The Flipside of Violence, or Beyond the Thought of Good Enough

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In one of his earliest and most significant texts, his 1964 “Violence and Metaphysics,” Jacques Derrida says the following:

Every reduction of the other to a *real* moment of *my* life, its reduction to the state of an empirical alter-ego, is a possibility, or rather an empirical eventuality, which is called violence; and violence [that is, empirical or real violence] presupposes ... necessary eidetic [or ideal] relationships. [However,] there is a transcendental ... violence, an (in general dissymmetry) whose *arche* is the same This transcendental violence institutes the relationship between two finite ipseities. In effect, the necessity of gaining access to the meaning of the other (in its irreducible alterity) ... on the basis of an intentional modification of my ego (in general) ...; and the necessity of speaking of the other as other, or to the other as other, on the basis of its appearing-for me-as-what-it-is, that is, as other ... —this necessity [of appearing or being a phenomenon] from which no discourse can escape, from its earliest origin—this necessity is violence itself, or rather the transcendental origin of an irreducible violence (Derrida, “Violence” 187-188 [French]; 128 [English])¹

The context for this quotation is Derrida’s discussion of Levinas’ thought of the other in relation to Husserl’s phenomenology of the other. The central idea in this quotation is twofold. On the one hand, Derrida is arguing that empirical or real violence presupposes eidetic or ideal relations such as the other appearing as what it is, as other. And, on the other hand, and, more importantly, Derrida is arguing that these eidetic necessities are themselves violent since they essentially force the other to be the same and no longer to be other: as he says, “there is a transcendental violence whose *arche* [or origin] is the same.” In other words, what is most important about this quotation is that Derrida is arguing that violence is essentially irreducible. Because violence is essentially

irreducible, we cannot, according to Derrida, speak of relations that are “absolutely peaceful.” As we know, Derrida develops the idea of transcendental violence throughout his forty year career. And, for many of us, Derrida’s idea of transcendental violence (and there are similar ideas in Foucault and Deleuze) has provoked a lot of thought.² Recently, however, questions have been raised about the imagery of violence that one finds in certain kinds of contemporary philosophical discourses that are commonly called “poststructuralist,” “postmodernist,” or “deconstructive,” that is, discourses in which Derrida was directly involved or which he inspired (see Murphy; Gilson; Steiner).

The questions raised seem to consist in three types. The first and most important question goes like this: in the discourses that we commonly call “poststructuralist,” “postmodernist,” or “deconstructive,” in a word, what we call “continental philosophy,” the imagery of violence is so widespread that it is not clear whether those who compose the discourses really know that of which they speak when they use the word “violence.” Obstacles, exclusions, and prohibitions, all of these are described through images of violence. Yet, the question is: is it really the case that these sorts of relationships are violent? Is blood really shed? Do these relations necessarily require the imagery of violence? Or are we who compose this sort of deconstructive discourse just confused? In short, through the charge of rampant confusion, this kind of question challenges the very legitimacy of the discourse (Gilson 179-180).

The second type of question raised about the imagery of violence is closely related to the first, and it is perhaps just as important. The question goes like this: when deconstructive discourses adopt the imagery of violence, calling it “originary,” “transcendental,” or “foundational,” it is not clear, as the argument goes, that the deconstructive discourse is being “vigilant” enough in regard to what we might call “real,” “physical,” or “historical” violence

(Murphy 117; Oksala 36-50).³ The argument continues in this way: even though the sort of philosopher who raises this second type question about “real” violence acknowledges the necessity of violent imagery in deconstructive discourses, this sort of philosopher demands more vigilance so that the imagery of violence does not give off the impression of a tacit endorsement of “real” violence.

Then, there is a third kind of question, which is somewhat different than the first two. Here the question arises because, as we have already noted, the violence is irreducible.⁴ If violence is irreducible (it is “originary,” “transcendental,” or “foundational”), then it seems any attempt to reduce violence is futile. The apparent futility resulting from the irreducibility of violence implies, as the argument goes, that nothing can be done. Consequently, the apparent futility seems to imply that there can be nothing like a moral principle in the strongest sense, which, I think, would have to be something like a categorical imperative, an unconditional imperative of non-violence or peace (Steiner 131).

I intend to respond to each of these three questions directly in three sections of this essay. However, before I do that, I think we need to understand the background for the development of a fundamental discourse colored by imagery of violence. This background comes from the history of philosophy and especially from two landmarks in that history: Plato and Nietzsche. In particular, we must see how Plato and Nietzsche speak about life. Here, however, as we shall see, it is really Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal return that is most important. The eternal return doctrine sets up all the reflections on time in what I have called “the great French philosophy of the sixties” (that is, Derrida, Deleuze, and Foucault) (see Lawlor, *Thinking through French Philosophy and Early Twentieth Century*).

Then, after the historical background, in a second step (the second section, which responds to the first type of question), I would like to present a kind of “logic” (based in the structure of time) demonstrating why the imagery of violence is necessary for a transcendental investigation of the conditions for or the genesis of experience. Of course, I am going to argue here that the imagery of violence is necessary. However, I am less certain that necessity and appropriateness are identical. In her 1969 book, *On Violence*, Hannah Arendt had questioned the transfer of a set of concepts appropriate to one region to another region. Starting therefore from a brief consideration of Arendt’s book, I will take up the second kind of question concerning the need for vigilance (the third section, which responds to the second kind of question). There is no question that we need to be vigilant against real, empirical, or physical violence. However, thanks to an insight from Deleuze, I shall argue that we need to be even more vigilant. We need to be vigilant against all the forms of thinking and therefore forms of behavior that confine us, forms in which we have comfortably settled down.

Following this call for even more vigilance, we shall, in the third step (fourth and concluding section, which responds to the third kind of question), attempt to turn this fundamental violence around; we shall attempt to reverse it or “flip it over,” hence the title of the essay, “The Flipside of Violence.” Indeed, as a response to the third kind of question concerning the imagery of violence in deconstructive discourses, the one that calls for a moral principle, I shall try to formulate something like a moral principle. However, unlike the sort of principle that this third kind of question calls for—one that allows for its untroubled application—the principle we find (if we can call it a principle), while unconditional and thus something like a categorical imperative, is unstable and troubling. This imperative makes us promise the impossible. It is this impossibility that makes us stop thinking that “the best guarantee” is “good enough” (Steiner 154), hence the

essay's subtitle, "Beyond the Thought of Good Enough." It is this impossibility that makes us be troubled, almost insanely troubled by the inescapable images of violence. However, before we reach this near madness, we must consider Plato and Nietzsche.

I. The Soul and Life, Plato and Nietzsche

We begin with Plato for the obvious reason that his dialogues are the first truly philosophical discourse on the soul, but also a discourse with imagery of violence. Just as obvious, we shall look briefly at the two most famous discussions of the soul, the great myth of the *Phaedrus* and Book IV of the *Republic*. As you recall, the great myth of the *Phaedrus* presents not a direct discourse on the soul; instead Socrates there presents a "figure" (*eikon*) of what the soul is (246a). According to Socrates, the soul resembles a chariot, with a charioteer and two winged horses. For mixed souls, that is, human souls, the two winged horses are of a different kind, one good, the other evil (*kakos*). The soul is trying through the winged horses to ascend to the banquet of the gods where one can view being or reality. But if the evil horse is not "well trained" (*paidies*), then the ascent is difficult for the charioteer. Moreover, when many mixed souls attempt to ascend, there is rivalry and competition, resulting in many horses becoming lame and losing wings (248a). The *Republic* Book IV presentation of the soul is equally well known. Like the charioteer and two winged horses image of the *Phaedrus*, the *Republic* presents the soul as having what looks to be tripartite composition: the rational part (*logos*); the desiring or appetitive part (*epithumtikon*), which is irrational; and the spirited part (*thymos*). The *Republic* psychological discourse is less figurative than that of the *Phaedrus* since, in Book II, Socrates suggests to Glaucon that, in order to investigate justice in the individual, they first investigate justice in something bigger, which is the city (368c-369b). Then they will use the "likeness" (*homoiosis*) of the bigger in order to

understand the smaller. So, in the *Republic*, Book IV, the discourse on the soul has moved away from the “likeness” of the larger image, the city, to the smaller, to what the soul in the individual really is. However, in Book IV, in order to explain the distinctive nature of the spirited part of the soul, Socrates makes use of a story (439d). It is the story of Leontius who, when encountering corpses after an execution, has a strong desire to look at them; but at the same time he feels disgust and makes himself turn away from the vision of the corpses. Eventually however, his desire to look at the corpses “overpowers” (*kratos*) him and he looks. Socrates comments on this story by saying that it “certainly indicates that anger [that is, *thymos*] sometimes makes war [*polemos*] against the desires as one thing against something else” (Plato, “*Republic*” 440a, trans. Bloom).

I would like to stress only two points about these two famous Platonic discourses. On the one hand, while the Platonic structure of the soul looks to be tripartite, it is really dualistic: there are the two horses, and then there are the rational part and the irrational part. The image of the charioteer and what is called “*thymos*,” which look to be a third part, in fact function as means of synthesis or unification between the two parts. Yet, and this is my second point, in *Republic*, Book IV, *thymos*, as something like a synthetic third term, appears to be the place of war. And of course, one cannot overlook the imagery of violence in the *Phaedrus* with the so-called “bad horse” requiring “training,” with horses getting injured in the ascent. Thus, over two thousand years before the rise of what we call “deconstructive discourse,” we find violence within the very first psychological discourse in the west. Perhaps, on the basis of this historical fact, we have to conclude that images of violence always accompany every reflection on the soul and therefore on life. Certainly, Nietzsche thought that wherever there is life, there is violence.

We find the identification of life with violence in paragraph 11 of the second essay in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. In paragraph 11, Nietzsche says,

To talk of ‘just’ and ‘unjust’ *as such* is meaningless; an act of injury, violence, exploitation or destruction [*Verletzen, Vergewaltigen, Ausbedeuten, Vernichten*] cannot be ‘unjust’ *as such*, because life functions *essentially* in an injurious, violent, exploitative and destructive manner, or at least these are its fundamental processes [*Grundfunktionen*] and it cannot be thought of without these characteristics. (Nietzsche, *Genealogy* 50)

Here, Nietzsche is describing life itself in terms of opposing forces, trying to take possession of one another. Importantly, in this description, Nietzsche indicates a necessity to life being violence (*Vergewaltigen*), and destruction or annihilation (*Vernichten*): life “*cannot* be thought of without these characteristics” (my emphasis). In short, Nietzsche is saying that violence is irreducible in life. As in Plato, in Nietzsche, life is fundamentally *polemos*; the opposing forces are brought together, so to speak, “synthesized,” on a battlefield. Of course, this paragraph (paragraph 11) and the one that follows it (paragraph 12) in *On the Genealogy of Morals* concern Nietzsche’s idea of the will to power. But, we should notice that the “message” (if we can speak this way) of *On the Genealogy of Morals* is that the slaves, the weak, and therefore the powerless, have a sort of power that can undo the masters, the strong, and therefore the powerful. In fact, while the doctrine of the overman remains obscure, it seems that the overman (beyond the forms of thinking, such as those based in resentment, that define man) is someone who has incorporated this weak form of power.

We have mentioned two of the three most famous Nietzschean doctrines. In fact, if we look at the published version of Nietzsche’s most important book, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, we see that, after the prologue which announces the death of God, the first book concerns the overman; the second book concerns the will to power; and the third book concerns the eternal return doctrine (Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*). The order of the three books indicates that the eternal return doctrine is most important; it is the very climax of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Indeed, if the order of the books in

Thus Spoke Zarathustra indicates a kind of priority or a movement toward the fundamental, then we have to realize that the eternal return doctrine is the basis for life.⁵ Life is eternal return. In Book Three, in the paragraph called “The Vision and the Riddle,” we find the clearest but also the most paradoxical presentation of the eternal return doctrine. The description of the doctrine and its images are well known, but I would like to draw our attention to three points in relation to the description and the images. *First*, Zarathustra stands under an archway called “the moment” (*Augenblick*). That the archway carries this name means not only that the eternal return doctrine concerns time, but also that it concerns a singular moment, in a word, difference. But, *second*, the archway crosses a road that extends endlessly in both directions, which Zarathustra calls “eternity.” However, this image of an endless straight road implies that time does not wind itself into a circle. It does not return to a selfsame identical origin, *arche*, or principle, and thus it does not advance toward a selfsame identical end, *telos*, or principle. Time then is anarchical and a-teleological. *Third*, even though time is eternal in the sense of having no primary origin and no ultimate end, time is still a return or a repetition. The eternal return doctrine does not reduce time to an unlimited series of disconnected points. The return in the doctrine’s name is supposed to account for the similarity of moments. This identification of life with time explains why Nietzsche’s thought had such a tremendous influence on Derrida, Deleuze, and Foucault. All of their reflections on “difference and repetition” flow out of the eternal return doctrine, and in particular out of time conceived as anarchy and a-teleology. Of course, while we are using the word “anarchy” in the literal sense of having no origin or no principle, its popular meaning suggests nothing less than violence.

II. “The First Time is the Last Time”⁶ (the response to the first kind of question)

We were just speaking of the tremendous influence of Nietzsche’s eternal return doctrine on twentieth-century French thought. However, it is impossible to underestimate the influence that Husserl’s phenomenology exerted, directly and indirectly, through its discovery of the structure of time. What Husserl calls the “living present” is the absolute foundation of all of experience, all knowledge, all assertions of truth, all relations to objects and others. In his investigation of time-consciousness, Husserl shows that the present that we are actually living is divided between a primary form of memory called “retention” and a primary form of anticipation called “protention.”⁷ For Husserl, the primary form of memory and the primary form of anticipation are invariants across all experience. That retention and protention are irreducibly invariant implies that, no matter what experience occurs, there will always be a sense of it repeating something else that has already passed away and there will always be a sense of it anticipating something else that is still to come. In other words, retention generates a repeatable meaning which makes recognition possible, while protention generates a horizon of the same meaning within which recognition occurs. Thanks to this terminology, we can see already that Derrida’s claim in “Violence and Metaphysics” is faithful to the phenomenological description of time (see Derrida, “La voix”; see Lawlor, *Derrida and Husserl*). No matter what, if I am to have access to anything or anyone other, the other must appear. And insofar as it must appear, it must appear as something, as having a meaning. Thus it must appear as fulfilling a repeatable form. In order to have access to the other, the other must appear in the horizon of the same and thus, in order to be what it is, the other is deprived, *necessarily*, of its alterity. In short, the terminology, which is eidetically necessary for us to be able to understand time, suggests a violation of the other’s alterity; in a word, it suggests violence.

Moreover, although Husserl speaks of the primal impression, of the moment that is happening right now, we have to see that this moment is stretched out between the immediate past and the immediate future. The present moment is differentiated, split apart, tortured by these two opposing movements. Immediate memory and immediate anticipation are irreducibly invariant, which means that all experience, no matter how apparently tranquil, is at bottom warlike. What Husserl calls “the primal impression” is, as we said of Plato’s view of the soul, a battlefield. We need to introduce one more implication of Husserl’s great discovery of the structure of the living present. Because retention and protention are irreducibly invariant across all experience, because these two opposing phases are fundamental or transcendental, because we cannot find anything like a present or a presence that is not contaminated by these two invariants, we cannot speak of an original starting point for the movement of time and we cannot speak of a final ending point for the movement of time. Like Nietzsche’s eternal return doctrine, Husserl’s structure of the living present implies anarchy and a-teleology.

The idea of time as anarchical and a-teleological is hard to understand. We can approach this difficult idea by thinking of artworks and, in particular, of theater performances. Theater performances are not technological production, or, more precisely, not technological reproduction. In technological manufacturing, there must always be a model that is first; and on the basis of the model, there are the products that are second. The products, of course, are different from each other—they are individuals or particulars—since I can enumerate them. However, these different products are copies of the model and thus they must resemble or imitate the model as closely as possible. In manufacturing, clearly, no one wants to make products that do not function exactly the same. This maintenance of identity is what manufacturing quality control does: the copies must be identical and function identically. To speak like Deleuze, we can say that technological repetition

is a repetition that does *not* make a difference. However, in French, of course, the word “répétition” means not only “repetition,” but also “rehearsal,” as in a theater rehearsal. Even the English word “re-hearsal” has the prefix which suggests repetition. If we think about theater rehearsals, one has to wonder what is being repeated in the rehearsal. The idea of the rehearsal implies first that the rehearsal is a copy or image of something. Yet, what is being rehearsed is nothing which precedes it insofar as what the performers are repeating or practicing in fact comes after the rehearsal: the main performance, “the premiere.” Notice that the word “premiere” literally means “first.” If we speak about a copy or image and the original on which the image is based, then with the rehearsal we have an original that comes second. But we still say, as the prefix “re” implies, that the rehearsal repeats something. If we say that the rehearsal repeats the script, then we have to say that the script refers to the idea that the author had for the performance. But, if we say that the rehearsal repeats the idea, then we also have to say that the idea is realized only in the performance that comes after the rehearsal. So, again we have a repetition which repeats something that comes after. In other words, unlike technological reproduction, a theater performance is a “creative repetition”; here we have a repetition that *indeed* makes a difference. An event such as the writing of *Hamlet* was based in no determinate model, no exact foundation, and no self-identical origin; therefore its subsequent theater productions, while repetitions, are able to be different from one another. Each performance is not a particular (that could be subsumed under a self-identical concept); each is an event or a singularity.

The idea of creative repetition seems to suggest no violence. However, images of violence are necessary because, *first of all*, creative repetition includes novelties, events, or singularities. Despite the apparent regularity of time (time as it is organized by representations and concepts), time is filled with singularities. As evidence of singularities, we can point to aha-experiences;

realizations; surprises; experiences that are intense to the point of pleasure or pain—like a boiling point or a blinding light. Perhaps, the most banal evidence for singularities in time are dates, the date on the calendar isolating the uniqueness of each day. In order to be able to account for these unique dates and unique experiences, we must think that there is something in the structure of time that is always singular, always event-like, and always new. As we saw, Nietzsche called the singularity within time the “moment” (*Augenblick*). How are we to think of the singular moment?

By attempting to answer the question of how to think of the singular moment, we are trying to avoid the confusion charged in the first kind of question. In order to avoid confusion, we must insist on taking the meaning of the terms we are using in a *strict* sense. We must think of a singular moment strictly, as a singularity worthy of that name. The logic that we are now going to lay out consists in four steps. (1) *To begin*, if we conceive singularity in the strictest way possible (as novel, event-like, unique), then, most formally and abstractly, we must describe a singularity as a *first time*. More substantially and concretely, however, we must say that the force of the moment disappoints; its eruption interrupts and disrupts expectations; it fractures them and breaks expectations apart. The moment changes and transforms; but it also deforms and un-forms, it undoes and destroys. The singular moment eats its way in; it intrudes like a guest. (2) *But also*, we have to recognize that, if the moment is strictly singular, unique, event-like, and novel, then as a first time a singularity is also and necessarily a last time. We must conceive a first time as a last time. In order strictly to be a first time, in order to be *unlike* any other time, there can be no other time like it ever again. If there were another time *like* the first time, then this similarity would impress, depress, and repress the singularity; it would push the singularity away and replace it. Due to this similarity, we would not be able to say that we experienced an event—and perhaps we have to wonder whether we ever truly experience an event, whether it is ever possible to speak of

an event since as soon as we speak we engage in generalities. The moment then becomes something lost, imprisoned, entombed, and archived. Indeed, we have to say that the flow of time, *on the one hand*, consists in singularities, *but also* (with this “but also” we are referring to a strange kind of non-unifying synthesis) we have to say that time, *on the other hand*, consists in generalities. We must also say that time consists in generalities for the following reason. If there is something like a singularity in time, then, as we saw in our discussion of Husserlian temporalization, the singularity must appear within a horizon of expectation formed by past experiences. These past experience form a horizon of expectation because they retain some feature or trait of the experience that is repeatable or iterable. This repeatable feature or iterable trait is a generality. (3) *Here*, we pass from the description of singularities to that of generalities. Again, in order to avoid confusion, we must think of a force of generality worthy of that name. If we think of generality strictly, then we must describe generality, most formally and abstractly, as a feature or a trait that endures at all times; it is omni-temporal; it repeats indefinitely, to infinity, even universally. More substantially and concretely, however, we must say that the force of generality expresses and extends; it moves away and goes over; it breaks free and opens; it transcends and transgresses. The generality eats its way out and escapes like a criminal fleeing a prison. (4) *Finally*, we return to our earlier description of creative repetition. This description of generality means that, even as a generality extends its sameness indefinitely, at the same time, a generality worthy of its namemakes possible or generate more events; and, as they come, these events worthy of the name, at the same time, make possible or generate more generalities.

At the root of this four-part logic, we find the most fundamental reason necessitating the imagery of violence. The imagery of violence is necessitated by the irreducibility of negativity in life, in lived-experience. Many philosophers have recognized the irreducibility of negativity in

experience (Barbaras 249). But here, thanks to the invariant structure of time, we have a negativity based in the past and future being synthesized but without unity, the strange synthesis we mentioned earlier: the battlefield. In other words, the limit between past and future is porous. This negativity is based on an eidetic, structural, fundamental, or transcendental *inability* to keep out events and on an eidetic, structural, fundamental, or transcendental *inability* to keep in generalities. The first time cannot not be a last time, and vice versa. Expressed abstractly and transcendently as a first time and a last time, the fundamental negativity of experience does not mean that every experience is one of bloodshed. We must not be confused on this point. However, the fundamental and irreducible negativity of experience (the in-ability or dis-ability) implies necessarily that every experience contains within it the *essential possibility* of what we call “real violence” (Derrida, “Limited Inc.” 95-96 [French]; 47-48 [English]). *Most simply*, because experience is fundamentally passive and receptive, I am necessarily open to what is coming. I am unable to stop what is coming and coming in. As soon as I open my eyes—and we should notice that even when my eyes are shut during sleep, I am still open since if I were not open I would not be able to be awoken (Merleau-Ponty 202 [French]; 166-167 [English])—something enters in. Because of this openness or non-closedness, this porosity, the structure of experience essentially includes the possibility of real intrusion, real violation, and real violence. As Derrida has already implied in “Violence and Metaphysics,” the essential porosity of the limit is the very condition for real violence. Again, we must stress that this logic does not mean that every experience I have is one of bloodshed. Not every experience implies that I have suffered a mortal wound. However, the structure of experience implies that as soon as I am born, I am dying. As soon as I experience, I am open to every possible event that is coming, the most possible of which is my death. Or we can think of this structural death in this way: as soon as I experience, I remember and anticipate,

through which a form is generated that is repeatable indefinitely beyond my finite life. I am fundamentally unable to enclose this generality within the time of my life; it survives while I am unable to do so. Because of this survival in the literal sense of going over and beyond life, I am unable to stop what is going and going away, what is taking and being taken away—such as my life.

III. More Vigilance (the response to the second kind of question)

If there is one claim that truly clarifies the logic that we have just laid out it is this: within the structure of time, we find the *essential possibility* of real violence. This essential possibility of actual violence explains why images of violence are necessary in the descriptions of time. Yet, to say this again, the essential possibility of violence, and the images of violence it requires, what we are calling “transcendental violence,” is *not* real violence. Despite this unequivocal assertion, we realize that we must still be vigilant. We must constantly remind ourselves that transcendental violence is not real violence. We must not let the imagery of violence used in transcendental discourse dull us to real violence and bloodshed. However, it seems to me that this kind of call for vigilance in relation to the difference between real violence and transcendental violence (that is, the essential possibility of real or actual violence) is not enough. We really need to be even more vigilant.

Again the demand for vigilance comes from confusion. There is a danger of confusing kinds of discourses, for instance, the confusion of biological discourse with that of political action. In other words, the danger is the importation of imagery and thinking that is appropriate to one region—the region of biology—into another region—the region of human action—in which it is inappropriate. Indeed, this dangerous confusion of biology and political action is the danger that

Arendt pointed out in *On Violence* (Arendt 74, 82). However, beside the confusion of regions of discourse, there is also the danger, which I think might be worse, of confusing the discourse of a founded region with fundamental discourse. This is the danger Husserl pointed to early in his career: the danger of a vicious circle between the psychological or empirical with the transcendental or foundational. And Heidegger's constant reflections on the ontological difference concern the same vicious circle danger. It is Deleuze, however, who gives this dangerous confusion its clearest expression. In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze says, "The foundation can never resemble what it founds" (Deleuze 120 [French]; 99 [English]). Deleuze's "principle" for the formulation of a foundation means that we must never import images into the foundation that originate in founded regions. It is this principle that forbids us from importing life-processes, including images of violence, into the foundation, in this case, into the essential structure of time. Here we must be especially vigilant. While the structure of time that we have laid out requires violent images, we must recognize that those images, imported from a founded region, remain inappropriate to the foundation. The vigilance we are speaking about now is a vigilance to continue to find new and different ways to think. I have deliberately removed the object from this phrase "to think" in order to indicate that the vigilance now required demands that we think beyond any constituted object or given subject, beyond any real fact or ideal essence, beyond anything at all (Heidegger 1998; Foucault 1998). Only through this thinking of nothing (in particular) will we be able to criticize and move beyond the current forms of thinking that confine us. The vigilance we are now speaking about demands of us that we constantly tell ourselves that these formulations, these images, these ideas and concepts are *not good enough*. Only with the recognition of this insufficiency of our current forms of thinking will we be able to find new modes

through which we can discover ways to combat real violence and real injustice. This recognition of insufficient thinking brings us to the third kind of question raised about transcendental violence.

IV. Conclusion: The Flipside of Violence (the response to the third kind of question)

As you recall, this third kind of question, in effect, rejects the apparent futility of eliminating violence. Instead, it asks us to return to moral principles, which are themselves based on stable foundations (Steiner 146, 164, 210). Let us reexamine the foundation we have been discussing throughout and especially reexamine it in light of Deleuze's principle of non-resemblance. At the beginning of our investigation, we quoted a long passage from Derrida's "Violence and Metaphysics." In that quotation, Derrida says, "[These] necessities [that is, the eidetic necessities such as the other appearing to me as other] are violence itself, or rather the transcendental origin of an irreducible violence ...". Derrida continues in this way: "[These] necessities are violence itself, or rather the transcendental origin of an irreducible violence, supposing ... that it is somehow meaningful to speak of pre-ethical violence. *For* [my emphasis] this transcendental origin, as the irreducible violence of the relation to the other, is *at the same time* [my emphasis] non-violence, since it opens the relation to the other" (Derrida, "Violence" 187-188 [French]; 128 [English]). I would like to stress three aspects of this quotation. (1) *First*, we should notice that here Derrida speaks not only of "this transcendental origin" or of "irreducible violence," but also of "pre-ethical violence." That is, the violence of which we are now speaking is not the violence that we normally imagine. In short, it is not violence that is willed. If this violence does not resemble the violence we normally and currently imagine, then how are we to think of it? You can see, I hope, that the foundation (transcendental violence) that Derrida is trying to formulate does not violate Deleuze's principle of non-resemblance. The non-resemblance between

this violence and normal or “real” violence explains why Derrida wonders if pre-ethical violence makes any sense. (2) Then, *second*, we should notice that, after Derrida wonders about pre-ethical violence making any sense, he says “for” (*car*). The explanation for this wonder about the meaningfulness of pre-ethical violence really lies in the following sentence. In fact, the explanation lies in the phrase “at the same time” (*en même temps*). (3) *Third*, “for at the same time,” the irreducible violence of the relation to the other is nonviolence.⁸ So, the foundation or structure that Derrida is formulating for us is self-contradictory, between violence and non-violence. The irreducibly violent relation to the other, Derrida says, “opens [*ouvre*] the relation to the other,” the very relation that is non-violent. Being violent and non-violent, this foundation cannot therefore be stable.

However, are we able to generate a principle, even perhaps, a moral principle, from this unstable, self-contradictory “foundation”? If we are going to generate a principle from this foundation, minimally it would have to exhibit the same self-contradictory structure of violence and non-violence. However, the self-contradiction expressed in the structure also includes the terms same and other. This opposition gives us a clue about what the principle might be. Another clue comes to us from the development of Derrida’s thinking. Immediately following the quotation we have been examining, Derrida says simply that “it is an *economy*,” and Derrida highlights the word “economy” (Derrida, “Violence” 187-188 [French]; 128 [English]).⁹ We know that, as Derrida’s thinking develops, he becomes more and more interested in the literal meaning of the word “economy,” as the law of the home (from the Greek “*oikonommía*”). The word “economy” then comes to be associated with the problem of hospitality (Derrida, “De l’hospitalité”). However, in 1967 (the publication date of *Writing and Difference*, in which “Violence and Metaphysics” is collected), the word “economy,” undoubtedly, must be charged with Marxist

connotations. It is not until 1993, of course, that Derrida writes a book on Marx, *Specters of Marx*. Near the end of *Specters of Marx*, we find this strange sentence: “tout autre est tout autre” (Derrida, “Specters” 273 [French]; 173 [English]).¹⁰

To conclude, let us investigate this sentence. The key to this sentence lies in the copula, which is both predicative and existential. What is wholly other *is* (the existential copula), and thus since it is *something*, it is not purely wholly other; and yet, what is wholly other *is* (the predicative copula) wholly other and thus asserting itself as wholly other the other is wholly other. In other words, the quality of “wholly-other” is attributed to the wholly other (predicative), and yet the wholly other exists as something that is the same as everything else (existential). Clearly, the sentence is self-contradictory.

We can elaborate on this analysis in the following way. The sentence “tout autre est tout autre” is *first of all* a tautology: “every other is every other.” Here, with the tautology, we have an assertion of existential equivalency. There is no difference between anything: “every other is simply the same as every other.” With this tautological rephrasing, with this sameness, we have the violence toward the other. The assertion does not respect the other’s alterity as such; it represses the other’s singularity within the generality of the “every.” But, there is a *second* way of understanding the tautology: “tout autre est tout autre” could be rendered in English as “wholly other *is* wholly other.” This rephrasing is still a tautology since on either side of the copula, one finds the same phrase. Nevertheless, despite the apparent tautology, this rephrasing stresses the attribute of wholly otherness. The stress of the copula could even lead us to add an exclamation mark at the end of the sentence. Now it would seem to be saying: “Make no mistake! The wholly other is truly, really, unequivocally wholly other!” Rephrased in this way, the sentence provides a clear expression of otherness. Now the sentence says nothing but alterity. It now respects the

other's alterity as such, and the violence of the expression seems to have been removed. Nevertheless, the two versions of "tout autre est tout autre" together confront us with the same self-contradiction we have seen before: between sameness and otherness, between violence and non-violence. Yet, there is a *third* way to render the sentence. "Tout autre est tout autre" could mean that "each and every other is wholly other." Now, with this third rendering, we approach something like a principle, even a moral principle. If we accept the language of respect for the other introduced already in the interpretations of "tout autre est tout autre," and if one then accepts the third rendering in which every single other must be considered as wholly other, and finally if one also accepts the addition of the exclamation mark, then we are confronted with an imperative that says the following. The imperative says that every single other—all of them—must be treated with respect. The imperative is unconditional, since the imperative includes all others, every single one of them.¹¹ The unconditional status of the imperative even commands us to promise. The imperative commands us, to say this again, to respect every single one. The universality of the commandment includes not just those present, but also those who have already passed away and those still to come. The imperative commands us to promise to remember all the others who have passed away to and to anticipate all the others still to come. The imperative says: "Promise that you will treat every single other, all of them, everywhere and at all times, with respect!" The promise is perhaps even the promise of perpetual peace.

The question now is obvious: can this promise be kept? Immediately, one will say "no." However, the reason for the impossibility of keeping the promise does not lie in the factual conditions of me being unable to find every single other. The reason for the impossibility is structural. No one is able to balance the singularity or finitude of experience with its generality or infinitude. I am able to let the other enter into me, but when I do, the opening makes the other the

same as me. I am able to let a generality take flight, but that generality will always land in a singularity. In short, there can never be justice. And the impossibility of justice means that something like violence in experience, even in the most non-violent experience, can never be eliminated. The impossibility of eliminating violence should, I hope, destroy any sense of good conscience. It should trouble us. It should not allow us to settle into the smug attitude in which we think that what we have thought, conceived, and done is “good enough.” It should stop us from becoming comfortable. We must not think that, because we have a stable moral principle by means of which we can decide against violence, we can be done with violence once and for all. No, instead, and this is the aim of deconstruction, I must make myself experience, *acutely*, the imperative of the promise and, I must make myself experience, *acutely*, the impossibility of me keeping the promise. Then, I undergo this mad imagination of violence, the imagination of so much violence being done to every single other that I could not not feel insufficient. The *feeling* of insufficiency would then move me.¹² It would move me to force myself to keep trying to keep the promise: eliminate violence of any kind, for every single other, found anywhere in the world or outside the world! This interminable effort to keep the promise is really the flipside of violence.

Notes

¹ English translation slightly modified. For an important reading of Derrida, see Goddard.

² The idea of transcendental violence has inspired all the work I have done since and including *This is not Sufficient*.

³ Johanna Oksala expresses concerns that foundational violence does not take into account “physical” and “historical” violence (*Foucault, Politics, and Violence* 37): “My central claim is, however, that the investigation of the constitutive role of physical violence must be thoroughly historical and must not rely on any ontologized notion of originary violence as such.”

⁴ To be clear, everything I am saying here is opposed to violence, especially in light of violence’s “stupidity,” as James Dodd has called violence.

⁵ Even though Steiner recognizes the great influence of Nietzsche on Derrida and Foucault’s thought, he does not take up the role that the eternal return doctrine plays in their thinking.

⁶ This phrase, “the first time is the last time,” appears in Jacques Derrida’s *Schibboleth pour Paul Celan* (12 [French]; 2 [English]). The same phrase appears in *Specters of Marx* (31 [French]; 10 [English]).

⁷ At approximately the same time as Husserl, Bergson too is showing that there is a kind of spontaneous memory in all experience that is required to explain experiences like false recognition. Bergson argues that experience immediately reproduces what is seen leading us at times to think that we recognize someone whom we had never seen before. Husserl would add that as soon as we have this flashing moment of recognition, experience also immediately and spontaneously anticipates something else coming. See Henri Bergson, “Memory of the Present and False Recognition” (*Mind-Energy* 106-148).

⁸ In more writings more recent than “Violence and Metaphysics,” Derrida refers to the non-violent side of this relation with Heidegger’s idea of *Zusage*, acquiescence. See Jacques Derrida, *De l’esprit* (147n1 [French]; 129n5 [English]). He also speaks of *Zusage* as an address that implies friendship or even an “I love you” in *Politiques de l’amitié* (243-244 [French]; 215-216 [English]). Indeed in *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida speaks of this prior friendship as a “temptation,” the temptation “of the book you are reading [that is, of *Politics of Friendship*]” (217-218). He adds, however, that it is a temptation that the book also resists. The temptation and the resistance to the temptation implies, even in 1994, both non-violence and violence at the same time.

⁹ By comparing the 1967 *Writing and Difference* version of “Violence and Metaphysics” to the original 1964 version in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, we see that the sentence “c’est une économie” is a 1967 addition. My thanks always to Robert Bernasconi who did the first real investigation of the differences between the two published versions of “Violence and Metaphysics.”

¹⁰ I first tried to analyze this sentence in *Derrida and Husserl*, 221-222.

¹¹ Fred Evans has developed an interesting idea of oracles. An oracle is a voice that is nihilistic; it attempts to repress the voices of others (for example, the fascist voice or the racist voice). Through this notion, he contests the idea of unconditional inclusion. See Fred Evans, *The Multivoiced Body* 268-274. In other essays, I have connected nihilism to what I call “the problem of worst” so that the idea of unconditional inclusion, which is a response or solution to the problem, amounts to an attempt to transform the nihilistic voices. But for both of us, these ideas are still being developed.

¹² Recently, I have tried to develop this feeling through the feeling of shame. It is not the feeling of futility.

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