and the Mennonite philosophical theologians a resistance to the notion that competing ideas and discourses will necessarily displace each other in antagonistic, competitive, and possessive ways, but also how she moves beyond the negations and critiques of violence outlined above and toward new and constructive narratives.

CHAPTER 3.

Grace Jantzen's Critique of Violence in *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*

In this final chapter I turn to feminist philosopher of religion Grace M. Jantzen not only because, like Derrida and the Mennonites, she considers violence to be an ontological and epistemological problem, but also because her affinities with Mennonite pacifist epistemology, her resistance to Derrida's approach to violence, and her re-narration of the history of violence each rely upon an underlying critique of displacement that casts new light on the problems of violence delineated in the previous two chapters.

I begin by introducing the general contours of Jantzen's late work – especially her uses of the key terms "violence" and "displacement" and their connection to her narrative of the history of violence in *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* – before briefly highlighting her affinities with the Mennonites and examining her critique of Derrida's account of violence. In the second half of the chapter, I show how her resistance to an ontology of displacement – wherein competing ideas and discourses necessarily displace each other in antagonistic, competitive, and possessive ways – allows her to provide a counternarrative to the violent metanarratives of modernity that avoids some major problems with metanarratives, such as the tendency to order origins and ends in absolutizing, universalizing, and totalizing ways.

Born in 1948 and raised in a Mennonite church in Saskatchewan, Jantzen began her studies at the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Calgary, before pursuing her second doctorate at the University of Oxford where she produced a dissertation on "The Doctrine of Divine Incorporeality." Jantzen taught at King's College London, and then Manchester

University until her death in 2006 at the age of 57.[1] Her major works include *God's World, God's Body* (1984), *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism* (1995), *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (1998), and her best known book *Julian of Norwich* (1987, 2000, 2011).[2] From her early work in *God's World, God's Body* to her later work in *Becoming Divine*, Jantzen emphasized the manifestation of the divine in the world, while conceiving of the world as the body of God and attributing to the divine a mystical love that challenges patriarchy and violence (as exemplified by Hadewijch and Julian of Norwich).[3]

In the final years of her life Jantzen embarked on an ambitious and wide-ranging project spanning ancient Greek and Roman thought, Jewish and Christian theologies, and French philosophies of postmodernity. The project was named *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*, and of the planned six volumes, three are extant.[4] *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* provides a philosophical and theological history of violence by locating the roots of violence in the western obsession with death and the corresponding displacement of beauty. Although Jantzen published only the first volume during her lifetime, Morny Joy and Jeremy Carrette

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[1] For further biographical details see the obituary by Jeremy Carrette, "Grace M. Jantzen: A feminist voice expanding the philosophy of religion," *The Guardian*. May 11, 2006.

[2] Grace M. Jantzen, *God's World, God's Body* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Grace M. Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), and Grace M. Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich* (London: SPCK, original 1987, 2nd Ed. 2000, reissued 2011). In the last few years of her life Jantzen completed a dissertation by her student Hanneke Canters called *Forever Fluid: A Reading of Luce Irigaray's Elemental Passions*. Published after Canters' death, the co-authored text appeared in a book series Jantzen edited for the Manchester University Press (2006). See Hanneke Canters and Grace M. Jantzen, *Forever Fluid: A Reading of Luce Irigaray's Elemental Passions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

[3] For a helpful survey see Morny Joy, "Grace M. Jantzen and the Work of Love: Preamble" in *Grace M. Jantzen: Redeeming the Present*. Ed. Elaine L. Graham (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009).

[4] See Jeremy Carrette, "'In the Name of Life!' Psychoanalysis and Grace M. Jantzen's Critique of Philosophy" in *Grace M. Jantzen: Redeeming the Present.* He writes that "In the papers she left after her death, Jantzen's original Routledge proposal for the intended six-volume study mapped out – as she promised in the first published volume – a fifth volume on psychoanalysis; which was to be entitled *The Desire of Psychoanalysis*." (p. 69).

edited two further volumes for posthumous publication, resulting in a trilogy that consists of *Foundations of Violence* (2004), *Violence to Eternity* (2009), and *A Place of Springs* (2010).[5]

In her 2002 article "Roots of Violence, Seeds of Peace," published in a special issue of the *Conrad Grebel Review* that collected responses to the September 9/11 attacks, Jantzen clearly summarizes her approach to violence, foreshadowing much of her later work in the *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* project.[6] Like Derrida and the Mennonites, Jantzen is concerned with the underlying epistemological and ontological character of violence, and she "propose[s] to look again, not so much at the particular outbreaks of violence, worrying as they are, but at its root system, the labyrinth of aggression and violence which springs up in destruction and warfare."[7] Jantzen suggests that the roots of violence lie in what she calls "the master discourses of modernity," arguing that her readers ought to challenge the natural status of violence as it is produced and reproduced in both language and history. In short, she states that her aim is "to show how violence has been naturalized and how it can be denaturalized, exposing its tangled roots to make way for seeds of peace."[8]

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[5] Grace M. Jantzen, *Foundations of Violence*: *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*. Volume I (London: Routledge, 2004), *Violence to Eternity*: *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*. Volume II. Ed. Jeremy Carrette and Morny Joy (London: Routledge, 2009); *A Place of Springs: Death and the Displacement of Beauty*. Volume II. Ed. Jeremy Carrette and Morny Joy (London: Routledge, 2010). All references will appear in-text in brackets, marked first by DD, then by volume number, then by page number.

[6] In addition to "Roots of Violence, Seeds of Peace," another essay that covers many of the major themes of Jantzen's trilogy is "On Changing the Imaginary" in *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*. Ed. Graham Ward (London: Blackwell, 2005) 280-293.

[7] Grace M. Jantzen, "Roots of Violence, Seeds of Peace" *Conrad Grebel Review* 20.2 (Spring 2002), 4.

[8] Ibid, 5.

Jantzen agrees with French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu that the western cultural habitus "produces history on the basis of history."[9] The word "habitus" is a widely used sociological term referring to the sum of habituated dispositions picked up in the mimetic processes of socialization. For Bourdieu, the habitus is a term for the common-sense world of "structured, structuring dispositions" which are "oriented toward practical functions."[10] In his attempt to account for how the habitus continues to reproduce itself, Bourdieu argues that its principles and dispositions are structured by a kind of regularity and regulation that gives it a "teleological" character and makes the reproduction of the dispositions of the habitus seem necessary and natural.[11] Bourdieu argues that "being the product of a particular class of objective regularities, the *habitus* tends to generate all the 'reasonable,' 'common-sense' behaviours (and only these) which are possible within the limits of these regularities, and which are likely to be positively sanctioned because they are objectively adjusted to the logic characteristic of a particular field, whose objective future they anticipate."[12] At the same time, the habitus also excludes many thoughts and behaviours that are incompatible with it, rendering them unthinkable and unimaginable. For Bourdieu, the habitus is "embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history."[13] Jantzen intervenes in this cyclical internalization and reproduction of the habitus by arguing that the western habitus is characteristically violent, and that violence is not inherent to human nature, but something that is only made to seem natural. Her resistance to

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[9] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice.* Trans. R. Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 56. Quoted in Jantzen, "Roots of Violence, Seeds of Peace," 5.

[10] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 52.

[11] Ibid, 53.

[12] Ibid, 55-56.

[13] Ibid, 56.

the reproduction of the natural and inevitable status of violence is a key part of the critique of Derrida that she provides in *Violence to Eternity*, and it is also important for the non-displacing approach she takes to the history of the west throughout the three volumes of her late project.

In "Roots of Violence, Seeds of Peace" Jantzen summarizes her general critique of the master discourses of modernity by challenging several influential ideas and paradigms, including the Christian notion of original sin, the Hobbesian political story that that humanity is in a war of all against all, the Darwinian biological idea that natural selection is analogous to war, the Hegelian philosophical idea that self-consciousness is analogous to a life and death struggle, and the Freudian psychoanalytic idea that aggression is instinctual and therefore natural.

Jantzen's sweeping critique of these master discourses of modernity (theological, political, biological, philosophical, psychoanalytic) is ambitious and wide-ranging, and risks falling into the problems of metanarrative positioning that we explored in the previous chapter. However, part of Jantzen's argument in this essay is that the vastness of each discourse she critiques has prevented clear sighted reflection on how "each discourse asserts the centrality of aggression to human nature," and has done so without adequately evaluating the empirical evidence required to back up that claim.[14] Jantzen rejects the notion that we can assume that because violence is ubiquitous it is definitive of human nature. For Jantzen, the assumption that human beings are naturally violent is self-reinforcing and must be challenged by therapeutic projects of denaturalization that challenge the inevitability of violence.

Derrida, the Mennonites, and Jantzen each situate violence in the world, but Jantzen's resistance to its naturalization is exceptional not so much because she seeks to deprive violence of its supposedly natural and inevitable status, but because of *how* she sets out to do so through a

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[14] Jantzen, "Roots of Violence, Seeds of Peace," 15.

careful non-displacing approach. Jantzen's commitment to the denaturalization of violence is as much about ontologies that make violence seem natural as it is about accompanying metanarratives that make violence seem inevitable – especially where appeals to the temporal and historical inevitability of violence are used to foreclose the myriad possibilities of peaceful and nonviolent sociability. But how does Jantzen's work stand in relation to the ontologies of violence explored in the first two chapters above? Below I recapitulate the arguments of the previous chapter and show how Jantzen's work provides them with a critical complement, before moving on to a brief exploration of Jantzen's affinities with the Mennonites and an analysis of her critique of Derrida.

Above I have shown how Derrida and certain Mennonite philosophical theologians address the ontological and epistemological problem of violence in contrasting ways that conceal similar priorities and values. Whereas Derrida considers violence to be endemic within language and categorization in ways that challenge Lévinas, several of the Mennonite theologians surveyed above sympathize with Milbank's notion that there is an original ontological order of peace that violence violates. At the same time, both Derrida and the Mennonite philosophical theologians use the term "violence" to reject movements of totalization and closure, both temporally and spatially. The Mennonite philosophical theologians challenge uses of force, violence, and coercion by those who attempt to make history turn out right, and Derrida challenges the violent enclosure of concepts and foreclosure of the future. But Derrida and the Mennonite philosophical theologians express this shared value of openness in different ways.

Whereas Derrida avoids positing an original peace from which violence deviates and to which one could return, the Mennonite philosophical theologians sympathize with efforts to ground peace ontologically in an origin to which one could radically return. The contrast

between the Radical Reformation perspective of Mennonite philosophical theologians and the Radical Orthodoxy of Milbank further shows how these ontological and epistemological uses of the term "violence" stand in relation to metanarrative configurations of relationships between origins, essences, and ends. Milbank defines violence as deviation from an essence or diversion from a telos, and his theology is defined by an oppositional metanarrative that seeks to return to a time before secularism while forcibly opposing it in the present. By contrast, Mennonite approaches are more conciliatory, less oppositional, and more open to seeing secular and philosophical thinkers as positive sources of truth in the shared process of cultural peace-making.

In further contrast with Milbank, the Mennonite theologians explored in Chapter 2 above refuse to provide a singular metanarrative that would allow them to position a final or original definition of either peace or violence. Huebner's refusal to make history turn out right and Blum's anti-foundationalism stand in stark contrast with Milbank's grand narrative of peaceful origins, stable essences, certain ends, and justified but tragically violent means toward those ends. That said, the restitutionist narrative of original peace, Constantinian fall, and radical recovery, is influential for the Mennonite philosophical theologians interpreted in Chapter 2.

Huebner and Blum respond differently, however, to Milbank's metanarrative. For Huebner, Milbank's ontology of peace is persuasive because it is founded on an ontology of givenness and seeks to "save theology from its own secular tendencies."[15] But, as I argued in the previous chapter, Huebner's positive appraisal of Milbank does not adequately account for the sharp differences between Huebner's own stated affirmation of precarity and the methodological violence, tragic justifications, and politics of enmity that Milbank uses in his opposition to

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[15] Chris K. Huebner, *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006), 84.

secularism. By contrast, and distinct from Mennonite theologians who would write off

deconstruction as a form of nihilism, Blum sympathizes with how Derrida questions whether we

can ever be separate from violence and uses Derrida's notion of undecidability to develop a

notion of impossible peace. For Blum, peace is not possible to achieve in pure terms, but it is still

possible to articulate a "no" to violence that meaningfully resists violence, even if that negation

appears as violence to some interpreters.[16]

Although Mennonite theologians like Derksen and Huebner avoid directly challenging

Milbank's relegation of Derrida to secular heresy and affirm the general orientation of Radical

Orthodoxy, others like Schlabach and Doerksen see in Milbank a methodological violence that

wrongly seeks to justify violent means by appeal to the tragic and fallen state of the world.

Kroeker's distinction between educative violence and suffering love further helps us to see

exactly where many expressions of Mennonite pacifism part ways with Milbank. Once the

divergences in the accounts of violence provided by Milbank and the Mennonite philosophical

theologians come into focus it is possible to see key similarities between the values of Derrida

and the Mennonite philosophical theologians, the most important of which is their shared value

of openness and corresponding use of the term "violence" as a name for totalizing movements of

spatial enclosure and temporal foreclosure.

Both Derrida and the Mennonite theologians examined above understand themselves to

be resisting oppositional and dualistic thinking (which is not to say that they successfully escape

all dualisms, but only that they desire to do so). I suggest that this exemplifies their mutual

prioritization of the opening of discourse and their shared refusal of ontologies and

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[16] Peter C. Blum, *For a Church to Come: Experiments in Postmodern Theory and Anabaptist Thought* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2013), 153, 159.

epistemologies that circumscribe and enforce knowable relationships between origins, essences, and ends. Despite Mennonite affinities with Milbank (who reduces Derrida's complex work to postmodern nihilism), Derrida and the Mennonite philosophical theologians share similar values (openness, resistance to closure and totalization) and similar means toward those values (undecidable mediations, and resistances to oppositional thinking). One major point of unity between Derrida and the Mennonite philosophical theologians is that they refuse disjunctive modes of categorization that divide the world into friends and enemies or truth and nihilism, and further question the underlying ontology of such divisions by challenging ontologies and metanarratives of displacement.

As I suggest at the conclusion of Chapter 2 above, an ontology of displacement is one that construes relationships between things in *necessarily* or *inevitably* possessive, antagonistic, and competitive ways that respond to difference with the assumption that of two differing terms, one must hold a dominant place over the other. This spatial ontology of violence in which some things will always dis-place others often correlates with a temporal and historical metanarrative that configures relationships between origins, essences, and ends in similarly zero-sum ways (for example, Milbank's implication that an essence is what it is until it is made to violently deviate, and his related implication that a thing has a singular telos from which it can be diverted or toward which it can be ordered or coerced). Derrida and the Mennonite philosophical theologians challenge such spatial ontologies and historical metanarratives of displacement by means of their key refusals and mediations, and in their desire to keep matters open and avoid closure and totalization.

However, neither Derrida nor the Mennonite philosophical theologians position their critical negations within positive counter-metanarratives that oppose that which they critique.

Derrida's work is marked by an effort to show how deconstruction is always already at work in philosophical oppositions and texts, and Blum's essay concludes with the suggestion that there are ways to resist violence that say "no" in challenging ways that may be taken as violence. But neither Derrida nor Blum make a strong case for positive, creative, and constructive alternatives to the problems that they delineate. Derrida's deconstruction is a process of unworking that attempts to negate and resist the metaphysics of presence and the violent hierarchies of classical philosophical oppositions, and none of the Mennonite philosophical theologians examined above are ready to provide a strong assertion or positive story about what exactly peace is without following it with precarious and impossible relativizations. For example, Blum's anti-foundationalism would prevent him from decisively re-founding Mennonite peace theology upon a new narrative, and Huebner's disestablishing approach prohibits him from building up a distinctive and assertive Mennonite theology.

By contrast, in *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* Jantzen argues that the cultural habitus of the west is founded on an obsessive relationship with death and mortality that violently displaces beauty and natality, while at the same time suggesting new redemptive values and counter-narratives. Jantzen's work re-emphasizes the social potential of creativity and birth and takes a therapeutic approach to the social imaginary and cultural habitus that systematically resists the conjoined notions that violence is natural and inevitable. For Jantzen, violence is the main feature of the cultural habitus of the west, from its Jewish, Christian, Greek, and Roman origins through modernity to postmodernity, most evident in an obsessive fear and love of death that fixates on mortality, and correspondingly displaces beauty, birth, and creativity. However, the way that Jantzen uses the term violence to describe this history and its perpetuation in the habitus is far more complex than it might initially appear. Rather than simply re-narrating the

history of violence in a way that attempts to replace, displace, or powerfully overcome the histories of violence she challenges, Jantzen's approach provides a new counter-metanarrative that challenges the displacing effect of dominating and hegemonic metanarratives (what she sometimes calls "master discourses").

The Problem of Metanarratives

Below I argue that Jantzen's affinities with the Mennonites, her critique of Derrida, and her positive counter-metanarrative of the history of violence, are each founded on a critique of ontologies of displacement. I further suggest that Jantzen's critique of displacement resonates with the stated values of Derrida and the Mennonites, especially their resistance to movements of closure and totalization. However, the problem of metanarratives persists throughout *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* in ways that require closer attention. Putting this problem into focus, in a recent article Morny Joy writes that,

> Jantzen was aware that, as in other aspects of her explorations, she was playing somewhat fast and loose with her observations. She admitted that her project would be a 'long story' in an era where grand narratives remain dubious; where she will omit including topics that might merit inclusion; where she will crisscross disciplinary lines; and finally, she will infringe in fields external to her own discipline.[17]

This statement of the problem helpfully assists us in asking an important question: in her sweeping revision of the habitus of the west over the course of the *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* trilogy, is Jantzen in fact trading one metanarrative for another, and thereby falling back into the problems she identified in the master discourses of modernity? Some initial indications are provided by Jantzen herself, who writes:

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[17] Morny Joy, "Violence, Vulnerability, Precariousness, and their Contemporary Modifications" *Sophia* 59 (2020): 19-30. See also, on the reconfiguration of "the imaginary" in the works of Pamela Sue Anderson (and Michèle Le Doeuff), Morny Joy, "Pamela Sue Anderson's Journeying with Paul Ricoeur" *Angelaki* 25 (2020): 84-96.

> my project runs across some academic currents and conventions. I am telling a long story, a story that will take several books to complete, at a time when grand narratives are suspect; even then I am leaving out many things which could well have been included. I am crossing all sorts of disciplinary boundaries, transgressing in fields outside of my expertise, and inviting readers to go with me in that transgression. Nobody can be expert in all fields, and inevitably different readers will find different parts to their taste. Inevitably, too, I will make mistakes; I hope that readers will point them out for correction in subsequent editions. The important thing, though, is that the issues are raised in such a way that they become part of collective discussion; that we do not turn our eyes away from either beauty or violence; that we begin to hear what each says to the other; that there may be healing and hope. (DD, I, viii)

This statement by Jantzen shows us, her readers, that she is aware of the risks of falling back into the problems of metanarratives in her attempt to critique a metanarrative of violence. But what exactly are the problems of metanarratives that Jantzen was responding to, and how does the problem of metanarratives stand in relation to the postmodern?

The problems of metanarratives to which Jantzen responded are best approached by looking briefly at the works of Jean-Francois Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, and Perry Anderson on the nature of postmodernity. In *The Postmodern Condition* Lyotard famously defines the postmodern as a legitimation problem brought on by "incredulity toward metanarratives."[18] Against modern legitimation strategies that rely upon appeals to a "metadiscourse" or "grand narratives," the postmodern (on Lyotard's account) is defined by incredulity – a sort of questioning mistrust.[19] He writes: "Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable."[20] In the context of the technical and scientific transformations of knowledge following the scientific and industrial revolutions, Lyotard emphasizes the role of narrative in the

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[18] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.* Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1984), xxiv.

[19] Ibid, xxiii.

[20] Ibid, xxv.

legitimation of knowledge, and at the same time laments the decline of narrative and the rise of

technical epistemologies that privilege means over ends.[21] Lyotard, however, not only diagnoses

these knowledge problems, but also normatively rejects the desire to "seize reality," proclaiming:

"Let us wage war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unpresentable; let us activate the

differences and save the honor of the name."[22]

For critics who concern themselves with the postmodern and its incredulity toward

metanarratives following Lyotard, the question of which modernity the postmodern succeeds by

means of its powerful prefix is central. For Jameson, the postmodern is not only an aesthetic and

architectural category that responds to aesthetic modernism, but more importantly it is an

historical and periodizing marker of the breakdown of capitalism and "a symptom of the deeper

structural changes in our society and its culture as a whole, or in other words, the mode of

production."[23] Elsewhere, Jameson considered the postmodern to be a response to modernism

that "looks for breaks, for events rather than new worlds."[24] Emphasizing its historical and

historicizing character, Jameson suggests that postmodernism is a periodizing concept that

represents a new social order.[25] Unlike Lyotard who identified a movement away from narrative

in the postmodern shift, Jameson identifies the postmodern as an "unforeseeable return of

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[21] Ibid, 37.

[22] Ibid, 82.

[23] Fredric Jameson, "The Antinomies of Postmodernity [Original 1994]" in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern* (London: Verso, 1998), 50.

[24] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), x.

[25] Ibid, xi-xiii.

narrative as the narrative of the end of narratives" – a story that both presupposes and uses breaks and continuities in its effort to make the past serve the present.[26]

For Lyotard and Jameson, postmodernism is a periodizing term that relies upon an intellectual history of modernism. As Perry Anderson says in his extended response to Jameson, "'Postmodernism' as a term and idea presupposes the currency of 'modernism'," which Anderson suggests is defined by the failures of the colonial project and the contradictions between industrialism and nationalism.[27] Anderson's work, although critical of Lyotard in some respects, also locates the postmodern in the context of a decline in the social bonds of trust that underpin language and society.[28] Amidst his account of the postmodern, Anderson highlights Lyotard's suggestion that the temporary and mixed character of the postmodern is a good thing because "any pure alternative to the [modern] system would fatally come to resemble what it sought to oppose."[29] This is the very problem that Derrida was at pains to address in his desire to oppose philosophical oppositions without being subsumed into the structure of opposition, and this suggestion that postmodern narratives struggle to oppose modern metanarratives without reproducing their problems is further analogous to Jantzen's critique of displacement.

This open question of whether the problem of metanarratives, as identified by postmodern theorists, recurs within Jantzen's resistance to metanarratives will guide my analysis of her work for the rest of this chapter, especially in its second half when I analyze the narrative arc of *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* by attending to its key images and distinctions. But

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1998), 3-5.

[28] Ibid, 25.

[29] Ibid, 26.

before proceeding to show exactly how Jantzen's grand story is both vulnerable to and protected from the problems of metanarratives, I will show how her work intersects with the Mennonites, how she critiques Derrida, and how her concepts of "violence" and "displacement" are interconnected.

Jantzen and the Mennonites

Jantzen's work resonates significantly with the pacifist epistemologies of the Mennonite thinkers examined in Chapter 2 above. Apart from the general notion that violence cannot be solved by means of violence – an idea that she shares with the Mennonite critique of redemptive violence – Jantzen's clearest stated affinities are present in her posthumous *A Place of Springs* where she affirms the Mennonite commitments to peace and justice. She writes:

> The peace churches of the Radical Reformation, which continue today as Mennonites and Quakers, are committed not only to refuse to participate in war but to do all they can to promote justice and peace so that war becomes unnecessary. Movements of nonviolent resistance such as that led by Martin Luther King in the USA and Desmond Tutu in South Africa, while owing much to the teachings of Gandhi, also drew deeply on Christian resources. (DD, III, 21)

Beyond this – which is the only mention of the Radical Reformation in her trilogy – Jantzen is closest to the Mennonite pacifist epistemologies of Huebner and Blum when she argues against the ways that violent terms become definitive of the ways we understand discourse.

As she did in *Becoming Divine*, in *Foundations of Violence* Jantzen argues that the "adversarial method" characteristic of analytic philosophy is a symptom of an underlying methodological problem that cuts across philosophical (and as we will see, theological) traditions (DD, I, 15).[30] Against the "intellectual aggression" of analytic philosophy in which "positions are

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[30] See Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, 3.

advanced, attacked, defended, embattled, or shot down in flames" Jantzen enjoins her readers to consider cooperation, risk, and vulnerability as better images for discourse (DD, I, 15). Working to transform the habitus and the "imaginary," she writes that "If the language we use indicates what we are and shapes what we become, then the ubiquitous language of violence is a worrying symptom of the necrophilia of modernity" (DD, I, 16).

A major commonality between Jantzen's critique and the work of Huebner and Blum – as well as Early and Grimsrud's extension of Yoder's pacifist epistemology – is the notion that discourse and conversation ought not be conceptualized by enmity and antagonism. Rather than characterizing discourse as war (as Derrida does in a complex and non-normative sense),[31] Mennonite philosophical theologians like Huebner and Blum attempt to reconfigure discourse using more peaceful terms like gift-exchange, precarity, and impossibility – terms that, although they have transformative potential, can also conceal significant conflicts of values.

Jantzen's work is resonant with the Mennonite desire for a peaceful discourse, but also goes beyond it. Although her work is framed by the idea that violence is an ontological and epistemological problem, Jantzen is uniquely sensitive to ways of thinking that restrict violence to the ontological or epistemological domains, or use the term violence in ways that abstract from or distract from what she argues the term ought to name. This places Jantzen close to Judith Butler's recent work in which a major precondition for understanding violence is accounting for the problems of sexual violence and rape.[32] Jantzen's desire to sharply name and condemn both

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[31] Derrida writes in "Violence and Metaphysics," that "There is war only after the opening of discourse, and war dies out only at the end of discourse." (116/170). However, this statement is situated in the context of his challenge to Lévinas and in relation to his desire to keep discourse open, and not as part of what Milbank construes as a secular ontology of violence in which all differences are negative. See Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," in *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

[32] Judith Butler, *The Force of Non-Violence: An Ethico-Political Bind* (London: Verso, 2020), 2.

ontological and epistemological violences and corporeal manifestations of violence – without doing so at the expense of each other – is a key part of her resistance to Derrida's work in "Violence and Metaphysics" where she rejects Derrida's statement "predication is the first violence."

Jantzen's Critique of Derrida

In *Violence to Eternity* Jantzen argues that when Derrida suggests language is violent, the term "violence" no longer serves to distinguish "the force of an argument and the force of a bomb" (DD, II, 18). Citing Derrida's claim in "Violence and Metaphysics" that "violence appears with *articulation*,"[33] Jantzen goes on to suggest that in these formulations "the language of violence has lost its moorings." (DD, II, 24). Jantzen's attention to the forcible, physical, and corporeal presence of violence in the present, which relies upon her notion that violence is not inherent or inevitable and can therefore be resisted, stands in sharp contrast with Derrida's uses of the term to describe language, ontology, history, economy, and articulation. Although Jantzen cites Derrida positively throughout her works – for example, in the closing argument of her *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* where she praises the methodology of deconstruction and considers it to share affinities with mysticism because it challenges all categories[34] – Jantzen also wants to resist the ways in which Derrida uses the term "violence."

I turn now to the early chapters of *Violence to Eternity* in order to situate Jantzen's critique of Derrida in relation to her greater challenge to the inevitability and naturalization of violence. In the first chapter of *Violence to Eternity* Jantzen addresses several problematic

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[33] Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," 147-148.

[34] Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, 350-353. See also Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, 10, 74-75.

definitions of violence, asking "Could there be creation without violence?" and arguing that "if

we say that *every* exertion of force is violent, then the effect is to evacuate the term 'violence' of

all specific meaning" (DD, II, 17-18). Jantzen then contests two definitions of violence:

"everything is violent" and "boundaries are violent" (DD, II, 17 and 19).

 The first definition of violence is something that Jantzen uses to represent Hent de Vries'

statement:

> Violence, in both the widest possible, and most elementary senses of the word, entails
> any cause, any justified or illegitimate force, that is exerted – physically or otherwise –
> by one thing (event or instance, group or person, and, perhaps, word and object) on
> another.[35]

Jantzen argues that the problem with this basic definition of violence (one that we can recognize

as both epistemological and ontological) is that it includes "nonphysical" phenomena and

"includes words" in such a way that "nothing is left out. Everything is violent. Creation is

violent; so is destruction. Religion is violent; but religion is also the 'counterforce' to violence."

(DD, II, 18). Here lies one critique of violence shared by Jantzen and Blum. Both Jantzen and

Blum respond to uses of the term "violence" that universalize violence ("everything is violent")

assuming that they will relativize violence ("if everything is violent, then nothing is violent").

 Jantzen's concerns are difficult to square with Derrida's use of the term in "Violence and

Metaphysics" because she insists that the term "violence" not be used to describe all acts of

creation, distinction, and force, and further insists that the term ought to remain usable for

distinguishing between language and physical destruction. However, as I argued in Chapter 1, it

cannot be so simple as to read "Violence and Metaphysics" and accuse Derrida of saying

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[35] Hent de Vries, *Religion and Violence: Philosophical Perspectives from Kant to Derrida* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 1.

"everything is violent" in a way that would close down or restrict consideration of problems, questioning, difference, the other, language, the future, and discourse.

However, in the interest of critically analyzing their claims, we should ask again whether Derrida really suggests that everything is violent, or if his uses of the term suggest that although there may be some violence in everything, not every thing is completely characterizable by the term "violence." Derrida's examples of speech without violence – which invoke, adore, and proffer proper nouns – give evidence that he does not consider all things, or all language, to be completely definable by the term "violence." This seriously calls into question Jantzen's reading of Derrida. Although Derrida does not use the term "violence" to distinguish between sentences and bombs in the way that Jantzen calls for, Derrida also does not equate the two or explicitly use the term violence to universalize, totalize, or enclose. Instead, Derrida's uses of the term occur in the context of his values, reflecting his desires to resist closure and maintain openness.

Jantzen's critique of the notion that all things are violent is not limited to the initial charge she lays against de Vries (and by implication, against Derrida). She writes further that "although it is important to be aware of ambiguities, it also seems to me that it is vitally important to have tools for discrimination between violence and non-violence, between those exertions of force, physical or not, which are destructive, and those which are creative." (DD, II, 18). Jantzen's major concern with universalizing definitions of violence is not that they include nonphysical phenomena under the category of violence, but that by their use "The force of an argument and the force of a bomb would be the same, in quality if not in quantity." (DD, II, 18). Clearly de Vries would not argue this point either, but for Jantzen the problem with the generic definition is its lack of helpful criteria for distinguishing between "the ways in which religion

fosters or colludes in the escalating violence of the world, and also the ways in which religion can make for peace." (DD, II, 18).[36]

Following from her critique of universalizing uses of the term violence, Jantzen turns to the work of Regina Schwartz in *The Curse of Cain* and resists the notion that boundaries are inherently violent.[37] For Schwartz, violence is present in constructions of identity that proceed by means of distinction and separation from an other, such that drawing boundaries would be the most basic act of violence. Jantzen thinks that this is a deeply misguided definition of violence and argues instead that violence occurs "not when difference is *defined* but when difference is perceived as *dangerous*, so that hierarchies are imposed and force is exerted to keep hierarchies in place" (DD, II, 19. italics in original).[38]

Jantzen further recounts Derrida's work in "Violence and Metaphysics" by stating that "Only complete silence could be nonviolent; as soon as one speaks, or conceptualizes meaning, even to ascertain need and appropriate response, one has entered the realm of predication" (DD, II, 24). We should pause here to recall that although in "Violence and Metaphysics" Derrida states that the only speech that would be nonviolent is the invocative call (147.21/218), he also prohibits any pure separation from violence (146.39/218). This prohibition, however, has consequences that Jantzen seeks to dispute. Her criticism of the reductive generalization "everything is violent" continues, and she states that "if *everything* is violent, if no response can

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[36] In an earlier version of this section, Jantzen suggests that *thanatos* is part of this violence. Compare *Violence to Eternity* (18-19) with "Thanatos and the Passion for Transformation," *Temenos* 42.1 (2006), 77.

[37] Regina Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). Schwartz asserts that "imagining identity as an act of distinguishing and separating from others, of boundary making and line drawing, is the most frequent and fundamental act of violence we commit." (5)

[38] This formulation resonates with the work of Audre Lorde, especially in "Scratching the Surface: Some Notes on Barriers to Women and Loving" [Original 1978] in *Your Silence Will Not Protect You* (London: Silver Press, 2017).

escape the economy of war, then the language of violence has effectively been lost as a tool for discriminating between responses" (DD, II, 24).

For Jantzen, something essential is lost when the term violence is given "universal scope" (de Vries) or is defined solely as differentiation (Schwartz) (DD, II, 21). Jantzen suggests that Derrida "encapsulates Lévinas' position" when he writes that "Predication is the first violence." (DD, II, 22). For Jantzen, Lévinas seeks to overcome the violence of conceptualization with ethics, but Derrida resists this movement by arguing that Lévinas's ethics cannot escape violent conceptualization. Jantzen states,

> Derrida shows that even to recognize the other, to respond to their particularity, requires that they are in some sense named, seen as individual and differentiated from others, not least in their specific need. But this means that the response is to that extent at least a linguistic and conceptual one; and hence, on Lévinas' terms, violent. (DD, II, 23-24)

Jantzen argues that in "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida has used the term violence so universally that it has lost its ability to distinguish between responses to violence, because "if our language places naming and killing on the same footing, something has gone badly wrong." (DD, II, 24-25). Jantzen's critique of Derrida is most fundamentally concerned with the problem of using the term "violence" to describe language and its conceptualization. In sum, Jantzen challenges the notion that she sees in Derrida that "every concept, every distinction or differentiation, is violent from the ground up" (DD, II, 23).

On one hand, Jantzen's critique of Derrida responds to the problematic fact that his use of the term "violence" does not directly assist in the task of naming material and corporeal violence – the very phenomena that give the term weight in the first place, and the phenomena that Judith Butler helpfully suggests are essential to account for in any rigorous conceptualization of the term "violence." In the interest of refocusing on the here and now in the name of natality, rather than seeking refuge in other worlds as in the obsession with death and mortality, Jantzen insists

that the term "violence" be responsible and responsive to the present presence of bombs. However, given the work of Chapter 1 above, there is no reason to think that Derrida intends to emphasize the ubiquity of violence in language *at the expense* of its material presence, as if saying that violence is everywhere would prohibit us from saying that it is also somewhere. In fact, Jantzen's critique of Derrida risks reacting to his suggestion that we cannot free language from violence with the assumption that his statements necessarily displace uses of the term "violence" that name and distinguish between the force of a sentence and the force of a bomb.

As I outlined in the introduction, however, the distinction between physical and linguistic means of violence is often very slight. As in the case of drone warfare, there is very little distance in time between the dropping of a bomb and the sentence that commands it. The origin of material violence in a sentence that commands it, and the end of violence in the dropping of a bomb, are not inherently or essentially separate, such that they would always require a hard distinction achieved by the splicing effect of the term "violence." That said, in keeping with Jantzen, we should nonetheless want to distinguish between the force of ordinary sentences and the force of a bomb in cases where they are indeed separate, for not every threatening command intends or results in a bombing.

Given the centrality of this problem for Jantzen and Derrida, I suggest that in order to access the fine distinctions between the violence in and of words, and the violence in and of bombs, it is vital to revisit the problem of metanarratives – for it is the temporal and historical narration of stories that configure the relationship between origins and ends that plays a determining role in how we understand violence and its displacing strategies and effects. Jantzen's desire to use the term "violence" to distinguish between the force of a sentence and the force of a bomb requires one to narrate and periodize a relationship between the origin of

violence in words and the ends of violence in actions. How we narrate where violence begins and ends is as important as how we might endow it with an essential definition. This is why Jantzen's critique of violence and her re-narration of the violent history of the west are so important, for the ontological and metanarrative aspects of her thought both rest upon her resistance to displacement in ways that I will demonstrate below through a reading of these two key terms (violence and displacement), and then an analysis of her trilogy's arc.

Violence in *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*

In the spirit of Derrida's desire to keep questions open here I will pose an open question: What is violence for Jantzen? To find answers to this question – in keeping with my methodological approach through which I consider the term "violence" to point to boundaries that reflect values and priorities – I will look to the specific instances of her uses of the term, focusing on the first volume of the trilogy.

Although she does not rely upon a singular definition of the term, in *Foundations of Violence* Jantzen uses the term "violence" frequently in reference to a constellation of related social problems. Appearing over 400 times in the book, Jantzen uses "violence" to describe various terms such as the world (DD, I, vii), language (DD, I, 14), ugliness (DD, I, vii) and digital technology (DD, I, 4). However, by tracing the most common associations with key surrounding terms, we can identify several major definitional loci. Jantzen considers violence to be defined by the love, obsession (dread and desire), or preoccupation with death (DD, I, vii, viii, 90, 91). Jantzen also considers violence to be dissonant with or contrary to the newness of natality, beauty, and creativity (DD, I, vii, viii, 3, 6, 35, 38). The term "violence" often appears in the context of her argument that mortality displaces natality in the cultural habitus of the west.

Jantzen attributes violence to various social terms such as the modern western "symbolic," "habitus," and "imaginary" (DD, I, viii, 5, 10, 15, 20, 21, 26, 29, 35, 52, 98).

In her own words of summary, Jantzen writes that "My central claim in all this is that the language of violence whether at academic or popular levels, is indicative of structures of a symbolic within which violence and death are unthinkingly chosen as apt metaphors for a vast range of causes and activities." (DD, I, 15). Although Jantzen has concerns about Derrida's use of the term "violence" to describe language in universalizing and obfuscating ways, she nonetheless highlights the ways that language is imbricated with violence, writing that "If the language we use indicates what we are and shapes what we become, then the ubiquitous language of violence is a worrying symptom of the necrophilia of modernity." (DD, I, 16).

Jantzen also situates the present violent western habitus in relation to its past. On one hand, Jantzen's critique of violence rejects its natural and essential status as a given characteristic of human nature, while at the same time Jantzen's critique of violence rejects the temporal and historical causal narratives of violence by disputing its inevitability. In *Foundations of Violence* Jantzen begins her work of tracing the lineages of violence by focusing on Ancient Greek and Roman thought, and in her analysis of figures like Achilles and Odysseus Jantzen uses the term "violence" to describe the glory, honor, militarism, heroism, sacrifice, warfare, and entertainment of the ancient Greek and Roman world (DD, I, 54, 58, 63, 66, 67, 70, 99, 108, 113, 251-253, 276, 289-291, 332). By deferring to the eternity that lies beyond glorious and violent death, Jantzen argues that ancient Greek and Roman thought valorized violence through an appeal to other worlds than this one. By contrast – for Jantzen consistently attempts to show how history could have turned out otherwise – she presents "the configuration of beauty that Sappho advocates: beauty premised not on violence nor on eternity but on this life and this

love." (DD, I, 64) Gender and sexuality are entangled with violence, for Jantzen, and in *Foundations of Violence* she considers violence to be gendered in very subtle ways. Violence is certainly linked with gender and the category of the "male," but not in an essentializing way (DD, I, 10, 16, 25, 27, 28, 48, 51, 81, 135, 141, 251, 267). Rather than defining human nature by using masculine categories, and rather than defining male as essentially violent, Jantzen systematically relativizes the underlying assumption of the master discourses of modernity, that violence is inherent in human nature and history, all while critiquing patriarchal varieties of violence that displace women, mothers, and children.

For Jantzen, violence is not natural but naturalized; it is made to seem inevitable and therefore justifiable (DD, I, 24, 28). This means that for Jantzen, violence is endemic in language – but not in a fatalistic way that would paralyze antiviolent action. She writes that "our language is full of metaphors of war, weaponry, violence and death" (DD, I, 5, and Chapter 2). Although language is shot through with violent images, Jantzen suggests that we can choose against the violence of language. While Derrida would agree that there are forms of language that are nonviolent – such as those that invoke or call – Jantzen is more confident than Derrida that there are positive and constructive ways to move apart from and work against the violence in and of language. This is in keeping with the distinctively positive aspects of Jantzen's work in its movement beyond negation, critique, deconstructing, dismantling, and dispossessing, and toward a new positive vision for peace.

Like Milbank, Jantzen defines violence in relation to origins and ends. But unlike Milbank, Jantzen does not attempt to articulate or enforce a structured and ordered relationship between essential beginnings and teleological goals. Instead, she attempts to provide a kind of therapy for relationships between natality (a kind of origin) and mortality (a kind of end) that

attempts to re-emphasize the former in response to its displacement by the latter. Against a "genealogy of death" that violently "threatens the very possibility of the future" Jantzen's narrative in *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* emphasizes natality, newness, creativity, and flourishing (DD, I, 34). But this requires a focus on life here and now, against the dissociative desire to seek refuge in other abstract, transcendent, or eternal worlds. For Jantzen, "Eternity, as surely as violence, was linked with a denial of natality" (166), whereas Sappho's focus on love in the present represents a nonviolent alternative that does not overlook the original possibilities of birth by seeking refuge in other worlds. This strategy of re-emphasis requires that Jantzen remove not only the natural status of violence (its essentializing power) but also the "inevitable" status of violence. She writes:

> But the repressed returns. Fragments remain. And in their very fragmentary and jagged nature they disrupt the smooth narrative of western self-constitution. How if we were to take Sappho seriously, with her assertion that the beautiful is that which one loves? How if we were to valorize not violence and death, but the beauty and love of life? We cannot undo the history of the west. But by challenging its alleged inevitability, by looking as far as we can down the roads not taken, we can become clearer about the ways in which power and knowledge have forged a violent and deathly narrative that could have been otherwise. (DD, I, 67)

Throughout *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* Jantzen challenges narrative strategies that naturalize violence and make it seem inevitable when it really is not. Below I will show how this temporal and historical argument about the non-inevitable status of violence is an essential part of Jantzen's project – both her critique of Derrida and her potentially grand narration of the role of violence in the development of the west. But first, I will take a closer look at her understanding of displacement and its role in the violent narratives she seeks to resist.

Violence and Displacement

In *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* the term "violence" is often used alongside "death" in contrast with Jantzen's positive term "natality." But in addition to its use in this context, Jantzen also uses the term "violence" in close proximity to the term "displacement." While the term "violence" occurs hundreds of times in *Foundations of Violence*, the term "displacement" occurs under twenty times. In *Violence to Eternity* as well, "displacement" occurs under twenty times, in contrast with over 500 uses of the term "violence." However, I argue that despite its relatively minor usage, Jantzen's use of the term "displacement" tells us something essential about her unique way of understanding violence.

Although she planned to write an additional volume on psychoanalysis as part of the projected six volumes of the series, according to Jeremy Carrette, for Jantzen "psychoanalysis holds an ambivalent place; it is therapist and patient, liberator and oppressor."[39] As such, Jantzen uses the term "displacement" in the existing volumes of *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* in both the specialized Freudian sense, but also in a general way as a name for the edging out of one thing by the dominating power of another.[40] I suggest that her understanding of displacement links together the Freudian notion of displacement as a fear of one thing superimposed upon another, and the more general idea that defining terms of the habitus (like mortality and natality) compete in relations of antagonism and enmity. In the context of her proposed therapy of philosophy, Jantzen associates these two meaning of the term "displacement."

> If we now carry the therapy analogy forward, one question it brings to mind is a question of displacement. A phobia about one thing (e.g. spiders, dirt) is often actually a deeply

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[39] Carrette, "'In the Name of Life!' Psychoanalysis and Grace M. Jantzen's Critique of Philosophy" in *Grace M. Jantzen: Redeeming the Present*, 70.

[40] For example, Jantzen writes that "the silencing of the maternal body includes other silences that have been less noted: in particular the silencing of birth and the displacement of beauty." (DD, I, 18).

unresolved complex about something else, to which the ostensible object of fear is related. Indeed the actual source of fear is repressed, silenced, precisely by this displacement, whereby the substitute becomes the focus of attention and anxiety. Thus in Freud's account of Little Hans, the boy's phobia about horses was a disguised complex about his father and masculine sexuality. Once he was able to acknowledge the real source of his fear and deal with it, his phobia about horses resolved itself. What suggests itself, then, if we follow the therapy analogy, is that the obsession with death characteristic of the western symbolic may be a displacement of something to which it is related but which renders it invisible, silenced within the symbolic structure. (DD, I, 17)

Jantzen's therapeutic approach to the violence of the western habitus calls attention to the ways that beauty and natality are feared and shows how these fears are made to seem like they are about something other than their true source. On Jantzen's account, because the maternal body and the process of birth are so threatening to the masculinist obsession with death and mortality, their disruptive influence through beauty must be deprived of a place through silencing and marginalization. Jantzen explains:

> Because of the integral connection of natality and creativity, the silencing of natality and the maternal body is, I believe, interwoven with the displacement of beauty in western culture, in such a way that beauty either is pressed into the service of death or else is itself silenced or marginalized. Indeed, as violence is a central symptom of necrophilia, so, I suggest, beauty and its creation is central to natality. However, although beauty and creativity is crucial to natality, it has too often been appropriated by the powers of necrophilia or subverted to the causes of violence. (DD, I, 39)

For Jantzen, it is not only natality, birth, and creativity that are displaced by mortality and death, but it is their beauty that is taken up and used to further the displacement of natality by mortality. For Jantzen "violence" names what occurs when the relationship between origins and ends (natality, mortality) are distorted in the displacement of beauty by death – not death on its own, but an obsessive relationship with death and the mortal condition that both hates it and loves it (in a sense, hating what it loves and desires, and therefore hating itself). In line with her values, Jantzen uses the term "violence" to name the displacement effect that occurs when the

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necrophiliac attraction to and obsession with death usurps and replaces the flourishing sociality of natality and becomes the dominant formative image of the "habitus" or the "imaginary."

However, Derrida also uses the term "displacement," but in quite a different way. Although both Derrida and Jantzen carry forward aspects of the term from Freud, they do so in divergent ways. For Freud, displacement is defined by the superimposition of the fear of one thing upon another, often in the context of dreaming, but also in everyday attributions of meaning, sexual desire, and jokes, wherein "this is about that." Freud's illustrative examples of displacement (*Verschiebung*) include: "When a lonely old maid transfers her affection to animals, or a bachelor becomes an enthusiastic collector, when a soldier defends a scrap of coloured cloth – a flag – with his life's blood…," but the most important example is dreaming, wherein events of the previous day are condensed and represented. [41]

Whereas Jantzen uses the term displacement to name the fear of women, mothers, children, birth, vulnerability, and creativity, and corresponding obsession with their supposed opposites, Derrida uses the term "displacement" in a different but potentially complementary way. In his introduction to a collection of essays on Derrida and displacement, Mark Krupnick argues that although it does not have a "special status" for Derrida, the term "displacement" is central to his critique of the metaphysics of presence. [42] Krupnick points out that especially in the interviews in *Positions* displacement is a name Derrida uses for the reversal and dismantling of hierarchical philosophical oppositions. [43] Against Hegelian sublations that attempt to transcend contradictions through grand claims of synthesis, Krupnick points out that in Derrida "there will

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[41] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1955), 200.

[42] Mark Krupnick, "Introduction" in *Displacement: Derrida and After*. Ed. Mark Krupnick (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983), 10.

[43] Ibid, 1, 12.

be no more grand claims, no more leapfrogging beyond stubborn conflicts to false reconciliations… We may move things about, we are not flattered into conceiving that we may 'pass beyond'."[44] On Krupnick's account, Derrida's disseminating and deconstructing approach uses displacement as a "violent intervention" that critiques thought itself and the teleological continuity of concepts.[45] Derrida's use of the term "displacement" is minor, and apart from a few essays, has not received significant attention in the discourse. That said, the place of displacement in his greater effort to question all categories and avoid all syntheses and assimilations, is not irreducibly different than Jantzen's use of the term in *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*, which I will focus on in this chapter and in the conclusion.

If the western habitus is violent, as Jantzen frequently claims, and if this violence is defined by an obsession with death and mortality that displaces the birth, newness, and creativity that characterize natality, then the *structure* of this movement of displacement must play an essential role in Jantzen's understanding of violence. Correlatively, Jantzen writes that "Preoccupation with death requires a refusal of beauty, or its displacement into some less threatening sphere." (DD, I, viii). For Jantzen, the obsessive love and hatred of death that characterizes the western habitus remains occupied with mortality at the direct expense of natality. In order to dis-place natality – to deprive it of a place in the habitus and its constitutive images and values – those who are obsessed with mortality and death must either silence and ignore the disruptive and interrupting forces of beauty, or actively beautify violence by using it as an instrument to resist the major terms of natality.

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[44] Ibid, 2.

[45] Ibid, 11.

The very idea that mortality could displace natality in the way Jantzen describes is premised on an ontology that would conceive of at least some relations between abstract terms like mortality and natality as being competitive and mutually exclusive. In a way that I consider to be exceptional, Jantzen's project *describes* the violent displacement of natality (birth, the feminine, the mother) by mortality (death, the masculine, the father), but does not *prescribe* or unconsciously repeat the ontological structure of displacement by replacing mortality with natality by further asserting it as a master discourse or narrative.[46]

Instead of reproducing displacement within her critique of displacement Jantzen reorients and reframes relationships between mortality and natality by re-emphasizing natality without effacing the very real and true characteristics of mortality that are distorted in necrophilia. Indeed, in *A Place of Springs* Jantzen follows Derrida by inquiring about what necrophilia "simultaneously silences and depends upon: what it constructs as its binary opposite." (DD, III, 188). Jantzen states again that gendered and bodily birth are disavowed by necrophilia:

> Necrophilia presents itself as obsessive anxiety about death, and virtually ignores birth, which is repressed at the level of the symbolic. Now, one of the things that the therapy analogy brings to mind is the question of displacement. A phobia about one thing (e.g. spiders, dirt) is often actually a deep unresolved complex about something else, to which the ostensible object of fear is related but represses precisely by attaching itself to a substitute. (DD, III, 188)

Jantzen's understanding of displacement is part of her "therapy of philosophy" (DD, I, 4). Like the beginning of *Foundations of Violence*, here at the end of *A Place of Springs* the therapy analogy – especially the combination of *thanatos* and *eros* – assists Jantzen in pointing to the combined dread and desire of death that causes mortality to take the place of natality.

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[46] It bears noting here that Jantzen's project is distinct from those radical feminist critics who advocate for counterviolence. For one account see Dianne Chisholm, "Violence Against Violence Against Women," in *The Last Sex: Feminism and Outlaw Bodies*. Ed. Arthur and Marilouise Kroker (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993), 29-66.

Jantzen's description of displacement is based on the notion that the main impetus for the displacement of beauty and birth by obsession with death is fear or anxiety. Driven by an affective repulsion that runs away from birth and beauty and toward death and ugliness, the violence of displacement critiqued by Jantzen rests on the ontological and epistemological presupposition that when two things are opposed then they must necessarily be in a relationship of displacement that calls for resolution by one winning out over the other. Although Jantzen is quick to identify situations in which these conflictual images govern – for example, the conditioning of discourse by the terms of war (such as "advance," "defend," and "position") – her positive and normative vision does not make compulsory this ontological relationship of violent displacement. In fact, she opposes the notion that natality ought to be valued at the expense of mortality. Sensitive to the risk of rewriting displacement into her critique of it, early in *Foundations of Violence* Jantzen states:

> My intention is not to set up binaries: mortality/natality; destruction/creativity. Instead, I shall be suggesting that the fundamental imbalance of attention and emphasis is part of the violent pattern of the west, and that this imbalance is in urgent need of attention if we are to redeem the present. (DD, I, 6).

This rebalancing of attentions and emphases brings Jantzen closer still to the Mennonite approaches to pacifist epistemology and ontological peace because she understands the risk of repeating structural aspects of violence in the attempt to do away with violence (something that some Mennonite theologians also resist under the designation "the myth of redemptive violence"). However, Jantzen is not suggesting that we should ignore real situations that are accurately described by this violent ontology of displacement. The important aspect of her work that I focus on here and below is her simultaneous refusal to ignore very real displacements that occur in situations of violence, and refusal to ontologize displacement or make displacement compulsory in her positive vision for the remediation of violence.

To clarify this problem of displacement alongside the epistemological and ontological problem of violence, let us return to our question: What is violence for Jantzen? In an important sense, for Jantzen, violence is found in the process of displacement – especially the displacement of natality by mortality. But Jantzen's vision of violence is not just definitional, but also genealogical and historical inasmuch as she tracks a relatively continuous influence of what she calls "violence" from Greco-Roman Antiquity (in *Foundations of Violence*), through Jewish and Christian traditions (in *Violence to Eternity*), and the master discourses of modernity, to the postmodern. In this history Jantzen's critique of violence entangles with her critique of how the violent habitus reproduces history on the basis of history through naturalizing strategies. In the following section I will survey the three volumes of *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* to show how the grand narrative of her trilogy may not be as grand as it first appears because of its strategic avoidance of reproducing displacement within its unique reconfiguration of natal origins and mortal ends.

Violence, History, and Master Narratives

In order to place Jantzen's critique of Derrida's characterization of language as violent in proper context, and to understand how she responds to the problems of violent displacement by means of her own metanarrative, we must turn to the images and historicizing movements that guide her approach in *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*. Jantzen is very cognizant of how dominant images, discourses, and narratives structure our ontologies and epistemologies. Rather than being a term that simply describes the foundations of language, Jantzen considers "violence" to be defined by the displacement and replacement of one narrative (natality, birth) by another (mortality, death). This means that for Jantzen the displacement of narratives is deeply connected to the problem of violence. However, her project risk association with the violence of

metanarratives, and self-consciously sets out to "tell a long story." At the beginning of

Foundations of Violence, Jantzen writes programmatically and at length:

> Although diagnosis and analysis is crucial, however, it is not enough. What I wish to show, also, is how the attraction of beauty can inspire resistance and creative response, and can draw forward desire that is premised not upon lack or death but upon potential for new beginning. Preoccupation with death requires a refusal of beauty, or its displacement into some less threatening sphere. Conversely, response to beauty reconfigures consciousness towards creativity and new life. Beauty, creativity, seeks to bring newness into the world, a newness that is at odds with violence. All of these terms – death, beauty, violence, creativity – have long and complicated histories and cannot be used as though they have unambiguous meaning. What I propose to do, therefore, is to consider how their understanding and practice has shaped western culture, and thereby help to effect a shift in the consciousness and praxis of western post/modernity, disrupting the symbolic of violence and beginning to open out a new imaginary of beauty which makes it possible to choose life.
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> In order to develop this theme, my project runs across some academic currents and conventions. I am telling a long story, a story that will take several books to complete, at a time when grand narratives are suspect; even then I am leaving out many things which could well have been included. I am crossing all sorts of disciplinary boundaries, transgressing in fields outside of my expertise, and inviting readers to go with me in that transgression. Nobody can be expert in all fields, and inevitably different readers will find different parts to their taste. Inevitably, too, I will make mistakes; I hope that readers will point them out for correction in subsequent editions. The important thing, though, is that the issues are raised in such a way that they become part of collective discussion; that we do not turn our eyes away from either beauty or violence; that we begin to hear what each says to the other; that there may be healing and hope. (DD, I, viii)

Is it the case that the three volumes of *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* provide a grand

narrative? Does Jantzen replace one grand narrative with another? The problem of master

narratives (challenged in postmodernity) is related to the problem of violence because of how

abstraction, totalization, universalization, possession, and the desire for certainty each take hold

of time and space and determine it by codifying and circumscribing relations between origins,

essences, and ends. Master narratives, metanarratives, and grand narratives, are problematic

because they violate the particularity of things by imposing a universal rule, subsuming a

heterogeneous multiplicity into a singular history, or reducing differences in space and time to a singular essence that is insulated from change and complexity.

By contrast Jantzen wants to keep history open while narrating a counter-history that does not seek to displace or replace what it counters by means of opposition. Her main strategy for approaching the problem of history is to show how history could have turned out differently, and still can. By using "violence" as a name for an ontology of displacement and by opposing displacement in ways that attempt to prevent its recurrence within opposition, Jantzen attempts to hold open the possibility of an ontology in which things do not exist at the expense of other things through the presentation of a narrative that, although it is in many respects "grand" and given to generalization, resists many of the problems of grand narratives identified by postmodern critics, not least because of the vulnerability with which she conducts her inquiry (se she expresses in the quotation above). This resistance is further demonstrated by the guiding images and arguments of the three volumes of *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* to which I now turn.

I. Foundations of Violence

Foundations of Violence begins with a dedication to Jantzen's partner Tina Macrae, and a quotation from Sappho: "I would rather see her lovely step / and the radiant sparkle of her face / than all the war-chariots… and soldiers…"[47] These lines express in brief the broader aims of the *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* project when they suggest that it is better to desire to see the steps and face of another whom one loves, than it is to desire to see instruments of war and

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[47] See Sappho, *A New Translation of the Complete Works*. Trans. Diane J. Rayor and André Lardinois Radboud (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 33. Fragment 16.

warriors who bear them. As a part of her counter-metanarrative of violence, and in continuity with her conviction that history could have turned out otherwise, Jantzen suggests that Sappho's voice could have been chosen for emphasis rather than that of Plato or Aristotle. For Jantzen' Sappho takes women's experiences seriously and presented a path of flourishing and natality that was not taken, but could have been (DD, I, 62-68).

The preface to *Foundations of Violence* extends the twofold image of love and war described in the quotation from Sappho, beginning with a description of Jantzen's cottage home in the Southern Lake District of the United Kingdom. Jantzen describes the stark contrast between beauty of the landscape at her home and the violence of the world further afield. Writing during the War in Afghanistan, Jantzen hears fighter jets flying overhead as she plays music and reads in her home, and she laments the way that "the western world projects its violence outwards," stating simply: "violence is ugly" (DD, I, vii) – a phrase she will repeat in *Violence to Eternity* in contrast with the beauty of love (DD, II, 22). Although she identifies the ugliness of violence, Jantzen also shows how violence is often considered to be beautiful and actively beautified. Anticipating her later work in *Violence to Eternity*, in *Foundations of Violence* these aesthetic ambiguities of beauty and violence assist Jantzen in making her key distinction between necrophilia and natality.

Whereas "necrophilia" names a specific fixation on mortality (obsessed with the fact that death is inevitable, both fearing and loving it), for Jantzen, "natality" is defined by the love of new life (focused on the fact that we have all been born and can create life). Powerfully, she asserts that although it is always possible that we may die alone, no one can be born alone (DD, I, 37). This reconfiguration of origins and ends, wherein the natal character of humanity is

emphasized before the mortal, undergirds her suggestion that a focus on natality can entail new forms of sociality that counter the individualistic obsession with mortality and death (DD, I, 6).

In the image that introduces *Foundations of Violence* both natality and mortality respectively reflect the peace of the Lake District and the violence of the War in Afghanistan. Presenting her readers with this image of beauty and death, Jantzen insists "that we do not turn our eyes away from either beauty or violence; that we begin to hear what each says to the other; that there may be healing and hope" (DD, I, viii). This resistance to the dissociative desire to take refuge in abstractions, other worlds, or eternity, at the expense of this time and this world, is a constituent part of Jantzen's critique of violent displacement. Her critique focuses on one particular displacement that has many violent effects: the obsession with finitude and the mortal condition at the direct expense of what she calls "natality" – term that she draws from the work of Hannah Arendt and Adriana Cavarero, and revises in unique ways.

Alison Martin suggests that for Jantzen, natality serves as a counter-narrative that "is not a concept or an action but an existential predisposition towards life, one that can provide an alternative to a symbolic of violent death."[48] Martin suggests further that Jantzen's use of the term natality refers to something divine, immanent, and embodied – a "minimalist concept" that "represents the absolutely undetermined yet simultaneously absolutely conditioned state of being human; a life that is never pre-given yet is not arbitrary."[49] However, by contrast, Alison Stone has recently suggested that Jantzen sought to emphasize natality at the expense of mortality[50] – something that I suggest is incommensurate with Jantzen's stated attempt in *Death and the*

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[48] Alison Martin, "Grace Jantzen: Violence, Natality and the Social" in *Intensities: Philosophy, Religion and the Affirmation of Life*. Ed. Steven Shakespeare and Katharine Sarah Moody (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), 74.

[49] Ibid, 76.

[50] Alison Stone, *Being Born: Birth and Philosophy* (London: Oxford University Press, 2019), 49.

Displacement of Beauty to re-emphasize and refocus attentions rather than replace or displace one term with another (cf. DD, I, 6).

Jantzen receives the concept of natality from two works by Arendt and Cavarero, specifically Arendt's *The Human Condition* and Cavarero's *In Spite of Plato*. In her work Arendt drew from Augustine's *City of God* the notion that action and initiative are linked with birth. For Arendt, "the most general condition of human existence [is] birth and death, natality and mortality."[51] In her presentation of the human condition, Arendt conceives of labor and work as "rooted in natality" and argues that the child, who is always a "newcomer" born into the world as a "stranger," possesses the capacity for newness and natality that is "inherent in all human activities."[52] Later, following her key quotation from Augustine, Arendt associates natality with a "startling unexpectedness" that is "inherent in all beginnings and in all origins."[53]

Although Jantzen draws her concept of natality from the work of Arendt, she does not strongly retain Arendt's association of natality with political action. Similarly, Jantzen's understanding of natality owes something to the work of Cavarero, but her use of the term is loosely based on Cavarero's *In Spite of Plato*, where it is used only sparingly.[54] Jantzen also develops her unique concept of natality elsewhere in her work,[55] and since Jantzen's death the term has become the subject of much discussion in the feminist philosophy of religion, being

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[51] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition: A Study of the Central Dilemmas Facing Modern Man* (New York: Anchor, 1959), 10.

[52] Ibid, 11.

[53] Ibid, 157.

[54] Adriana Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato: A Feminist Rewriting of Ancient Philosophy*. Trans. Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio and Áine O'Healy (London: Routledge, 1995), xviii, 61-62, 105.

[55] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, Chapter 10., and Grace M. Jantzen, "The Horizon of Natality: Gadamer, Heidegger and the Limits of Existence," in Lorraine Code (Ed.) *Feminist Interpretations of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2003)

taken up and interpreted in new works by Cavarero on Arendt, and by Fanny Söderbäck.[56] Although the discourse on natality continues, below I will focus on her specific use of the term in *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*.

While staging a dialogue between beauty and violence, a major premise of *Foundations of Violence* is that "the choice of death, the love of death and of that which makes for death, has been characteristic of the west from Homeric and Platonic writings, through centuries of Christendom, and takes particularly deadly shapes in western postmodernity" (DD, I, vii). Part of this choice, for Jantzen, is the decision to emphasize mortality at the expense of natality throughout the entire history of the west from antiquity to the present. At this stage, it appears that Jantzen's work will repeat the broad and sweeping generalizations characteristic of the very grand narratives and master discourses that she critiques. But, as I argue in this chapter, her critique of displacement and emphasis on the contingency of history are protective factors that prevent these albeit problematic generalizations from taking on the violent and absolutist forms that characterize discourses of mastery.

At the beginning of her trilogy, Jantzen suggests that violence is something that takes root in our habituated patterns of thinking and knowing. In response to the problem of violence in postmodernity, Jantzen proposes for her readers the task of "disrupting the symbolic of violence and beginning to open out a new imaginary of beauty which makes it possible to choose life" (DD, I, viii).[57] Concerned with violence in the imaginary, Jantzen's project is twofold, engaging in both descriptive "diagnostic and analysis" and normative "resistance and creative

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[56] Adriana Cavarero, "'A child has been born unto us': Arendt on birth." Trans. Sylvia Guslandi and Cosette Bruhns. *philoSOPHIA* 4.1 (2014) 12-30. Fanny Söderbäck, "Natality or Birth? Arendt and Cavarero on the Human Condition of Being Born" *Hypatia* 33.2 (Spring 2018): 273-288.

[57] This admonition to choose life resonates with the Hebrew Bible (Deuteronomy 30:15-20) and is also taken up by theologian Dorothee Sölle in *Choosing Life*. Trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1981).

response" (DD, I, viii). Following this methodological statement, the first chapter of *Foundations of Violence* provides a further illustration in which death and beauty are co-instantiated: the cellist of Sarajevo who plays on as the war rages around him, rejecting the accusations of madness levelled by the soldiers, and implying that it would be madness *not* to meet the violence of slaughter with the beauty of music. This image inspires several of Jantzen's key questions:

> Who is mad and who is sane in a world in which beauty confronts death, and violence silences creativity? How can we learn to name what is happening, and find resources for transformation? Where are the springs of hope that could bring newness and flourishing into a death-dealing world? (DD, I, 3).

Jantzen believes that it is the task of the scholar to understand how certain ways of thinking "have shaped and mis-shaped the world" (DD, I, 3), and she undertakes this task of reimagining through a "redemption of the present" – historical and historicizing terms that suggest the violence of the past does not have the last word on either the past or the future.

Jantzen's project of redeeming the present and providing therapy for philosophy calls for the active reshaping of the world through narratives of resistance that give alternatives to the ways that the dread of death has come to replace and displace the love of life. Jantzen identifies continuities between "the preoccupation with death," "the means of death," and "the combat with death" (DD, I, 5). According to Jantzen, death is "both dreaded and desired," meaning that necrophilia and necrophobia are inextricably tied together in a knot of simultaneous attraction and aversion (DD, I, 5). Jantzen distinguishes between the dread of death and the love of life, pointing out that the former has often been conflated with the latter (DD, I, 12). Given the constitutive role of language in the formation of the habitus, Jantzen condemns the combative and rivalrous paradigms that saturate not only the discourse on death and disease, but also academic discourse in the university. For example, to fight disease, or to wage war against cancer – a disease that Jantzen herself died from in 2006 – rely upon "tropes of death and

warfare in our everyday vocabulary [that] inscribe and reinscribe patterns of thought and behaviour which are normalized by the very fact that they come to be routine and conventional. Gradually they determine what is morally thinkable." (DD, I, 14). Jantzen incisively shows how the closed circle of death-dealing language limits and determines the available options. Citing examples from the early 2000s, ranging from popular culture and new media to global politics and war, Jantzen avoids taking refuge in universalizing abstraction and instead calls to account the "central metaphor" of death and violence that has shaped the master discourses of modernity, citing examples such as the death of God, the subject, and the author (DD, I, 14).

In Jantzen's thought, the habitus is not merely determined by metaphors of violence, but also by gendered power relations that unfold under the long shadow of patriarchy. Jantzen suggests that the historical and contemporary disempowerment of women is correlative with aggressive male violence, exemplified by the rivalrous patterns of sport and war. She writes that not only have men been the main shapers of the habitus, but "the preoccupation with death… is largely a male preoccupation" (DD, I, 16). Jantzen provides some nuance to her association of men with the obsession with death in order to leave room for exceptions, but it remains a central claim in her argument that is not neutralized by her qualifications.

Furthering the therapeutic analogy, and following Freud, Jantzen suggests that if a phobia of one thing is really an unresolved issue with something else, then it is possible that the fearful obsession with death characteristic of so much of masculinity may be a displacement of something else: maternal bodies and female sexuality (DD, I, 17). She asks:

> are the death-dealing structures of the western symbolic, discernible from Homer to the master discourses of post/modernity, attempts to silence and control the mother, and all the other (m)others who might bring the central fear to mind: the earth, its beauty, its peoples, its unpredictable life? Is the suppression of natality part of a deep fear of gender? (DD, I, 17).

For Jantzen, the domination of women by men reflects the male obsession with death, so much so that women become linked with death and sexuality in deeply violent ways, not least of which are the reduction of the female to a figure of temptation, and the sexualization of female death (DD, I, 18). Fantasies of violence in which women are killed by their male lovers are exemplary of this displacement according to Jantzen, and they stand in continuity with the lack of attention paid to birth and natality within the western habitus.[58]

The way for intellectuals to change the world for the better, Jantzen suggests, is to practice a sort of therapy that seeks to "bring the repressed dimensions of history to the fore" (DD, I, 4).[59] Jantzen nuances her therapeutic analogy by stating that "I am not suggesting that the psychoanalytic model of neurosis and therapy is in every respect applicable to the social order" (DD, I, 4), but she pursues her critical and therapeutic goals nonetheless, attempting to show how the habitus has been "formed by a triangulation of death, gender, and religion" that is deeply threatened by the positivity of beauty and birth (DD, I, 4). Offering therapy for the violent condition of the world and the discourses that symptomatically reaffirm this violent condition, Jantzen contends that a mere appeal to reason will be insufficient in much the same way as how those who come to therapy cannot simply be reasoned into an improved state of mental health. Instead of proceeding in a "didactic or exhortatory" mode, while also pointing out the methodological limits of "genealogies, archaeologies, and deconstructions," Jantzen attempts to navigate between the twin dangers of moralizing argumentation that would reduce complex

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[58] For an historical look at women's deaths, focusing on the Ancient Greek context, see Nicole Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*. Trans. Anthony Forster (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

[59] Jantzen also repeats this analogy with therapy at the close of the trilogy (DD, III, 188).

ethical issues to clear boundaries between good and evil, and historicizing argumentation that

would neutralize any normative aspiration by appeal to deterministic essentialisms (DD, I, 19).

Through the transformative therapy of both the death-obsessed culture and the death-

obsessed individual, Jantzen wants to disinvest her readers in the epistemic patterns that form "a

habitus of violence" (DD, I, 21). One major way in which she begins this work is to problematize

the status of nature in order to lay bare the real decisions that have covered over voices who

might otherwise have been heard. As she does in her article "Roots of Violence, Seeds of Peace,"

in *Foundations of Violence* Jantzen responds to the claim that violence and death are naturally

definitive of human nature by critiquing the rationalization and naturalization of necrophilia in

both Freudian psychoanalysis and Darwinian biology.

But instead of assuming that violence is natural because of its ubiquity, but without

ignoring the ubiquitous violence of the world, Jantzen asks what at first looks like an innocuous

question: "*who* is violent?" (DD, I, 27). Pointing out that violence is overwhelmingly gendered,

Jantzen states that,

> By and large it is men who make war; men who commit violent crimes such as rape or
> murder; even men who play football or engage in other aggressive sport-substitutes for
> violence. This is not to say that women are never violent: some of them are. Neither is it
> to argue that women are morally superior to men. There are other moral evils besides
> violence; some of them arguably worse. But the incidence of *violence* is heavily skewed
> to the male. (DD, I, 27).

If it is true that violence is most often male then Jantzen argues that it cannot be true that

violence is innate to human nature, for that would reduce humanity to definition by a

characteristic that applies to only approximately half of its members. This disrupts not only the

notion that violence is natural, but also disrupts the equation of maleness and humanness and the

concomitant dehumanization of women. Against both essentialism and biological determinism,

Jantzen acknowledges that there are major statistical differences between men's and women's

participation in the violence of war, rape, and murder, without suggesting that women are morally superior to men (for that would be to re-inscribe in reverse the very essentialism that she is opposed to). Rather than romanticize or essentialize, Jantzen states that,

> one can move from 'violence is part of human nature' to 'violence is part of male nature' to 'violence is part of a sub-group of male nature,' but this dwindles to the claim that violence is innate to those who are violent, and only the violence itself can be adduced as evidence. In spite of the fact that the master discourses of modernity naturalize violence, the arguments for such naturalization simply do not hold water. (DD, I, 28).

According to Jantzen violence is not natural, and by the same logic, nonviolence is also not unnatural. Jantzen argues that part of the grip that violence has on the habitus is found in its hold upon our attentions, such that we have lost the imaginative capacity to envision alternatives to violence (DD, I, 29). For Jantzen, the power of necrophilia is maintained by its ability to rationalize itself by appeal to the natural status of death.

Creativity rather than violence, and natality rather than mortality-obsessed love of death – both reorientations that Jantzen advocates for require a careful distinction between mortality and natality (DD, I, 35). Both mortality and natality are more than biological facts because they structure human experience by situating life between a beginning and ending, bookending human experience in ways that are not only ontological and epistemological, but also storied and narrated (DD, II, Chapter 2). Rather than relying upon a binary distinction between natality and mortality that would require a choice between them, Jantzen remediates the two categories, showing how the death-obsessed paradigm of mortality has dominated and erased the life-affirming perspective of natality, but resisting the idea that natality must simply replace mortality as a response to its displacement.

Rather than focusing on the eternal destiny of the soul after death, and the often-accompanying desires for another world, and rather than emphasizing the salvation of the eternal

soul at the expense of the welfare of human life on earth, and rather than focus on the mind and its abstraction and distance, Jantzen focuses her attention on creativity, the body, and the novel prospects of natality (DD, I, 36-37). Natality does not deny the reality of death, but instead insists on attention to life and the body, here and now. For Jantzen, natality resists the lonely individualism of death-obsession precisely because being born necessarily brings with it a web of relationships – she writes that "individualism is not possible for natals" (DD, I, 37). Unlike the damaging individualistic fragmentation that is a constituent part of the western habitus, a focus on natality emphasizes the central role of sociality and connectivity in human life. Where a focus on natality and its sociality brings many relational possibilities, a restrictive and displacing focus on mortality forecloses such possibilities by fixating on the finality of death (DD, I, 38).[60]

Jantzen argues that violence is symptomatic of a necrophilia which endures by first displacing beauty and creativity, and then replacing these aspects of natality with a corresponding overemphasis on mortality (DD, I, 39). Against the use of beauty and its equivocation with death as political tactics twisted to serve existing power, Jantzen reveals the decision-points along the way in which the love of heroism and war exemplified by Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were chosen, for example, over the peaceful *eros* of Sappho's poetry. The violent mobilization of the category of beauty endures in modernity, evident in the continual denigration of vision and the absence of the beautiful even in the presence of art (DD, I, 40-41).

In the second part of *Foundations of Violence* Jantzen begins with the image of the eternal glory of Athens. Acknowledging and challenging the supposedly democratic, tolerant, and civilizing template that Greek civilization has been for western culture and politics, Jantzen

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[60] Similarly, in her revision of messianism and vitalism Agata Bielik-Robson argues that a life reduced to the struggle for survival is not a full life because it constantly defers its fulfilment in its effort to stave off death. See Agata Bielik-Robson, *Another Finitude: Messianic Vitalism and Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 21.

critiques Plato's search for eternal truth and beauty in the realm of the immortal and Aristotle's violent ideas about who flourishes (men) and who does not (women, slaves, children).[61] Against these dominant voices stands the peripheral and marginalized figure of the poet Sappho, who presents an alternate vision that does not fetishize the youthful and violent death of heroic male soldiers as the pinnacle of human achievement (DD, I, 52), but one that meets the sulking anger of Achilles and the desire to die in glorious battle that he engenders with a very different focus on love. This love is not governed by the measures of honor and shame nor the immortal heroism of *areté*,[62] but is instead defined by the adoration of a lover: a particular lover with a particular face. Rather than denying the present temporal world in favor of the eternal otherworld (DD, I, 60), Sappho's alternative paradigm is world-affirming and favors the soft face and lovely gait of the lover rather than the hardened face and structured march of the soldier (DD, I, 63).

Sappho offers a kind of beauty that is *otherwise* – otherwise than the valorization of the young male body and the displacement of memory through killing (DD, I, 62-63). According to Jantzen's account of Sappho, violence is not beautiful; violence is ugly, and love is beautiful. Sappho reorients beauty by rejecting both violence and eternity, affirming peaceful love here and now, and orienting the attentions of her readers toward it (DD, I, 64). Jantzen writes further:

> But surely the central point is that Sappho is offering a different understanding of beauty from that which is predominant in the Homeric writings. This is beauty otherwise. Nor is it simply a question of finding different things beautiful, as though it were a matter of subjective taste: Homer likes ships and horses and armour; Sappho prefers women. Rather, it is a different conceptualization of beauty, which rejects both poles of violence and eternity. For Sappho, beauty is involved with love, not with violence. And love is always love of the particular. It is cherishing the specific individual characteristics that make the beloved not a mirror of oneself but the unique person she is. Moreover, in

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[61] See, for example, Aristotle, *The Politics*. Ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Book I, 12. p. 27.

[62] "*arete*. A word for which we have no equivalent in English. *Arete* includes the concepts of excellence, goodness, manliness, valor, nobility, and virtue." Stephen G. Miller, *Arete: Ancient Writers, Papyri, and Inscriptions on the History and Ideals of Greek Athletics and Games* (Chicago: Ares, 1979), 105.

> Sappho's writing beauty is not displaced to some eternal realm beyond death with its fiction of perpetual youth. Her love is centred in this present life and its vicissitudes, not in some immortal or deathless realm. (DD, I, 63-64)

Jantzen's search for alternatives attempts to reorient the desires of her readers, to re-glorify some figures over others, and to reshape attention to history by reforming the faculty of attention itself through an emphasis on redemptive love in and of the present. As such, she shows that the repressed returns in fragmentary but significant ways, the unspoken speaks louder than the spoken in a series of conspicuous absences, and the inevitability of violence is only alleged, and not naturally determined (DD, I, 67).

On Jantzen's account, the desire for immortality is concomitant with the desire for victory, whether victory over an army, a nation, or victory over death itself (DD, I, 68). This desire for victory and its accompanying competitive spirit are evident in both the violent rage of Achilles and the wit of Odysseus, but neither of these rivalrous paradigms are commensurate with Sappho's vision of love, nor with the association of femininity with the sea in ancient Greek thought (DD, I, 83). For Jantzen, the image of the sea points toward gender, and fluidity (rather than rigidity) is a mark of the feminine.[63] In light of how the "enticing and treacherous" waves of the sea mirror feminine sexuality and its liquidity, Jantzen writes:

> In the linkage of the sea with death and with the female, it is significant that the temptations, pleasures and dangers which Odysseus encounters on his journeyings across this barren sea are for the most part figured female, and their danger often lies in their sexual enticement. (DD, I, 83-84)

Not just Sappho, but the *Odyssey's* Calypso, and both Scylla and Charybdis, are witnesses to the challenge that the fluid and liquid feminine poses to rigid male structures of dominance, rivalry, competition, and violence. Like the waves already described, Penelope too tempts the male and

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[63] See also Canters and Jantzen, *Forever Fluid*, Chapter 7. Compare with Irigaray, *Elemental Passions*, 79-80.

pulls him off course, but unlike the promise of immortal life in the identification of beauty and death on the battlefield, this death is by feminine seduction and leads only to oblivion rather than an idealized other world (DD, I, 88). For Jantzen, the demonization of the feminine finds an important genesis here, although in *Violence to Eternity* she points out the demonization of the feminine in Christianity and modernity in other, no less disturbing, ways.

However, with reference to the work of Adriana Cavarero, Jantzen sees in Penelope an alternative imagination that contains resources for feminist critique.[64] Penelope's shroud, weaved by day and unraveled at night, is an image of excellence, but excellence "against the grain" – a hidden resistance to the desire to go out upon the water and fight death like men should supposedly do (DD, I, 90). Jantzen writes that,

> Although men have configured death as the measure of life, this configuration is a perverse and violent reversal of reality. Life is dependent upon *birth*. Without birth there would be no life, no adventure, no possibilities for action. It is birth, not death, that gives us our lives. Birth is the repressed premise without which the *Odyssey* and its flirtation with death could never get under way. (DD, I, 90).

Instead of death being the measure of life, Jantzen situates death in a more balanced place at the end of life, rather than something to be avoided or mastered during it (DD, I, 90). Odysseus's violent homecoming at the end of *The Odyssey* and his slaughter of competitors serve as an image of what Jantzen seeks to resist in the whole tradition of western thought, and she is quick to point out that "the Homeric preoccupation with gendered death" is replayed and repeated in Christian thought in Clement, Tertullian, Origen, and others (DD, I, 94).

It is not a conceptual stretch, even if it is a temporal one, to make connections between the valorization of domination, control, and violence in ancient sexualities, and present-day cultures of violence against women. Do the structures of these ancient expressions of gendered

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[64] See also Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato*, 6-7.

violence endure in the present western habitus? Jantzen thinks they do. The act of turning our attention to this world, here and now, serves to disrupt what Jantzen contends is a large part of the problem of necrophilia: its abstracting displacement of this world in favor of other worlds (past or future), evident, for example, in Plotinus' distancing from the material world in favor of a divine ascent by stages towards "the unchanging beauty of eternity" (DD, I, 357).

The same anachronistic and dissociative desire to take refuge in other worlds that Jantzen diagnoses can be rear facing as well, for it is often safer for the theorist of violence to remain comfortable identifying violence in the past without drawing connections across time with the violence of the present. Jantzen's willingness to make such connections increases over the course of *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* throughout which she shows how the abstracting tendency of world-denying ascent toward eternity is taken up and furthered by Christian mystics and theologians, eventually leading to the violence of modernity – and this is the bridging task of the second volume, *Violence to Eternity*.

II. Violence to Eternity

The second volume of *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*, edited for posthumous publication by Morny Joy and Jeremy Carrette, begins not with the images of the Lake District or of Sarajevo, but with the city of Venice and its "breath-taking beauty built on violence" (DD, II, 1). Jantzen marks a transition from her genealogy of violence in ancient Greece and Rome in the first volume, to her genealogy of violence in Jewish and Christian traditions in the second volume, moving toward a focus on seventeenth century Christendom, modernity, and postmodernity in the third and final volume.

Whereas in *Foundations of Violence* Jantzen resisted the identification of violence with human nature, in *Violence to Eternity* she resists the identification of violence with the Christian concept of sin (DD, II, 3). She writes that "it has been a besetting temptation to Christian theologians to tell the story of religion in the West as a narrative of the struggle of the destructive impulses of sinful humanity over against the redemptive creativity of the divine, the conflict between violence and beauty" (DD, II, 3). Jantzen critiques this narrative for its inadequate account of the relationship between violence and beauty, both because this story construes the relationship between violence and beauty as necessarily antagonistic and because it ignores the many ambiguities and complexities that tie beauty and violence together. Instead of simplifying the narrative of redemption, Jantzen's principled effort to put beauty and violence in dialogue continues with deeper complexity as she reads the Christian creation story in Genesis, detecting "hints that violence is not just a result of human sin, but is present before the first human pair is made" (DD, II, 3).

Jantzen does not claim that violence is a direct symptom of the Christian notion of the Fall, implying that she does not hold to a concept of original peace that violence would later disrupt. Instead, Jantzen concerns herself with the ambiguities of violence. Rather than contrasting a peaceful Hebrew creation narrative in Genesis with a violent Babylonian creation myth in the *Enuma Elish* as some Christian theologians have done,[65] Jantzen points to the violence of both, and finds cruelty and violence "at the heart of the divine" (DD, II, 5). Jantzen criticizes those who ignore the presence of divine violence in the Hebrew scriptures and the Christian gospels, and while she demands that critical gaze be cast upon these texts, she does not

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[65] See, for example, Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

cast wholesale judgment on entire texts or traditions, but instead she finds in them resources for creativity and flourishing.

Rather than give way to interpretive techniques for reading biblical narratives that identify the reader with those oppressed by the violence of earthly rulers (for example, the Israelites in exile), Jantzen reorients the hermeneutic gaze once again by encouraging the reader to identify with victims of God's violence (such as in the conquest of Canaan) (DD, II, 6). In identifying ways in which divine creativity and divine destruction go hand in hand, Jantzen seeks not only to interrupt interpretations that allow for the legitimation of human violence by appeal to divine violence, but also to avoid easy distinctions between violence and beauty.

Writing during the War in Iraq, *Violence to Eternity* is Jantzen's attempt to expose how the legacy of Christendom continues to legitimate violence, but to do so while remaining critical of her own context as well (DD, II, 7). Conscious of the complexity of her genealogical endeavor, and consistently suspicious of the inscription of patriarchy within that method (for genealogies are most often patrilineal), Jantzen states that her task is "to discern *both* how Christendom from its foundational texts has legitimated and valorized violence *and* how it provides resources for creativity and peace" (DD, II, 7. italics in the original). In doing so Jantzen is not only helpfully self-critical of the tradition that has formed her, but she refuses the temptation to conceive of religion and secularity in competitive terms.

As explored at the beginning of this chapter, it is in *Violence to Eternity* that Jantzen begins to develop a critical definition of violence, theorizing both its materiality and conceptuality with reference to major thinkers within the tradition of continental philosophy. The first chapter of *Violence to Eternity* begins with yet another evocative image, this time of the Garden of Eden, a site that according to some narratives symbolizes the descent from beauty and

innocence into violence. Pointing to interesting ambiguities within the Christian creation narrative, Jantzen observes that there are several creation accounts within the biblical record, and quotes Isaiah 65:17: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth." (DD, II, 15)

For Jantzen, the vision of a new heaven and new earth is a troubled one, for it contains a utopian aspect (and natality), but at the same time involves the violent vanquishing of God's enemies. Jantzen is concerned, however, for those who stand apart from God's favor, stating "just as in the case of the flood, violence and beauty appear in tension: a tension that becomes unbearable if we put ourselves into the position of those who are outside, rather than those whom God has favored" (DD, II, 16). Although the rest of *Violence to Eternity* reads Jewish and Christian texts with an eye for these ambiguities of beauty and violence and the displacements that often accompany them, here in the first chapter Jantzen turns to questions of ontology, epistemology, and violence.

In the first chapter of *Violence to Eternity* Jantzen asks: "Could there be creation without violence?" (DD, II, 17). Although creation and destruction seem to be opposites, Jantzen counters this common-sense notion by pointing again to the ambiguities of beauty and violence and examining the idea that constructive movements may conceal destructive aspects that cannot be completely accounted for. Disputing the notion that "everything is violent" (de Vries) and the notion of "violence as boundary" (Schwartz), Jantzen claims that "separation [of self and other] is essential if we are to ever experience the richness which respectful mutual interaction with others who are genuinely different from ourselves can bring" (DD, II, 19). As mentioned above, Jantzen counters these two definitions – "everything is violent" and "boundaries are violent" – arguing that violence occurs "not when difference is *defined* but when difference is perceived as *dangerous*, so that hierarchies are imposed and force is exerted to keep hierarchies in place"

(DD, II, 19. italics in original). Jantzen challenges the competitive paradigm that sees all differences as zero-sum games leading to victory or defeat, by making a case for the positive status of difference. She writes,

> If all forms of differentiation or separation were violent, then to create would be the paradigmatic act of violence. Newness can only arise if it is different from what preceded it: if it were not different it would not be new. So if difference itself indicates violence, then creating anything, making anything new, is a violent act. (DD, II, 20)

Looking again to the Christian creation stories in Genesis and Isaiah, the concerns that Jantzen raises regarding God's violence remain, but at the same time she sees the creation that they express as something radically connected to the act of differentiation (such as the God of Israel separating heavens and earth or scattering people across the earth after the fall of the Tower of Babel) (DD, II, 20). For Jantzen, violence is not only the result of when difference is seen as dangerous, but it is also encouraged "when the mutuality of creation is denied, when difference is perceived of as threatening rather than enriching, and force is exerted to dominate or stifle the potential of others" (DD, II, 20).

As examined above, Jantzen turns to Derrida and argues against what she considers to be his universalization of violence, and concomitant neutralization of the usefulness of the term. However, Jantzen's critique of Derrida is followed by an engagement with the work of René Girard – a section that further clarifies her resistance to the notion that violence is inevitable and definitive of history and human nature. Jantzen first charges Girard with not allowing sufficient space for creativity in his theory of mimetic violence and desire, and then summarizes his description of desire as a possessive conflict that generates violence through a polarizing and contagious narrowing of rivalry toward the scapegoat upon whom is heaped the rivalry of all. Jantzen challenges what she understands to be Girard's equivocation of ritual victimization and hominization (DD, II, 27-28), and rejects what she considers to be Girard's implicit notion that

social peace enters the world through the negative violence of scapegoating rather than through positive creativity (DD, II, 29). Critiquing what she considers to be Girard's restrictive focus on violence within groups, Jantzen points to the fact that most contemporary violence occurs not within but between groups and contends that inter-group violence and intra-group violence cannot be understood without each other (DD, II, 30).

According with her notion that history could have been otherwise, and with her argument that human nature is not defined by violence, Jantzen's major challenge to Girard is found in her assertion that desire does not always lead to rivalry and can instead lead to mutual cooperation. Rather than focus her attention on rivalry between brothers or parricidal dynamics between fathers and sons, Jantzen again reorients her readers' attention to relationships between mothers and children – the generous spirit of natality rather than the agonism of rivalry and mortality. She concludes her first chapter: "It is not a surrogate victim who can bring peace; rather it is creative thinking, new ways of looking at old problems, that can find a way forward" – understanding of course that Jantzen is critical of progressivist narratives that reduce the way forward to different kinds of political and technological imperialism (DD, II, 34 and 25).

Violence to Eternity furthers Jantzen's critique of violence, arguing that "violence cannot be overcome by more violence, but only by finding creative alternatives, new possibilities that emerge not out of mimetic rivalry or lack but out of generous desire" (DD, II, 35). Rather than looking violently upon violence by ignoring its historicity in the search for a stable essence for the term, Jantzen posits narrative as a remedy for the discontents of hitherto existing definitions of violence (DD, II, 35-36). This serves as one vital connection between her critique of violence and her critique of the reproduction of history on the basis of history. Privileging histories not essences, Jantzen rejects defining violence as "the exertion of force [de Vries], or the making of

boundaries [Schwartz], or mimetic rivalry [Girard]" and instead offers a genealogy of violence

that understands itself as simultaneously incredulous toward metanarratives (Lyotard) and yet

positively disposed towards a critical narrative identity (DD, II, 35-36). She writes: "Our choice

is not about whether we have stories but about whether we become conscious of them and

choose how they shape our future" (DD, II, 37).

In her effort to develop "non-violent alternatives to the conflicts that are tearing the world

apart in the name of God" (DD, II, 53) she prioritizes historical consciousness in which

beginnings (natality) and ends (mortality) are reoriented. Jantzen seeks to cultivate non-

displacing attentions and emphases, and she attends to and emphasizes voices who bear witness

to the fact that history could have turned out differently (DD, II, 53). With these three priorities

in mind, I now turn to the third volume of *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* in which the

Quaker tradition to which she belonged and the Mennonite tradition from which she came are

both minority discourses Jantzen resources for her counter-history of violence.

III. A Place of Springs

In *A Place of Springs*, Jantzen advances her positive alternative vision: a spirituality of beauty

that draws from the works of George Fox and Quaker women. As with the previous two

volumes, *A Place of Springs* too begins with a paradigmatic vignette. The introduction sets the

stage with an image of Jantzen's home – and it is no coincidence that homecoming images recur

throughout her work, given their Platonic, Homeric, and Augustinian resonances and her

argument that origins ought to be re-encountered with a difference (DD I, 98). Vulnerably,

Jantzen again invites her readers into her cottage in the Lake District, reintroducing us to her

partner Tina and pointing out the plenitude of her home and its "pets and flowers, music and

books" (DD, III, 1). Lest a cynical reader think that this image is quaint, recall that Jantzen is aware of the violence of the world, both in the slow creep of the cancer in her body during her writing of this volume and in the sounds of fighter jets roaring overhead.

However, images of violence are not the main emphasis in Jantzen's third volume, for *A Place of Springs* represents a positive turn in her thought that moves toward the sacred (DD, III, 1). Complicating the category of nature once again, Jantzen sees violence in both nature itself and in human nature, but she does not allow violence to have the last determining word on these natures. Rather than averting her eyes from violence, Jantzen attunes her gaze to the search for alternatives to violence, praising secular critiques of the violences of Christianity, but adopting a Quaker position out of the desire to be honest to her religious convictions and in the name of a narrative integrity that acknowledges the formative role of spiritual and sacred experiences in her life (DD, III, 2).

Turning to the Radical Reformation and its various Anabaptist, Mennonite, and Quaker lineages, Jantzen sees the peace church tradition as a potential bearer of social justice that does not merely renounce violence but actively seeks to live in ways that remove the conditions under which violence flourishes (DD, III, 5). She writes autobiographically: "The standpoint that I take in this book is that of a Quaker, having been born and brought up as a Mennonite on the Canadian prairies and via a formative decade or so in the Church of England." (DD, III, 5). While tracing her Quaker identity back to both mystics and reformers, Jantzen points out that the Quaker "inner light" and "answering" of the divine in all people is "incompatible with violence" (DD, III, 7). Against the "technologies of power of mainstream Christendom" and the emphases on authority, doctrine, and obedience in both Catholicism and Protestantism, Jantzen's expresses her convictions more clearly in *A Place of Springs* than previous volumes (DD, III, 8-9).

Jantzen opens the first chapter of *A Place of Springs* in a way that stands in continuity with her methodological approach in the previous two volumes. She begins with an image and recounts the story of "Beauty and the Beast" as it is usually told, but she then retells it differently by employing key reversals and perspective changes that illuminate both the problems of patriarchy and seeds of peace that lie latent in the story (DD, III, 17-20). Following this retelling and re-narration of an influential cultural narrative, Jantzen further develops her approach to the ambiguities of Christianity. Just as she pointed to alternative voices who could have been heard in antiquity (Sappho), in *A Place of Springs* Jantzen suggests that Christianity too contains within itself traditions and figures who resist its own violence, including the Mennonites and the peace churches of the Radical Reformation as well as nonviolent resistance movements (DD, III, 21). In line with her emphasis on the contingent character of history and her attention to alternative voices who show paths of peace, Jantzen sees possibilities in the peace church tradition (DD, III, 5). In addition to her praise for the Radical Reformers and its heirs, Jantzen is close to the Mennonite philosophical theologians when in *Foundations of Violence* she claims that "violence breeds violence" (DD, II, 31) and violence cannot effectively remediate violence (DD, II, 35). But here in *A Place of Springs* her Quaker identity provides positive resources that move beyond critique.

In spite of the violent legacy of Christianity, Jantzen contends that it contains the seeds of its own renewal (the "Seeds of Peace" in the title of her 2002 article). The Mennonite peace witness and Quaker peace work exemplify the ambiguity of beauty and violence, but also seem to represent a hope for renewal in Jantzen's work (DD, III, 34 and II, 153). Praising the historical connection between the Quakers and twentieth century feminist thought, Jantzen extends her critique of violence, stating that "peace begins at home" (DD, III, 37), echoing the final line of

Violence to Eternity: "the personal continues to be the political" (DD, II, 218). For Jantzen the epistemic is always existential. Ways of thinking and knowing, attitudes and dispositions, are each in continuity with the politics of violence. If peace begins at home then the question of violence is an economic one, pertaining to the management of the household. Given the intimate ties not only between the religious and the political within the concept of economy, but also the ways in which political economy is historically linked with household economy and family life, Jantzen's statement that "peace begins at home" is layered with meaning – especially considering that the volume began with an invitation into her home.

At the conclusion of *A Place of Springs* Jantzen sets forth her positive vision, arguing that beauty draws out creativity that moves beyond repetitive imitation through an openness to exploration and the unknown (DD, III, 13 and 190). This stands in stark contrast to the "close-minded protectionist response that would induce violence." (DD, III, 13). Amidst this critique of protective enclosure, Jantzen makes mention of Derrida, stating that

> as we have learned from the deconstructive strategies of Derrida, it is instructive to discern, in a dominant notion like necrophilia (or speech, or rationality, or indeed religion), what it is that this discourse simultaneously silences and depends upon: what it constructs as its binary opposite. This is not to say that it really is its opposite, of course; indeed, part of the deconstructive strategy is to dismantle such putative binaries. However, it is significant to lift up what has been suppressed, to see how this changes the picture. (DD, III, 188).

Here at the end of *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* Jantzen returns to its central problem: the violent displacement of beauty and natality by an obsessive love and hatred of death. Jantzen's affinity with Derrida's dismantling of "either-or" binaries is of a piece with her critique of logics of displacement that rely upon the dominance of one part and the corresponding submission of the other, and although her critique of Derrida's use of the term "violence" is a part of her argument she does not understand that critique to displace a positive evaluation of his

deconstruction. This disposition of non-displacement is a constituent part of her general critique of violence, her affinities with the Mennonites, her critical and affirmative comments on Derrida, and the grand story she narrates about the origins and ends of the violent western habitus.

History and Displacement

For Jantzen, the violence of displacement is connected to how we imagine the field upon which competing narratives and differences play out (what she calls the "habitus," the "symbolic," and the "imaginary"). Her key definition of violence as that which occurs when differences are treated as inherently dangerous accords with her greater framing narrative of the displacement of beauty and natality by the dread and desire for death that is characteristic of a distorted obsession with mortality. Whereas Derrida suggests that language cannot include within itself its own origin and end, and where Milbank and the Mennonite philosophical theologians dispute the question of whether we can possessively know or should coercively enforce a metanarrative relationship between origins, essences, and ends, Jantzen's work provides positive resources for re-narrating these temporal and historical terms by emphasizing contingency and challenging inevitability through a therapeutic process of denaturalization.

I suggest that the way Jantzen imagines displacement itself is deeply connected to the sweeping narrative that her work presents, and that her critique of displacement protects her counter-metanarrative from several of the charges she lays against the master discourses of modernity and from the greater problems of metanarratives. Jantzen does not seek to displace mortality with natality, and she understands that part of the problem that she seeks to address and redress is the very notion that one thing must exist or be emphasized or valued at the expense of

another. This non-displacing approach is also borne out in both her critique of Derrida and her narrative resistance to the grand narratives of modernity.

In conclusion I want to suggest that, despite the appearance of a grand narrative in the *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* project, Jantzen is not attempting to replace one grand narrative with another by asserting a traditional master narrative or metanarrative. My reason for thinking that Jantzen's work avoids many problems of grand narratives – their violent historicizations that violate the differences, diversities, and contingencies of what they historicize – is that (via Bourdieu) Jantzen self-consciously and consistently rejects "reproducing history on the basis of history" (DD, I, 29). Her emphasis on the contingency of history protects against the possibility that her narrative will become dominating and displacing. Jantzen's core argument in her late trilogy is that violence is found in the *ways* that mortality displaces natality. But rather than repeat this structure of violent displacement, in which for example death replaces birth, Jantzen suggests re-emphasis and re-focusing. Opposing the violent destruction that results from a focus on mortality to the creative life that springs from a focus on natality, Jantzen does not seek to simply invert the two terms, therefore remaining within their structuring opposition. Instead, she reemphasizes and rebalances the perspective of western modernity with a new orientation toward hope and creativity (DD, I, 38-39).

The connection between violent displacement and history in Jantzen's work is exemplified by her refusal to displace and replace master discourses with her own narrative. Instead, she calls her reader to pay attention to the neglected voice of Sappho in such a way that turns attention away from the dominant figures of Plato, Homer, and Aristotle but does not seek to ignore or replace them. Jantzen's strategy of re-emphasis is represented well in her reconfiguration of the image of homecoming which serves as an essential connection between

her critique of violent displacement and her refusal of grand narratives. In Jantzen's reading of Homer's *Odyssey* she emphasizes that the journey she is proposing requires that travellers be changed by encounters in such a way that homecoming transforms both the one who returns and the home to which one returns (DD, I, 95-98). She writes:

> Indeed if it were not the case that origins could thus be reencountered, there would be no possibility of radical (i.e. 'from the roots') transformation, because the roots could never be exposed to be configured differently. If the violence and preoccupation with death that shapes western culture is to be transfigured, this can only come about by confronting *both* its deep genealogical structures *and* the possibilities of alterity: the latter without the former cannot bring about change. Only when we bring otherness home and learn to live with it, destabilizing the assumptions that have hitherto characterized our point of origin, does it enable us to think – and live – otherwise. It is the way to bring newness into our world. (DD, I, 98)

Bringing otherness home, and bringing newness into the world, while resisting the notion that differences are dangerous and refocusing attention without displacement and replacement, are each constituent parts of Jantzen's critical genealogy of violence. Whereas radicality for Milbank is found in Christian opposition to a threatening secularism, and radicality for the Mennonites is defined occasionally as a return to pacifist origins, but most often by mediations, for Jantzen radicality names a return to the roots of violence that re-encounters origins and returns home without the desire to destroy differences by conceiving of them as antagonistic competitors.

Although there is certainly a risk of reductive representation in the narrative that *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* tells about violence and history, Jantzen's critique of violence attempts to show how histories – from ancient Greek and Roman thought, to Judaism and Christianity, to the master discourses of modernity and their challenge in postmodernity – are constituted by decisions at each stage. Without making historical decisions seem more peaceful than they were, Jantzen's work provides a positive narrative for thinking about and challenging violence that is more beautiful than grandiose.

Jantzen's attention to displacement is also deeply historical, for she goes beyond Derrida's statement that history is violence, and beyond Mennonite refusals to make history turn out right, and instead makes positive and constructive suggestions for moving beyond the reproduction of history on the basis of history, and toward new narratives that privilege birth and creativity. By dignifying the origin of humanity in natality and the end of humanity in mortality, while refusing to displace the one with the other, Jantzen's work is in continuity with both Derrida's goal of moving apart from the framework of philosophical opposition, and the Mennonite desire to move outside of relations of enmity. But Jantzen moves further still beyond these negative and protective values, and toward an ethic of natality, creativity, birth, and flourishing in this world. Instead of taking refuge in other worlds – whether an other world in which everything will always be violent or one in which things are originally peaceful.

For Jantzen, violence is deeply connected to the desire for other worlds that denies this world and its bodies, genders, mothers, and others (DD, I, 5, 16, 31). Jantzen notes that the desire for other worlds can readily be used to justify violence in the present world. Desiring an other world rather than attending to the present world allows for justifications of violence not only by means of spatial displacements that render the present world disposable by valuing other worlds at its expense, but also by temporal deferrals that make the present world a part of a disposable past that pales in comparison to a utopian or dystopian future of apocalyptic revelation. This critique is articulated in tandem with Jantzen's use of the term "violence" to point to epistemological and ontological problems of displacement and opposition. She writes that

> the attempts of recent scholars to define an essence of violence have failed. I also argued that violence cannot be overcome by more violence, but only by finding creative alternatives, new possibilities that emerge not out of mimetic rivalry or lack but out of generous desire whose resources are like a well springing up ever and again with newness of life and beauty... (DD, II, 35)

Jantzen rejects Derrida's definition of violence because she is concerned that it will displace the usefulness of the term for distinguishing between language and material violence, but it is her critique of displacement that constitutes a more substantial challenge to both Derrida and the Mennonites. Whereas Derrida suggests that the question must be maintained as a question, and the Mennonite philosophical theologians attempt to keep peace precarious and impossible enough to avoid its violent closure, Jantzen's critique of displacement addresses the persistent paradox of possession I identified in the works of Derrida and the Mennonites, namely that in their effort to maintain openness, there are moments when that effort collapses into the very closure it seeks to prevent. This is especially the case when the critical aims of Derrida and Blum remain in a negative space without the presence of a positive remedial vision for the problems of violence. It is this resonance that I will take up and extend in the conclusion below.

CONCLUSION.

Deconstruction, Pacifism, Displacement

This dissertation began with the general notion, shared by its three sources, that violence poses a distinctly ontological and epistemological problem. Unlike treatments of violence that would restrict its definition to that of physical injury or harm, Derrida, the Mennonites, and Jantzen each consider violence to be a term that points toward deeper ontological and epistemological problems. In the introduction I provided an account of how violence can serve as a diagnostic concept for assessing the values that its users and critics desire to protect against violation. When we understand violence as the violation of boundaries that are determined by values, the question becomes: what values are being protected against violation when the term "violence" is used?

In answer to this question, I have argued that the various uses of the term "violence" in Derrida's "Violence and Metaphysics," in the pacifist epistemologies of certain Mennonite philosophical theologians, and in Jantzen's *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* trilogy each reflect similar values. Common to Derrida's deconstruction, philosophical expressions of Mennonite pacifism, and Jantzen's critique of the violent displacement of natality by mortality, are similar desires to keep things open and resist closure. Derrida uses the term "violence" to condemn philosophical totalization and protect against the closure of language, questions, problems, discourse, difference, the other, and the possibilities of the future; Mennonite philosophical theologians use the term "violence" to condemn force and coercion and open up a Christian vision of peace and history that is precarious and impossible rather than secured and certain; and Jantzen uses the term "violence" to resist the competitive and antagonistic displacement of beauty and natality by death and mortality, positing instead a more open and positive vision of flourishing and sociality, rooted in natality, creativity, and birth.

In short, for Derrida, the Mennonite philosophical theologians, and Jantzen, violence is an ontological and epistemological problem that presents itself in conceptual movements and rhetorical gestures of closure and totalization. But beyond their similar priorities – as evidenced by the similar values informing their uses of the term "violence" – Derrida, the Mennonite philosophical theologians, and Jantzen also employ similar means toward their aims: Derrida resists the "either-or" enclosures of classical philosophical oppositions by means of a "neither-nor" negation (the "neither this, nor that" of undecidability); the Mennonite philosophical theologians attempt to keep open the possibility of peace by theorizing its precarious and impossible nature, by trying to hold knowledge without imperialistic or colonial desires to possess and control, and by mediating between or exceeding "either-or" thinking by pursuing various historiographical and theological mediations ("neither Catholic nor Protestant," "both Catholic and Protestant," "middle-ways," "third-ways"); and Jantzen articulates a creative vision of human flourishing that moves beyond the logic of displacement wherein mortality and death necessarily and violently displace natality and birth, and toward a positive and therapeutic denaturalization of violence that proceeds through re-emphasis rather than replacement.

Both Derrida and the Mennonite philosophical theologians use "neither-nor" negations in their respective attempts to stand apart from the oppositional frameworks they refuse, and these frameworks are often premised on the displacement of concepts wherein one side of an oppositional pair is dominant over the other. For Derrida, this relationship of what I have called displacement is found in the violent hierarchy of classical philosophical oppositions, and for the Mennonite philosophical theologians it is found in possessive and coercive approaches to knowledge based on relations of enmity and competition. However, despite their similar opposition to the notion that opposed terms should play out in zero-sum games of domination

and enmity, neither Derrida nor the Mennonite philosophical theologians have made extensive use of the term "displacement." Although it is not a fault of their work that they do not use this term in the way that I suggest, the notion of displacement is helpful because it clarifies the character of the oppositional structures similarly refused by Derrida and the Mennonite philosophical theologians.

In Chapter 3 I turned to Jantzen as a challenge to Derrida and the Mennonite philosophical theologians because she provides a positive metanarrative of the history of violence that exceeds their critical negations and relativizations, and because her work resists violent displacements. Below, following a recapitulation of my argument in relation to each source, I provide some concluding remarks on how my extension of Jantzen's concept of displacement has the potential to reorient ontologies of violence in ways that challenge and build upon deconstructive and pacifist approaches.

Deconstruction

For Derrida in his challenge to Lévinas in "Violence and Metaphysics," there is something about language, categorization, and predication that cannot escape violence, and in his commentaries on the works of Jean-Francois Lyotard and Walter Benjamin there is something about the judgement of violence that can itself be violent. But the violent hierarchies that structure classical philosophical oppositions cannot be resisted in an oppositional way without being drawn back into their all-encompassing structure. Derrida's undecidability, in which things are not judged and decided beforehand in ways that foreclose real decision, is connected with his desire to keep the future open, and his use of the term "violence" to name movements of closure and totalization. According to Derrida, neither light nor night, speech nor silence, are the pure

cure or cause of violence. Attributing meaning to a pure causal origin or a singular end is incommensurate with Derrida's approach.

For Derrida, Lévinas' movements of dismantling, dispossession, and displacement resist the violent desire to secure knowledge characteristic of traditional ontologies. But rather than follow Lévinas all the way, Derrida challenges his ethics of the other and phenomenology of the face by resisting the idea that one could definitively achieve peace under the terms of the face-to-face encounter. He writes "Predication is the first violence," "one never escapes the *economy of war*," and "violence appears with *articulation*" because he is wary of any ontological or epistemological claim that would suggest we could be without violence.[1] Purity remains a central problem for Derrida, and he refuses both pure violence and pure nonviolence.

For Derrida, the notion that we could achieve a state of peace without any violence is at risk of forgetting that we are always already prejudging violence. Both *pre*dication and *pre*judgment are temporal terms that periodize by means of their prefix. Part of their violence, for Derrida, is their deciding beforehand how things will turn out. In this way, the notion that predication is the first violence is deeply historical, for "first" is a term that indicates both definitional and temporal forms of precedence. The economizing grasp on history by those who define the world through codified orderings of origins and ends is something that Derrida thinks is violent, and yet he is also drawn back into the war of light against light that characterizes this violent economy of history when he designates predication as the first violence.

In *Préjuges* Derrida sets forth a similar challenge when he points out that law cannot tolerate its own history and "presents itself as an absolute, absolute and detached from any

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[1] Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," in *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 147, 148, 147.

origin."[2] For Derrida, law says both "no" and "not yet" – simultaneously negating through difference and engaging in temporal deferrals that allocate something important to the time of the end. Detaching from origins and deferring to ends, for Derrida the law is further problematic when it calls for a disjunctive choice between "either/or" or "yes or no" in a way that is "virtually violent, polemical, inquisitorial" and torturous.[3]

Derrida's deconstruction of law is characterized by a movement between the poles of aporias and paradoxes that is haunted by undecidable relationships between oppositions. Amidst his aporetic and undecidable approach is a variety of mysticism that challenges all categories – one that resembles the hollow space of messianism that he detects in the work of Lévinas. For Derrida, undecidability challenges both either/or thinking and prejudgment, suggesting that each decision between opposed terms could be otherwise and attempting to keep the future open enough that something new could happen that would not already be circumscribed by existing cycles and distinctions. In this way he is close to Jantzen's extension of Bourdieu's critique of the reproduction of history on the basis of itself. The problem lies in both the simplistic distinctions of oppositional thinking that would demand a decision between two bad options, and the periodizing prefix "pre" in prejudgment and predication that judges before a judgment and linguistic utterance were made. It would seem that like justice, violence is also haunted by undecidability because the foundations of its judgment are mysterious and cannot be known in advance.

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[2] Jacques Derrida, *Before the Law: The Complete Text of* Préjuges. Trans. Sandra Van Reenen and Jacques de Ville (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2018), 39.

[3] Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law," in *Acts of Religion*. Ed. Gil Anidjar (London: Routledge, 2002), 231.

Pacifism

Anticipatory, binaristic, and prejudging responses to mysterious foundations also play a key role in the exchanges between Mennonite pacifists and the Radical Orthodoxy of John Milbank. For Mennonite philosophical theologians Peter Blum and Chris Huebner, violence is a problem that is endemic in thinking, knowing, and speaking, and expressed in movements of possession and closure. Huebner's pacifist epistemology resists the violent closure of discourse with a "dialogical vulnerability" and "patience as method," while conceiving of peace as precarious and unpossessable. Blum's partial affirmation of an ontology of violence follows Derrida and challenges the possibility that peace can be definitively achieved, suggesting instead that its achievement and universalization are impossible.

Both Blum and Huebner proceed from within contemporary Mennonite identities and orient their work in relation to the history of the Radical Reformation, and both resist the work of John Milbank and the greater tradition of Radical Orthodoxy in different ways. Whereas Huebner offers a counter-gift to Milbank that is reticent to sharply criticize his justifications of violence, Blum directly challenges the ontology of peace upon which Radical Orthodoxy rests. Although Blum follows Derrida's notion that the very foundations of our language and categories are never free from violence, other Mennonite theologians are inclined to see in Derrida the heresy of secular reason and the looming threat of a postmodern nihilism that is so important to Milbank's oppositional and reactive metanarrative. Although their critiques of Milbank and responses to Derrida are mixed, a common thread in the Mennonite conversation is the notion that violence is a theological problem that is best addressed by bringing the ethical and

political orientation of Mennonite pacifism to bear on ontological and epistemological terms with "constant suspicion and vigilance regarding the violence in both saying and doing."[4]

In his challenge to Lévinas, Derrida uses the term "violence" to describe the foundations of language, but Blum is concerned about how such a claim could allow violence to take on a universal status, such that everything would be violent. Although the notion that everything is violent is a totalizing claim that is contrary to the values that underpin Derrida's use of the term "violence," the notion that it is nearly impossible to be without violence remains a key aspect of Derrida's work, and he admits to very few exceptions to the violent character of language and categorization. Constituting a very different spatial and temporal economy and history of violence, the Mennonite critique of redemptive violence – in which the economy of returning violence for violence or solving violence with violence is resisted – is expressed in Blum's 'no' to violence. Against the oppositional framework that would demand a decision between passive withdrawal and self-consciously violent action, Blum says 'no' to violence in a way that negates its necessity but not its reality. These themes appear in Huebner's work as well, as he articulates a peace that is precarious while trying to remain dispossessive, restless, and nonreactive. Huebner's notion that peace is ontologically prior to violence appears to follow Milbank's ontology of peace, but his refusal to take power in order to achieve it sets him apart from Milbank in ways that are starker than he emphasizes. Restlessly moving against the desire to know, control, secure, and preserve peace, Huebner's dialogical vulnerability is taken up and furthered by Blum who considers pure ontological peace to be impossible. While Blum does not

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[4] Peter C. Blum, *For a Church to Come: Experiments in Postmodern Theory and Anabaptist Thought* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2013), 148. See also Chris K. Huebner, *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006), 97-113.

seem to think that peace is ontologically prior to violence, he does think that violence need not have the last word.

The key distinction between the ontology of peace in the works of Blum and Huebner, and the ontological peace of Milbank, is not that they differ on the ontological importance of peace, but that they differ on whether they can know and ought to enforce a metanarrative ordering of origins, essences, and ends. For Milbank, it is possible to know and justifiable to forcibly ensure how things are and where things should go, but for the Mennonite philosophical theologians it is never a clear matter to know what peace is, and it is never justifiable to use violence to achieve such a peace. Precarious and impossible, the peace of the Mennonite philosophical theologians addressed above is intertwined with temporal and historical terms – specifically the refusal to make history turn out right, and the refusal to rest in a certain peace that circumvents the changing character of the world that is always passing away.

Displacement

By contrast with Derrida, and with the Mennonite theologians who seek a pacifist epistemology and ontological peace, Jantzen's work does more to account for the breadth of violations that the term "violence" attempts to name – especially gendered and sexual violence, both epistemic and corporeal. Like Blum, Jantzen is suspicious of any use of the term that would endow it with a universal status, but Jantzen's concern is that the universalization of violence prevents its users from distinguishing between the force of an argument and the force of a bomb. Jantzen is sensitive to problems that inhere in definitions of violence that implicitly claim that "everything is violent," "boundaries are violent," or "creation is violent" because, on her account, these diminish the distinctive usefulness of the concept. At the same time, Jantzen's trilogy unfolds a

counter-metanarrative of the history of violence that, at first face, makes many problematic generalizations about the place of violence in the west.

In Jantzen's *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* violence is the main feature of the cultural habitus of the west, from its Jewish, Christian, Greek, and Roman origins through modernity to postmodernity, most evident in an obsessive fear and love of death that fixates on mortality, and correspondingly displaces beauty, birth, and creativity with its desire for other worlds beyond the natal origins and mortal ends of this finite life. However, as I suggest in the preceding chapter, Jantzen's use of the terms "violence" and "displacement" are linked. I have argued that what makes Jantzen's work exceptional is that she provides a positive account of the history of violence while resisting the violent ontology of displacement that understands the world as a place of antagonistic zero-sum games wherein different terms must necessarily displace and replace each other. Because Jantzen's work challenges the cyclical normativity of the habitus in which history is reproduced on its own basis and violence is made to seem natural and normal, her grand story of the violent history of the west is at least partially protected from the problems of metanarratives as diagnosed by postmodern thinkers: their universalizing, totalizing, and absolutizing circumscription of narrative relations between origins, essences, and ends. This is especially evident in her affirmation of contingency and emphasis on moments in the history of western thought at which things could have been otherwise than violent (Sappho instead of, but not at the expense of Aristotle; natality instead of, but not at the expense of mortality, etc.).

The term "displacement" helps to name a major problem that each source above attempts to address, but does not often clearly state, namely, the problem of reproducing a problematic dualistic structure within a way of thinking intended to critique or resist such a structure.

Jantzen's core argument in her final trilogy is that the western habitus is defined by an obsessive fixation that both loves and fears death. Jantzen argues that this "necrophilia" (as she calls it) focuses on death and the fact that we are mortal, at the direct expense of its supposed opposite: natality, the fact that we have each been born, and can create. Jantzen's most evocative illustration of this contrast is that while we may well die alone, we cannot be born alone. This, for her, is evidence that there are more resources for positive social and political life in re-emphasizing birth and natality than there are in focusing solely on death and mortality.

But what is unique and important in Jantzen's work is that she does not seek to replace or displace mortality with natality, both because there is something about displacement that is violent, and because there is something about the master narratives of modernity that violently displaces creativity, beauty, and natality out of the fear of mothers, children, and others. Jantzen does not argue that violence will be remediated once natality wins out over mortality as the main feature of the habitus. Instead of making compulsory the antagonistic displacement of one key term by another, wherein one thing must exist at the expense of another through relations of dominance and submission, Jantzen critiques the violent obsession with death in the west without repeating violent displacement in her critique of its results.

As stated in the introduction, at stake in this dissertation is the question: what kinds of continuities and discontinuities between ontological and epistemological ideas about the world and how we have knowledge of it, and acts of physical and corporeal violence that pierce flesh or bring a life to an end, form the basis for the concept of violence? Here at the end, we can see that the connection between language and corporality continues to trouble users of the term because when we refer to violence, the power of the term is owed to the images of physical violation it evokes. This brings us to a terminological problem. The difference between ontologies and

epistemologies of violence (which use ontological and epistemological categories to conceptualize corporeal violence like killing or warfare), and ontological and epistemological violence (which use the term violence to describe the major terms of ontology and epistemology such as being and discourse) is not clarified by Derrida, Jantzen, or the Mennonites. Much rests on the predicating function of the word 'of' in the term "ontology of violence" or "ontology of peace" but there is no consistency in how these terms are used in the works examined above. In order to address this lack of clarity, in conclusion I suggest distinguishing between the term "ontology of violence" which I understand to be a theory that aims to offer an account of the ontological status of corporeal violence, and "ontological violence" which I understand to describe a kind of violence committed in the ontological register itself.

Correlatively, I suggest distinguishing between "epistemologies of violence" that purport to give epistemological resources for better knowledge of corporeal violence (e.g., providing epistemological criteria for identifying when a physical act of violence has taken place), and "epistemological violence" that refers to violence committed in an epistemological way, through a particular way of knowing, communicating, or persuading. These terminological reorientations may be helpful for the discourse on violence because they qualify the term "violence" in a way that addresses the concern that Jantzen and Blum have with Derrida's work. Simply adding a word that qualifies what kind of violence is being referred to could address the concern expressed by Jantzen that Derrida's statements on violence do not distinguish the force of a sentence from the force of a bomb.

Jantzen's concern with Derrida's use of the term violence is based on the notion that "if we say everything is violent, then nothing is violent." Although her aims are clear when she critiques Derrida, I also note that she seems to think that the idea that everything is violent will

necessarily displace the kinds of resistance to violence that she thinks are important, including uses of the term to distinguish between sentences and bombs. However, I see no evidence to suggest that the idea that language is violent will necessarily paralyze critiques of corporeal violence like those of bombs and wars. In fact, the notion that if we say everything is violent, then we will be unable to distinguish between sentences and bombs, is based on the very kind of displacement that Jantzen wants to resist elsewhere in her work. More attention to such displacements within critiques of uses of the term "violence" would help to resist the reactive assumption that if we use the term "violence" to name speech acts or ontologies then our ability to resist corporeal and physical violations will be diminished.

Conclusion

Above I have placed Derrida, the Mennonites, and Jantzen in dialogue on the question of violence with attention to what values the term "violence" protects and how the boundaries that demarcate these values are imagined. Although Derrida, Jantzen, and the Mennonite philosophical theologians each approach violence from different standpoints, in Derrida's deconstruction of western metaphysics, in the philosophical turn in 21st century Mennonite pacifism, and in Jantzen's *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*, the term violence is used to refer to distinctly ontological and epistemological problems.

Furthermore, despite being situated in very different discourses – Derrida within philosophy and literary criticism, the Mennonite philosophical theologians within Christian philosophical theologies, and Jantzen within the broad bounds of the feminist philosophy of religion – they share similar basic questions. At stake for each is the ontological question "is the world violently ordered?" and the corresponding epistemological question "can I come to

knowledge of the world in a way that is not violent?" On one hand, ontological inquiry gives these thinkers terms with which to ask the question: "does violence inhere in being and existence themselves, such that things in the world necessarily exist in conflictual competition with, or at the expense of, other things?" On the other hand, epistemological inquiry provides terms for these thinkers to ask questions like: "can my ways of thinking, knowing, communicating, and persuading be violent?"

In the works of Derrida, Jantzen, and the Mennonite philosophical theologians, the term "violence" is directly applied to both the ontological structure of the world and to epistemological ways of knowing, naming, and conversing about that world. These ontological and epistemological accounts of the world are not distinct but entangled. The descriptive ontological position that the world is structured violently (as in the statement "we live in a violent world!") can form complex relationships with justifications of violent acts of both coercive persuasion and physical harm. In between the ontological claim that the world is violent, and the commission of violent acts, are certain mediating positions.

For example, for Milbank the fallen and tragic character of the world allows for the commission of violent and coercive acts that are meant to reorient things in accordance with their proper ontological essence and teleological end. Milbank's justification of coercion and violence is founded on the notion that human beings can not only know but also forcibly ensure conformity to ontologically ordered origins and ends, and his ontology of peace performs temporal deferrals that place emphasis on peaceful ends secured by violent means which can be retroactively assented to. This is one explicit case in which violent means are justified with reference to peaceful ends, but there are also more subtle ways that such connections are implicitly made. I may draw conclusions from the ontological notion that the world is a violent

place defined by competitive and antagonistic displacements, and these conclusions may be used to justify violent acts by appeal to supposedly greater goods like safety, security, and certainty. These continuities are often established implicitly through the use of images and metaphors that identify discourse with conflict.

Derrida, Jantzen, and the Mennonite philosophical theologians each draw complex but direct lines of causal influence between violent ontologies and epistemologies, and violent actions. Although they do not suggest that an implicit belief that the world is an inherently violent place will necessarily motivate or cause acts of physical violence, Derrida, Jantzen, and the Mennonite philosophical theologians each understand violence in the ontological and epistemological registers as a necessary but not necessarily sufficient condition for the commission of acts of physical or corporeal violence. For Jantzen, epistemological violence takes the form of an adversarial approach in which militaristic images of "advancing" arguments and "defending" positions define discursive norms. For Mennonite theologians the application of pacifist values to epistemology demands the rejection of imperialistic and colonial ways of knowing, which they define as being coercive and dominating, both refusing vulnerability and considering difference to be a threat rather than an opportunity for learning. It is obviously not so simple to say that an epistemology that seeks to possess, control, and dominate the other during a conversation will lead directly to physically violent acts that cause bodily harm. However, in the work of Jantzen in particular, the fact that the continuities between epistemologies and actions are complex does not diminish her argument that violent epistemologies are necessary preconditions for acts of physical violence.

But a delicate moment in the tension between description and prescription occurs when the desire to keep the question open (Derrida) and peace impossible (Blum) and precarious

(Huebner) turns back on itself and makes openness, impossibility, and precarity something one must conserve or make compulsory. Epistemic force, rhetorical power, and subtle coercion are dangers that haunt even the desire for openness. Derrida, the Mennonite philosophical theologians, and Jantzen each struggle to keep open something that cannot really be kept. Desiring to preserve and maintain the otherness of the other, the problematic status of the problem, the ongoing questioning of the question, and the openness of the future, the precarious and impossible character of peace, and the creative social possibilities of natality. But each of these desires for openness are troubled by the possessive defeat and ironic foreclosure of what they desire by its achievement. Displacement is a helpful name for one key aspect of such possessive and self-defeating desire because the paradox of achieving a precarious peace or the open status of the question is based on the self-displacement of the desires for precarity and openness themselves.

Derrida and the Mennonite philosophical theologians respond to this logic of displacement, but each in their own way fails to fully take its problems into account. For example, Derrida's challenge to Lévinas in "Violence and Metaphysics" takes the form of a commentary that goes to great lengths to avoid critiquing his work in an oppositional way. And yet, the entire undertaking of "Violence and Metaphysics" is based on the disjunctive idea that Lévinas thinks that we can come to peace, and Derrida thinks that we cannot be without violence under such conditions. When the stakes are as high as both Derrida and Lévinas claim they are, Derrida's use of the term "violence" keeps the question of violence so open that he seems unable or unwilling to make the simple distinction between the force of a sentence and the force of a bomb. This is not to say that he does not adequately condemn violence, and nor is it to say (with Blum and Jantzen) that he simply thinks that everything is violent. It is to say that when the

problem of violence is before him, Derrida seems more concerned with keeping things open than with the task of sharply challenging the instances of physical violence that give the term its meaning and power in the first place.

The Mennonite philosophical theologians too err on the side of keeping peace open, precarious, and impossible. Both Huebner and Blum risk making the precarious and impossible character of peace into primary determiners of peace rather than cautions that would condition but not foreclose a positive and constructive narrative of the remediation of violence. This will disappoint those who approach their work looking for a clear and definitive Mennonite definition of violence or peace.

This is where Jantzen's approach more successfully accounts for the problems of violence and displacement. In *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*, Jantzen attends closely to the problem of displacement, whereby the valuation of one thing competitively replaces another, the desire for other worlds displaces or replaces this one, and mortality displaces natality. Despite the overwhelming persuasiveness of the logic of displacement, however, Jantzen seeks refocus the attentions of her readers on natality without displacing mortality in the process. For Jantzen, it is not enough to do as Derrida did and show how language is shot through with violence. Instead, for Jantzen, one must counter violence constructively by re-emphasizing and refocusing on the terms of natality rather than mortality, but without gestures of displacement.

It is Jantzen who most effectively uses the term "violence" to resist displacement where it is found precisely because she refuses to allow violent displacement to become a part of the critique of violence. In this way, she aligns with the critique of redemptive violence set forth by the Mennonite theologians examined in Chapter 2. Given that it is vital to clarify *which* narratives and values conflict when violence is disputed and *how* exactly relationships between

conflicting narratives and values are characterized, I suggest that those concerned with the ontological problems of violence pay further attention to both when the logic of displacement is repeated within critiques of violence, and when displacement reigns and should be resisted in more direct ways than are possible under the terms of undecidability (Derrida), precarity (Huebner), or impossibility (Blum).

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