

On Violence, Justice and Deconstruction

Chung-Hsiung Lai
National Cheng Kung University

Abstract

In this paper, I will first explore the *chiasmus* relation between violence and metaphysics in the thought of Levinas¹ and Derrida. Then, I will move to examine “the *aporia*² of justice” in Derrida’s reinterpretation of Benjamin’s critique of violence with respect to law-making and law-preserving. Finally, by problematizing the *aporia* of deconstruction, I will attempt to provide a critique of Derrida’s “Plato’s Pharmacy” in order to place Derrida’s ethical account of deconstruction *under erasure*. My core contention is: if deconstruction *is*, as Derrida claims, ethical and just, it must be unethical and unjust in the first place in what he calls an “economy of violence.” Violence *per se* lies at the heart of both deconstructive justice and injustice. Yet, to achieve the former, the latter paradoxically must be accomplished first—a betrayal which functions as the condition of possibility and thus of impossibility of deconstructive justice—thereby making the very moment of deconstructive decision an anxious and painful experience of *aporia*, or in Kierkegaard’s phrase, “a moment of *madness*.”

Keywords

violence, justice, deconstruction, *aporia*, Derrida, Levinas,
Benjamin, the Other, ontology, ethics

¹ Levinas (who died on Christmas Day 1995) is an outstanding Jewish-French philosopher. He found that the primordial ethical experience of Being had been neglected by Heidegger’s hermeneutic metaphysics of Being, thereby promoting the “first philosophy” or “the phenomenology of the Other” (as we may call it) through an analysis of the “face-to-face” relation with the Other in his two major works—*Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. He is also Derrida’s close and admired friend. The relationship between the two great Jewish thinkers is thus one of those rare examples of a genuine intellectual friendship that has reciprocally transformed and deepened both philosophers’ work. Derrida’s recent book *Adieu* (1999) was originally his funeral oration for Levinas.

² “*Aporia*” in Greek means “unpassable path.” It is the situation in which two equally valid, opposed and non-interpenetrative poles make choice impossible; or the choice is forever possible but the very act of choosing is impossible. *Aporia*, in brief, signifies the *impasses* of meaning; that is, “something that does not allow [direct] passage” (Derrida 1992: 16).

Everything that appears to consciousness, everything that is for consciousness in general, is *meaning*. Meaning is the phenomenality of the phenomenon.

—Derrida (1981: 30)

Violence *per se* “exists” everywhere *in* and *through* time. It essentially comes from opposition, that is, from the scission of being into the Self and the Other, or of consciousness into the meaning and non-meaning. To *be* is the very hunger for violence. That is, to *be*, by its nature, is to choose, to suppress, to exclude, to assimilate and thus to *be* violent; a *desire* of *presence* and thus of the effacement of the *trace*. Violence can thus be seen as the *prior-to* and *in-the-face-of* condition of the possibility of philosophy, politics, science, history, culture, religion, language and Being, above all, that of *the* decision made *now* and *here*. However, the decision made (and thus the totality established) is constantly *haunted* by the excluded, assimilated and repressed in the name of *justice*. The imminent demands of the Other speaks of the language of justice. As a result, the decision made at the very moment unavoidably leads to indecision again. Rigorous and insightful reflection on violence and justice *as such* can be found scattered over Derrida’s work.

I. Violence and Metaphysics in the Thought of Levinas and Derrida³

Violence applied to a free being is, taken in its most general sense, war.

—Levinas (1993: 19)

The violence of the political mistreats the face yet again by effacing its unicity in a generality. The two violences are in the end the same, and Levinas associates them when he speaks of “attention to the Other as unicity and face (which the visibleness of the political leaves invisible), which can be produced only in the unicity of an I.”

—Derrida (1999: 98)

³For some pertinent analyses in respect of violence in the thought of Levinas and Derrida, see Edith Wyschogrod’s “Derrida, Levinas and Violence,” Peter Atterton’s “Levinas and the Language of Peace,” Robert Bernasconi’s “Violence of the Face” and Christina Howells’s *Derrida: Deconstruction from Phenomenology to Ethics*.

Derrida's scrutiny of violence surely has a long history. For instance, the chapter: "The Violence of the Letter: From Lévi-Strauss to Rousseau" in *Of Grammatology* attempts to examine what may be called "a genealogy of violence" in terms of *arche-writing* (as an original structure of repetition). Derrida argues that Lévi-Strauss, like Rousseau, associates writing with simple binary-opposition violence and falls prey to structuralism. He points out that writing is violent in so far as it classifies and pigeonholes, going against the *différance*-structured economy of writing. Accordingly, Derrida believes that Lévi-Strauss's anthropology fails to recognize the original violence in writing. He then distinguishes three levels (tertiary structure) of violence of writing: first, the "arche-violence": "the originary violence of language which consists in inscribing within a difference, in classifying, in suspending the vocative absolute" (1976: 112); second, the totalizing violence: the force which organizes and assimilates the first violence into effects of propriety; and, third, the resistant violence: the returning force of what is excluded and repressed in the disciplinary system of language. As effects of *arche-writing*, these three levels of violence together constitute the endless cycle of the violence *against* violence phenomenon or what Derrida calls an "economy of violence" (1978: 117) (this phenomenon will be elaborated in a later section).

However, more importantly for exploring ethics and politics in Derrida's work, "Violence and Metaphysics"⁴ and "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'" examine the primordially of the phenomena of violence and (in)justice and their irreducible relation. Let's look at Derrida's cogent interpretation and critique of Emmanuel Levinas's ethics in "Violence and Metaphysics" first. Levinas offers an explanation of violence that crosses the traditional and empirical boundary of brute force. For Levinas, the Western philosophy (the whole ontological tradition of the determination of Being as *presence*) from Parmenides to Heidegger is the assimilation of otherness into sameness, where the Other is digested like food and drink. Metaphysics, he argues, is *ipso facto* the very product of violence. That is why he repudiates Heidegger's ontology to explore the implications of the Husserlian pure I, an

⁴ Besides Derrida's well-known interpretation and critique of Levinas's thought in "Violence and Metaphysics" (in *Writing and Difference*), the work of Levinas has also been introduced to the English-speaking world by Colin Davis, Simon Critchley, Robert Bernasconi and Geoffrey Bennington. To my mind, in the rather debatable domain of moral philosophy, Levinas's richness of writing lies in both his style of representation (unique, rhapsodic, prosaic and elliptical) and his exclusive and persuasive analogical description of "hostage," "insomnia," "fecundity," "sensibility," "love," "Eros," "death," "time," "fatigue," "the third party," "Gyges," "dwelling," "said-saying-and-unsaid" and, most significantly, "the face of the Other."

alter-ego, in the name of ethics or, more precisely, of an ethics of ethics.

Ethics, in the Greco-Germanic philosophical tradition is either a branch of philosophy (even in the Kantian treatment of it as metaphysics) or the Heideggerean rethinking of a neglected Being in his “the destruction of the history of ontology” (Heidegger 44). The latter was launched against the so-called onto-theological adventures of the Western philosophical tradition, in a return to the Pre-Socratics who according to Heidegger did not separate ethics from the process of thinking itself. Yet one can perhaps argue that this familiarity with Being is one of ecstasy and fusion in which the neutrality of Being ultimately reduces all beings to itself in a totalizing movement. Levinas produces just such a critique of the Heideggerean project by giving a radically different meaning to ethics:

The fundamental experience with objective experience itself presupposes is the experience of the Other. As the idea of the Infinite goes beyond Cartesian thought, so is the Other out of proportion with the power and freedom of the I. The disproportion between the Other and the self is precisely moral consciousness. Moral consciousness is not an experience of values, but an access to external being: external being is, *par excellence* the Other. [...] The face of the Other puts into question the happy spontaneity of the self. (Levinas 1990: 293)

Therefore, for Levinas, ethics is the dissymmetrical relation to the wholly Other who “signifies” by his *face* (itself a *trace* of the face). No correlation is possible hence the movement from the Same to the Other is irreversible (Levinas 1969: 35-36). The nub of this ethics is the radical alterity of the other. Levinas writes:

The alterity, the radical heterogeneity of the other, is possible only if the other is other with respect to a term whose essence is to remain at the point of departure, to serve as *entry* into the relation, to be the same not relatively but absolutely. *A term can remain absolutely at the point of departure of relationship only as I.* (1969: 36)

This is Levinas’s best-known ethical face-to-face relation, where the face of the Wholly Other commands one to refrain from violence (e.g. “Thou should not kill”). Ethics, for Levinas, is the diachronic infinity to come that constantly interrupts the synchronic

totality of ontology, an eternal resistance of the Other. Levinas claims that the *face* in which the Other, the absolute Other, presents himself does not negate or replace the Same with violence but calls one to responsibility. He writes: “This presentation [of the face of the Other] is pre-eminently non-violence, for instead of offending my freedom it calls it to responsibility and found it. As non-violence, it nonetheless maintains the plurality of the same and the other. It is peace” (1969: 203). Obviously, for Levinas, in the relation with the Other, the ethics secures priority of peace in discourse. What makes the violence possible and thus breaks the peace is the very refusal to meet the Other in a face-to-face relation. As a result, “Violence applied to a free being is, taken in its most general sense, war. War is not the collision of two substances or two intentions, but an attempt made by one to master the other by surprise, by ambush. War is an ambush” (Levinas 1993: 19). War violates the *prior-to* peace.

Derrida however questions Levinas’s non-violence oriented ethics, which privileges peace over war. He believes that were there a non-violent language, it would have to be one that goes without “verb,” without “predication,” without “*to be*.” “But since finite silence is also the medium of violence, language can only indefinitely tend toward justice by acknowledging and practicing the violence within it” (Derrida 1976: 117). Levinasian absolute peace, for Derrida, only exists in the domain of pure non-violence and of absolute *silence*, or, in an unreachable Promised Land, a homeland *thither* without language. Accordingly, in contrast to Levinas, Derrida calls for an “economy of violence”: “an economy irreducible to what Levinas envisions in the word. If light is the element of violence, one must combat light with a certain other light, in order to avoid the worst violence, the violence of the night which precedes or represses discourse” (117). For Derrida, discourse can only do itself violence and negate itself in order to *affirm* itself. Philosophy, as the discourse of the Self, can only open itself to the question of violence *within* and *by* it. It is an economy: “violence against violence, light against light” (117). “One never escapes the economy of war” (148). In other words, if metaphysics is a violence of assimilation, one must fight against this violence with a certain other violence; a violence of revolutionary action against a violence of police action. It is this endless cycling, or the tertiary structure, of violence, which makes the economy of violence *irreducible*.

Henceforth, to Derrida, Levinas’s notion of ethics as a critique of ontological violence is also presented in his discourse which presupposes the very ontological language that it claims it overcomes. That is, doesn’t Levinas’s critique of philosophy

itself arguably use an assimilating language of philosophy as discourse of the Self? (Derrida 1976: 131). Accordingly, Derrida claims that every philosophy, including Levinas's philosophy of ethics, "can only choose the lesser violence within an economy of violence" (313). Yet, Critchley and Bernasconi remind us that to see "Violence and Metaphysics" as a mere critique of Levinas is surely to misread Derrida's deconstructive reading (Bernasconi and Critchley 1991: xii). "Violence and Metaphysics" aims much higher. It attempts to demonstrate by a double reading (a reading and a writing). That is, it "shows, on the one hand, the impossibility of escaping from logocentric conceptuality and, on the other hand, the necessity of such an escape arising from the impossibility of remaining wholly within the (Greek) logocentric tradition" (Critchley 1991: xii). Derrida's deconstructive reading allows the two impossibilities to interlace and thus to suspend the critical moment of deciding between the two in the thought of Levinas.

Generally speaking, Levinas's second key book, *Otherwise than Being*, is often regarded as an indirect response to Derrida's critique.⁵ In *Totality and Infinity* (on which Derrida's "Violence and Metaphysics" is mainly based), Levinas attempts to introduce his ethics-oriented "first philosophy" by opposing it to "a philosophical thought which reduces the Other [*l'Autre*] to the scale of the Same and the multiple to the totality, making of autonomy its supreme principle" (Levinas 1990: 294). However, the major concern of *Otherwise than Being* is the complex and subtle relation between "the Said," "the Saying" and "the Unsaid," especially the possibility of an ethical Saying which interrupts the ontological language of the Said. Levinas sees Derrida's deconstruction as an absolutely ethical Saying which also undermines the Said of philosophy. Besides, he, in "Difficult Freedom," recognizes the existence of the "economy of violence." He writes: "the adaptation of the Other [*l'Autre*] to the scale of the Same in the totality is not attained without violence, War, or Bureaucracy—which alienate the Same to the Other" (294).

Nevertheless, he doesn't accept Derrida's idea that there is nothing beyond the economy of violence. Levinas writes in "Wholly Otherwise" (the only article by Levinas devoted exclusively to Derrida and deconstruction): "we walk in a 'no-man's land,' in an in-between [...] which is uncertain even of the uncertainties which flicker everywhere. Suspension of truths! Strange epoch!" (3). Yet, amidst the "ruins," he

⁵ Derrida's "At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am" (1991) is an answer to Levinas's indirect response in *Otherwise than Being*. For an excellent commentary on this essay, see Critchley's "'Bois'—Derrida's Final Word on Levinas."

says, a certain ontological foundation is left intact; the critique of the determination of Being-as-Presence has been found using in its very critique the present tense of the verb *to be* in predicative propositions. “Discourse in the course of which, amidst the shaking of the foundations of truth, against the self-evidence of present lived experience seems to offer an ultimate refuge to presence” (5). It is the case that within the rigorous reflection of the style of scepticism one can glimpse the “interstices of Being” where the diachronic movement between the Said and the Unsayings occurs. The profound and intersecting *chiasmus* thus formed by the interlacing of Derrida’s two deconstructive readings is where the critical insights lie.

It appears to me that neither Levinas nor Derrida arrived at the crossroads of “truth” without their respective *blindness*. The patricide (of the word) and the ensuing blindness are highly reminiscent of a certain Oedipus of the Orestes myth. A blindness that can see the blindness of the other but is unable to see itself. Paul de Man, referring to the rhetorical language of critics, states that “their language could grope toward a certain degree of insight only because their method remained oblivious to the perception of this insight. The insight exists only for a reader in the privileged position of being able to observe the blindness as a phenomenon in its own right” (106). Although this irruption by the Other for reflexivity of the Same accords with Levinas’s ethical relation, one must be acutely aware that the phenomenon of blindness applies to a metaphorical language and not to a direct speech as shown by de Man who finds “blindness to be the necessary correlative of the rhetorical nature of literary language” (141).

It is *perhaps* the nature of deconstructive decision: any deconstructive reading (which chooses a lesser violence as a resistance against the violent oppression of the Said in the name of justice for the Unsaid) in the economy of violence is always already subject to other deconstructive readings *to come*. In other words, one may state that the refusal to meet the Other in the face-to-face relation (or a deconstructive relation) actually results from the refusal or inability of the Self to see and examine its own blindness, which makes the violence possible. “If it is only in the passage through the transcendental that the original structure of violence is opened up (hence the resistance of philosophy to the human and social sciences), then it is in fact only through the experience of the economy of violence that judgments of lesser violence can be made” (Howells 24). Nevertheless, is the deconstructive ethical saying *absolutely* ethical? To what extent can the violence be repaired by *a* deconstructor? Is Derrida’s economy of violence unproblematic? We should return to these questions

when we explore the *aporia* of deconstruction in the last section.

II. The *Aporia* of Justice as the (Im)Possibility of Deconstruction

You delight in laying down laws, yet you delight more in breaking them. Like children playing by the ocean who build sand-towers with constancy and then destroy them with laughter. But while you build your sand-towers the ocean brings more sand to the shore, and when you destroy them the ocean laughs with you. —Gibran (58)

Justice is what gives us the impulse, the drive, or the movement to improve law. —Derrida (1997: 130)

As we have seen, in “Violence and Metaphysics,” Derrida does deal with some ethical issues but only in abstract ways to avoid, it is argued, falling into the structured mire of theory, method and philosophy or, in general, of the “limited economy.” Indeed, Derrida is often criticized for lacking positive and concrete socio-political aims and purposes. It seems that he has changed his privilege subjects—linguistic and philosophical thought over political and social thought⁶—although the spirit of deconstruction remains the same *there* for him. In most of his recent ethical-political articles and books, he *clearly, directly* and *devotedly* explores the political implications of deconstruction by joining the textual-linguistic *différance* to an ethico-political deconstructive messianism—*justice* (along with notions of democracy, laws, friendship and politics). “Justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructable. No more than deconstruction itself, if such a thing exists. Deconstruction is justice” (Derrida 1992: 14-15). Justice, as the only thing he believes is undeconstructable, is a forever-coming messianic otherness—“the coming of the other,

⁶ One must admit that Deconstruction’s heyday has gone; nevertheless, it has been regarded as “a classic of the postmodern canon.” It is thus no surprise to find “deconstructive blood” throbbing in those otherness-oriented postmodern movements (such as postcolonialism, feminism, post-Marxism, New Historicism and Multiculturalism as well as Queer studies). One may safely state that Deconstruction’s decline is partly attributed to its falling back into the textual formalism it was supposed to remedy because Derrida refused to enter the political arena “directly” even when his deconstructive ideas had already been widely used by many postmodern “isms” to speak for the Other. Yet, at length, he blew his political trumpet. As Mark Lilla points out that “as recently as 1990 he [Derrida] declined to explain the political implications of deconstruction [...]. But now, at long last, he has spoken. During the past five years Jacques Derrida has published no fewer than six books on political themes” (37).

the absolute and unpredictable singularity of the *arrivant as justice*” (Derrida 1994b: 28). Justice, in the image of haunting specter, has *directly* lead deconstruction into ethical, social and political arenas and into, one may suggest, a post-deconstructive era.

Deconstructive justice, however, can never be fully *done* in any tangible juridical form for it exists not merely for a historical wrong (which must be righted) or an epistemological violence (which must be repaired). Rather, it stands for the very *possibility* of justice as an *imminence*. In other words, just as history *per se* can never risk being reduced to historiographical records, files or representations, so can justice never be ontologized as juridical-moral rules within a hegemonic horizon. The logic of hauntology⁷ indicates this irreducible justice wholly external to the justice, a justice which is, and refers to, a justice of otherness separated irrevocably from juridical-moral justice and is always already antecedent to ontology and exterior to totality. Furthermore, this demand of justice to question is always imminent, uncompromising and unconditional. Only through a perpetual *re-questioning* injustice in an irreparable rupture, can the Other gain access to speak *for* itself and *of* itself in the name of *justice*. Responding to the imminent ethical demand of the Other for Derrida becomes “the art of politics” in our postmodern/postcolonialist context. Simon Critchely rightly states:

The infinite ethical demand of deconstruction arises as a response to a singular context and calls forth the invention of a political decision. Politics itself can here be thought of as *the art of response to the singular demand of the other*, a demand that arises in a particular context—although the infinite demand cannot simply be reduced to its context—and calls for political invention, for creation. (1999: 276)

It is perhaps the “infinite ethical demand of deconstruction” which demands that Derrida reread Benjamin’s “Critique of Violence” in his essay—“Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’” as his ethical response to the call of the Other. In

⁷ The logic of hauntology, for Derrida, in *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International* (1994), is the eternal return of singularity, the repetition of first-time-and-last-time or the re-revenant of revenants (revenant as “re-coming back”): namely, the infinite trace of the present-absence spectre. In other words, the possibility of an iterative trace as the first first-time and the impossibility of the repetition as the final last-time make spectrality possible. Derrida defines, “[r]epetition and first time, but also repetition and the last time, since the singularity of any first time makes of it also a last time. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a *Hauntology*” (1994b: 10).

this seminal essay, Derrida mainly provides his critique of Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" by exploring (1) the idea of deconstructive justice in the three-fold *aporia* and (2) the irreducible relation between the law-violence and justice. He clearly states that the reasons he reinterprets Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" are firstly this text provides lessons for Western democracies, and secondly, "it lends itself to an exercise in deconstructive reading" (1992: 30). At the very beginning of "Critique of Violence," Benjamin states: "the task of a critique of violence can be summarized as that of expounding its relation to law and justice. For a cause, however effective, becomes violence, in the precise sense of the word, only when it bears on moral issues. The sphere of these issues is defined only by the concepts of law and justice" (227). In this article, he not only soundly problematizes the relation between justice and law but also puts the criterion for violence into question. Derrida however points out that Benjamin resorts to much of binary opposition to construct his critique (such as natural law and positive law). When Benjamin addresses the forms of violence of the law, he distinguishes the difference between "law-making" and "law-preserving" in respect of violence (Benjamin 283). He provides an example of law-making which concedes classes the right to strike in Germany after the World War I to explain the character of violence in the endless ends-and-means process of law-making (278).

Then, after attacking the death penalty, Benjamin uses the word "spectral mixture" to criticize the two forms of violence (the lawmaking and law-preserving) which are present in another institution of the modern state—*police* (286). Generally speaking, Derrida believes that the reason why Benjamin still insists the separation between lawmaking violence and law-preserving violence is because if the two are ghostly mixed together, then we may not be aware of the violence masked by the legitimacy of the law and forget the origin of the law-violence. Consequently, we are bound to be trapped in the endless circle of ends-and-means process of law-making. Derrida believes that Benjamin's binarism-guided critique of law-violence puts himself into a self-deconstructing condition, providing us with a "pre-deconstructive" critique of law-violence nevertheless.

Henceforth, violence, not virtue or morality, is at the heart of our institutions of law. Here then is a restatement of what Marx saw with sharp clarity; the passage from the general to the particular or *vice versa* (which can also be called the space of translation) is necessarily *violent*. In other words, there is no continuity without rupture and the continuation across the rupture, that is, the founding moment is one without precedent. The *null-site* of deconstruction is here in the moment of law-making,

in the instance of decision which must arise in the *vertigo* of indecision. Stating that “deconstruction is justice,” Derrida proceeds to draw an unstable distinction between justice and law; law he says is de-constructible while justice is not so. Deconstruction does not abdicate in the face of the opposition between just and unjust yet is not satisfied by such oppositions either. Deconstructive interrogation, according to Derrida, destabilizes and complicates the opposition between *droit* (as law, convention, institution, positive law) on the one hand and Nature and natural law on the other. It mimics the oscillation of difference or the displacement of oppositional and puts into question the authority of the questioning-form itself in order “to show the constitutive undecidability, radical incompleteness or untotalizability of textual, institutional, cultural, social and economic structures” (Critchley 1999: 163). Moreover, deconstruction is a double-movement between an empirical interrogation of *law-as-droit* and an interrogation of the subjection of this interrogation; an apolitical movement that formulates logico-formal paradoxes together with the events that are evidently political.

In relation to justice and *law-as-droit*, Derrida writes that “deconstruction takes place in the interval that separates the undeconstructibility of justice from the deconstructibility of *droit* (authority, legitimacy and so on)” (15). It is to this interval, an aporetic space, that I have referred when speaking of the unbridgeable gap between the Self and the Other (in terms of Levinasian ethical relation). Justice, if it at all could be *is*, is only *there*. This distance where justice is concerned is not a spatial gap but time itself in its very nature as a perpetual *pending* or an *inadequation*. In the language of Levinas, the rupture between “is” and justice is “diachrony” which separates the synchrony of being (“is”) from the an-archic anachrony of justice. Justice, therefore, is experienced only as an experience of the impossible. Diachrony, which makes all experiences possible, is itself paradoxically impossible as an experience. If justice is considered as an experience of infinity (as Levinas and Derrida do)—and infinity is the form that cannot contain its content—then rather than say that justice is separated by an unbridgeable gap from every present, one must be able to *affirm* that justice is this very separation, this very aporetic interval.

Accordingly, justice is an experience of *aporia*: experience is a passage, a traversal towards a destination. *Apouira*, as the *impasse of meaning*, does not permit (direct) passage. The experience of this impossibility is the *aporia* of justice. Derrida explains that justice is incalculable; whereas law is the element that pertains to calculation. Moments, he writes, in which “the decision between just and unjust is never insured by a rule” (16) are the experience of justice. Law is political while

justice metaphysical. Justice is singular while law plural. Derrida points out that there are three *aporias* that relate to justice:

First, the *aporia* of the rule: it is said that one must be autonomous in order to act. Yet, actions that are not “responsible” in the sense of not being related to a rule or a law are considered simply arbitrary. However, the simple application of a rule is not recognized as a just act notwithstanding its legality. The only type of act that has a relation to justice is aporetic, interpretative; suspending *prior* rules so they can be invented anew. It is a state of anxiety that prevails for the duration between suspension and re-invention. This problem of justice will have been posed at the founding moment of law to be violently revolved by a repression which leads to justice being dissimulated within the law as a repression.

Second, the haunting of the undecidable: Justice pertains to action; it is almost commonplace that only a decision has the possibility of being just. However, every justice-as-law (distributive justice) is disturbed at its very core by an imperative that is *prior* to all calculation; that of the undecidable which is “merely the oscillation or the tension between two decisions. It is the experience of that which, though heterogeneous, foreign to the order of the calculable and the rule, is still obliged—it is of obligation that we must speak to give itself up to the impossible decision, while taking account of law and rules” (24). The “ordeal of the undecidable” prevents the full-presence, therefore the justice-fulfillment, of a decision from within even while driving it towards this very aim.

Last, the urgency that obstructs the horizon of knowledge: Justice, though ever-unpresentable, cannot wait; “a just decision is always required *immediately*” (24). The instant of decision, according to Kierkegaard, is a madness and yet it is also an offer of the possibility of redemption for us. A just decision is taken only in a rending of formal time and in defiance of dialectics, in an “affirmatory suspension” (not an absence) of both knowledge and rule. Even the possession of infinite information will not have sufficed because a decision by its very nature is a rupture in the chain of judicial deliberation that must necessarily precede it. A decision is *performative* (justice) as opposed to *constative* (rule). The *performative* is irreducibly thoughtless, unconscious and does not respond to the demands of theoretical rationality because of its irruptive internal violence. In turn, every *constative* relies upon a *performative* structure, on the dissymmetry and violence rupture of the latter for only such is capable of addressing justice-as-law.

Although Derrida writes of three *aporias* related to justice, he points out that there

is only one *aporia*, that of singularity, that multiplies itself infinitely. Furthermore, justice in its (three-fold) aporetic nature cannot be anything but “*avenir*”; always to-come and without guarantees. It is *performative*; a *perhaps*, due to its structural urgency of precipitation, a welcome interval of possibility for transformation. Due to this structural incalculability, justice-as-*performative* is wide open to abuse. This raises the vital question of appropriation, for left unguarded justice can “always be reappropriated by the most perverse calculation” (28). There is no way out of the necessity of negotiation—the irresistible relation between the incalculable and the calculable. It has been demonstrated that the *performative* (justice) is repressed and dissimulated within the *constative* (law) in the same manner that the repressed signified lies within the language system; the ethical Saying within the Said. In each case what suspends the process lies within it as a *haunting* of an instant completely *otherness* to it. This renders all categories violently impure and results in a destabilizing of all distinctions by what Derrida calls “*differantielle contamination*” (38). Purity without violence is an impossibility due to the fact that “*iterability* requires the origin to repeat itself originarily, to alter itself so as to have the value of origin, that is, to conserve itself” (43).

Justice is aporetic. It, like deconstruction, can never be calculated and represented as in the law-as-*dorit*. It does not exist *as such*. However, the encountering of the *aporia* of justice can generate some uncertain and tentative movements involved in the investigation of given enigmas, of attempting to access the (im)possibility of crossing the given borders of law-as-*dorit*. Accordingly, the decision of calculation must be made and *re-made in and through* time. In *Derrida and the Political*, Richard Beardsworth soundly points out that “*an aporia* demands decision, one cannot remain within it; at the same time its essential irreducibility to the cut of a decision makes the decision which one makes contingent, to be made again. The promise of the future (that there is a future) is located. In this contingency of time resides the possibility of justice” (5). The *aporia* of justice signifies both the impossibility of deconstructive experience and “the promise of the future,” which is always *there—a messianism without Messiah*.

III. The *Aporia* of Deconstruction in Derrida’s “Plato’s Pharmacy”

Pharmacia (*Pharmakeia*) is also a common noun signifying the administration of the *pharmakon*, the drug: the medicine and/or poison [...]. Only a little further on, Socrates compares the written texts *Phaedrus* has brought along to a drug (*pharmakon*). This *pharmakon*, this “medicine,” this philter, which acts as both remedy and poison, already introduces itself into the body of the discourse with all its ambivalence to analysis. This charm, this spellbinding virtue, this power of fascination, can be—alternatively or simultaneously—beneficent or maleficent. —Derrida (1981: 70)

In “Plato’s Pharmacy,”⁸ Derrida contends that the primary concern of the *Phaedrus* is the problem of rhetoric that still remains one of most controversial works of Plato: many orthodox commentators, even at the end of the twentieth century, cannot reasonably explain why Plato, in his old age, still wrote a book to denounce writing after he himself had written a considerable number of books. Unlike most commentators, Kierkegaard, in *The Concept of Irony*, argues that all Plato’s works are products of irony. Derrida holds a similar opinion that there are many ironies, uncertainty, and insights in the *Phaedrus*. Derrida believes Plato in the *Phaedrus* actually condemns the writing at the front door of the text, while welcoming writing from the back door. The problematic and unsettled interpretations of the book offers Derrida a great opportunity to deconstruct the *Said* of Plato’s *Phaedrus*.

In short, Derrida grafts the *pharmakon*, *pharmakos* and *pharmakeus* into the *Phaedrus* to highlight the movement of contradiction in order to represent his ethical Saying in the economy of violence; violence against violence, light against light. For instance, by the deconstructive graft within the double edged word *pharmakon*, Derrida not only successfully reverses the hierarchy between poison and remedy, between memory and forgetfulness and between writing and speech but also undermines the hierarchy of the two opposite signifieds. However, there are, I contend, two unchecked problems as blindness in Derrida’s deconstructive reading of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, which render the deconstructive justice impossible and make the economy of violence

⁸ “Plato’s Pharmacy,” first published in the *Tel Quel*, nos 32 and 33 in 1968 in France, is the beginning part of *Dissemination*, in which Derrida spends some hundred pages not to seek a brilliant new interpretation of Plato’s dialogue, nor to unveil the flaws, weaknesses or Parkinson symptoms of Plato, nor to challenge the philosophers with a literary reading that ignores the plain drift of Plato’s argument and delights in discovering odd turns of metaphor, but the necessity with which what Plato does write is systematically related to what he does not write.

problematic.⁹

First, the main problem of Derrida's ethical Saying is not its presence but its absence from the text of Platonic dialogue. Here is the dilemma: on the one hand, "like any text, the text of 'Plato' could not be involved, at least in a virtual, dynamic, lateral manner, with all the words that composed the system of the Greek language" (Derrida 1981: 129). On the other hand, since the absence of the "presence" of the word *pharmakos* in the dialogue stops acting as an obstacle for the external signifieds (128-34), there is a serious risk of opening the text to an anarchic interpretation that might enable the entrance of any signified in the net-eye of the text and result in the fragile texture of the text being crushed by dangerous intrusions. The deconstructive insertion of a word which is absent from the present text becomes a difficult and major task of the Derrida's grafting reading: how can we graft a "proper" or "legitimate" signified without repressing other marginal signifieds? How can one choose to use a lesser violence in the economy of violence without first using a worse violence to assimilate other others? Is deconstruction as *ethical* and *just* as Derrida claims? Or is the injustice of the blindness hidden behind his confident insight: "Deconstruction is justice?"

According to Derrida, not every signified is a legitimate participant in textual activity (1981: 129-30). For example, the context which allows the addition of another signified (poison) to the one given by the French translator Robin (remedy) excludes yet other signifieds of the word *pharmakon*: *dye*, *paint*, *color*, and *chemical reagent* which appear in the Greek-English Lexicon revised by Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie (1973). Why don't these signifieds, as other possible meanings of *pharmakon*, take a place in Derrida's deconstructive reading of Plato's the *Phaedrus*? Is it not as a result of a deconstructive violent repression? Derrida might argue that it is because the *indifference* of the context of Plato's the *Phaedrus*. In other words, the context serves as the borderline, and consequently hints at a curtailed internal contradiction within Derrida's strategy of deconstructive reading. Accordingly, only those words which, though actually absent from the text, are connected with it associatively and united with its present words by means of combining forces, can participate in the deconstructive ethical Saying process to challenge against the Said and then under-

⁹ Owing to the discursive limit of this paper, I'm forced to *choose*: excluding my major part of the summary of Derrida's "Plato's Pharmacy" in order to focus on my critique of his deconstructive reading. Perhaps Derrida is right—in the world of *to be*, a decision, however reluctantly, is always needed. For a succinct analysis of "Plato's Pharmacy," see Christopher Norris's *Derrida* (25-45) or Jonathan Culler's *On Deconstruction* (142-44).

mines the hierarchy between the Said and the “legitimate” Unsaid. That is why Derrida says:

We do not believe that there exists, in all rigor, a Platonic text, closed upon itself, complete with its inside and its outside. Not that one must then consider that it is leaking through on all sides and can be drowned confusedly in the undifferentiated generality of its element. Rather, provided the articulations are rigorously and prudently recognized, one should simply be able to untangle the hidden forces of attraction linking a presence word with an absent word in the text of Plato. (Derrida 1981: 130)

In other words, the aim of Derridean deconstructive reading is to unveil the hidden forces of attraction linking a present signified with an absent signified which is confined within the limits of the context. Only when we choose the words in this condition or limitation, can the problem of absence resulting from unconscious trends which cause the suppression of signifieds such as *dye*, *paint*, *color* and *chemical reagent* be solved, and the ultimate goal of Derrida’s deconstructive reading be achieved. Nevertheless, it is still too early to celebrate the victory of Derrida’s ethical Saying. Such a deconstructive condition or limitation puts the premise of deconstructive reading into question. That is, it is this limitation which shows the impossibility of the necessary deconstructive condition, namely, that the text must be treated as an a-hierarchical phenomenon, in which meaning is always *differing* and *deferring*. The mere admission of the fact that not every word may enter into the process of interpretation is an admission of the fact that the text is a hierarchical phenomenon. For instance, choosing not to use *dye* as a signified for *pharmakon* preserves the hierarchy between central and marginal and reasserts the boundary of difference.

This hierarchy is implied by the very words Derrida chose and grafted to fulfill his own goals of deconstructive reading. So we might call it a *deconstructive hierarchy*, as a strategic step or temporary moment, resulting from the necessary deconstructive condition. Consequently, by only grafting one of the marginal signifieds onto dominant signified, Derrida might be accused of allowing himself to establish an unethical *deconstructive hierarchy* outside the Said in order to undermine the *traditional hierarchy* inside of the Said. That is, the *aporia* of deconstruction is: deconstruction is neither *justice* nor *injustice* in the economy of violence; but, *simultaneously* both. The ethical implication of deconstruction is never a simple one-way straightaway in the

economy of violence. It moves forward and backwards at the same time to the direction of justice; an aporia. Deconstructive ethics paradoxically must betray the friendship of other others in its decision to *be* the ethical Saying in order to challenge against the Said in the economy of violence. Aporetically, it begins with this unethical betrayal; a betrayal which functions as its condition of possibility and thus of impossibility of deconstructive justice. The unsurpassable, unquenchable and aporetic anxiety of the ethical Saying is always already predicated on the (im)possibility of deconstructive justice.

Second, there is another problem in the way of Derrida's deconstructive reading as an ethical Saying: the Greek word "*pharmakos*" used by Derrida never actually appears in the text of Plato's dialogue. In other words, *pharmakos* is a seemingly absent lexical item which has no last appeal to the "words on the page," while *pharmakon* is a dominant and present word, though its shadows can be traced through supplementarity that everywhere govern the text. It is different from the case of the *pharmakon*, which we just discussed above, because the *pharmakon* is dealing with a signifier which, "for all its hiddenness, for all that it might escape Plato's notice, is nevertheless something that passes through certain discoverable *points of present*" (Derrida 1981: 129). This kind of grafting reading is still within the lexical limits of *pharmakon* regardless of whether it is repressed or dominant, inside or outside. However, the term *pharmakos* is not a mere absent signified of a signifier in Plato's text but an absent signifier in Plato's complete dialogue (Norris 42). Derrida might argue, we should destroy those binary oppositions (absent/present, inside/outside or signifier/signified) that serve as normative standards to define the operations of textual commentary. After all, *pharmakos*, from both language and cultural perspectives, is demonstrably there among the lexical resources of the Greek language. And it plays, without any doubt, an essential role in Greek culture.

Actually, such a Derridean answer to this question rests upon the notion of intertextuality: "any text is a new tissue of past citations. Bits of code, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social language, etc. pass into the text and more redistributed within it, for there is always language before and around the text" (Barthes 39). With this notion of intertextuality, we may say that any text is intertextual and each text is influenced by other texts both diachronically and synchronically. Nothing stands alone. Everything influences and changes everything else *in* and *through* time. Language is surely no exception. If this is so, there will be no fixed borderlines between Plato's text and other texts in the Greek context.

Yet, how many members are there in a pharmaceutical metaphor's family in the Greek language? According to the same Greek-English dictionary mentioned above, besides Pharmacia (*pharmakeia*), *pharmakon*, *pharmakos*, and *pharmakeus* that are utilized by Derrida in "Plato's Pharmacy," we found out that there are still *pharmakow* (medical treatment, witchery) and *pharmakur* (one who grinds drugs or colours).

Derrida might safely argue, again, the word *pharmakur* does not take place in the "Plato's pharmacy" not as a result of a deconstructive violent repression, but because of the *indifference* of the context. But how about the word *pharmakow*? Although it never occurs in the texts of both Plato and Derrida either, it is strongly related to both *pharmakon* and *pharmakos* lexically, semantically and culturally: semantically, since the three terms are distinguished by last letter, they are certainly related through a common etymology. Semantically, if Socrates were a *pharmakos* (sorcerer) who specialized in *pharmakow* (witchery and medical treatment), then the *pharmakon* he used would be either cure as a *pharmakow* (medical treatment) or poison as another *pharmakow* (witchery). Culturally, *pharmakow*, like *pharmakos*, also plays an important role in Greek mythology and culture. What is more important, *pharmakow*, like both *pharmakon* and *pharmakos*, is also a double-edged metaphor: medical treatment/witchery. That is, *pharmakow* forms a crucial internal contradiction that can be used as a Derridean deconstructive weapon to undermine the structured hierarchy in the economy of the Same. So how can we say *pharmakow* is indifferent to Plato's text where everything points to it as key to that text's most essential and intricate logic of sense? Derrida, thus, might be charged, by only choosing and grafting *pharmakos*, not only for establishing an unethical deconstructive hierarchy between the marginal or repressed the words—*pharmakon*, *pharmakow* and *pharmakur*, but also for repressing the legitimate word *pharmakow* to bring more light to Plato's text. If this is true, Derrida's "Plato's Pharmacy" can be seen as a blindness that can see the blindness of the other but is unable to see itself.

Indeed, Derrida's deconstructive reading of the *Phaedrus* intends to search for the legitimate Unsaid and unavoidable logic by which the text deconstructs its own most rooted assumptions. We are willing to acknowledge that he has successfully forged new and fresh connections established by single term: *pharmakon*, by which he has undermined the traditional and rightful interpretation of Plato's the *Phaedrus*. Nevertheless, in my critique, I have tried to demonstrate that the necessary limitation of legitimate participant as the rightful resistance in the economy of violence results in the *deconstructive unethical violence* and *repression* against other marginal signifieds.

One should keep in mind that, in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault points out: “Power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective” (94) and thus “[w]here there is power there is resistance; and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (95). That is, resistance is, by its nature, a product of power and thus of violence.

Furthermore, resistance is not only a reactionary phenomenon between the Said (Self) and the Unsaid (Other) but also between the Saying other and the Unsaid others. That is, there are still other others, or what Levinas calls “the third party,”¹⁰ that dwell between the Self and the wholly Other. The *aporia* of deconstruction appears at the very moment in which a deconstructor is forced to choose, to exclude and to assimilate—a decision must be made *now* and *here* at the price of other repressed others, which consequently makes the moment of a decision of deconstructive justice an anxious and painful experience of *aporia*. It is the *aporia* of deconstructive justice which makes the pure and simple ethical choice impossible. The *aporia* of deconstruction, in brief, signifies the *impasses* of ethics, a *dilemma*, a *paradox*, where the deconstructive justice gets into trouble. Henceforth, any deconstructive resistance is paradoxically a double violence; an *unethical* violence unleashed to silence the other voices of resistance at the first place transformed into an ethical violence of the Saying against *the* oppressive violence of the Said in the irreducible economy of violence. Deconstructive injustice arguably always already lies within the deconstructive justice presented in a particular context. Deconstruction *is* (in)justice.

Perhaps the astute reader would perceive in the limitations of this essay the very enactment of transcendence; the *ideatum* overflowing the *idea*, and in its misreadings the paradox of *betraying* the *Said* of Derrida’s deconstruction in order for the *Saying* to be unveiled. My reading actually attempts to place the legitimacy of Derrida’s deconstructive resistance into question, *under erasure*, thereby interrupting the deconstructive justice achieved in his “Plato’s Pharmacy.” However, this surely does not mean that Derrida’s deconstructive reading is “wrong.” On the contrary, it proves

¹⁰Third party means another other or other others between the I and the Other. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas’s face-to-face relation concentrated solely on the encounter between the Self and the Other. Therefore, Derrida points out that Levinas needs to provide us with “some account of how, without universalization, the encounter with the Other can be at the foundation of a moral society” (Davis 52). Therefore, to answer Derrida’s question, Levinas introduces the notion of the third party in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Levinas writes: “This ‘thirdness’ is different from that of the third man, it is the third party that interrupts the face to face of a welcome of the other man, interrupts the proximity or approach of the neighbour, it is the third man with which justice begins” (150).

deconstruction is “right”—there are no final deconstructive reading or ethical Saying since there is no undeconstructable (deconstructive) reading. More accurately, *theoretically*, deconstruction cannot establish a hierarchy and be trapped in the mire of binary opposition, but *practically* a deconstructor (including Derrida himself) sees only text as far as the mind-eye can reach. Hence, if anything is deconstructed in my critique presented above it is surely not deconstruction itself but the authority of *a* (not *the*) deconstructive reading of Plato’s the *Phaedrus* and *an* (not *the*) interpretation of deconstruction given by Derrida. If deconstruction cannot be reduced into any system of philosophy, theory or methodology, as Derrida often insists, he should agree that it also cannot be limited within the space where only his mind-eye can reach. His authority, that of *a* deconstructor, must open up itself and welcome for the Other. If deconstruction can be “*is*” at all, it is only *there* for all the unsaid others.

IV. Conclusion

The aporia can never simply be endured *as such*. The ultimate aporia is the impossibility of the aporia *as such*. The reservoir of this statement seems to me incalculable.
—Derrida (1994a: 78)

Levinas’s ethics has provided us with an account of violence that crosses the traditional and empirical boundary of brute force. Being the *a priori* condition of possibility of all sorts of discipline and being, violence *per se* “*is*” everywhere *in* and *through* time. Figuratively, one might even say the world can keep on spinning is simply because of the economy of violence; violence against violence, light against light—a Nietzschean self-affirmation in the name of justice. The violence of law-making and law-preserving, as Benjamin points out, undermines the possibility of justice which the law attempts to grasp and represent. Yet, Derrida argues that justice, like deconstruction, is undeconstructable. “It is through Justice as an (im)possibility that the law can be criticized, that is, deconstructed. [...] It is this activity of displacing or dissociating law and, thus, moving toward justice that makes convalescence possible in the sphere of the legal” (Arrigo and Williams 323). That is why Derrida states: “Justice is what gives us the impulse, the drive, or the movement to improve law” (Derrida 1997: 16). Such an impulse also involves the suspension of that which is known, customarily—as a

suspension of morality (perhaps in a Nietzschean trans-valuation of all values) that leads to an anxiety of indecision. It is the anxiety caused by the *aporia* of deconstruction, which makes the simple ethical decision impossible while, in the economy of violence, a decision must arise in the *vertigo* of indecision as an ethical violence. The responsibility and promise of future for other others is thus in need to reduce and protect against such a *vertigo* of (un)ethical violence.

To sum up, critical insights result only from critical blindness. Derrida's deconstructive reading of Plato's dialogue the *Phaedrus* proves that the insights can be gained only because the traditional critics of Plato are in the grip of the blindness, so the passages of explicit critical reflection or thematic statement in discourse seem to depend on the violence assimilation and suppression of the implications of the unsaid used in such passages. However, his insights in "Plato's Pharmacy," as I have argued, unmask the blindness of both his reading and his ethical account of deconstruction, allowing me to intervene and reveal multi-faceted and ambiguous meanings of other Unsaid in the text. Nevertheless, my deconstructive reading *said* in this paper is admittedly limited by its own discursive borders and own masked blindness. In the irreducible economy of violence, a deconstructive light is always already subject to other deconstructive lights and a deconstructive justice to other deconstructive justices *to come*. Violence *per se* lies at the hearts of both deconstructive justice and injustice, which renders the one-dimensional ethical decision impossible *at the very moment here I am*. Fortunately, the ethical Saying doesn't exhaust itself in the Said. It is always maintained within the Said as the permanent possibility of the latter's interruption and therefore of a messianic justice for the third party *to come*. It is *performative*; a *perhaps*, due to its structural urgency of precipitation, a welcome interval of possibility for transformation. In a word, it is the *aporia* of justice, which generates and ensures the economy of violence in the deconstructive horizon—a horizon where the promise of future *presents* and *goes beyond* and *yonder*, always *yonder*.

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About the Author

Chung-Hsiung Lai is currently Assistant Professor of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan. His special interests include critical theory, postmodern history, postmodern diaspora, globalization, Salman Rushdie studies and Chinese American literature. His most recent article is "Diasporic Desire: Deterritorializing Identity in Gish Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land*." *ACLA 2002 Annual Conference*. Puerto Rico: American Comparative Literature Association (co-hosted by the University of Puerto Rico).

[Received September 18 2002;
accepted December 9 2002;
revised December 16 2002]

Violence, Justice, Deconstruction: 177. criteria, highest amongst them justice. Law and justice are not opposed; they are linked in a paradoxical way. When law violates its established procedures and harms someone; when it does not recognize or uphold rights which have been given already or are reasonably expected; when it breaches basic principles of equality and dignity " in all these cases the law acts unjustly according to its own internal criteria of justice.Â But this deconstructive operation is precisely the work of justice about which we cannot say that here it is, in front of us, full and fully revealed.¹³ Deconstruction is justice. 13 DOUZINAS & WARRINGTON, JUSTICE MISCARRIED Chapter 4 (1995). Downloaded from <https://www.cambridge.org/core>.