

Georges Bataille's 'Ethics of Violence'

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Abstract

In this article I will focus on Georges Bataille's understanding of violence, whose position and reaction to fascism and Nazi violence in particular have been questioned, and his political engagement has been characterized as ambiguous to say the least. This article focuses on Bataille's understanding of violence. His position *vis à vis* and reaction to fascism in general and Nazi violence in particular has been questioned, and his political engagement has been characterised as ambiguous, to say the least. The article endeavours to throw some light on the thought of a philosopher whose attraction to violence, horror, anguish and death as equally as to love and life may easily allow his project to be misread. How can Bataille, imbued within the Nietzschean tradition of *beyond good and evil*, both call for a *hypermorality* of 'holding nothing back!' and make sense of Auschwitz as something humanly possible, yet resist any direct accusations of being a Nazi politics supporter? The article first contextualises Bataille's 'ethics of violence' within his discussion of the *heterogeneous* and the *science of heterology*, then explains the nature of his fascination with violence and horror and finally considers his reaction to the reproaches mentioned above. In other words, this discussion can be read as revolving around a question and the attempt to answer it: what, according to Bataille, is one to make of or do with violence, and why? Is one to deny it as one does an enemy and a threat, come to terms with it as something inevitable or go after it as something necessary? But are these options easily distinguished, if one sees violence, indeed as a *pharmakon*?

Key Words: Bataille, violence, ethics, morality, *hypermorality*, *heterogeneous*, *heterology*, anguish