Religion's Ambivalent Relation with Violence: From Scott Appleby to Emmanuel Levinas

Xin Mao

Department of Philosophy (Zhuhai), Sun Yat-Sen University, 519082 Zhuhai, China; maox3@mail.sysu.edu.cn

Abstract: The recent debate on the relation between certain religious traditions and violence has offered us multiple perspectives on this issue. Some scholars accept the conflictual image of religion in the contemporary time projected by the media, seeking the reason for religion's supposedly violent nature. Some scholars have completely rejected the association between violence and religion, defending religion against what they see as a myth. Faced with difficulty reaching any consensus, R. Scott Appleby addresses the complexity of the phenomenon through the notion of ambivalence. His approach accommodates the revolutionary moments of religion and offers us a comprehensive perspective on the violence used by religious actors. In this paper, however, I will argue that Appleby fails to distinguish between violence on an ontological level and violence as means to achieve justice. I will introduce the notion of ambivalence as it appears in Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy to construct an alternative theory about religion's ambivalent attitude towards violence, where violence is limited to its role in justice but is yet transcended by religious infinite love. With this extended meaning of ambivalence, I will be able to confirm that the interhuman encounter implied in one's relation to the sacred should be prioritised in addressing religious violence.

Keywords: religion; violence; ambivalence; Scott Appleby; Emmanuel Levinas; justice

---

1. Introduction

The current debate on the violent nature of certain religious traditions, ongoing for a decade, has immensely enriched our understanding of the role of religion in global conflicts (Kimball 2008, 2011; Juergensmeyer et al. 2013; Appleby et al. 2015; Selengut 2003; Ward 2006; Cavanaugh 2009; Appleby 2000), yet there remains no consensus among scholars concerning the events when religion is related to violence. On the one hand, public debate and the media lay the accent on religion's allegedly conflictual nature in contemporary society, with ethnic conflicts often seen as the result of religious difference where the absolutism and exclusivism of one side trigger conflict with another. Scholars have endeavoured to examine this phenomenon, exploring the real reasons behind the phenomenon of faith groups who fight for their beliefs and religious identity. As Charles Selengut points out, religion calls for love, but this love in its absolute form does not override the "sacred duty to kill" (Selengut 2003, p. 2). He maintains that believers, in defence of the truths of their traditions and revelations, are "forced to fight" on behalf of their religion against people who refuse to accept their truth. For them, any negative attitude towards the divine truth of their faith is "violating God's directives to humanity" and deserves to be punished (Selengut 2003, p. 2).

On the other hand, some scholars consider that religion being violent is merely incidental and that claims of religion's violent nature call for contextualisation. Scholars, such as Keith Ward and William T Cavanaugh, have argued against the "myth of religious violence", thus defending religion from the current accusation of being a cause of violence and conflict in present-day society (Ward 2006; Cavanaugh 2009). For them, the link between religion and violence is often supported with insufficient reasons or misplaced interpretations. Cavanaugh argues that even though religion has

been seen as a significant factor in conflicts historically and in contemporary society, there is no clear measure indicating that religious factors contribute more to violence and conflicts than secular ones. For Cavanaugh, the key secular motivations of economics and politics are in fact much more influential on violence and conflicts than the motivation of religion. For Ward, the accusation that religion has a conflictual nature is made without a proper definition of religion and based upon selected reading of historical events. The all-inclusive content of some definitions of religion, associated with various ideologies and communities, leaves religion considered indiscriminately responsible for many diverse events. The difficulty in obtaining a clear and definite view on religion's violent nature is reflected in the polarised attitude towards religion in general.

Among the divided scholarly discussions on the subject, Scott Appleby presents us with a more comprehensive interpretation of religion's relation to violence through the lens of what he calls "the ambivalence" of religion towards violence. He acknowledges the "internal pluralism" in religious phenomena and endeavours to find language to express the ambiguous relation between the militant necessity of prophetic theology in oppressive states and the peaceful pursuit of many religious movements that condemn the wrongfulness of "uncontrollable destructiveness" (Appleby 2000, p. 10). For Appleby, the possibility of a violent approach being adopted by religious actors is a natural consequence of human beings' finite capability to receive the infinity of the sacred. A militant approach can be used destructively but can also be a source of passion and motivation for religious groups engaged in peacebuilding. With his rich knowledge of the contemporary development of churches' roles in revolutionary societies and the important contribution of religious NGOs to peacebuilding, Appleby shows us that this ambivalence is unavoidable and that violence cannot be simply condemned.

There are certainly limitations of Appleby's theory, for example, a tendency to base his arguments mainly on the monotheism traditions. However, in this paper, I will examine the philosophical foundation of Appleby's construction of religion's ambivalent relation to violence. Appleby's effort to bring in the concept of ambivalence to address the complex relation between religion and violence runs a risk of legitimating violence ontologically. To be clear, the political mission of religious leaders in their alliance with people against oppressive states and the militant approach of the peacebuilding NGOs cannot be equated to accepting violence on transcendental religious grounds. To express one's decisive resistance to oppression and desire for justice cannot be seen as the same as consenting to violence in the name of the divine. In this paper, I will explore these difficulties with Appleby's conception of ambivalence and bring in Emmanuel Levinas's alternative signification of ambivalence to develop Appleby's theory. In his philosophical venture, Levinas establishes a notion of ambivalence (or ambiguity) that signifies the relation between being and otherwise than being (Levinas 1998b, p. 9). The relation between being and otherwise than being is explored by Levinas more specifically as the relation between ethical infinity and justice and, in a similar fashion, religion and politics. For Levinas, the relation between the divine and the human subject does not lose its infinity when it is reflected in interhuman relations. Rather, the encounter with the human other is part of one's path towards God, and, especially when the relation between religion and violence is at issue, the interhuman encounter implied in one's relation to the sacred should be prioritised in addressing this violence.

2. Appleby's Notion of Ambivalence and the Philosophical Problems with It

2.1. Appleby's Notion of Ambivalence

Comparing those who consider some religions' violent nature to be just a matter of fact with those who defend religion's essential role in modern life, in the hope of dissolving the association between religion and violence, Appleby calls for a re-examination of the violent moments of religion and asks especially for caution towards the claim that violent acts "committed in the name of religion" are inevitably motivated by other concerns. For him, common understanding would not associate these violent actions with religious essentiality per se, yet these acts are not necessarily "lacking in religious qualities" (Appleby 2000, p. 30). For Appleby the religious quality is to be seen from the

perspective of human relations to the sacred, and he specifically follows Rudolph Otto's theological discussion of the complexity of the relation between human beings and the Holy. According to Otto, the scholars of his time had equated the designation of the will of the Holy to a certain moral will, which he argues is inaccurate. For Otto, moral goodness does not exhaust the significance of the Holy. He emphasises that, as can be seen from its Latin root, the term *numinous* (or holy) clearly signifies an "overplus of meaning" (Otto 1958, p. 5). Otto refers to this additional meaning as an "unnamed something" (Otto 1958, p. 6). People see this unnamed something as irrational, as it is often beyond the simple categories employed in a rational and moral understanding of the Holy. Yet, for Otto, the irrational experience of the Holy is as important as the rationalisation of the Holy in modern theology. To be more specific, this irrational experience of the Holy, the dialectic of "the feeling of dread evoked by its overpowering and uncontrollable presence (*tremendum*)" and the "feelings of awe, wonder, and fascination (*fascinans*)" coexist (Appleby 2000, p. 28). It is exactly the terror one gets from the incomprehensible wrath of the "super-rational" holiness that leads to Appleby's further acknowledgement of violence as a religious quality.

Thus, based upon his reading of Otto's detailed analysis of the complexity of the encounter with the sacred, extending beyond moral and rational explanations, Appleby proposes that the human encounter with the Holy is "premoral", especially in the sense of a status possessed before the establishment of goodness and evil. This dimension of the Holy as neither good nor evil theoretically allows Appleby to claim the ambivalence of violence as an innate possibility of religion. The ambiguous encounter with the sacred in religion leads to a plurality of interpretations, and this pluralism opens an ambivalent space on the meaning of violence. For Appleby, to define religion only as violent or nonviolent wrongly commits us to a certain reductionist perspective towards the relation between religion and violence. According to him, the dialectic qualities of one's experience of the sacred as awe and wonder allow both perspectives on religion as essentially "a creative force" and a "destructive and inhumane spectre" (Appleby 2000, p. 10). Using his extensive knowledge of religious conflicts in modern times, Appleby demonstrates the deep tension existing in most religious traditions "between the use and the sublimation of violence" (Appleby 2000, p. 11). An obvious example is the common praise of "holy martyrs" in many religious traditions where the behaviour of violently ending one's life is valorised.

Through establishing a theory of ambivalence, Appleby is able to conceptualise religion's double relation with violence and offer us a hermeneutical tool to understand the complicated phenomenon. Even though peace is similarly historically promoted by religious traditions, the dual character needs to be acknowledged. Appleby emphasises that his claim is not based upon reasoning about the sacred being ambivalent but, rather, upon the imperfect perception of the sacred from the limitations of the human perspective. Defining this ambivalence of the sacred as a human awareness of both possibilities of the sacred—life and death—can reflect a real human experience of the world where people's "attitude toward violence, sexuality, and other self-transcending powers are ambivalent" (Appleby 2000, p. 31). In many concrete events of faith, one can observe that the ambivalence of the encounter with the sacred allows religious leaders to choose "what is orthodox or heretical, moral or immoral, permitted or forbidden" (Appleby 2000, p. 31).

2.2. Difficulties in Appleby's New Approach to Religion and Violence

Appleby's model of ambivalence offers us a new perspective on the real content of religion and violence in life, which takes us beyond idealised pictures of religion. From the ambivalence of the human comprehension of the divine, he reaches an important conclusion about the essential role of religious actors in modern society, which recognises actors raising their voices against oppressive regimes and supporting the revolutionary populace for justice. With this new framework, Appleby could re-evaluate the militant approaches adapted by religious actors, especially in revolutionary prophetic theology and within urgent religious peacebuilding events ongoing around the world. Appleby stresses that religious actors can contribute immensely to peacebuilding around the world not

by their silence but by militant acts. The ambivalence of the religious possibilities on violence enables religious actors to adapt to specific situations to influence history in their own way.

Appleby thus describes the religious events, which require violence as their means and thus ontologically affirms the violence in religion. Yet, there are problems in Appleby's conceptualisation of religion's ambivalent nature and with his approach to the legitimation of violence. First and foremost, one can observe a confusion between an ontological legitimisation of violence and a functional justification of the violence used in religion to achieve justice. With his ontological acknowledgment of violence as a religious quality, Appleby names both violent murderers and peacemakers as ones who "go to extremes" and who can be legitimate interpreters of the sacred (Appleby 2000, p. 11). For Appleby, both of them are engaging in "self-sacrifice" in their devotion to the sacred; both claim to be "radical", but a close look would call for a more nuanced approach. The term "militant" clearly means different things in the case of religious actors using violence towards others for revenge and peacebuilders' active attitude towards their cause for peace. For the ones who use religion as a reason for violence, the attitude of being "militant" expresses their aggressiveness; yet, for the peacebuilders, "militant" rather designates their passion and opposition to selfishness.

Appleby has not offered a close examination of the notion of violence that is in use in his theory. It is a familiar observation that the notion of violence rarely receives any positive evaluation in daily usage. According to Hector Avalos, violence has mainly been seen in terms of "inflicting pain on the human body" (Appleby et al. 2015, p. 556). Violence is not only physical but can be psychological, in the form of a certain marginalisation in society, or can be both physical and psychological, as in verbal abuse. Avalos points out that a differentiation can be made between justified violence and unjustified violence, where unjustified violence is only "senseless and immoral" (Avalos 2015, p. 556). Therefore, if Appleby is using the common notion of violence and desires to give a neutral meaning to violence, he needs to examine the relationship between violence and justice, as it is an oxymoron to claim that unjustified violence is ontologically allowed by the sacred.

In Appleby's argument, the *tremendum* of the infinity of the divine leads to the possibility of violence and destruction, but the relation between experiencing terror of the sacred and engaging in violence towards human others is not examined. There is a deep discord between Appleby's utilisation of Otto's notion of *tremendum* and his purpose of locating a neutral perspective on violence towards other human beings. Violence from God to human beings in the form of *tremendum* can be recognised as the infinity of the sacred that is beyond human comprehension, but violence from one religious actor to the other is a human affair and thus is finite. Appleby confuses an experience of horror stemming from the infinity of the Holy with the action of using force on the human other. This is to say that even though terror can be part of the ambivalent experience of the Holy, violence to human others is not innate to this terror and therefore is not a necessary fact or ontological consequence of the inevitable *tremendum*. Directly translating the dialectical nature of religion as its being both rational and irrational, stemming from the simultaneous dread of and love from God, scarcely allows ambivalence to enter into the question of violence towards human others.

If one tries to assess interhuman relations in terms of the relation between religious actors and the sacred, violence and religion no longer exist in a two-dimensional relation but now appear in a three-dimensional framework. The Holy, the religious actor, the human others and their inter-relatedness, must all be taken into consideration. This unexplored three-dimensional relatedness in Appleby has been examined closely by Emanuel Levinas. The religious subject, the divine and the human other are in a complicated relation, and the religious subject cannot ignore his/her encounter with the human other in his/her path towards God. In fact, he/she can only approach God through facing the human other. I will shortly explore this idea in detail.

Appleby endeavours both to embrace a pluralistic view on religion and to legitimise the revolutionary moment among religious actors. According to Appleby, the ambivalent stance of religion on violence is reflected in each religion's limited reflection of the sacred. For example, Appleby claims that in Eastern traditions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, ambivalence reigns in the religious

imagination, where avatars of fertility commingle with warrior gods (Appleby 2000). Moreover, to acknowledge the existence of a diversified religious image, the ambivalence of violence should be allowed. Yet, one must not confuse diversity with dismissing right or wrong. The violence done in the name of religion is sometimes claimed to be purely ideological and cannot be legitimised in the name of diversity. This is to say, celebrating diversity cannot be a proper reason to legitimate violence in religion ontologically.

Taking a closer look at the examples given by Appleby where violence is legitimate for religious leaders, we can observe that the ambivalence described by Appleby is not really an ambivalence of religion towards violence but, rather, an ambivalence towards violence from the perspective of justice. In his example of South African revolutionary violence, Appleby shows that in seeking to take responsibility for the people who were under oppressive rule by the state, the church leaders were caught in a dilemma between the pacifism they promoted religiously and the necessity of violence to oppose the violence of the state. In this situation, Appleby argues, pacifism hides the importance of justice to society under the religious heading of universal peace. He maintains that "some charismatic and evangelical churches deliberately chose not to become involved in socio-political issues, but this was to support the status quo by default" (Appleby 2000, p. 35). Thus, in this scenario, to not use violence is to support an unjust regime and hence violence plays a role in the service of justice, especially when the demand for justice is urgent. However, this is not the same as saying that religious events must end by supporting violence. The political signification of violence in justice will be transcended by religious charity and love after justice has been served. In other words, violence cannot be justified ontologically as a reaction to the divine, but it can be seen as a by-product of justice, which is a secondary and only temporary concession. Religious leaders bear political responsibility for the cause of justice and therefore can fall in line with a revolutionary populace when the state is violent towards its people. Yet, they are nowise simply political leaders, because they have "plus" responsibilities, which extend beyond political ones. Hence, Appleby's argument does not legitimate violence on an ontological level, but only on a functional level, as far as justice is concerned.

I accept that Appleby is correct to highlight the ambivalent role of violence in religion and to claim that "religious actors play this critical and positive role in world affairs not when they moderate their religion or marginalize their deeply held, vividly symbolized, and often highly particular beliefs in a higher order of love and justice" (Appleby 2000, p. 16). Yet, I argue that violence itself is only thereby allowed in the sense of its function in achieving justice. Resistance and militant actions are legitimate as regards the aim of establishing a just society. Violence does not have an ontological status in religion, and the ambivalence in question is actually between peace and justice, where violence is secondary. In order to gain a more comprehensive picture of the religious ambivalence towards violence, one needs, rather, to examine the dynamics between religion and justice. For this purpose, I will turn to explore Emmanuel Levinas's notion of ambivalence, making the argument that it is only through Levinasian ambivalence that Appleby's proposition on re-examining violence in religion can be reached.

For Levinas scholars, Levinas's notion of ambiguity (ambivalence) signifies the relationship between being and otherwise than being. It is a common observation that "being" in Levinas has the connotation of the ontological totality of the same, which does violence to the alterity for the sake of its own egological movement. Despite his critique of the Western ontological tradition, Levinas does not deny the necessity of the dialectical relation between being and otherwise than being, that is, between the violent ontological and the ethical. Similar to Appleby, he utilises the notion of ambivalence/ambiguity to express this dialectic relation, which has deep implications for the relation between religion, peace and justice. Next, I will examine Levinas's notion of ambiguity, comparing it to Appleby's use of the term. With Levinas's new notion of ambiguity, I will endeavour to contribute to an alternative philosophical framework to the understanding of the relation between religion and violence.

3. A Levinasian Reconstruction of the Ambivalence of Religion's Violent Nature

3.1. The Notion of Ambivalence in Levinas

In order to bring Levinas's notion of ambivalence to address the philosophical limitation of Appleby's theory of ambivalence on religion and violence, we first of all need to establish a basic understanding of the complicated meaning of ambivalence in Levinas. The perplexing notion of ambivalence (ambiguity) in Levinas bears a signification, which is close to his other difficult notions such as *diachrony*, *otherwise than being* and *saying*. Gaining a more mature conceptualisation in Levinas's later philosophy, ambivalence signifies the alternative relation between the human subject, the other, the third party and God through the diachrony of the "Saying" and the "Said".

To be precise, in his earlier work *Totality and Infinity*, ambiguity for Levinas is not different from that for Appleby. As "of several possible meanings" (Appleby 2000, p. 29), ambivalence designates an opposition to the Greek tradition of light centrism, where meaning is unified with an idealised existence. According to Levinas, in the Greek luminous tradition, vision reveals everything with light, and no ambiguity can exist. Philosophers do not distinguish the acts of revelation from "production" (Levinas 1969, p. 26). This lack of distinction is criticised by Levinas as following a reductionist view towards the other. Similar to Appleby, this reductionist perspective for Levinas formulates a "totalizing vision", where alterity is dismissed of its importance (Sparrow 2013, p. 10). This can be extended to a claim that, religions' alternative moments of violence cannot be simply eliminated from the name of religion to maintain an idealised picture of religion.

As I mentioned above, in Levinas's more mature work, ambivalence specifically signifies the alternative relation between the human subject, the other, the third party and God through the "Said"/"Saying" structure. To understand what is new in his later conception of ambivalence, one needs to briefly analyse the significance of Said and Saying and their inter-relatedness. Without delving into the complex whole of Levinas's works, we can see that the introduction of the notion "Saying", which is different from the everyday interlocution with language, can be seen as Levinas's effort at presenting a certain ethical relation with the other. This ethical relation is stressed as "being absolute and excessive, something that will strip away all layers" of the "cultural or literal" (Hand 2009, p. 53). Compared with the "Said", which designates the common system for discourse, the "Saying" is not simply a verbal expression; it rather signifies the situation where one is exposing one's vulnerability in communication with the other (Levinas 1998b). Levinas names it the "denuding of denuding" (Levinas 1998b, p. 49), where one does not hide oneself in language. The language of the Said is a language of being where one's ego-centric self-preservation is deemed as natural and righteous. The Said, with its ontological categories, is referred to as a game where everything is presented without ethical "consequences"; yet, Saying preserves the enigma and weight of human existence for the other (Wesphal 2000, p. 205).

Levinas claims for the "anachronism" of Said and Saying in order to show the ambivalence of one's infinite ethical responsibility for the other and written moral rules that are followed with indifference. He explains that we find ourselves in the systematised Said and have no memory of the Saying. This is because, consciousness is born with the Said, where Saying does not belong to any sort of knowledge. The moral rules written in the Said are already part of the ontological game where the origin of the infinite responsibility in the saying cannot be retrieved. Through this anachronism, Levinas establishes a new ambivalence as a subject bearing infinite responsibly for the other without knowing the source of such responsibility. The Saying constantly exposes the subject to his/her responsibility for the other and interrupts the ontological immanence of the subject being a functioning part of the Said. The subject in the ontological Said cannot give rational explanation of the infinite responsibility as such. In Levinas's own words,

> An ambivalence that is the exception and the subjectivity of the subject, its very psychism, the possibility of inspiration: to be the author of what was, without my knowledge, inspired in me—to have received, whence we know not, that of which I am the author. In the responsibility

for the other, we are at the heart of this ambiguity of inspiration. The unheard-of saying is enigmatic in its an-archic response, in my responsibility for the other. This ambiguity within the subject is the trace of the infinite, alternately beginning and intermediary, the diachronic ambivalence that makes ethics possible. (Levinas 1996, p. 105)

The abstract meaning of the ambivalence between Saying and Said as ethical subjectivity in the diachrony of being infinitely responsible for the other and being part of the game of ontology is put into more concrete terms by Levinas as the dynamic between ethics, justice (politics) and religion. Indeed, compared with his early works where ontological categories are fiercely criticised, in his mature work, Levinas acknowledges the necessity of ontological calculation, but only at the request of justice. In his ethical prescription, the infinite responsibility towards the other is under question when a third party is present. According to Levinas, the third party is "another other" whose relation with the other is unknown to me. My responsibility for both the other and the third party demands justice within this plurality. The movement from the Saying of the infinite responsibility into the Said of ontological systems is not a coincidence but is motivated by the demand of justice: "the third party introduces a contradiction in the saying whose signification before the other until then went in one direction" (Levinas 1998b, p. 157). The Said in this new situation is a path towards justice where ontological categories, such as "comparison, coexistence, contemporaneousness, assembling, order, thematization" (Levinas 1998b, p. 157), which were refused, now gain positive meanings.

The significance of this ambiguity in religion comes with the dynamics between ethics and justice. Illeity is the name of the sacred or the Holy in Levinas, through which he endeavours to show the enigmatic side of the sacred that is beyond all cognition. According to Levinas, the enigma that is ultimately different from the immanent category of disclosure and dissimilation "comes to us from Illeity" (Levinas 1998b, p. 75). Yet, for him, the enigma does not signify the lack of cognition of the sacred's qualities but, rather, the unknowingness of the source of our infinite responsibility for the other. The overplus meaning of the sacred here is not the ambiguous feeling of *tremendum et fascinans* but, rather, the ambivalence between "the stronger than me in me" and "the less than nothing", in other words, the infinite ethical order and the unknown status of the source of this order (Levinas 1998b, p. 156).

To be precise, with the introduction of the essentiality of justice, the meaning of Illeity is inscribed into the dynamics between the ambivalence of ethical singularity, justice in multiplicity, and the interruption of the ontological categories of justice by the ethical infinity of Illeity. In justice, right or wrong are calculated and each responsibility is compared; yet, the infinity in this path becomes finite. This is to say, for the purpose of justice, political institutions are necessary to treat each citizen on an equal footing, where not only the other is violently deprived of his/her alterity, violence may also be used to eliminate wrongfulness or as punishment. However, justice does not have the final say in the dynamic movement of Illeity. The ontological immanence is interrupted by Illeity in the form of a personal order of responsibility and love. The ambivalence is hence a movement, which ceaselessly moves from the ethical duo to justice of the multiple parties, which is yet transcended by an order from Illeity to encounter the persons in the system of justice with overflowing responsibility and love.

In an interview, Levinas maintains that beyond the harshness brought in by justice, one can find "a religious breath or a prophetic spirit in man", which produces charity that will not disappear underneath political institutions (Levinas 1998c, p. 175). "Justice is warped without charity", claims Levinas (1998c, p. 104), which, for our current discussion, would mean that violence committed in the name of justice cannot absolve my responsibility for the other. One knows the rationality of violence to the person who commits wrongfulness with the aim of justice but is ordered by Illeity to use charity and love to overflow this violence.

3.2. The Difference between the Levinasian Notion of Ambivalence and Appleby's Notion of Ambivalence

From our discussions above, both Levinas's conception of the ambivalence between the infinity of religious charity and finite justice and Appleby's establishment of the theory of religion's ambivalence

towards violence can be seen as attempts to counter the reductionist approach to religion and violence. According to Appleby, the reductionist perspective ignores the complexity of religious actors' reactions to concrete social scenarios, and for Levinas, the reductionist views violate the alterity of the other. Nevertheless, Levinas's discussions of ambivalence are essentially different from Appleby's theory of ambivalence, and I argue they can contribute to addressing the problems in Appleby's theory.

First of all, differing from Appleby, Levinas clearly discerns between the terror one experiences from the infinity of God and violence in interhuman relations. For Appleby, as I have remarked above, it is the incomprehensible wrath of the divine that legitimates the ambivalence of religion towards destruction and violence. Yet, religious actors who experience concrete social scenarios are not facing choices that only concern the irrational understanding of the sacred but, rather, must daily decide how to face human others. The two-dimensional framework, limited to the relationship between the believer and the sacred, confuses the complicated roles one may have in society, which are a mixture of the private, ethical, political and religious. Levinas, through the ambivalence between the Said and the Saying, creates a three-dimensional movement where one's prior ethical subjectivity moves into the area of justice with the appearance of the third party, and, subsequent to that, an immediate correction of the violence done by justice is enforced by the enigmatic Illeity with an overflowing of charity and love. The religious experience of the sacred cannot claim a monopoly in the place of interhuman relations. In fact, as Levinas maintains, when Illeity comes towards me, I receive the order to "accomplish a movement towards the neighbor" (Levinas 1998b, p. 13). The relationship between the religious subject and the human others are not irrelevant to the relation between the religious actors and the sacred; instead, one's ability to answer to the ethical call from the human other is essential to one's religious experience (Mao 2018, p. 7). Hence, the ambivalence of religion towards violence needs to be discussed in terms of interhuman relations, rather than being anchored only in the qualities of the Holy.

Second, concerning Appleby's lack of discernment within the notion of violence, Levinas offers us a proper standard to discern between different kinds of violence—that is, the measurement of disinterestedness. Appleby is right to argue against a point of view where all religious violence is seen as ideological. Yet, we need to face the ideological violence done in the name of religion and make an effort to discern ideological violence from the violence used in justice. In his paper "Idealism and Ideology", Levinas points out that to know clearly how ideology works, we need to be able to interrupt the totality of the same with a gap "opened by disinterestedness" (Levinas 1998a, p. 5). In brief, disinterestedness signifies a desire that is not based upon need, where the subject ceases his/her egological inclination, taking responsibility for the other to the degree of substituting for the other's responsibility. Levinasian ambivalence excludes any violence done in an interested manner. Many violent religious actors have been motivated by self-referential reasons—for example, the motivation to "join the ranks of the holy martyrs", where one can rise "from the dead" to a "chorus of praise" (Appleby 2000, p. 25), is an interested use of violence measured by the standard of disinterestedness. This violence cannot be justified through its supposed religious quality. The interested religious violence is done by martyrs who want to go straight to Paradise, but the disinterested religious subjects in Levinas go towards the others "who stand in the trace of illeity" (1996, p. 64) and fulfil their role in justice resisting wrongful oppressions without abusing this resistance for their own sake.

Third, following Levinas's accounts of violence, justice and religion's ethical call, one can clear a space for religious transcendence that goes beyond political purpose. The dynamic between religion and politics makes it possible that the oppressive status quo will be challenged as unjust and an objective calculation of its wrongfulness will be processed. In the system of justice, there would be no encounter between the judge and the judged, as it is objectivity that is being served. In this sense, religious plurality can come together under the same cause of justice where wrongfulness is examined without encountering the wrongdoer face-to-face. This keeps the necessary violence used in just causes away from revenge and anger. However, religion, after its action in line with justice, proceeds to a moment of transcendence where love and the renewal of relationship are made possible. The violence

that is used in the cause of justice would be re-examined by the religious love, and hence, chances for excessive forgiveness and charity can exist. The religious pursuit will not end with achieving a just society but continue to re-establish interhuman ethical relations, with the aim of securing better justice thereafter.

4. Conclusions

From the above discussion, we can conclude that Levinasian ambivalence—which is more precisely an ambivalence between infinite ethical responsibility for the other and justice for the third parties—establishes an alternative view on religion's relation with violence, in which violence serves the purposes of justice as telling right or wrong among the subject, the other and the third party, while the excessive charity from Illeity serves to correct the violence. The ambivalence is more exactly the acknowledgement of violence's possible role in achieving justice, which is demanded by the religious subject's infinite responsibility for third parties. Yet, this violence will face scrutiny through the lens of disinterestedness and will also be transcended by excessive charity where a reconstruction of a better interhuman relationship is pursued.

An alternative Levinasian theory of religion's ambivalence on violence can offer a better philosophical ground for Appleby's socio-political analysis of religious actors' complicated choices concerning peace and justice in contemporary society. This more comprehensive philosophical ground, developed from Levinas's perspective, especially shows the essentiality of ethics—not the moral norm of any given society but a call for responsibility in concrete human encountering—in discussions on religion and violence. This perspective not only avoids reductionist views on religion towards violence, but also steers clear of the ontological legitimation of violence. Violence between religious actors and against the general populace needs to be contextualised within the cause of justice. An ontological legitimation hardly opens up a future that is different from our blood-soaked history, but a diachronic future of overflowing charity and responsibility can give us hope of peace. The pursuit of this paper is limited to an abstract philosophical framework and terms are defined mainly within the discussions on ambivalence, religion and violence found in Appleby and Levinas's writings, which call for future attempts to extend to a larger framework and apply theories as such to concrete analysis of specific cases of religions' violent moments.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

Appleby, Scott. 2000. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Appleby, Scott, Atalia Omer, and David Little, eds. 2015. *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Avalos, Hector. 2015. Religion and Scarcity: A New Theory for the Role of Religion in Violence. In *The Oxford Handbook of Religions and Violence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 554–70.

Cavanaugh, William T. 2009. *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflicts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hand, Sean. 2009. *Emmanuel Levinas*. London and New York: Routledge.

Juergensmeyer, Mark, Margo Kitts, and Michael Jerryson, eds. 2013. *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kimball, Charles. 2008. *When Religion Becomes Evil*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

Kimball, Charles. 2011. *When Religion Becomes Lethal: The Explosive Mix of Politics and Religion in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Levinas, Emmanuel. 1969. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Levinas, Emmanuel. 1996. *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*. Edited by Adriaan Peperzak, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Levinas, Emmanuel. 1998a. "Ideology and Idealism". In *Of God Who Comes to Mind*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Levinas, Emmanuel. 1998b. *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Levinas, Emmanuel. 1998c. *Entre Nous*. London and New York: Continuum.

Mao, Xin. 2018. "Transformation from Real-Centredness to Other-Centredness: A Levinasian Re-Appraisal of John Hick's Religious Pluralism". *Religions* 9: 255. [CrossRef]

Otto, Rudolf. 1958. *The Idea of the Holy*. Translated by John Harvey. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Selengut, Charles. 2003. *Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence*. Lanham: ALTAMIRA PRESS.

Sparrow, Tom. 2013. *Levinas Unhinged*. Winchester: John Hunt Publishing.

Ward, Keith. 2006. *Is Religion Dangerous*. Oxford: Lion Hudson Plc.

Wesphal, Merold. 2000. Commanded Love and Divine Transcendence in Levinas and Kierkegaard. In *The Face of the Other & The Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*. New York: Fordham University Press.