

Ricœur on Violence and Religion: Or, Violence Gives Rise to Thought

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Abstract: This essay demonstrates Ricœur’s explication of the various roles religion can play especially in regards to acts of collective violence, and also how his conceptions take us beyond the traditional dichotomies of religion as necessarily violent, or necessarily peaceful. It focuses on three essays where his most formidable reflections on religion and violence can be found: “Religion and Symbolic Violence” (1999), “Power and Violence” (first published 1989), and “State and Violence” (first published 1955). First, the essay hermeneutically describes the intricate relationship between violence and religion within these three essays, pointing to *(i)* three perils of religion especially regarding communities, *(ii)* the figure of the magistrate within some religiously motivated political revolutions, and *(iii)* the danger of ecclesiastical orders demonstrating not only authority but also forms of domination. The essay then phenomenologically ties these three threads together, demonstrating a way of understanding both the promises and perils of religion as it relates to violence, both in the work of Ricœur and beyond it.

Keywords: Ricœur, violence, religion, authority, state, power.

An object of desire. A rivalry. A scapegoat.¹ These elements are essential to a description not only of Girard’s mimetic theory of violence, but also the recent protests in Charlottesville Virginia in 2017. The protesters’ competition surrounded the symbol of a near-meaningless, generally overlooked object,

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the statue of General Robert E. Lee. The conflict reached a climax, as the fight over the object grew tense. Then an act of senseless violence took place that ended with the murder of Heather Heyer. Both groups retreat somber and aware that their contribution to that conflict produces victims. So far, this brief interpretation is thoroughly Girardian in the sense that it gives a causal explanation of the elements of the conflict. One might wonder, however, given the religious rhetoric of “both sides,” to what degree religion played a role, not simply as a supposed *solution* to the problem of mimesis (as Girard is known to do with Christ as the one whose *detournement* “hacks” the system of sacrifice/atonement), but also as a deeply integrated force coursing through the passion demonstrated in the conflict itself. Such real acts of violence, and the potential roles religion plays in them, should give rise to thought.

Religious violence has been addressed by countless scholars, some of the most well-known being perhaps Freud, Girard, Bataille, Derrida or Assmann. Yet violence, as a certain canalization of human affectivity, already played a role in Durkheim’s analysis of religion in the question of the cultural and religious moulding of the collective life-world. With Girard’s focus on “sacrificial violence” (2013, first published 1972) and the contributions of other scholars like Turner (1977) and Burkert (1972), it has been shown that this religious moulding may implicate violence at its very heart.² Yet it is not uncommon to refer to the “ambivalence of the sacred,” making religion both a source of violence and peace (Appleby 2000). Contemporary discussions still struggle with whether religious violence should be considered as a *temporarily misdirected behaviour* fostered by problematic interpretations of religious narratives, or whether we need to acknowledge a *structural implication* of political violence in systems of religious practices. It also certainly seems reasonable to conclude that there is an inconspicuous ideological commitment (that in itself is absolutistic, divisive, and even irrational) within the “secular” *claims* themselves that religion necessarily makes peoples and groups more violent because it is absolutistic, divisive, and irrational (Cavanaugh 2009). Despite these concerns, however, we still usually conclude that religion inherently is violent.

Yet is “religion” (a generalizing term that itself may be an act of violence!) decidedly and inherently violent? Is violence *constitutive* of religion?³ For Paul

² For example Burkert claims that “[the] worshipper experiences the god most powerfully not just in pious conduct or in prayer, song, and dance, but in the deadly blow of the axe, the gush of blood and the burning of thigh-pieces. The realm of the gods is sacred, but the ‘sacred’ act done at the ‘sacred’ place by the ‘consecrating’ actor consists of slaughtering sacrificial animals. Sacrificial killing is the basic experience of the ‘sacred.’ *Homo religiosus* acts and attains self-awareness as *homo necans*.” (Burkert 1972: 2–3)

³ This word “constitutive” is key, for it points to the possibilities of being both moral and religious. If, as Benjamin (1986) concludes, that violence becomes an issue only in relation

Ricoeur, the answer is “no,” but the way at which we arrive at that answer demonstrates that the question is flawed from the very beginning. Although religion is so easily exploited politically, violence is not constitutive of religion but “residual” in the sense that violence is a constant threat in and to religious experience (Ricoeur 2000: 268). It is against the particular, aforementioned backgrounds of the issues of collectivity, the political, and authority that Ricoeur’s novel interventions into and extensions of Girard’s concept of violence can be investigated. Ricoeur wrestled with all three of these issues in relation to violence not only academically, but also personally, as he was no stranger to experiences of great violence. From being in a POW camp for 5 years to ridicule in 1968–69, his insights furnish critical perspectives on the lived phenomenological experience of the power of violence and the potential role religion plays in offering a meta-interpretation of it. One key to understanding his work and references to religion and violence involve the at once dual promise-peril of religion, which he describes metaphorically in a late interview:

In the past, when I reflected on violence, I observed that it grows and culminates when one approaches summits that are at one and the same time the summits of hope and summits of power. The height of violence coincides with the height of hope, when the latter claims to totalize meaning, whether political or religious. Now even if the religious community is constituted outside the sphere of the political and even if it aspires to gather human beings around a project of regeneration other than a political project, it passes in its turn through the parade of power and violence. The church presents itself as an institution of regeneration. The eminent position of the religious, and its very transcendence in relation to the political, are not without certain perverse effects. (Ricoeur 1998: 154–155)

The metaphor is the vehicle of truth and thinking for Ricoeur, and it points to the narrativity of human life. The metaphor used here is that of hiking up a mountain peak, with Religion being this doubled-edged summit that, if we are to understand it correctly, always bears both potential promise as

to morality, law, and justice, then to refer to religion as inherently violent makes the religious person culpable to violence. A violence that is “constitutive” of religion also would entail that the very power and essence of religion would not be possible *without* violence. Others continue to hold that violence is essential to being a living human being. For an argument of the “fundamental violence” always at work within the human, see the more psychologically oriented reflections of Bergeret (1984). If in fact one concludes, as Max Scheler does, that the human inherently is irreducibly religious (or spiritual, or seeking some element of sacredness in their lives), and also that the human is inherently violent, then of course this immediately would entail that religion by necessity is violent. (I would like to thank Cătălina Condruz for comments on an earlier draft of this essay, and for her helpful suggestions regarding violence, constitution, and Walter Benjamin.)

well as peril. Recently others have focused on Ricœur and violence (Staudigl, Moyeart, Jonkers, Gschwandtner, e.g.), yet still necessary is a study that both compiles his most essential insights regarding especially collective violence, and highlights the role of religion within them.⁴ For Ricœur violence is by no means univocal and can be understood according to many different concepts, forms, shapes, and kinds; violence in some cases is constitutive, is deliberative, and institutional. In general, “*there are morals because there is violence, which is itself multiform,*” yet elsewhere Ricœur associates even a structure of morality with a form of social engineering, and thus conceives of it as a kind of violence.⁵

This essay demonstrates Ricœur’s provision, not only of novel understandings of the role of religion in violence, but also of a parallax view on collective violence itself as a multifarious phenomenon.⁶ Our idealized responses to acts of violence *disclose* (and therefore furnish us with experiences in need of close interpretation) rather than simply *constitute* our ethical, political, and religious atmospheres of experience. It is to this productive *disclosure* that the subtitle of my article “Violence gives rise to thought” gestures. In this demonstration, I will (i) summarize Ricœur’s engagements with violence, especially in regards to religion; (ii) bring these engagements into conversation with one another so as to construct and make explicit what they mean for religion, or—to use the always already controversial, yet still ambiguous dyad—“religious violence”; and (iii) employ these ideas for a brief reflection on a recent, concrete act of collective violence that gives rise to thought.

I will rely upon three of his lectures that deal specifically, although at times enigmatically, with violence: “Religion and Symbolic Violence,” (1999) “Power and Violence,” (first published in French in 1989) and “State and Violence” (in *History and Truth* 1965, first published in 1955). In the first, violence as a symbol of mimetic desire in/for communities is developed in order to account for religion as an injunction into that symbol, whether by crossing violence out, or by giving it license to express itself. In the second, “Power and Violence,” the conclusion is made that power can only be distinguished from violence when it finds a way to operate with an authority that is non-dominatory, and in which religion does not immediately get associated with piety only.

⁴ See here, for example, Jonkers 2017.

⁵ Ricœur 1995: 295. See here Schweiker 1993a and 1993b.

⁶ It seems that Ricœur’s understanding of religious violence could encompass all three of the forms he mentions in his interview with Changeux (forms addressed especially in regards to evil): “I see at least three distinct forms of violence: violence in language—slander, defamation, treason, perjury: in short, destruction of language through the rupture of pacts; violence in action—murder, attack on the physical and mental integrity of others; finally, institutional violence, which is to say destructiveness on the part of institutions whose function goes beyond the survival of individuals. Because the *polis* offers a much vaster temporal horizon than the life of an individual, institutional violence—which we may call ‘war,’ in the broad sense of *polemos*—proves to be particularly formidable. The level of description does not go beyond lament. We deplore evil and the many forms it assumes.” (Changeux and Ricœur 2000: 283)

And in the third, “State and Violence,” Ricœur concludes that “The State is a reality maintained and instituted by murderous violence” and that even some religious “revolutions” or instantiations of setting up kingdoms of God preserve the figure of the magistrate (1965: 246). The present article by no means presumes to offer a comprehensive account, for violence is addressed throughout Ricœur’s work, beginning as early as a 1951 essay “The Historical presence of non-violence,” and spanning his career, extending into the early 2000’s. The aim here rather is to collect three of his major reflections on violence that implicate religion most explicitly, and to distil them to motivate scholars interested in the phenomenon of violence to not ignore the essential roles religion plays.

1. *Three Perils in “Religion and Symbolic Violence”*

In “Religion and Symbolic Violence” (an essay developed from lectures at a conference on education and Girard, published in 1999) Ricœur employs Girard’s *Violence and the Sacred* to agree that there are inherent violences *associable with* religion, but rejects the view that violence is the product of an attempt to “create” or conceive of transcendence as out-and-beyond the finite (contrary to Maurice Bloch, *La Violence du religieux*). The integration of transcendence into everydayness underscores the essential role of human embodiment, its symbolisms, and emotive potential in religious practices, as seen in a variety of “religious” violences (e.g., sacrificial, purifying, or purging violence) that target both the individual and the social body as a site and cipher of transcendence. Ricœur’s interest here is an anthropological account that conceives of religion as a symbolic reality that is a part of one’s “emotional dynamic” to confront her autonomous “capacity” (see here Ricœur’s *Oneself as Another*) and to control and take rational account of circumstances. “Capacity” indeed is “the key word around which my entire meditation revolves” he claims, and here one encounters violence in realizing that “at the very basis of my conviction [...] I recognize a reality which I do not control as my own.” (Ricœur 1999: 2). That is, this uncontrollable reality is internal to me and involves me at my core, leaving me open to violence. It is not an external transcending source, but something that lives within me. Lacking control and comprehension of it, I am *incapacitated* by it. Here Ricœur’s *Oneself as Another* gets applied, for there he already developed a theory of capability, namely of action, speaking, and taking responsibility, pointing to their necessary limits. Here religion plays a fundamental role: “the capable man is the one addressed by religion” (Ricœur 1999: 3).

Religion calls upon the capable human to act. Yet again, religious experience *challenges* and pushes me and my presumed finitude to my borders. It was Kant who introduced a kind of “healing of our capacity” or regeneration after being paralyzed by radical violence and evil, and Ricœur employs

Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone to demonstrate that despite these benefits, there also is a struggle against religion's internal defects. The three *potential* defects or perils of religion that can explode into violence include "the confiscation of the symbolism by self-designated Interpreters, the corruption of obedience by the spirit of servitude and immaturity, and manipulation by a particularly vicious form of power, ecclesiastical power." Thus, (i) the claiming and controlling of the power of the symbol; (ii) the abuse of the idea of obedience that reduces it to blind servitude; and (iii) the commandeering of the pastorate and abuse of church power. This allows for attention to a first essential observation by Ricœur in regards to religion and violence in the essay: "it is along this dual movement of an act that is liberating yet is itself burdened by its own limits, that I am going to discover the moment of violence." (Ricœur 1999: 3).

Yet this "moment" of violence, or rather, the point at which the "community" erupts into violent activity is when its affective fragility reaches a foundational "disproportion" or imbalance. When an inner conflict occurs between our finite capacity and the superabundant *Abgrund*, the extra-rational and excessive that addresses us, then an *emotive* imbalance or disproportionality can potentially explode into violence. This emotive disproportion goes beyond a mere subjective possibility. When members of a self-identified collective are more or less embodying a "disproportionate" state, there is a greater potential for an even higher emotive imbalance. There is a certain *foundational* disproportion (that is, a disproportion that is paramount and highly volatile to the very *foundations* of that community) that implicates religion, and we can understand this through another of Ricœur's metaphors: the "capacity" of a vase and its excessively being overflowed with water.⁷

The vase is both a receptacle for the water source, but also a means of constraining it within its finite limits, and this points to a constraining violence whereby the water is forced "to adapt itself to the dimensions of the vase. This is an operation that I would call self-protection against what may appear, quite rightly, as the threat of an overflow, the threat of excess." (Ricœur 1999: 4). The infinite flow of excess threatens the finite capacity, and here the excess (e.g. God) gets converted into a threat to my independence and liberating will. The threat to the vase calls for it to shore up its borders to protect itself from being overflowed or destabilized. This protectionism becomes violent whenever we attempt

to strengthen the interior structures of the opening, the point of reception, in order to compensate for the kind of threat constituted by the excess in

⁷ "The metaphor focuses on the contrast between the spring that overflows and the vase that tries to contain it, in the double sense of offering a receptacle but also of constraining within limits. By its finite capacity the vase limits and delimits what overflows it by the excess of its superabundance." (Ricœur 1999: 3–4)

relation to a finite capacity. That is what we are dealing with here, establishing enclosure around the sides, for want of being able to seal off the top. (Ricœur 1999: 4)

It is now the case that not only my religious beliefs, but also I personally, constantly am under threat precisely by what the beliefs are constituted, and this unconditional groundlessness destabilizes my convictions. By protecting myself and my community, by setting up its borders, I cultivate a violent state.⁸ At this point one could be prone to think that the solution to all this violence is to be more tolerant and open. Yet there is another turn of the metaphor of the vase/overflowing source that represents another kind of violence that creeps onto the scene, even among those of us who claim to be non-violent via liberal tolerance:

an excessive acceptance, so to speak, of differences can lead to the feeling that all differences are indifferent. This is the “no matter what” attitude, where tolerance tips, as it were, by its own excess toward indifference. At this point, I withdraw to shut myself up where I feel at home and strengthen the walls once more. To strengthen the walls means to contain by force those on the inside but also to expel those whom I cannot contain.⁹

A tolerance that becomes indifferent closes off the valves and thereby rejects what is not internal to my own beliefs as unworthy of causing me to reassess my own convictions. This is a kind of passive violence and perhaps, to use language Ricœur used elsewhere, a “residual violence.” This is not necessarily the kind of “violence in return” to which Maurice Bloch in *La Violence du religieux* refers as the product of the conquest of transcendence over the real and “vital” in a ritual act of violence that harms exterior beings.¹⁰ What gets instituted is a double violence that is amoral to the reality or “vitality” of others. Although sympathetic to the overall hopes of non-violence and Bloch’s bemoaning that “ritual is understood as denial of the natural” (i.e., that the

⁸ Ricœur 1999: 4. Further, “[it] is in myself that I experience this disproportion between my finite capacity for adherence and the acknowledgment of something fundamental that exceeds me and threatens me by its excess, and thereby I suffer. So violence is then like an effort to protect myself against the danger of losing my roots, an imminent threat I only obscurely perceive.”

⁹ Ricœur 1999: 5. In these specific regards, see especially Moyaert (2011), who employs Ricœur to point to the subversive and transformative power of counter-utopian narratives.

¹⁰ For Bloch (1997), the sacrificial ritual creates a split subject, split between its real, “vital” aspect, and its “transcendent” aspect. There “the transcendent expels the vital, such that for a moment the person becomes completely transcendent. This victory of one aspect of the person over the other is the primary element of violence in rituals. This violence, however, is only preliminary to an ulterior violence that enacts for the subject the triumphal recovery of the vital by the transcendent element of the person.” (Bloch, quoted in Ricœur 1999: 6)

conflicts of life, community and relationships resolve themselves with cultivation and work) doubt is cast on Bloch's thesis, mostly because he does not see the necessary correlation between the "transcendent in the moral" (Ricœur 1999: 7) nor does he accept the supposed necessity of something "exterior to destroy [...] a foreigner, an adversary, an enemy" (Ricœur 1999: 8).

It then becomes necessary to perform a kind of reduction upon how a feeling of excess can be *perceived* as a threat that begins from within, and then is projected without ("the conversion of the feeling of excess into that of a threat," Ricœur 1999: 8). "Why is excess menacing?" Ricœur wonders, even regarding his own theory of the vase and its overflowing. To arrive at an answer he turns to a creative development of Girard's theory of mimesis, which, in a nutshell operates as such: I desire what you desire, you also desire what I desire, and this creates conflict because we both cannot have what we desire. We then reconcile this conflict through the introduction of a third party (a sacrifice) in order to break down the mimetic threat. One of Ricœur's unique contribution here is to argue that this goes beyond a mere descriptive psychology, and is prevalent within real communities:

this capacity of reception is from the outset what I would call a community of reception, of reading, of instruction, such as we see in the religions of the Book. And even in the non-scriptural religions there is in the oral tradition something like a scripture, an inscription, brought about by the ritualization of instruction. It is therefore as an instructed community that a community lays hold of the words of this instruction and claims to reduce this instructional power to its finite capacity of comprehension (by which I mean here the ability to receive and contain). And it is into this difference, this disproportion between the excess and a finite community's informed capacity to receive, that I see the mimetic process inserting itself.¹¹

Communities often agree implicitly upon their held commitments, which then get ritualized. This reduces whatever comes from the outside (again, the very thing that constitutes their convictions!) to what can be understood/comprehended finitely. The community thus comes to operate with a fundamental disproportion between the superabundant and the community's *ability* to receive from it or reflect upon it, constantly leaving the community in a state of flux.

Girardian mimesis gets reconstructed as a solution to this perceived problem. The superabundant, which is both a "God which is object of desire and fear" gets "treated as property" (Ricœur 1999: 9) and therefore becomes an

¹¹ Ricœur (1999: 9) confesses that he originally dismissed Girard's theory falsely as a psychology, an individual description that omitted the roles of social relations and institutions; real actions in the real world of communities.

object of mimetic desire. Thus “all other historical communities who lay claim to the same transcendence, but in terms of a different confession, appear as rivals in the struggle for appropriation of [...] the absolute Other” and “this object of desire-fear” (Ricœur 1999: 9–10). Religious communities, which *in most cases claim* to be hospitable to everyone, all of a sudden turn on their very own faith claims in creating conflict with others’ faith claims and truth claims. Taking for granted the many historical examples that abound when it comes to these conflicts, especially among the monotheisms and religions of the book,¹² these conflicts demonstrate that, following the metaphor once again of the vase, we wish *to have* (possess, control) with an “appropriative desire” the superabundant excess—God, Godself. It is this desire that creates mimesis that contributes to the superabundant source becoming a threat:

Now why would this foundational source be perceived as threatening and not as gratuitousness and generosity? That is really what it is, fundamentally. Is it not the projection of our appropriative desire onto the source itself of our summons, our calling to being, that transforms into a threat that which fundamentally is only the bestowal of gifts, the enlargement of my capacity of reception? (Ricœur 1999: 10)

We somehow convert this overflowing generosity—through our combination of appropriative desire and the stretching of our capacities—into a threat; and this, in part because we *project* onto this superabundance a violence that we ourselves have created in conjunction with competition for rights to call ourselves the chosen people of God, the rightful heirs to the superabundant.

What then is necessary? Something or someone who can deconstruct and subvert through a kind of *détournement* or hijacking of this system of victimization and a dismantling of the scapegoat mechanism.¹³ Our capability to receive (is this not also a form of having and desiring!?) must run in conjunction with the sacrificial “processional” that “corrupts the reception of the fundamental and transforms it into entrapment in the rivalry with all the other communities that themselves were receptive communities but became entrapped” (Ricœur 1999: 11). The finite capacity of the community is measured also, then, according to that which and those whom it rejects, even if

¹² Ricœur 1999: 10. Indeed “[e]xamples abound in the environment of monotheism, where they are perhaps the rule, whether we consider the battle of Yahwism against Baal, the massacres of the priests of Baal in the book of Joshua, the competition between the synagogue and the Christian church of the early centuries, the ritual murder of Jews in Christian Europe of the Middle Ages, or the religious wars within Christendom from the 16th to the 18th Century.”

¹³ After all, “within the biblical world itself, it is certainly necessary to move back from the Gospel narratives to the prophetic nucleus in the Second Isaiah. Here we find the suffering righteous one who already represents, along with Job, the deconstruction of the System of atonement, of sacrificial atonement.” (Ricœur 1999: 11)

such rejection is one of “indifference” as mentioned earlier. We should be critical of how exclusion gets grafted onto this “finite capacity.”

Thus, in this essay violence is the fear of the loss of the self that is ultrarational not only in that it is *overly* calculative and “safe,” but also is in its efforts to protect my own past and tradition against “losing my roots” (Ricoeur 1999: 4). As Gschwandtner recently noted, Ricoeur’s association between violence and religion seems to be in regards to ritual instead of text, and that this reinforces “the distinctions between manifestation and proclamation or a phenomenology of the sacred versus a hermeneutics of prophecy.”¹⁴ Framed within the context of act and ritual, my “finite capacity of reception” (Ricoeur 1999: 8), or as he puts it a few years later, my creative capacity of religion gets threatened by a “violence seizing the source of life itself” (Ricoeur 2010b: 34). “Seizing” presents the imagery of the engine of a car that seizes, no longer operates, and suddenly is ruined. Seizure is, as Staudigl puts it employing Sartre, a kind of “antirecreation.”¹⁵ Yet this is a strange development, as in fact “the religions [...] are connected [...] in a relationship of mimetic rivalry, having as object the source of life undivided in its outflow, divided in its receptacles” (Ricoeur 2010b: 35). Religious experience of this source of life by necessity gets challenged by my finite capacity, which is further burdened by fear, desire and ensuing hatred.¹⁶

One might interpret here two conceptions of “collective religious violence.” The first is that of a collective violence *that comes* from religious motivation (e.g. American religious extremists who claim their faith commitments compel them to murder doctors who perform abortions), and the second is a collective religious violence that occurs due to the emotive disproportionality at work in the subjective capacities of the religious (these are more inconspicuous acts of violence such as the subtle pokes between members of religious communities engaged in epistemological debates). Overall, there is a “fundamental groundless ground” (Ricoeur 1999: 9) upon which we quite paradoxically seek to rely. That is, in some respects, an “authority” to which we return that cannot be easily pinpointed. When the religious community does not live with this tension and paradox, it violently dispels the truth upon which its religious commitments are based. I now turn precisely to this question of how power and authority relate in order to unfold another means of understanding the relationship between religion and violence in Ricoeur.

¹⁴ Here Gschwandtner (2016) points out that it is hospitality to which Ricoeur turns as a kind of solution or response to our pervading capacity for violence.

¹⁵ “Man in his attempt to ‘seize the source’ thus becomes, in Sartre’s terms, the ‘Anticreator’, dwelling in his attempts to negate a substantialized idea of negativity.” (Staudigl 2016: 770)

¹⁶ For Ricoeur “this finite capacity that shapes the receptacle with the partitions that fear and hatred reinforce. It is this finite capacity that is put to the test in any religious experience, of whatever confession.” (Ricoeur 2010b: 36)

2. *The Figure of the Magistrate in "State and Violence"*

Given that nearly 45 years had passed between his writing "Religion and Symbolic Violence" and "State and Violence" (first published in French in 1955), one might be prone to think that the prior reflections were more rudimentary than the latter ones and demonstrated changes in conviction. Perhaps the best evidence in his work to which we can refer to reject such an idea would be his interviews published in 1995, just prior to his work on symbolic violence. There he reiterates a claim mentioned earlier, that violence is productive and constitutive within the historical community, and that the State (which he defines according to Eric Weil's definition, the concerns of whom centrally involve violence) is the organization of a community that gives it decision-making power, lending to a "hint of what I called 'residual violence'. Residual rather than constitutive; because violence is not the whole of the political, but its dark side. It implies a constant threat of resurgence, but it is not, in my opinion, constitutive of the state." (Ricœur 1998: 105; see also Weil 1950)

Although the essay seems to be a direct corrective of Walter Benjamin's insistence upon violence as constitutive of the political in *Zur Kritik der Gewalt*, "State and Violence" springs directly from Machiavelli's insight that "the State is that reality which up to now has always included murder as the condition of its existence, of its survival, and first of all, of its inception" (Ricœur 1965: 242). For Machiavelli violence decidedly is constitutive of the State's activities. Yet as Ricœur teaches in another chapter on "Non-violence," even the non-violent can equally lead, in the face of war, to violence.¹⁷ Thus, and contra Machiavelli, Ricœur is not interested so much in speaking of the state as "evil," but rather as a functional regime that often turns to violence, especially when opposed by other states, or by those threatening revolt from within it. The meaning of the human is "political" (Ricœur 1965: 234), and the degree to which the power of a State is part and parcel of its own form of a constraining and legitimating violence is in need of closer investigation. Although this is a rather long quotation, it calls for close reflection, for it encapsulates one of Ricœur's central claims in this essay:

¹⁷ Indeed "[f]ailing to consider the broadest dimensions of violence, pacifism thinks itself humane and benign. It believes it is already *in* the world, that it has come from the world, the result of the natural goodness of man which is simply masked or hindered by some few evildoers. It is not aware that it is actually very complicated, that it has history against it, that it can only come from *elsewhere*, that it summons history to something other than what is naturally intended by history. [...] Thus the violence which one refuses to embrace turns to the profit of another violence which the former did not prevent or perhaps even encouraged. Hence if non-violence is not to have any meaning, it must fulfill it within the history which it at first transcends. It must have a secondary efficacy which enters into account with the efficacy of the violence in the world, an efficacy which alters human relationships." (Ricœur 1965: 234)

The political existence of man is watched over and guided by violence, the violence of the State which has the characteristics of legitimate violence. Let us first make certain of our point of departure: what is the minimum violence instituted by the State? In its most elementary and at the same time most indomitable form, the violence of the State is the violence of a penal character. The state punishes; in the last analysis it is the State which has the monopoly over physical restraint. It has taken from individuals the right to do justice themselves; it has taken upon itself all the diversified forms of violence inherited from the primitive battle of man against man. For all violence, the individual may call upon the State, but the State is the last court of appeal beyond which there is no recourse. By approaching the violence of the State by way of its punitive, penal side, we have directed ourselves to the central problem; for the multiple functions of the State, its power to legislate, its power to make rulings and to execute them, its administrative function, its economic function, or its educational function, all these functions are ultimately sanctioned by the power of constraining as the final authority. To say that the State is a power and that it is a power of constraining is one and the same thing. (Ricoeur 1965: 234–235)

Although humankind's political life is not necessarily "violent" per se, it usually is under surveillance by the State with a violence of legitimation. The State also has taken upon itself to operate on behalf of the people *as its punisher*. It commits acts of violence, and Ricoeur reduces all of its activities (from legislation, to economy, to education) to a violence of "restraint" that makes the State itself a "final authority." Not only does the State commit illegitimate violence. It also presents itself as untouchable, unscathed, and immune to critique in a strange mixture between "legitimacy and violence." It operates with a *calculative, moral* (nearly bio political), paradoxically *physical*, and punishing role that maintains the State's power and legitimacy. These two go hand in hand.¹⁸

The State's calculative apparatus appears in the form of moral prescriptions for its people. This points to a role for religion, namely, one with an interventionary character. Many Christian traditions emphasize the importance of seeking to overturn violence subversively (for example, Christ's calls for turning the other cheek, loving one another with a tender and fraternal affection). This affection, not to mention the mandates of grace and mercy, always cut against the grains of the figure of the magistrate, who *punishes* wrongdoers with justice, and whom St Paul evokes, criticizes, and reduces to being a

¹⁸ Ricoeur claims "Anything which the State adds in the form of illegitimate violence only serves to aggravate the problem. It is enough for us that the State which is reputed to be the most just, the most democratic and liberal, reveals itself as the synthesis of legitimacy and violence, that is to say as a moral power of exacting and as a physical power of constraining." (Ricoeur 1965: 235)

representative exemplar of the State itself.¹⁹ In this case, some Christian traditions institute a kind of revolt of the State, subverting not simply the political as such, but also how we have understood it normatively associated with the State. The State founds, gives, and preserves itself without saving humankind, and further instils the old ritual violences of more primitive religions. Salvation is found in an entirely non-State politics. For Ricœur, Christianity gives rise to

a dimension of moral life which shatters the strictly political boundaries of human life: this new dimension is Agape, brotherly love and its vocation of non-resistance, of sacrifice, and of martyrdom. The repercussion of this new ethic upon the political reality consists in making the State appear as a power incapable of maintaining itself at this level of the new ethic; and yet this power is not bad in itself; it is confirmed, but in its rightful place and given a mark of precariousness. The state is no longer the substance of rational history; its coercive pedagogy preserves mankind but it does not save it. (Ricœur 1965: 240)

Christianity has its own power that goes beyond survival, replacing the kingdom and regime of preservation with one of salvation. Yet does this automatically entail the innocence of the religious? Not quite. For we also need to attend to the act of implicit submission to the State as a complicity to its violences, not only among those who benefit from it, but also and most troublingly those who are submitted to it.²⁰ Sacrifice is not always pure and liberative, as demonstrated in those who kill other humans in war. Necessary in this Christian subversion is that the group takes care so as not to develop simply another form of the magistrate, reversing roles in some way by punishing those who work for the State! It becomes essential then that the Christian life of sacrifice is not surrendered for a political one of coercion:

Hence the same man who is summoned to brotherly love, which returns good for evil, is the magistrature which punishes wrong-doers. The active citizen, the one who assumes his share of sovereignty, is himself a magistrate. How shall he live under two spiritual regimes, that of love and that of established violence, under two pedagogies, that of sacrifice and that of coercion? (Ricœur 1965: 241)

¹⁹ “What does the magistrate do? He punishes. He punishes those who do wrong. Here then is the violence which we were evoking at the outset. It is precisely within the notion of penal action that St. Paul sums up all functions of the state.” (Ricœur 1965: 240)

²⁰ In Ricœur’s words, “[l]imited violence, consubstantial with the State, begins to be problematic as soon as it is a question not only of being subjected to it, but also of making use of it (in reality, to submit oneself interiorly in conscience is already to ratify this violence and to exercise it symbolically by identification with the authority who commands and constrains).” (Ricœur 1965: 241)

This conflict between sacrifice and coercion reaches its climax and practical reality in the linking up of war-religion-violence. War becomes a paradoxical limit situation (here following Jaspers' existentialist notion) in which one is seen as a sacrifice while attempting to kill another.²¹ War can be qualified uniquely as the direct instantiation of the paradox of murdering another *in the name of* what commands the utmost respect in any society, the most pure act—sacrifice of oneself for another, yet in a way that this “other” is replaced by the amorphous body of a State or civilization. In war, one's life is placed on the frontline and under immediate danger, attempting to murder one neighbour for the sake of loving another one. Religion is implemented uniquely here for it calls to a sacrifice that is not implementable by the State, yet it always already runs the risk of being commandeered by a “legitimate,” restraining, or coercive moral violence. This idea of the self-designation and identification with the State (as a magistrative power) opens onto another key topic addressed by Ricœur in regards to religion and violence: authority.

3. *Bad Authority in “Power and Violence”*

After the famous riots of May '68, Ricœur was elected dean of his faculty in 1969. During this time the students were more and more aggressive against figures of authority, and Ricœur experienced specific instances in which he needed to justify his own position as a Professor as one of non-violence. Authority became too quickly associated with power, and power became too quickly associated with domination, and thus, violence. As he puts it in his 1998 interview:

The year 1969 saw something like a rejection of knowledge. I recall that once I was dragged into a large amphitheater to explain myself. “What do you have that we don't” someone asked me. I answered, “I've read more books than you.” This rejection made no distinction between knowledge and power, and power was reduced to violence, so that nothing that had anything to do with a vertical relation could be lived honestly.²²

This recollection intimates a view he began sketching some 10 years earlier when reading Arendt's “On Violence,” the claims in which and with which,

²¹ Indeed “War is this limiting situation, this absurd situation which makes murder coincide with sacrifice. For the individual, to wage war is both to kill the other man, the citizen of another State, *and* to throw his life in to the scale so that his State might continue to exist.” (Ricœur 1965: 244)

²² Ricœur 1998: 38. He mentions that specifically during this time in Paris “power was immediately identified with violence and denounced blatantly as such” (Ricœur 1998: 37).

although tested and prodded, he eventually agreed.²³ It was in “Power and Violence” (originally published in French in 1989) that Ricoeur employs Arendt’s work to argue for how “the constitution of power is the forgotten present of political action” and that Arendt’s held *distinction* between power and violence can further be understood by engaging in key concepts such as *opinion and authority*.²⁴ Arendt is known for privileging this distinction, and Ricoeur, with the title “Power and Violence” brings them into comparison with an “and” instead of “or”.

It is necessary first to introduce Arendt’s argument: “Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it.”²⁵ Further, she distinguishes violence from power in part because violence is instrumental. As for State power, it is the “legitimate” power to restrain and violence can be used to replace real strength and power. Arendt considers violence more collectively, and this likely is what attracts Ricoeur, who is well known for his resistance to individualistic “psychologism” in explaining social phenomena. For Arendt, power is necessarily a social, political ability to act with others in concert, and it loses its strength when the group loses its cohesion. Indeed “power stands in need of numbers, whereas violence up to a point can manage without them because it relies on implements” (Arendt 1969: 111) and “violence is distinguished by its instrumental character” for “the purpose of multiplying strength.” (Arendt 1969: 115)²⁶ Thus we arrive at the distinction between power and violence, as one should not be reduced to the other. Power is action in concert, and violence is instrumental in order to gain power, filling the empty vacuums of space unoccupied by real power.

Ricoeur observes however that power easily can be misunderstood simply to be a matter of authority, and as such, can indeed lead us back to acting violently. This grave error leads to a qualification of the political as domination,

²³ Also in *Critique and Conviction*, Ricoeur is asked “isn’t this idea of the paradox of the political also found in Hannah Arendt?” to which Ricoeur responds: “It is true that I have also tried to present this paradox on the basis of Hannah Arendt’s analyses. [...] I had been struck by one of her ideas in particular, which I reformulate in saying that the political is presented as an orthogonal structure, with a horizontal plane and a vertical plane.” The horizontal is the wish to live together: power. It general goes unnoticed and only remarks “its existence until its falls apart, or when it is threatened.” Whereas the vertical, hierarchical side concerns the “differentiation of the governing and the governed; it is to this vertical dimension, obviously, that he attached the legitimate, and ultimate, use of violence” (Ricoeur 1998: 99).

²⁴ Ricoeur 2010a: 18. Originally published in Abensour 1989: 141–159 and Ricoeur 1991.

²⁵ Arendt 1969: 123. Arendt states, “violence is distinguished by its instrumental character. Phenomenologically, it is close to strength, since the implements of violence, like all other tools, are designed and used for the purpose of multiplying natural strength, until in the last stage of their development they can substitute for it.” (Arendt 1969: 113–115)

²⁶ Arendt states: “Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and it remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together.” (Arendt 1969: 113)

later qualified as “the subordination of one will to another.”²⁷ After a careful exposition of Arendt’s position, Ricœur develops his own position, an epistemological interpretation that fundamentally concerns the political as “opinion,” insisting that power is prejudicial, pre-contractual, constituted by living together and debating, and perhaps most importantly, yet also most enigmatically, “has the status of the forgotten” (Ricœur 2010a: 25). Ricœur extracts from Arendt the significance of something immemorial, for political action operates with a forgetting that “constitutes the present of our living-together.” It is a forgetting unrelated to the past that gives the present its true possibility. The closest, as Heidegger put it, paradoxically is the most hidden (in §7 of *Sein und Zeit*), and we inherently forget what is at the core of our very present. Ricœur employs Heidegger’s idea to conclude: “power is at the same time both the closest reality, constitutive at each movement of present living-together, and the most hidden—and in this sense always forgotten” (Ricœur 2010a: 26).

It is not domination that is the basis of power relations, but rather a pervading sense of togetherness, the mass. Domination is constitutive of violence. One thus quickly arrives at the unsteady and difficult balance between domination *vis-à-vis* authority, with authority acting as a kind of lever between power and violence. Arendt’s reflections on authority are for him a bit ambiguous, and while authority can be domination-oriented, creating contempt, it also can be obeyed, possibly with neither “coercion nor persuasion” as a form of respect that is not necessarily insistent or violent.²⁸ Where Arendt asks what authority “is,” concluding that it essentially is about a *foundation*²⁹, Ricœur turns to how authority gains its social force and identity. He wonders as to what it is in our social lifeworld today that has disappeared, and what this inconspicuous absence tells us about the present condition, concluding that what has disappeared is “the trilogy *religion-tradition-authority*” in which authority is the stable, most enduring, yet often overly criticized element (Ricœur 2010a: 30).

The Romans implemented authority with precision and understood it to be a necessary form of social cohesion for the city. Historically regarding this trilogy:

if authority is in the first foundation, religion is that which joins it immediately by the link of piety, and tradition mediately by being transmitted from

²⁷ Ricœur 2010a: 21. He claims, “before the temptation of violence there is an error in the very nature of politics defined in terms of domination” (Ricœur 2010a: 20). Here we could raise the question of volition more clearly—what is it? Is it intention? Is it pure meaning or “wanting to say” as Derrida will critique Husserl in *Speech and Phenomena*? Ricœur here conceives domination in terms of restraint.

²⁸ Arendt 1969: 114. See here also, Arendt 1993.

²⁹ Arendt 1993: 136.

the Ancients. The constraining power of the foundation is at the same time authority, tradition, religion. What is specific to the idea of authority is the *augmentation* [...] that power receives from this transmitted force. (Ricœur 2010a: 31)

Thus, what might Ricœur suggest to be missing in political power today? A particular kind of authority. But what happens whenever a society tries to implement it?—Violence. From Robespierre to Lenin and Stalin, such examples likely will lead us to conclude that we should in no uncertain terms reject the Roman project of the authority-tradition-religion trifecta.³⁰ Yet, concludes Ricœur, Arendt seeks instead a different kind of authority upon which to establish (a non-violent) power.

Of course, we should not be deceived by any illusions, as were Ricœur's aforementioned revolutionary students in 1969. Authority is necessarily inherent (although it may dissolve itself) even within *revolutions* and *insurrections*. It may even be most prevalent, albeit in a veiled form, within the enclaves that so adamantly seek to bring down authorities and structures of State power. The enigma of power to which Ricœur refers (2010a: 33) is constituted precisely by the necessity of authority in these revolutions. "Authority" is not necessarily violent, but it may lead to the coming into communion of *foundation* and *dictatorship*, the generative pair from which violence springs. In order to have a power *without* violence, necessary is a legitimation and authority that is not only counter-dictatorial, but also durable.³¹ Power and foundation are necessary, yet "cannot coincide. Power is volatile, foundation is that which alone can render power durable." (Ricœur 2010a: 33) For Arendt, the politics of living together involves knowing the fragility of power and collective consent (both of which must be *founded* via an augmentation and authority). Thus, necessary is the cultivation of a fragility that does not explode into violence. The political here, as Ricœur interprets Arendt, is like an atom bomb in need of being handled by skilled and steady hands. The essay then is concluded with a demonstration of how all revolutions, despite seemingly independent from a tradition, or believing themselves as such, still rely on a

³⁰ Ricœur 2010a: 32. Ricœur seems to be extracting this trinity from Arendt, albeit somewhat indirectly. One finds a version of this trilogy in her work here: "For to live in a political realm, with neither authority nor the concomitant awareness that the source of authority transcends power and those who are in power, means to be confronted anew, without the religious trust in a sacred beginning and without the protection of traditional and therefore self-evident standards of behaviour, by the elementary problems of human living-together." (Arendt 1993: 141)

³¹ Here, Arendt concludes that the non-violence of the American revolution was successful in creating authority "a completely new body politic, without violence and with the help of a constitution" (Arendt 1993: 140). Ricœur sums up Arendt's hopes perfectly here: "Here one comes upon Arendt's political utopia: a modern revival of the Roman experience of foundation in the spirit of Machiavelli, but without Robespierre and the Terror, without Lenin and Stalinism—in short, without the relapse into violence." (Ricœur 2010a: 33)

“tradition of authority. This is the law of precedent in the chain of the eruptions of power.” (Ricœur 2010a: 34)

Yet if we stop at the power-violence relation, the phenomenon of violence disappears and we lose access to the experiences that make it so exceptional. The true enigma that constitutes this relation is one within the correspondence between “*foundation* and *innovation*.”³² This relation between foundation and innovation, between tradition and the poetic, between originality and an absolutely creative act, is not easy to explain. Yet it is of pivotal importance, for it is the balance and carburation of these two that holds political action together. In conjunction with tradition, our creative, spontaneous, innovative ability constitutes politics and living/acting together, yet out of the necessity of working together, we presume it in our *acting in concert*. This leaves us with a foundation that is anterior to our particular project at hand. And this is why

the forgotten of politics is always divided into two: the forgotten of that which we *are* from the sole fact of acting together [...] and the forgotten of that which we *have been* by the force of an anterior foundation always presumed and perhaps never unobtainable [...]. (Ricœur 2010a: 35)

Conclusion: Religion and Violence Give Rise to Thought

Given the dynamic, yet nevertheless non-contradictory uses of the notion “religion” by Ricœur throughout all three of these essays, it is possible to distil these different uses into a more synthetic (yet still dynamic and multifarious), phenomenology of violence, demonstrating the roles of religion within it.

In “Power and Violence” religion possibly can play a role in violent acts, namely when it gets used to underwrite a restraining, dominative authority that does not allow innovation. It is a dark religion insofar as it keeps subjects in check by overemphasizing the role of “piety” at the expense of surrendering their very humanity or poetic capabilities. This undermines the political as such, and sides religion with domination and foundation. This rich essay furnishes not only a reflection on the political, and not only a realization that revolutions necessarily hold a certain tension in their authorities and seemingly invisible foundations (which can easily explode into that which they struggle against), but also a kind of *apophatic* approach to describing violence. Violence gives rise to, and motivates Ricœur to understand what, can truly avoid violence, or avoid a systematization that does not harbour immediate and institutional violent potential.

³² In Ricœur’s words, “between *foundation* and *innovation* that there exists an enigma much larger than that of the relation between power and violence to which we are party” (Ricœur 2010a: 35).

Here the genesis of violence comes from the linking-up of foundation and dictatorship. Violence can so easily spring from political movements that, in word yet not in deed, claim to reject violence, namely, because they operate with an authority that does not concern “living together” in the sense of allowing the authority-innovation relation to find its proper tension. And religion (as beliefs, practices, or as frayed cultural expressions) can play a part in this process, especially when it is used as a means of piety, a means of *constraining* and underwriting these forms of “bad” authority, which, with religion in hand, augments a kind of violent power.

Next, in “State and Violence” we learn that although religions, their communal gatherings together can be limited by the State, there always is an undetectable religiosity over which the State has no power to regulate or dissolve. This is not merely an abstract form of “spiritual power” that overcomes the forces of the world. This is the power of vital, lived religion to overturn violence. Yet we should not be so naïve to think that by going against the magistrate, one does not become oneself the very thing one rejects in the State—the villain of *magistration*.

Further, even those who are *victims* or claim to reject the State’s violence can be complicit in it in various ways, and here religion also gets implicated. War is an example of a sublimation of religion, namely, of sacrifice, and it is a corrupted version of religious action for it instantiates the paradox of murdering another in the name of the pure act of love for someone else. One chooses sides in the most extreme of senses. Religion calls for a sacrifice that is not implementable by the State, yet it also always already runs the risk of being coercive.

And then in “Religion and Symbolic Violence,” religious violence appears when the self-limiting capacity of a religious community to accept the superabundant reaches its limits, and the community mimetically spins off into an inconspicuous conflict over epistemological rights to being the true religion and representatives of God, who becomes the “object of fear and desire.” This can come to a climax in cases of indifference (which stew for years under a hidden closure of a false tolerance of religious others in our proximity), or of outright disgust at the other and their supposed immorality. Yet it again seems clear that “religion” and “violence” do not necessarily presuppose one another, insofar as they each could independently occur without the other. There is the potential of “residual” violence in religion, and religion might play a role in the occurrence of any acts of violence. Yet the phenomenon of religion itself—contrary to social theories that have insisted that violent sacrifice and the protectionism of tradition are inherent to religious action—does not presuppose the admission of violence, nor does it by necessity incite more violence within an already violent human race.

Returning to the living metaphor or symbol of the Charlottesville Protests of 2017, which should give rise to thought, Ricœur's work allows for another perspective. First, there seems to be a hidden dimension of religion motivating the conflict, reminding of the double edged sword of promise and peril religion presents: it resources the infliction of the social wound, while also calmly balm and tending to it.³³ Here, religion reminds us that *we* (as religious action always can be thought in terms of collective action) do not have full control of our collective capacities, but also that we do indeed have capacities, for in the religious experience I am being (and we are) "addressed." Religion possesses the power to heal, yet simultaneously, to create division, further instilling the radical evil from which one is healed.

Second: American media presented how the Nation constantly was looking to the President (a figure of authority) to take a side in the conflict, to say something substantive that would cause the violence to subside, or to call for a force of intervention in Charlottesville. Yet in such cases, the State's intervention would have had little impact and regulation upon the often-undetectable religiosity of which both sides of the conflict claimed themselves to be unique representatives. When a community or collective claims to act in concert in the name of God then the State will lack the authority ultimately to eradicate its motivation and the conflicts between communities motivated by unconditional claims to representing God (unless of course the State itself has become that ultimate source). This aspect of religion is not merely an abstract form of "spiritual power" that overcomes the forces of the world. It substantively demonstrates the unifying, binding strength of very specific unconditional claims.

And third: the violence in Charlottesville had reached a *foundational* disproportion. The two sides of power (one composed of the alt-right, neo-Nazis, "traditionalists"; the other of ANTIFA, progressive liberal humanitarians) both had reached an emotive and affective imbalance between the rational and irrational, and were prepared for unified violence to bring about resolution. Yet once the violent murder of the victim, Heather Heyer, occurred, not only could one suggest that a Girardian mimesis was at work (according to which religion could be interpreted as a healthy *response*). Instead, following Ricœur's development of Girard, a kind of porous religiosity itself helped fuel the conflict and violence. The victim of this tragic violence became the scapegoat that allowed the conflict to de-escalate temporarily. The statue was but an excuse to rally and have conflict; to respond to the feeling of needing to overthrow the magistrative rule of the other (especially in the case of the alt-right). Yet in the end, the State quite clearly was not the object of conflict. From the view of the alt-right, the representatives of the progressives and so-called leftists represented the State (or "swamp") from which only violence would liberate their group. Each side claimed an unconditional right, in the

³³ Caine-Conley 2017.

name of representing something superabundant to the State's power (whether God or an unconditional moral justice) that gave them legitimation to use violence to subdue the other.

The role of religion in these acts of violence indeed gives rise to thinking. Interestingly enough, "What Makes us Think?" was the chosen title of Ricœur's interview with Jean-Pierre Changeux in 1998. There, Changeux challenged that religious fundamentalism, from a global perspective, is just as dangerous and threatening as other forms, such as political fanaticism. To this Ricœur responded, with tongue in cheek "But in the West it is finished. We are done with wars of religion. We have passed from war to tolerance, and from tolerance to equal status" and it is precisely in this form of tolerance that a new violence can arise, for one cannot "bear the sight of violence without trying to stop it."³⁴ He self-critiques the West and its utopian "tolerance" as often leading to a kind of violent indifference that in a nutshell indicates that other communities' uniqueness is inconsequential, thus reinforcing the violent act of sealing the borders between communities. In the end, it may be that violence not only *discloses* but also produces or *constitutes* aspects of religion that otherwise would go overlooked and unnoticed were it *not for their manifestation and instantiation in violence*. It would be such an experience of religion, as violent, that would give rise to more than thought. It would give rise to the remembrance of the Fall, of humankind's condition of brokenness; of the decimation of the human to the dominion of others and even unto oneself.

One might here wonder as to whether or not there is any salvation or escape from violence. Somewhat paradoxically, as those familiar with Ricœur (again, for whom there is not constitutive violence in religion) will know, the solution will come in the form of *conflict*. That is, conflict can save us from violence, namely, a hermeneutic life of a "conflict of interpretations." Yet this "we," a community of scholars, also run the risk of absolving ourselves of violence in distancing ourselves from it, and perhaps falling prey to indifference by merit of being overwhelmed by such conflict. This leads to the somewhat nihilistic thought about a paradox of thinking about violence phenomenologically and whether or not reflections upon it ultimately would have any value for anyone: such phenomenologies of violence likely are of interest neither to the unrepentant doer of violence indifferent toward it, nor the "non-violent"

³⁴ Changeux and Ricœur 2000: 298, and 218 respectively. See here the section "Religion and Violence" (259–271). Around this time of writing, Ricœur elsewhere mentions the historical wars of religion: "Language exists only in languages. And the invisible Church exists only in visible churches. The problem is to take on this historical constraint without violence. When I say without violence, I am looking in the direction of Buddhism, because historical Christianity was not good at managing this relationship; it has often tipped over into extreme violence—the Crusades, the Inquisition, the wars of Religion, the English Protestants forbidding the Irish Catholics to ordain their priests, and so on." (Ricœur 1998: 154) In these regards, see also Ricœur 1999: 7.

person who believes s/he is free from it.³⁵ Instead, the potential value of any such reflections may be of use only to the victims of violence. But that already presumes too much, namely that phenomenology offers the possibilities of a universalizable, true, valuable, and transcendental depiction of a victim's experience from a third person perspective. Such a presumption may instantiate, yet again, violence.

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³⁵ This is an adaptation of Karl Barth's claim about the paradox of hell, that it is a non-category, perhaps, because the unbelievers are indifferent towards it and go about unaffected by it, and the believers believe they are redeemed from its clutches.

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