
Derrida, originary violence and metaphysics of presence

Derrida, violência originária e metafísica da presença

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ABSTRACT

Jacques Derrida, on one hand, is a thinker of violence. His scrutiny of the concept of violence has a long history. The earlier Derrida concerns more with the structural violence or the violence of *logos*, while the later Derrida concerns more with the empirical violence or the violence of the state. Certainly, violence plays a central role in his philosophy. Jacques Derrida, on the other hand, is famous for his critique of the entire European Philosophical tradition as Metaphysics of presence. He questions the metaphysical assumptions at the core of the philosophical tradition. Hence, this paper would like to explore one of his earliest essays, “Violence and Metaphysics”, and then illustrate how and how and why for Derrida, philosophy is, in fact, a philosophy of violence and always remains what he calls a *metaphysics of presence*.

Keywords: Jacques Derrida. Emmanuel Levinas. Originary Violence. Metaphysics of Presence.

RESUMO

Jacques Derrida, por um lado, é um pensador da violência. Seu escrutínio do conceito de violência tem uma longa história. O primeiro Derrida se preocupa mais com a violência do logos, enquanto o Derrida tardio se preocupa mais com a violência empírica ou a

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violência do Estado. Sem dúvida, a violência tem um papel central em sua filosofia. Jacques Derrida, por outro lado, é famoso por sua crítica de toda a tradição filosófica europeia como metafísica da presença. Ele questiona as pressuposições metafísicas no centro da tradição filosófica. Assim, este artigo pretende explorar um de seus primeiros ensaios, "Violência e metafísica", bem como ilustrar como e por que para Derrida a filosofia sempre é, de fato, filosofia da violência, e sempre permanece no que ele chama metafísica da presença.

Palavras-chave: Jacques Derrida. Emmanuel Levinas. Violência originária. Metafísica da presença.

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Jacques Derrida, on one hand, is a thinker of violence. His scrutiny of the concept of violence has a long history: his thinking of violence begins with his reflections on writing and language, and it is deeply embedded in the semiologic consideration of the differentiation, figuring prominently in *Of Grammatology* (1967), *Voice and Phenomenon* (1967) and *Writing and Difference* (1967). Through the conceptualization of *originary violence* implicated in *originary writing* in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida discovers that violence is ubiquitous and everywhere in all language use. The question of violence continues to circulate as a prominent theme in Derrida's later works like *Force of Law* (1994), and *Politics of Friendship* (1994). He exposes and challenges the traditional assumptions, and hierarchies of power through the direct discussion on sovereignty, force, legislation, animality... Certainly, violence plays a central role in his philosophy. Jacques Derrida, on the other hand, is famous for his critique of the entire European Philosophical tradition as Metaphysics of presence. He questions the metaphysical assumptions at the core of the philosophical tradition. Hence, this paper would like to explore one of his earliest essays, "Violence and Metaphysics", in reference to his tripartite structure of violence in *Of grammatology*, and then illustrate how and how and why for Derrida philosophy is, in fact, a philosophy of violence and always remains what he calls a *metaphysics of presence*.

In "Violence and Metaphysics" (1967), Derrida offers a famous deconstruction of Levinas's ethical thoughts from his 1961 book *Totality and infinity* and formulates the

question of violence and thus his critique of western philosophy as metaphysics of presence. In fact, this deconstructive reading cannot be considered simply as his refutation of Levinas. Why? The explanation can be found in Derrida's (1986) response to Andre Jacob's challenge in the discussion about Levinas,

Faced with a thinking like that of Levinas, **I never have an objection**. I am ready to subscribe to everything that he says. That does not mean that I think the same thing in the same way, but in this respect the difficulties are very difficult to determine; in the case what do differences of idiom, language or writing mean? I tried to pose a certain number of questions to Levinas whilst reading him, where it may have been a question of his relation to the Greek logos, of his strategy, or of his thinking with respect to femininity for example, but what happens there is not of the order of disagreement or distance. (p. 74).

Here, Derrida admits that he has never objected to Levinas's thoughts totally. He is "ready to subscribe to everything that [Levinas] says", while there is a difference between him and Levinas in terms of the methodology to the problem(s) posed, but no philosophical difference between them. To respect Derrida's will, "Violence and Metaphysics" can never be considered his refutation of Levinas. Rather, he follows Levinas's position to question "his relation to the Greek logos, of his strategy, or of his thinking with respect to femininity for example". However, Critchley (2014) argues that Derrida is a little disingenuous here, since the idiom, language and especially writing do play some crucial roles in his deconstruction, such that all these forms the contents of Derrida's thought and also reflect his position. And throughout the reading of this essay, it is not difficult to discover some disagreements between Derrida to Levinas. Nevertheless, let us have a humble and generous attitude to explore his deconstruction of Levinas.

In "Violence and Metaphysics", Derrida sees that Levinas's project in *Totality and Infinity* is a "new, quite new, a metaphysics of radical separation and exteriority" (2001, p. 110). This new metaphysics "fundamentally no longer seeks to be a thought of Being and phenomenality" (p. 101). Rather, it "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) [and from] oppression itself" (p. 102). Doubtlessly, Derrida agrees with Levinas's criticism that philosophy is essentially Greek, so he writes,

The entirety of philosophy is conceived on the basis of its Greek source... It is simply that the founding concepts of philosophy are primarily Greek, and it

would not be possible to philosophize, or to speak philosophical, outside this medium. (p. 100)

Like Levinas, Derrida sees both Husserl and Heidegger remain within this tradition, that these two phenomenologists are really Greeks: “any possible dialogues between Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerian ‘ontology’... can be understood only from within the Greek tradition” (2001, p. 101). In other words, they maintain the privilege of light in Western philosophy since the Greeks. According to Derrida, the Greek ideal is,

A world of light and of unity, a “philosophy of a world of light, a world without time”. In this heliopolitics, “the social ideal ... is the collectivity which says ‘us,’ and which, turned toward the intelligible sun, toward the truth, experiences the other at his side and not face to face with him. (p. 111)

Inheriting such an ideal, western philosophy systematizes or totalizes every otherness into the realm of the same. In this regard, Derrida agrees with Levinas’s criticism of western philosophy as an ontology, which is “a reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being” (Levinas, 1969, p. 43). As so, Derrida argues that the western philosophers even “renounce the other... (which) is to enclose oneself within solitude and to repress ethical transcendence”, they “do not think the other” (2001, p. 113). However, “the absolute alterity of each instant... cannot be produced within the identity of the subject” (p. 113). As a result, this leads to the threat of solipsism in modern classical philosophy. Derrida continues to argue that “if [‘Western philosophy has most often been an ontology’] is true..., a Reason which does nothing but [only] recall itself to itself..., then [a Reason] has always neutralized the Other, in every sense of the word” (p. 120). For Derrida, “every reduction of the Other... is... violence” (p. 159). Thus, Western philosophy, including phenomenology and ontology, “would be philosophies of violence”, as both of them are marked by the “historical violence of light” (p. 113-114).

Certainly, Levinas does not inherit such an ideal. Rather he discovers that the same is called into question by the other. Simply because the alterity and the “exteriority” of which cannot be reduced to the same. According to him, putting the spontaneous self into question by the presence of the Other is to go “beyond the disdain or disregard of the other, that is beyond the appreciation or possession, understanding and knowledge of the other” and seeking for a non-totalize, non-violent ethical relation, Levinas calls this

positive movement metaphysics or ethics, i.e. “the putting into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other”, the putting into question of the Same (Levinas, 1969, p. 43). Levinas describes such Metaphysics as a desire, that “tends towards *something else entirely*, towards *the absolutely other (l’absolument autre)*” (p. 33). Levinas’s use of the term “desire” here refers to a very special sense of desire. It is not desire based on need, but “a desire without satisfaction which... understands the remoteness, the alterity, the exteriority (*extériorité*) of the Other” (p. 34). “The Other metaphysically desired” is not “other” that I can possess, such as the food that I eat, the places where I travel, and the place where I live. This is because the alterity of the things that I can possess is “reabsorbed into the unity of the system”, which turns out to “destroy the radical alterity of the Other” (p. 35-36). Rather the Other is “something else entirely”, “the absolute other”, the Other, which will never be absorbed or reduced. Such Metaphysical Desire is the desire of the Other. However, such desire cannot be satisfied since the alterity of the Other is absolute, infinite, and thus irreducible. According to Levinas, the infinite alterity of the Other can be revealed in the everyday encounter with the face of the Other (*le visage d’Autrui*), in the way that “the Other presents himself [or herself], exceeding *the idea of the other in me*” (p. 50). The face can even be considered as the condition of possibility for ethics. [Ethics here is “opposed to first philosophy [i.e., ontology], which identifies freedom and power” (p. 47). However, it does “not contrary to truth; it goes to being in its absolute exteriority, and accomplishes the very intention that animates the movement unto the truth” (p.47). It is well known that, for Levinas, ethics is the true *prima Philosophia*, which precedes ontology, and which is rightfully and philosophically primary, whereas the tradition fails to recognise it.] Levinas writes,

For the presence before the face, my orientation toward the Other can lose the avidity of the gaze only by turning into generosity, incapable of approaching the other with empty hands. The relationship, established over the things hereafter possibly common, that is, susceptible of being said, is the relationship of discourse. (p. 50)

In the face-to-face (*vis-à-vis*) encounter with the Other, my avidity of gaze on the other turns into generosity and language. For Levinas, (also for Derrida) vision is a violent recognition that would possess the other. The tradition considers it as the chief sense over other senses. According to Levinas, “Vision presupposes the light... [which] makes the thing appear by driving out the shadows” (1969, p. 189). Vision or my gaze is to absorb

the other into the Same. The other here is not the Other: it is not transcendence; it has no interiority. However, the face is not an object for vision; it cannot be reduced to my vision of it. Rather the face provides the “light”. The face “at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves on me, the idea existing to my own measure and to measure of its ideatum – the adequate idea... [i]t does not manifest itself by these qualities... It expresses itself” (p. 51). I look at him and he looks back at me; I speak to him, and he speaks back to me, he expresses himself. According to Levinas, “the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised” (p. 198). Conversation “maintains the distance between me and the Other, the radical separation asserted in transcendence [which] prevents the reconstitution of the totality, cannot renounce the egoism of its existence... conversation consists in recognizing in the Other a right over this egoism, and hence in justifying oneself” (p. 40). In conversation, I wait for him (the Other) to express his thoughts to me. I admit the distance between me and him as well as his transcendence, as I do not know his mind until he speaks: I face “the very unforeseeableness of his reaction”, he can “sovereignly say no to me” (p.198-199). However, he “opposes to me not a greater force... not some superlative of power, but precisely the infinity of his transcendence... this infinity stronger than murder, already resist[s] us in his face, [it] is his face, [it] is the primordial expression is the first word: ‘thou shalt not kill’” (p. 199), which is there from the beginning and non-negotiable. Levinas calls it “the ethical resistance”, “the resistance of that which has no resistance” (p. 199). Thus, conversation makes us recognize the individuality of the Other – the Other is “more than me”, who exceeds me. According to Levinas, “the relation with the Other alone introduces a dimension of transcendence and leads us to a relation totally different from experience in the sensible sense of the term” (p. 193). It is a relation to the infinite. “The face” from the beginning, “offers itself to [my] compassion and to [my] obligation” (p. 198). There is a commandment in the appearance of the face. The Other is that which I cannot evade, comprehend, or kill. The infinite non-totalize, non-violent ethical relation to the face of the Other is accomplished “in discourse, in a conversation which proposes the world” (p. 96). As such, our relation to the Other is not homogeneous but heteronomous. This is because we cannot reduce the Other into the same; we cannot absorb the Other into the unity of the system. The infinite alterity of the Other is there at the beginning. For Levinas, alterity is prior to identity: “the alterity of the other does not

result from its identity, but constitutes it: the other is the Other” (p. 251). In the relation to the other, I have my own distinct identity. Such identity is the result of my acting according to the irreplaceable responsibility that the Other summons you to. My relation to the Other is an ethical relation. In this sense, the Other is the otherness of the other who constitutes my identity. Thus, alterity is prior to identity. Thus, the infinite relation to the Other is prior to the totalized relation to the Other. Ethics precedes ontology. In this sense, identity presupposes alterity; the totalized relation to the Other presupposes the infinite relation to the Other; ontology presupposes ethics. Hence, Levinas concludes, “Ethics as first philosophy (*l'Éthique comme la philosophie première*)” (p. 304).

Echoing Levinas, Derrida claims that, “the Other, as Other, is not only an alter ego. It is what I myself am not” and argues that the Other must at first be recognized as an alter ego; otherwise, “its entire alterity would collapse”, and it becomes a mere thing that is “entirely in the world [but] not... the origin of the word” (Derrida, 2001, p. 156). Derrida further argues that,

the egoity of the other permits him to say ‘ego’ as I do; and this is why he is Other, and not a stone, or a being without speech in my real economy. Therefore, if you will, he is face, can speak to me, understand me, and eventually command me. Dissymmetry itself would be impossible without this symmetry. (p. 157)

The Other is an ego as I am. The Other as an alter ego exists in a symmetrical relation with the “I”. The “I” and the Other are the same in being egos, which presupposes the horizon of the same. There is a more fundamental symmetrical relation between the I and the Other, before the dissymmetrical relation between the I and the Other: to neutralize the Other or to reduce the Other to the same. Derrida writes that “the Other is absolutely other only if he is an [alter] ego, that is, in a certain way, if he is the same as I” (2001, p. 127). Therefore, for Derrida, the Other is at first an alter ego. Derrida further argues that to refuse to see the Other as an alter ego, on one hand, is to reject a more fundamental symmetrical relation between the I and the Other, on the other hand, is to neutralize the Other or to reduce the Other to the same. According to Derrida, “every reduction of the Other to” the same, “is... violence” (p. 159). This is why Derrida thinks 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* [i.e., as a transcendental alter ego] is, within the ethical order, the very gesture of

all violence” (p. 156). However, to see the Other as an alter ego is to presuppose the horizon of the same, which is also a reduction of the Other to the same and thus it is violence. Hence, there is always violence exercised through the symmetrical relation and from the same through the reduction of the other in the dissymmetrical relation. And there is always violence in philosophy, which seeks “to be a thought of Being and phenomenality” (p. 101), and always maintains the privilege of light of unity to systematise or totalize every otherness into the realm of the same.

In “Violence and Metaphysics”, Derrida does not object Levinas in the sense that he appreciates Levinas’s attempt to “(seek) to liberate itself from the Greek domination of the Same and the One (other names for the light of Being and of the phenomenon) [and from] oppression itself” (Derrida, 2001, p. 102). However, he doubts whether Levinas can really “free itself of [the] light” and escape from the violent tradition through his account of the ego and the encounter with the other. According to Derrida, Levinas understands the ego or the “I” as the same. “I” am the same over time through self-identification, the ego “alters itself toward itself within itself”, i.e., “within its own movement of identification” (p. 116). Derrida argues, for Levinas, “the alterity or negativity interior to the ego, the interior difference, is but an appearance: an illusion, a ‘play of the Same’” (p. 116). Here, one may argue that Derrida identifies Levinas with a position the latter attacks, which is to assert that “the alterity or negativity interior to the ego... is... an illusion” (p. 116). In fact, for Levinas, the alterity which includes the absorbed alterity and the ego which includes the egotism’s ego are real, and both of them are necessary for us to have infinity. Based on such an understanding of the ego, Derrida argues, it “necessarily follows... that Levinas will describe history as a blinding to the other and as the laborious possession of the same” (p. 116), which is in fact placing the relation with the other beyond history. Derrida’s diagnosis is correct, as for Levinas, ethics has a reality beyond that of history. Here appears the displacement of the concept of historicity. Derrida then turns to question Levinas’ account of the encounter with the Other, as he writes,

Truthfully, one does not have to wonder what this encounter is. It is the encounter, the only way out, the only adventuring outside oneself toward the unforeseeably-other... there is no way to conceptualize the encounter: it made possible by the other, the unforeseeable “resistant to all categories”. Concepts suppose an anticipation, a horizon within which alterity is amortized as soon as it is announced precisely because it has let itself be foreseen. [However,] the

infinitely-other cannot be bound by a concept, cannot be thought on the basis of a horizon; for a horizon is always a horizon of the same, the elementary unity within which eruptions and surprises are always welcomed by understanding and recognized. Thus, we are obliged to think in opposition to the truisms which we believed – which we still cannot not believe – to be the very ether of our thought and language. (p. 118)

The encounter with the Other is “the only way out”, because such an encounter “is the only possible opening of time, the only pure future, the only pure expenditure *beyond* history as economy” (Derrida, 2001, p. 118). In fact, such an encounter “*is present* at the heart of experience... *as a trace*” (p. 118-119), which is deferring and differentiating. This is why the classical conception would call such a present an “impossible presence”. Thus, it “can no longer be described by traditional concepts, and which resists every philosopheme” (p. 103), as to conceptualize something is to totalize every otherness in it into the realm of the same. However, Derrida argues that it is impossible to conceptualize the encounter without falling back into the Greek categories of language and light. In this sense, “there is no way to conceptualize the encounter”, and “it is necessary to state the other in the language of the Same; that it is necessary to think true exteriority... by means of the Inside-Outside structure and by spatial metaphor” (p. 140). Even, though Levinas realizes that “[i]n the face, the other is given over in person as other, that is, as that which does not reveal itself, as that which cannot be made thematic”(Derrida, 2001, p. 128), he describes the relation to the Other in phenomenological terms, (for Derrida, they remain as the classical philosophical language which presupposes presence, and in relation to space) that draws him back into the Greek violent categories of language and light, and thus leads to the failure of his attempts. For Derrida, Levinas’s language always betrays him, as he assumes what he attempts to deny. Derrida keeps on saying, “perhaps, that there is no philosophical logos which must not first let itself be expatriated into the structure Inside-Outside” (p. 140). Thus, there is no final philosophical “departure from Greece”, no departure from metaphysics. In this regard, did Derrida admits that even his philosophy cannot escape from the Greek violent categories of language and light?

For Derrida, while Levinas presupposes such a symmetrical relation between two egos, he also presupposes such violence in stating the dissymmetrical relation to the Other. Again, there is always violence exercised through the symmetrical relation and from the same through the reduction of the other in Levinas’ sense which underlies the non-violent dissymmetrical ethical relation. That is a necessary violence that no relation with the

Other can avoid. This is because the encounter “is present... as a trace” and the Other is present as absence or present as “nonphenomenal”. It is “always behind its signs and its works, always within its secret interior, and forever discreet, interrupting all historical totalities through its freedom of speech” (Derrida, 2001, p. 128). Therefore, there must be a “transcendental and pre-ethical violence, a general dissymmetry whose archia is the same, and which eventually permits the inverse dissymmetry, that is, the ethical non-violence of which Levinas speaks” (p. 160). This transcendental violence, “which does not spring from an ethical resolution or freedom, or from a certain way of encountering or exceeding the other, originally institutes the relationship between two finite ipseities” (p. 160), is what Derrida calls the *originary violence*. This conclusion links us back to his claim at the very end of the section on “The violence of letter” in *Of Grammatology*. The opening of ethics must be non-ethical and violent, as there is always the originary violence, which is a transcendental violence, at work: this is “the irreducible violence of the relation to the other” (p. 160). In fact, Derrida explains Levinas’ error in separating non-violence from violence, because while they are inseparable, because such violent relation is “at the same time non-violence, since it opens the relation to the other” (p. 160). As such, Derrida argues that “Levinas’s metaphysics in a sense presupposes... (Husserl’s) transcendental phenomenology that it seeks to put into question” (p. 166), which means Levinas presupposes Husserl’s living present as “the absolute form of egological life, of ego” (Husserl, 1999, p. 35). At the same time, he argues that Levinas also presupposes Heidegger’s fundamental ontology, which is the thought of being qua being:

Just as he implicitly had to appeal to phenomenological self-evidences against phenomenology, Levinas must ceaselessly suppose and practice the thought of precomprehension of Being in his discourse, even when he directs it against ‘ontology.’ Otherwise, what would ‘exteriority as the essence of Being’ mean” (TI)?... Ethico-metaphysical transcendence therefore presupposes ontological transcendence. (Derrida, 2001, p. 177)

The thought of being is to consider what makes a being to be. “To let be” (*laisser-être*), for Heidegger, is not an “object of comprehension first” (as Levinas has understood), but rather to disclose “all possible form of existent and even those which, by essence, cannot be transformed into ‘objects of comprehension’” (Derrida, 2001, 172). For Derrida, the thought of being “conditions the recognition of the essence of the existent... (and) the respect for the other as what it is: other” (p. 172). Everyone as *Dasein* is a disclosing

being; the Other like me is also a disclosing being. He argues that Levinas misunderstood the thought of Being as the concept of Being. In fact, for Heidegger, “Being is not the concept of a rather indeterminate and abstract predicate, seeking to cover the totality of existents in its extreme universality... Being is transcategorical... [or] what Levinas says of the other: it is ‘refractory to the category’” (p. 175). Being is an impossible presence, which only appears through its traces. Thus, Derrida writes that “the understanding of Being always concerns alterity, and par excellence the alterity of the Other in all its originality” (p. 175-176). Thus, “every determination... presupposes the thought of Being” (p. 175), as “there is no speech without the thought and statement of Being... Being itself can only be thought and stated” (p. 179). Even Levinas’s account of the face also presupposes the thought of Being, i.e., presupposes Heidegger’s fundamental ontology. Derrida admits that “the thought of being... is never foreign to a certain violence” (p. 184): for the thought of Being “always appears in difference... Being dissimulates itself in its occurrence, and originally does violence to itself in order to be stated and in order to appear”. Derrida later states that “the first violence is this dissimulation” (p. 186). In this sense, Levinas must presuppose the “violence” – the originary violence that he seeks to escape from in this ontology. For Derrida, Levinas fails to see the impossibility of pure non-violence in human relations, thought and language, as well as the inseparable relation between violence and ethics. Derrida argues that there is no way to free itself from the “historical violence of light” and escape from the Western tradition. There is no final philosophical “departure from Greece”, as there is an originary or transcendental violence that is “tied to phenomenality itself, and to the possibility of language”, a violence that is “embedded in the root of meaning and logos” (p. 156). Not only Levinas, but even Derrida himself, the language of his philosophy remains the same as all philosophical discourse, which is inherently violent. All these draw him back to the “philosophies of violence”. In fact, At the beginning of “violence and metaphysics”, Derrida announces the death of philosophy:

That philosophy died yesterday, since Hegel or Marx, Nietzsche, or Heidegger—and philosophy should still wander toward the meaning of its death ... that philosophy died one day, within history ... that beyond the death, or dying nature, of philosophy, perhaps even because of it, thought still has a future ... all these are unanswerable questions ... these are problems put to philosophy as problems philosophy cannot resolve. (p. 97-98)

The death of philosophy, in the sense that philosophy always desires the impossible, raises the problems that philosophy itself cannot resolve. The impossible is the pure non-violence. It is impossible because all philosophies remain in the “historical violence of light”. Thus, they are unavoidably violent. Even for Levinas, though he wishes to overcome ontology, by enacting a “departure from the Greece”, such that he would arrive at a non-violent ethical relation with the Other. However, for Derrida, it is still impossible, as “the impossible has already occurred” from the beginning (Derrida, 2001, p. 98). “The entire philosophy”, including Levinas and Derrida himself, “is conceived on the basis of its Greek source... the founding concepts of philosophy are primarily Greek” (p. 100). The privilege of light in Western philosophy as inherited from Greeks results in the cultural and intellectual condition that, there is no language that can escape from the light:

The philosophers (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,... by risking the (worst) violence. (p. 146)

Hence, philosophy is irreducibly and unavoidably violent. “Violence, certainly, appears within the horizon of an idea of the infinite... this horizon is... the horizon... of a reign in which the difference between the same and the other, *différance*, would no longer be valid” (Derrida, 2001, p.161). By this, he means that the difference between the same and the other in philosophy is still under the play of trace and under the moment of *différance*. Once there is *différance*, there can never be a purity of the same or of the other, and no infinity of the same or of the other. So that there can never be a purity of violence and non-violence. Both pure violence and pure non-violence are contradictory concepts, which are impossible: “pure violence, a relation between beings without face, is not yet violence, is pure non-violence”, while “pure non-violence, the nonrelation of the same to the other (in the sense understood by Levinas) is pure violence” (p. 183). There is always already an originary or transcendental violence in philosophy that is “tied to ... the possibility of language”, a violence that is “embedded in the root of meaning and logos” (p. 156). In this sense, even Levinas must use this violent language, as there is no such non-violent language that could “do without the verb to be, that is, without predication” (p. 184), and of course even Derrida. There is no way to separate violence from

metaphysics, as well as ethics. This is the Western philosophical tradition inaugurated by the Greeks, which Derrida calls “metaphysics of presence”.

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