

Editors

LUDGER HAGEDORN (IWM), MICHAEL STAUDIGL (University of Vienna), and
JASON W. ALVIS (Stanford University, University of Vienna)

VIOLENCE AND THE GIFT: CHALLENGING CONTINENTAL
PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

The collection of papers in this special issue began at the conference “Violence and the Gift: Challenging Continental Philosophy of Religion,” which took place on April 25-26 2014 in Vienna, Austria. The meeting was organized by the *Institute for Human Sciences* (IWM) in cooperation with the University of Vienna as part of the research project “Religion beyond Myth and Enlightenment”, underwritten by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF P 23255-G19). Designed as an expert meeting to bring together renowned scholars in the field, it sought to address the meaningful potential the confluence of the topics of “the gift” and “violence” could have for continental philosophy of religion today.

Broadly, the topic of the gift has received considerable attention over the last three decades in phenomenology, theology, and the philosophy of religion, yet the question “can a gift be given?” is not simply abstract or theoretical, but also comprises eminent practical, political, and personal consequences. Marcel Mauss demanded that the issue of the gift is “one of the rocks on which our societies are built,” and this claim became further differentiated in the controversy between Derrida and Marion “On the Gift” in the late 90’s, especially in regard to Negative theology. Their debates swirled around the problem of how the gift may or may not have a perplexing and seemingly dialectical relationship with the “economy” of exchange and reciprocity. Despite the ways in which research on the gift has slowly begun to fizzle out in the last decade, there are a number of unrecognized themes and unresolved *practical* problems that are implicated in this fecund topic. One among them is the problem of *violence*. The presumed goodness or beauty of “the gift” in relation to love, responsibility, and purity of sacrifice, has overshadowed a not-yet theorized “dark side;” the potentially inherent “violences” that may take place in the process of gift-giving, loving, and sacrifice. Patočka’s *Heretical Essays* touch upon this “dark side” that Derrida in his *Gift of Death* framed as the triangulation of heresy, mystery, and responsibility.

The collection of articles in this issue seeks to enter the outlined discourses by introducing “violence” into the field of “the gift” and exploring questions such as: How does sacrifice signal to an economy, and thus threaten the gift? In what sense could we say that love, or “falling” in love, perhaps entails a self-violence? What of related concepts such as “darkness,” obscurity, and “tremendousness?” Is there a “givenness of evil,” and if so, would this entail that we have to surrender the language of “the gift” in such cases?

We would like to thank *The Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* for taking on this special issue, as well as the Swedish composer and cellist Peter Schuback for his grandiose Cello-Concert entitled *Gewaltige Musik*, which was presented at the conference. It is most unfortunate that Schuback's "Tremendous Music" could not be presented alongside the articles that it inspired.

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