

# 1 Interpersonal Violence

The concept of violence bears some kind of deep and intimate relationship to the notions of harm, destruction and human suffering. And this truism goes a long way towards explaining why violence is generally regarded as an extremely serious social problem, and something about which any sane society must be gravely concerned. Violence hurts. And so, if our lives are to go reasonably well, collectively we must find some way of at least limiting the harm that we are likely to suffer at the hands of our fellow human beings. But we can't effectively control violence, in this fashion, if we can't discuss violence, with one another, in some reasonably coherent fashion. In order to tackle the problem of violence, we need to know what the problem is. We need to know what we're talking about.

Surprisingly, however, violence remains a complex, unwieldy and highly contested concept that is, frankly, not well understood. This partly explains why strong and pervasive disagreement persists over even basic empirical questions about the principal causes and the most effective means of preventing violence. But disagreement about and confusion over the nature of violence is probably driven, in the first instance, by an even more fundamental uncertainty about how we ought to live together, and what, if anything, we owe one another. Probing into the nature of violence, in other words, inevitably draws us into the difficult and contested realm of moral values and moral reasoning.

My focus in this essay is on definitions—or, as some might prefer to say, conceptual analysis. There are a great many competing accounts of what we mean, or should mean by the term “violence.”<sup>1</sup> Choosing between these competing accounts is not easy, and my aim here, at least initially, is not so much to favour any one position, but to raise our understanding of what is at stake when we choose to define violence one way rather than another. In so doing, I hope to raise our level of violence literacy so that we can make more intelligent choices in coping with and creating our shared social environment. It's neither reasonable to expect nor advisable to hope for societal consensus on our views regarding the nature of violence. In a healthy society, questions about the values that underlie and inform any given social order must be challenged and vigorously debated on a regular

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basis. But in using language wisely, and reflecting carefully on the meanings of our words and the values to which they commit us, we can perhaps fashion the term “violence” into a powerful lens through which we can gain important insights into the nature of our existing social reality. And if we can perceive more clearly our present predicament, then perhaps we’ll also be better able to envisage a better alternative. Only if we can see clearly where it is that we want to go, do we stand much of a chance of ever getting there.

### 1.1 SEMANTICS

I take a pragmatic approach to the evaluation of definitions. A good definition, that is, is simply one that serves our interests well. Since violence is such a complex phenomenon, and since we use the term “violence” in so many different ways to serve such a wide variety of different purposes, no single definition (or analysis) of violence is demonstrably superior to all others. Each brings with it certain costs and benefits, and each brings into sharp relief only certain aspects of our social environment. In order to be genuinely useful, a good definition must do more than simply provide us with a synonym—a word or phrase that, according to existing linguistic usage, expresses the same meaning as the term violence.<sup>2</sup> Rather, we need a definition that captures the conceptual content of this term and that identifies, in an illuminating fashion, the various relations that obtain amongst its conceptual constituents.

Yet there are no clear uncontested facts regarding the “true” nature of violence, and there is no clear “objective” sense in which some definitions just get it right while others are wildly off the mark.<sup>3</sup> Many definitions of violence succeed in drawing insightful conceptual connections while highlighting (or privileging) certain features of our social lives that other equally illuminating definitions simply ignore. Therefore, before we can intelligently choose between competing definitions, we need to be clear about what any specific definition of violence can *do* for us. And, to that end, we need to pay some preliminary attention to exactly how it is that definitions of violence tend to work, and how competing definitions tend to differ from one another.

Let me acknowledge at the outset that violence is both a highly ambiguous and an extremely vague term. It’s ambiguous because, as a noun (“violence”) or an adjective (“violent”), it can refer to different things, depending on how it is used in different contexts. An ambiguous term, that is, is a term that has at least two separate meanings. We can’t possibly explore all of the meanings of the terms “violence” and “violent” in this essay. So my focus here will be on violent phenomena that, in the broadest sense, relate to human activities that bear significantly upon the lives and well-being of all sentient creatures, including human beings, of course. In other words, I will

focus, at least initially, on acts of violence—the commission or “doing” of violence—and on related phenomena that either facilitate or discourage this kind of human activity. I’m interested in this particular meaning of the term because I’m interested in understanding how the practice of violence makes our lives go better or worse, both collectively and individually. Most fundamentally, then, I’m interested in understanding violence from a moral perspective.

Accordingly, I will largely ignore extended or metaphorical uses of the term violence (as when we speak of a violent storm or doing violence to a text, for example) as well as adverbial uses of the term (as when we speak of someone waving her hands violently or performing a piece of music in a violent fashion) that have no moral significance.

“Violence” is a vague term because it has a fuzzy or indeterminate range of application. In other words, many acts, for example, clearly qualify as being violent, and many acts are clearly disqualified as not being violent.<sup>4</sup> But in between these two extremes, there exist a large number of borderline (or so-called fringe) cases where it’s just not clear—where there is no fact of the matter—as to whether the act in question is violent. And in these borderline cases, it’s possible for two competent native speakers to utilize the same definition of violence, and to know everything there is to know about a certain situation, and yet still disagree about whether that situation involves an act of violence, without either speaker being mistaken in any trivial or obvious sense. Compare this with the word “bald,” another vague term. Some men are clearly bald, others are clearly not bald, and in borderline cases two native speakers can know perfectly well what some individual looks like and yet still disagree about whether he is bald, without either speaker being obviously mistaken.

In an attempt to reduce (and possibly even eliminate) vagueness, researchers often propose definitions that articulate precise necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of some term. So, for example, we might stipulate that someone is bald just in case that individual is an adult male with fewer than 5,000 hairs on his head. (This definition might serve the interests of a barber who owns a reliable hair-counting machine and who wants to set a lower fee for cutting the hair of bald men, but who also doesn’t want this fee to apply to children.) So being an adult, being a male, and having fewer than 5,000 hairs are three separate necessary (or required) conditions for being bald on this proposal. And together the three conditions are jointly sufficient in the sense that anyone who possesses all three of these properties is guaranteed to be bald, again on this specific proposal. This new definition of baldness is much more precise than the term’s ordinary meaning, but notice that it doesn’t eliminate vagueness altogether since “adult” is also a vague term (at least in its everyday use outside of various artificial legal contexts, for example). So insofar as there may be no clear fact of the matter as to whether someone is an adult, this more precise definition will still admit of borderline cases.

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Definitions that offer necessary and sufficient conditions are very common, and they can be of great benefit in introducing a certain degree of precision into the discussion of particularly unwieldy topics. Definitions that come close to eliminating vagueness can be especially useful when there is a need to count or measure things—the number of bald men in a certain room, for instance, or the intensity of the violence that occurred over the course of a weekend within a certain neighbourhood. But it's important to note that vagueness is not an inherently bad thing—it's very important in poetry and diplomacy, for example—and it's not necessarily a strong mark against any particular definition of violence that it is vague to some extent. Again, it all depends on what we want to do with the definition in question, and whether the amount of vagueness that is present will significantly interfere with that task.

In what follows, I'll assume that any definition of violence under discussion is an attempt to articulate the necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of that term, unless there is clear and compelling evidence to the contrary.

### 1.2 HAVIN

Definitions of violence can be categorized in terms of the position, if any, that they take on the following five core issues. These issues can also be understood as the five most fundamental “dimensions” of the phenomenon of violence itself.

1. Harm
2. Agency
3. Victimhood
4. Instrumentality
5. Normativity

Together they yield what I will call the HAVIN criteria (where the acronym is pronounced with a long “a” so as to rhyme with the word “haven”). These criteria essentially just alert us to the fact that certain key questions must be asked about any proposed definition of violence, if we are to understand the full implications of that proposal. Etymologically, “violence” involves the exercise or imposition of harmful force. (Some authors also appeal to etymology to support the idea that violence occurs when human beings are violated in certain ways.<sup>5</sup>) The Latin adjective *violentus* emphasizes “the way something is done”—that is, in a physical, forceful, boisterous or agitated fashion—whereas the verb *violare* emphasizes “what is done”—that is, injury, destruction, dishonour or violation.<sup>6</sup> So the first and fourth dimensions play a central role in many definitions of violence.

The first dimension raises the question of exactly how violence is related to the infliction of harm or injury. Is the actual infliction of harm literally a necessary feature of any act of violence, for example? Or, less stringently, is harm merely a reasonably foreseeable consequence? Or, to take a quite different tack, does violence result from the mere intention to cause harm, regardless of the nature of the consequences that are in fact produced? Furthermore, how are we to understand the very notion of harm itself? And does it make sense to identify fundamentally different kinds of violence in terms of the fundamentally different kinds of harm that they (aim to) produce?

The second and third dimensions raise the questions, respectively, of the identity of the perpetrators of violence, and the identity of the victims or recipients of violence. If violence somehow involves the infliction of harm, then presumably there must be some individual who suffers that harm, and some agent who is responsible for its infliction. Does it make sense, then, to place conceptual constraints on the kinds of entities who can fill these various roles? Or can literally any agent behave, in some conceivable set of circumstances, as a perpetrator of violence, for example? And is it possible for violence to occur either without a perpetrator, or without some kind of a victim?

In her classic text *On Violence*, Hannah Arendt writes that “violence is by nature instrumental” since it “always needs implements” or “tools,” and is “never possible without instruments.”<sup>7</sup> The fourth dimension raises the question as to whether any conceptual constraints need to be placed on the means by which violence occurs; or, more specifically, on the instruments that perpetrators may use in inflicting harm upon victims. Does violence necessarily involve the exercise of physical force? Or can violence result from the use (or abuse) of absolutely any kind of instrument? Or, contrary to Arendt, is it possible to commit violence without the use of any “instruments” whatsoever?

Finally, violence tends to be regarded in a highly negative normative (or evaluative) light. That is, violence is usually considered, at the very least, to be a very bad thing, or an unfortunate and regrettable occurrence. But can we go further than that? Are acts of violence always morally wrong? And, if so, are they morally wrong by definition? Or, if these suggestions are too strong, is an act of violence always at least *prima facie* wrong—that is, wrong other things being equal—but something that can be morally justified in exceptional circumstances? And, if so, does it follow that violence is usually (i.e., more often than not) morally wrong? Or perhaps violence is a morally neutral concept in that nothing follows about the moral character of an act *merely* from its characterization as an act of violence. This last option would, of course, still allow for the possibility that some acts of violence are morally justified, whereas others are morally forbidden, in virtue of their other divergent morally relevant characteristics.

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Parallel questions can, of course, be raised about violence and the related normative notion of rationality. That is, are violent acts always irrational or imprudent? And, if so, is this because violence is irrational by definition? Or is violence only irrational, other things being equal, because, for example, violent acts tend to frustrate the perpetrator's own long-term goals in purely self-interested terms? But, if so, is it possible, then, that eminently rational acts of violence could still be performed in a variety of exceptional circumstances?

By thinking about violence along these five dimensions, we are confronted with a truly dizzying array of profoundly deep and difficult questions. I don't think it's wise, however, to attempt to answer these questions in the abstract and to arrive at a cogent definition of violence entirely on one's own, without first engaging, to some extent, with the important scholarly literature that already exists on this topic. And the HAVIN criteria can help us enormously in understanding the exact import, as well as the possible shortcomings or limitations of any number of existing proposals. Therefore, in an effort to enhance our understanding of violence and its five dimensions, at least as articulated by the HAVIN criteria, let's begin by looking in some detail (in this and the following chapter) at two promising definitions of violence—definitions that are both very popular but also very different in character—to see how well they serve our various personal and political interests.

### 1.3 OED

Dictionaries, of course, offer (more or less insightful) definitions, and it's often useful to begin a semantic or conceptual analysis by touching base with a dictionary definition—especially if one wants to remain (more or less) faithful to lexical meanings that record actual linguistic practice within a certain community. This is also an important place to begin when studying the semantics of violence since, surprisingly, a number of philosophers have argued that good dictionary definitions of violence are in fact superior to any of the more sophisticated accounts that philosophers have been able to construct over the years.

C. A. J. Coady, for example, has recently claimed that scholars would be well advised to work with something as simple as the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition, which runs as follows:

(OED) Violence is the exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on or damage to persons or property.<sup>8</sup>

Coady argues that any so-called “restricted” definition of violence, like OED, has a number of significant advantages over “wider” or more liberal accounts. One principal advantage, Coady argues, is clarity. When we

employ a definition of this sort, we have a very clear understanding of what counts as violence, and we're certain not to stray implausibly far from existing linguistic practice. Coady also argues that there are other advantages having to do with (what we can call) intellectual integrity. If we restrict ourselves to a restricted definition then, Coady claims, we're less likely to fall into the careless, muddled, dishonest and counterproductive trap of condemning something as violent solely because, for extraneous political reasons, we strongly disapprove of the act or practice under consideration.<sup>9</sup> And that's because OED, according to Coady, is the "most politically neutral" definition available, in addition to being the definition that best captures the "normal or ordinary understanding" of the term violence.<sup>10</sup>

I agree that it's important not to abuse language and to remain honest, both with ourselves and others, throughout our intellectual endeavours. I also agree that clarity of thought and expression is a great intellectual virtue. At the same time, I want to make two important points about restricted, dictionary-like definitions of violence. First, their apparent simplicity and perspicuity is, to a surprising extent, an illusion. Second, restricted definitions may also serve political agendas, and so it's dishonest to favour restricted definitions of violence (over wider definitions) solely on the basis of (seemingly apolitical) semantic criteria without acknowledging the political ramifications of that choice. Let's begin with the first point by exploring how OED fares with respect to the HAVIN criteria.

OED is replete with gaps and ambiguities that raise a host of difficult interpretational problems. Consider, for example, the Harm criterion and OED's claim that violence involves the use of physical force "so as" to inflict injury or damage. Arguably, this claim is ambiguous. On one reading,

(A) violence occurs when injury *in fact* results from the use of physical force.

And on a quite different reading,

(B) violence occurs when someone uses physical force with the *intention* to cause injury.

Arguably, (B) is the more natural reading.<sup>11</sup> (We could express (A) more clearly by saying that violence involves the exercise of physical force *that* causes injury.) And (B) is also most likely the reading that Coady has in mind. "Restricted definitions," he writes, "are typically those that concentrate upon positive interpersonal acts of force, *usually* involving the infliction of physical injury."<sup>12</sup> So Coady is probably not employing (A), since this remark clearly allows for the possibility that some violent acts may in fact cause no (physical) injury.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, in explaining "the point in having a concept of violence of this kind," Coady appeals to the fact that many people are especially fearful of "the forceful intrusion into their lives

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of those who are *intent* upon inflicting harm and injury upon their person.”<sup>14</sup> So (B) gives us a way of addressing this fear since, according to (B), what we fear is the commission of violence against us.

(B) is certainly not an inherently implausible claim. Far from it. But in choosing (B) over (A), it’s important to bear in mind both that we *have* made a choice and that this particular choice has significant consequences. Here are three consequences that are worth thinking about. First, according to (B), as previously noted, violence can occur even when absolutely no injury or damage is done to any person (or piece of property) since all that is required is the *intent* to injure.<sup>15</sup> Second, according to (B), violence can occur even when someone intentionally injures another person (or piece of property) with purely benevolent or altruistic motives, since (B) does not take into account the reasons that may motivate a violent perpetrator in aiming to inflict injury upon another. (In fact, taking these first two points together, we can now see that, according to (B), violence can also occur when a benevolent actor aims to inflict an injury but fails altogether in actually producing any harm.) Finally, according to (B), violence does not necessarily occur even when one person in fact severely injures another, since the injuring party may have had no intention to inflict injury. In an extreme case, one may, according to (B), exercise physical force in a manner that kills another person without committing violence against that person.

I think it’s fair to say that each of these consequences is at least somewhat counterintuitive, and that each departs somewhat from our use of the term “violence” within ordinary language. This is not surprising since our everyday understanding of violence is heavily influenced by central (or paradigmatic) cases of violence where people succeed, with malicious intent, in harming others; and each case described above departs, in significant ways, from that model. Nonetheless, one cannot honestly endorse OED, or something like it, as a superior conceptual tool that ought to be utilized in understanding the phenomenon of violence, without acknowledging that the “fit” between this definition and ordinary linguistic practice is far from perfect.

Now, to be sure, any definition, like OED, that purports to offer necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of a profoundly vague term, such as violence, may deviate from existing practice, to some extent, whenever it takes a stand on rare, trivial or unusually tricky borderline cases. And these sorts of consequences may be entirely unproblematic. But the three kinds of cases discussed above are neither rare nor trivial nor contrived. These cases do not necessarily involve extraordinary circumstances, or strange individuals with peculiar personalities and far-fetched motivations, or the kinds of weird and anomalous causal chains that philosophers are fond of discussing. According to (B), for example, a drunk driver who accidentally kills a pedestrian does not commit an act of violence against that pedestrian. (Call this—the third type of case mentioned earlier—the case of the Unintentional Attacker). Similarly, a man who shoots and kills

his wife in a psychotic rage does not commit an act of violence, provided that he is so out of control that he literally has no understanding of what he is doing, and is therefore simply incapable of forming the relevant sorts of intentions. Whereas an aggressor who deliberately attacks some individual, but is overpowered and so fails to inflict any injury, does commit violence against that individual. (Call this—the first type of case mentioned earlier—the case of the Unsuccessful Attacker.)

I'm not claiming that these results are, in any obvious sense, either objectively incorrect or deeply problematic. But for many people they are at least somewhat jarring. These are, to some extent, surprising results and, when our attention is first drawn to them, most of us need to reflect, for a longer or shorter period of time, to decide whether we find these results palatable. So my main point, at this juncture, is simply that even a seemingly straightforward dictionary definition, like OED, once properly understood, has the power to significantly alter our descriptions, and ultimately therefore our very perceptions of highly significant interpersonal interactions involving the use of physical force.

It's also important to recognize that definitions never work in isolation from other beliefs, world views or philosophical presuppositions that are prevalent within a particular linguistic or political community. That is, something further can usually be said to render any seemingly counterintuitive result a bit more palatable. And sometimes a compelling argument can be launched that leads others to accept a genuinely new proposal as a welcome improvement over existing practice.

Consider again the homicidal drunk driver, for example, and suppose that, contrary to (B), you are strongly disposed to regard his behaviour as being violent in nature. A defender of (B) could respond as follows. Even though the driver's actions are not violent according to (B), he's certainly not blameless either and we can readily invoke any number of additional normative expressions to explain why his behaviour is morally wrong, and why he is culpable for the act in question. Most significantly, even though the drunk driver did not plan or intend to harm anyone, he did cause serious harm to another by engaging in reckless, irresponsible and grossly negligent behaviour. So we have the conceptual resources to condemn the drunk driver's behaviour even while insisting that his actions are not violent. And an advocate of (B) might argue further that it's very important to restrict the strongly charged term "violence" (and its cognates) to acts that are especially heinous insofar as they involve the willful *intention* to inflict injury. And so, by way of contrast, even though the Unsuccessful Attacker fails to inflict injury, he has exhibited exactly the kind of deliberate, planned and purposive behaviour that society has a special interest in strongly condemning, or at least strongly discouraging, and the word "violence," with its strong negative connotation, is especially well suited to this task. In fact, as Coady himself argues, it's because "intentional action is of distinctive importance" that "most people are more impressed by, and worried about,

restricted violence than about other ways in which human beings contribute to harming one another.”<sup>16</sup>

These kinds of arguments are extremely important, but they too have to be thought through carefully to their logical conclusions. Any apologist for (B) will have to address the following problem, for example. It’s typical for people to deal with the Unsuccessful Attacker case by surreptitiously incorporating criminal or malicious intent into the discussion of their preferred examples. Robert Holmes, for example, asks us to imagine someone “who throws a bomb into a crowd.” This bomber, Holmes continues, “performs an act of violence even if the device fails to explode.”<sup>17</sup> Now, this example works best in support of (B) if we assume that the bomber in question is doing something morally wrong insofar as he is acting from an evil intention to harm innocent people. And so this is exactly the kind of act that we, as a society, want to discourage and strongly condemn even if, on occasion, luck or ineptitude interfere with its successful execution. But (B) will have a considerably more difficult time making sense of the actions of someone else in the crowd who aims to inflict injury upon the bomber himself, before the bomb has been detonated, as a way of preventing harm to innocent bystanders. This person would thus be attacking the bomber from the sort of benevolent intention that I referred to previously. (Call this—the second type of case mentioned earlier—the case of the Benevolent Attacker.) Yet, according to (B), this individual has committed an act of violence. (Let’s assume that the Benevolent Attacker is attempting to tackle the bomber and knock him unconscious. So it’s clear that she is exercising physical force.) And this result seems even more implausible if we stipulate further that the Benevolent Attacker in fact fails to inflict any injury upon the bomber. (If we suppose, that is, that she’s an Unsuccessful as well as a Benevolent Attacker.) But whether she succeeds or not, presumably we don’t want to condemn or even discourage this kind of benevolent or altruistic behaviour, and so it seems at least *prima facie* odd to refer to this as an act of violence. In dodging one counterintuitive implication—i.e., in explaining why we should accept the peculiar claim that the Unintentional Attacker does not commit violence—we have unwittingly run headlong into another.

#### 1.4 NORMATIVE NEUTRALITY

In the previous section, I introduced the idea that perhaps the term “violence” ought to be used to pick out those acts that society has a special interest in strongly condemning, or at least strongly discouraging. If we follow the further suggestion that society has a special interest in intentional behaviour, then this allows us to make sense of the distinction that (B) draws between the Unintentional Attacker and the Unsuccessful Attacker. We have a reason, that is, to be especially concerned about the behaviour of the (intentional but) Unsuccessful Attacker that does not apply, or carry over to

the behaviour of the Unintentional Attacker. However, this line of reasoning also leaves us with the jarring conclusion that the Benevolent Attacker is the perpetrator of an act of violence, according to (B), even though it seems implausible to claim that her behaviour ought to be condemned or discouraged, especially since many would regard her action as being morally praiseworthy.

It's important to note, however, that Coady himself never explicitly endorses the idea that society has a special interest in condemning acts of violence as such. In fact, his text is curiously silent on certain key issues pertaining to the Normative dimension of violence. It's clear that Coady rightly abhors many individual acts of violence. But it's also clear that he believes that many acts of violence are morally justified. (Three obvious examples are interpersonal violence used in self-defence, state violence used to enforce the law, and state violence used in the execution of a just war.<sup>18</sup>) But Coady never discusses the question of how we should normatively appraise an act of violence solely in virtue of the fact that it is an act of violence. He doesn't tell us whether all acts of violence share any particular moral characteristic, for example. So the fact that Coady praises—though without endorsing—Augustine's "thin" conception of peace for providing a "reasonably neutral, *empirical* way of determining when peace has occurred," suggests that he may be attracted to OED for similar reasons.<sup>19</sup> It's plausible, that is, to interpret Coady as endorsing OED in part because he believes that, according to that definition, violence can be identified in a purely empirical manner, without raising or presupposing any controversial normative issues.

It's easy to miss this, however, since Coady's discussion of OED sometimes introduces ad hoc or extraneous normative elements that can easily lead the reader astray. I noted earlier, for example, that in explaining "the point" of adopting an OED type of definition of violence, Coady appeals to the idea that "many people fear very greatly . . . the forceful intrusion into their lives of those who are intent upon inflicting harm or injury upon their person."<sup>20</sup> In following up on this point in the very next paragraph, however, Coady shifts to a discussion of the dangers of "*malevolent* intrusions" into our lives, and the general difficulty of avoiding various forms of "human *malevolence*."<sup>21</sup> This kind of language certainly suggests that violence must be morally wrong at least, if not downright evil. But, unfortunately, talk of human malevolence takes us well beyond any discussion of the nature of violence itself since OED clearly places no constraints on the moral character of the intentions that are operative in the commission of violence. Some violent acts are certainly motivated by malevolence, but others—such as those of the Benevolent Attacker—are not. So Coady does not commit to the idea—nor does he have any grounds for committing to the idea—that society has a special interest in condemning, or even discouraging acts of violence as such. It may be unfortunate or regrettable that a Benevolent Attacker, or someone acting in self-defence, is forced into a situation where she has to contemplate the option of employing violence. But, once placed

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in that situation, it seems possible that, from Coady's perspective, the resort to violence ought to be praised and encouraged unequivocally.<sup>22</sup> So while many of us rightly fear those forceful intrusions into our lives that spring from malevolent intentions, we also have reason to be thankful that certain members of society—police officers, for example—frequently fulfill their civic duty by exercising physical force with the intention to cause harm.

So Coady can effectively respond to the particular dilemma posed in the previous section simply by denying that there is anything inherently problematic about violence. But someone who is initially attracted to OED may be taken aback by this revelation. Many people, I think, would regard this denial as a significant departure from our commonsensical understanding of that term.

### 1.5 SOCIAL HARMONY

The narrow issue under consideration here is whether the Benevolent Attacker is a forceful counterexample to (B). But there is a much larger and extremely important methodological issue at stake here as well. One plausible (or at least promising) way of arguing in support of (B) would involve appealing to the social utility of its promulgation, and eventual adoption within some society or other. In other words, one could argue that (B) picks out a certain form of human behaviour that constitutes a particularly serious threat to social harmony, for example, and that, in order to protect ourselves effectively from that threat, we need some way of referring to this kind of behaviour, in an easy and readily intelligible manner, within our collective moral, legal and political discourse. More specifically, we need some way of effectively conveying the message that the kind of behaviour in question is something that we, as a society, strongly condemn or discourage.

In order to understand better how an argument like this might actually work, let's look now, in a little more detail, at exactly what sort of behaviour (B) does (and does not) encompass. (B) does not focus exclusively on purely intentional acts, since the mere intention to cause harm does not constitute violence according to (B). Nor does it focus exclusively on purely physical activity, since the mere exercise of physical force does not constitute violence according to (B). Nor does it focus exclusively on consequentialist considerations, since the mere production of harm does not constitute violence according to (B), and since the actual production of harm is not necessary for violence according to (B). Rather, (B) privileges a very specific amalgamation of these various properties as capturing the essence, if you will, of violence. (B) carves out *the exercise of physical force with the intention to cause harm* as a form of human behaviour deserving of special consideration, and it allows other (sometimes closely related) forms of behaviour to slip through its conceptual net. And it's not implausible to

argue that this specific form of human behaviour poses an especially serious threat to social harmony.

It makes sense to strongly discourage people from using physical force in a deliberate attempt to harm others. Human beings are highly vulnerable to this kind of attack, especially given the particularly fragile nature of our bodies, and so the social benefits of implementing some kind of protection against these exercises of physical force are readily apparent. At the same time, it also makes sense to set these cases apart from various closely related forms of human behaviour.

Consider, for example, what we can call a Genuine Accident—a situation where someone acts in a way that results in harm or death to others, but where there is no intention to inflict harm, where that harm is entirely unforeseeable, and where no one is in any way culpable for the infliction of that harm. (Imagine that you trip and fall and seriously injure a co-worker while building a house, for example.) A Genuine Accident can cause as much harm as an act of violence, but it is not itself an act of violence according to (B). And this makes good sense since we can't do much of anything to prevent these accidents from occurring. Yes, Genuine Accidents cause harm. But there's simply no *point* in discouraging people from or condemning people for “participating” in them.

It also makes sense to set violence apart from situations where someone does form the intention to inflict harm upon another, but does not take the additional step of following through on this intention by attempting to *fulfill* it through the exercise of physical force. (Imagine someone who angrily forms the intention to harm another but then later calms down or lacks the courage to act on that intention.) To be sure, these cases are worrisome, and someone who characteristically forms these kinds of intentions may pose a genuine threat to social harmony, since she may eventually choose or muster the courage to act upon them. (If you genuinely form the intention to harm others often enough, this may significantly warp your character and slowly transform you into a (more) dangerous person.) Nonetheless, the mere intention to inflict injury arguably poses a less serious threat to social harmony than does a physical action that actually embodies (or attempts to fulfill) that intention. (B) captures this distinction by designating only the latter act as an act of violence. There is less of a point in discouraging others from participating in the former activity—both because it is less of a threat to social harmony, and also because it is more difficult to identify and monitor purely intentional behaviour that is not manifested in a physically discernible manner.

At the same time, someone who takes the further step, and does exercise physical force with the intention to inflict harm upon others, does pose a very serious threat to social harmony even if, through either bad luck or ineptitude, he in fact fails to inflict any injury upon anyone. Unlike the individual discussed previously who merely forms an intention to harm, this individual—the Unsuccessful Attacker—has demonstrated a willingness and

an ability to act on that intention. This act places the well-being of others at substantial risk, in a way that merely forming an intention does not. So the action of this individual poses a more serious threat to social harmony. (Furthermore, if he has acted this way once, there's a good chance that he may do so again.) And it's easier to track this threat since it has manifested itself in a physically discernible manner. In designating the action of the Unsuccessful Attacker as being an act of violence, (B) acknowledges the seriousness of this threat, and the need to discourage others from acting in this manner.

Now, do the Unintentional Attacker and the Benevolent Attacker constitute forceful counterexamples to this general line of reasoning? Arguably, no. And, in fact, this line of reasoning can also help us to understand why our responses to these two cases are likely to be more ambivalent than our response to the Unsuccessful Attacker.

Recall that our homicidal drunk driver—the Unintentional Attacker—does not commit a violent act in killing a pedestrian since he had no intention (we are assuming) to harm that individual. Despite the absence of that particular intention, however, this “accident” presumably occurred alongside numerous other intentional, deliberate activities for which the driver *is* culpable. (So this is not a Genuine Accident.<sup>23</sup>) Presumably he knew beforehand, for example, that by getting drunk he ran the risk of later driving in that condition. Perhaps he drove, while drunk, knowing full well but not caring that he was endangering the lives of others. Perhaps he enjoys breaking the law, and wanted to experience the thrill of driving while drunk. And so on.<sup>24</sup> So it's this odd and complex intermingling of intentional and non-intentional behaviour that leaves us uncomfortable with the claim that the drunk driver does not engage in an act of violence. (We would have few, if any qualms about this conclusion if, say, the driver had been drugged or hypnotized, by other agents, throughout the entire scenario.) But a true defender of (B) must bite the bullet and accept the conclusion that the Unintentional Attacker has not committed an act of violence. At the same time, the fact that our misgivings about this case can be traced back to its intentional components underscores the point that there is something compelling about OED's insistence on the fundamental importance of intentions.

I want to discuss the case of the Benevolent Attacker at greater length in a later section of this chapter. It's sufficient to note here, however, that this case is complex for a different reason; namely, that the Benevolent Attacker is acting from a complex mix of commendable as well as (seemingly) problematic intentions. Yes, she exercises physical force with the intention to inflict harm upon the bomber. So a defender of (B) must bite the bullet and acknowledge—perhaps somewhat counterintuitively—that the Benevolent Attacker is the perpetrator of an act of violence. Her relationship with the bomber does pose a serious threat to social harmony and, according to the

line of argument currently under consideration, she exhibits *exactly* the kind of behaviour that society has a special interest in strongly condemning, or at least strongly discouraging.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, she also acts from other benevolent motives, and this is the kind of behaviour that society typically has a special interest in strongly encouraging.<sup>26</sup> So this complicates our response to the Benevolent Attacker. But once we understand exactly how the case is complicated, we'll presumably be more willing to accept that it's no longer obvious how this case is best described. That may be enough, for the moment, to eliminate the Benevolent Attacker as an obvious or even a forceful counterexample to (B).

It should be clear, by now, that (B) is not nearly as clear and simple as Coady makes it out to be. Any proponent of (B) will be faced with some difficult decisions, and some of these decisions will revolve around choices that have to be made about how to argue in support of (B) and its various implications. In this section, I have launched a tentative argument in support of (B) that appeals to the social utility that results from its promulgation. Some may take exception to the particular details of this argument. But if there is any merit at all in this general line of argument, then it's difficult to take seriously Coady's claim that (B)—or indeed any other conception of violence that results from this general kind of argument—is “politically neutral” in any important sense.

The kind of argument that I have launched in support of (B) is clearly not value neutral as it self-consciously promotes certain kinds of values, certain kinds of human relationships, and certain kinds of social and political arrangements—and self-consciously condemns or discourages others. This kind of approach helps us to understand why it is important to get clear about the nature of violence. (This controversy takes us well beyond any dispute that is merely about the meanings of words, for example.) And it also helps us to make sense of the rather fine and subtle distinctions, within the sphere of human behaviour, upon which (B) fundamentally turns. But it should be obvious that a fundamentally different conception of violence—a fundamentally different way of carving up human experience, that is—might very well emerge from an argument that promotes some basic value other than social harmony, for example, or from an argument that understands social harmony in a fundamentally different way.<sup>27</sup> Even if Coady is correct in claiming that (B) comes fairly close to capturing our “normal or ordinary understanding” of violence, it doesn't follow that (B) itself is politically neutral.<sup>28</sup> It's possible, rather, that we've just become so comfortable with (B)—it seems so natural and so familiar—that we now have difficulty even perceiving the social and political *choices* that underlie its adoption. It's possible, that is, that (B) has become so popular, in certain circles, that we have become blind to its true nature, and insensitive to the manner by which it shapes the social fabric of our lives.

## 1.6 FORESEEABILITY

I've now identified a number of consequences that follow from (B), and I've suggested how a defender of (B) might plausibly find a way to embrace some of (B)'s more surprising implications. There is, however, another way of responding to any counterexample. Rather than biting the bullet and accepting it as a somewhat jarring but ultimately legitimate consequence of one's preferred account—a problem that has to be “explained away” in effect—one can, of course, always tinker with a definition in a way that eliminates the counterexample, hopefully without introducing others. Here are two further interesting proposals that are well worth considering and that fall very much within the spirit of OED.

James Childress has defined violence as

(C) the intentional harming of another person by physical force<sup>29</sup>

where, I take it, the intention to cause harm and the actual infliction of harm are two separate conditions that are each individually necessary (and jointly sufficient) for the commission of violence. This is an even more restricted definition than (B) since (C) denies (while (B) affirms) that an attacker who fails to inflict harm has committed an act of violence. So (C) deals effectively with the (potential) counterexample of the Unsuccessful Attacker. An advocate of (C) would presumably claim that while the Unsuccessful Attacker intended to commit an act of violence, he failed to succeed (not only in harming his victim but also) in committing a violent act.

Robert Holmes, on the other hand, has written:

(D) In its strictest sense physical violence is the use of force with the intent to harm, kill or cause destruction; or at the least, the use of force that has harm, death, or destruction as a foreseeable outcome.<sup>30</sup>

This disjunctive definition is wider or more liberal than (B) insofar as it adds an additional condition, and I take it that the satisfaction of *either* condition is sufficient to guarantee violence. The first condition is essentially equivalent to (B). So (D), like (B), does not require the actual infliction of harm. And so (D) agrees with (B) in viewing the Unsuccessful (but intentional) Attacker as having engaged in an act of violence. What principally sets (D) apart from both (C) and (B) is its affirmation of the claim that certain dangerous or reckless acts, that may only unintentionally cause injury, should nonetheless be regarded as violence as well.<sup>31</sup>

The interpretation of (D) is in fact quite complicated, however. Here I'll mention just three complications. First, (D) refers to the idea that it is sometimes foreseeable that some use of force may result in some kind of harm, but it doesn't specify the individual (or institution?) to whom this eventuality is (or ought to be?) foreseeable. In legal contexts, this problem is often

|     | I Unsuccessful<br>Attacker | II Benevolent<br>Attacker | III Unintentional<br>Attacker | IV Genuine<br>Accident |
|-----|----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| (B) | ✓                          | ✓                         | X                             | X                      |
| (C) | X                          | ✓                         | X                             | X                      |
| (D) | ✓                          | ✓                         | ✓                             | X                      |

Figure 1

dealt with by appealing to what a “reasonable person” ought to know, and presumably it is ultimately up to the courts to give content to this claim in specific cases involving negligence, for example. But here I’ll make the simpler assumption that, in interpreting (D), we should appeal to what ought to have been foreseeable, from the perspective of the individual agent who is actually exercising force in the case under consideration, roughly at the time at which he chooses to exercise force. This interpretation fits Holmes’s description of the case that he appeals to in introducing the foreseeability condition. “A deranged person, flailing about in a padded cell,” he argues, does not commit violence, no matter how much that individual harms others, since he is not “able to foresee any consequences” of what he is doing at that time.<sup>32</sup>

Second, (D) doesn’t specify whether it must be foreseeable that the use of force in question is (virtually) guaranteed to result in harm, in order for a certain act to be violent. Or whether it must be foreseeable merely that the act in question runs a substantial *risk* of causing harm. And finally, on a related matter, it’s not clear, from the statement of (D) alone, whether a forceful act, that foreseeably carries a significant risk of harm to others, ought to be classified as violence even if the act in question causes no harm whatsoever.

So (D) raises a number of difficult interpretational questions. But I take it that the general point of Holmes’s proposal is, roughly, that foreseeability ought to be treated on a par with intentionality. And so, since Holmes clearly acknowledges that an intention to cause harm can render an act violent even when that act only risks, but may fail altogether in, producing any harm, it makes sense to interpret (D) as making a comparable claim about foreseeability.<sup>33</sup>

This interpretation allows us to usefully contrast (D) with (B). Recall that, according to (B), a drunk driver who negligently but unintentionally kills a pedestrian has not committed an act of violence. But this act is violent, according to (D), provided that the drunk driver, in choosing to drink and drive, ought to have foreseen that this kind of behaviour runs a substantial risk of harming and even killing others. Since this provision often obtains, (D) deals effectively with the (potential) counterexample of the drunk driver.

But now this reading of (D) may itself run the risk of being too liberal in its interpretation of violence. Consider a drunk driver who, with no malicious intent, incurs a substantial risk of injuring others but is lucky enough to get away without causing any injury. (This is presumably the most common drunk driving scenario.) According to (D), this driver has committed a violent act. Even those who are willing to describe a malevolent but Unsuccessful Attacker as being violent might very well balk at this result, however. Notice as well that (D), on its present reading, makes no explicit mention of either illegal, reckless or negligent behaviour. So (D) has potentially worrisome implications far beyond the case of drunk driving. If one could plausibly argue that the very act of driving a car under present-day highway conditions, for example, foreseeably runs a substantial risk of harming others then, according to (D), many careful and responsible drivers commit violence every day even if they are never involved in an accident that causes anyone any harm.<sup>34</sup>

At this point, a defender of (D) might want to introduce an asymmetry into our understanding of violence whereby agents who fail to produce harm can be engaged in violence only if they are acting with malicious intent. In other words, if you cause harm then your action is violent provided that either you acted with malicious intent or the harm was foreseeable. But the situation is different when dealing with actors who fail to cause harm. If you intend to cause harm but fail to do so, then you are an Unsuccessful Attacker and your action is still violent. But if you fail to cause harm when that harm is merely foreseeable, and you are not acting with malicious intent, then your action is not violent. So, for example, driving a car in a responsible fashion is not a violent activity. Nor is driving a car while drunk, so long as you're lucky enough not to cause any harm. Now, a position developed along these lines may very well be defensible. (One would, of course, eventually have to justify the asymmetry to which it appeals.<sup>35</sup>) At the same time, it should be obvious that, in defending (D) in this manner, we have moved very far indeed from the kind of simple, clear and transparent account of violence that was supposedly available to us in our familiar and prosaic dictionary definition.

## 1.7 PRIMA FACIE WRONGNESS

In the last two paragraphs, we considered two different proposals regarding the roles that the notions of intent and foreseeability ought to play in our understanding of violence. But someone may object that these proposals are both unsatisfactory in that they each fail to discriminate between a sober and responsible driver, on the one hand, and a drunk driver who is just lucky enough not to cause any injury. On these proposals, either both drivers engage in violent activity, or neither does. (Notice, of course, that (B) also fails to discriminate between these two cases.) And these proposals fail,

so the objection might further run, because (D), upon which these proposals are based, ignores the Normative dimension of the acts under consideration. In particular, these proposals fail to consider the obvious fact that a drunk driver does engage in morally wrong behaviour, whereas a sober and responsible driver does not. So if one could argue, for example, that violence is morally wrong by definition, then it wouldn't be possible to classify these two (very different) acts together.

Unlike Coady, Holmes explicitly discusses the Normative dimension of violence at considerable length. But the conclusion that he reaches is not that violence is morally wrong by definition, but only the much weaker claim that violence is *prima facie* morally wrong. Violence is "*prima facie* wrong, or wrong all other things being equal," Holmes writes, "just by virtue of the fact that it is *prima facie* wrong to harm people."<sup>36</sup>

The idea that some acts are "*prima facie* wrong" derives originally from W.D. Ross, who, in his classic essay "What Makes Right Acts Right?," identified the *prima facie* duty of "non-maleficence"—the duty not to injure others, that is—as one of the most stringent *prima facie* duties by which we are bound.<sup>37</sup> If an act harms someone, then, according to Ross, that is one reason for believing that the act in question is morally wrong, all things considered. Causing harm, that is, is a morally relevant and, more specifically, a wrong-making characteristic—a characteristic, Ross says, that has a "tendency" to make an action morally wrong, all things considered.<sup>38</sup> This doesn't mean that all, or even that most acts that cause harm are morally wrong, all things considered. But if it were possible (which it is not) for an act to possess only a *single* morally relevant characteristic, then any such act that caused harm *would* be morally wrong, all things considered, according to Ross, in virtue of the *prima facie* wrongness of causing harm.

There is, however, a glaring problem with Holmes's argument in support of the claim that acts of violence are *prima facie* wrong. According to his own proposal (D), acts of violence do not necessarily cause harm. So it's not possible to argue that acts of violence as such are *prima facie* wrong in virtue of the fact that it is *prima facie* wrong to cause harm. Holmes's argument takes an illicit leap from the notion of causing harm to the quite different notion of committing violence. In other words, since only some acts of violence cause harm, this line of argument can establish only that some, but not that all, acts of violence are *prima facie* wrong.<sup>39</sup>

Now, it may not be too difficult to argue, in some more suitable fashion, for the intuitively compelling claim that acts of violence are *prima facie* wrong. After all, Holmes also says that "violence is the paradigmatic way of mistreating persons."<sup>40</sup> This remark certainly rings true and *sounds* just right to a great many people. And one explanation for this reaction is that Common Sense Morality has succeeded in acclimatizing people to the idea that "being violent" is a morally relevant, wrong-making characteristic of human behaviour. Nonetheless, we still need some kind of an argument for this claim. (Recall that Coady, for example, seems to deny it.) We can't

simply create prima facie duties out of thin air whenever it seems convenient to do so. Ross himself insists that “there is nothing arbitrary about these prima facie duties.” Any judgment about prima facie duty, he says, captures an “objective fact” about our moral lives and represents “the cumulative product of the moral reflection of many generations.”<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, any defender of OED working within the Rossian tradition will have to bear in mind not only that Ross never explicitly discusses the topic of violence, but also that he insists that “it is not our duty to have certain motives, but to do certain acts.”<sup>42</sup> So it’s just not obvious how Ross would want intentional considerations—of the sort that are essentially involved in any discussion of OED—to factor into judgments of prima facie rightness and prima facie wrongness.<sup>43</sup>

Nonetheless, let’s grant, for the sake of argument, that it’s prima facie wrong to use violence in the sense articulated by (D). But, of course, this assumption is of no help whatsoever in resolving the problem that initially led us into exploring Holmes’s analysis of the Normative dimension of violence. That problem, you will recall, was to find a way of differentiating the action of a drunk driver from the action of a responsible sober driver, where each driver foreseeably runs the risk of harming others, but is in fact lucky enough to harm no one. But if each driver commits an act of violence, according to (D), and if that kind of violence is prima facie wrong by definition, then each driver does something that is prima facie morally wrong and we are forced, once again, to classify their behaviour in the same way.<sup>44</sup>

Suppose instead, then, that we amend (D), along the lines suggested earlier, and arrive at the conclusion that neither driver commits an act of violence. But nothing follows, from this purely negative claim, about the prima facie rightness or wrongness of their behaviour. So, once again, we are forced to classify their behaviour in the same way.

At this point, however, a careful student of Ross’s writings might draw an even more disturbing conclusion. Ross actually claims that *every* act is simultaneously both prima facie right and prima facie wrong. Every act, that is, possesses at least one right-making characteristic that tends to make its performance morally right, all things considered; and at least one wrong-making characteristic that tends to make its performance morally wrong, all things considered.<sup>45</sup> But if this is correct then every act that we have considered so far—and, indeed, every act that we will consider later in this text as well—is both prima facie right and prima facie wrong.

This conclusion is disturbing for two reasons. First, viewed as analytical tools, the notions of prima facie rightness and prima facie wrongness now seem to be much too weak to be of much use in capturing the theoretical difference between violent acts and other forms of human behaviour. So even though Holmes, unlike Coady, directly confronts the Normative dimension of violence at great length, conspicuously absent from his discussion is any acknowledgment of the crucial fact that the main normative conclusion that he draws about violent behaviour—namely, that it is prima facie

wrong—can, and in Ross’s judgment ought to be, drawn with equal merit about every act that is not violent as well.

The second (related) reason why this conclusion is disturbing is of a more practical nature. Holmes argues that, given that violence is *prima facie* wrong, it follows that there is a moral presumption against violence. In other words, acts of violence are “in need of [moral] justification.”<sup>46</sup> This is presumably Holmes’s way of capturing the general idea, that we encountered earlier, that society has a strong interest in condemning or at least discouraging violent behaviour. But if literally every act is *prima facie* wrong, then this presumption holds across the board, and does not apply uniquely to violent behaviour. And any presumption that holds against literally any act can hardly be a very strong presumption, which suggests that in fact very little indeed may be required to defeat or override this presumption—by those who are interested in providing a moral justification of violence. Yet the tone of Holmes’s writing suggests that those who wish to morally justify the use of violence face a very heavy burden of proof.<sup>47</sup> Clearly, more work needs to be done in sorting out these issues.

It has to be said, however, that Holmes himself denies that literally every act is *prima facie* wrong, since he claims that “acts of non-violence” are not *prima facie* wrong.<sup>48</sup> But this claim is ambiguous. Holmes makes it clear that all that he means by an act of non-violence, in this context, is that the act under consideration does not involve the exercise of physical force. But, of course, an act that is non-violent in this sense may very well possess any number of additional wrong-making characteristics that would render that act *prima facie* wrong. So Holmes must instead mean that an act of non-violence cannot be *prima facie* wrong simply in virtue of being an act of non-violence.

But this is puzzling for two reasons. If an act of non-violence is merely an act that does not involve the exercise of physical force, then Holmes’s claim amounts to nothing more revealing than the suggestion that there’s nothing morally wrong as such in acting in a way that does not involve the exercise of physical force—and it’s hard to see this as anything but an utterly banal claim. (This would be comparable to claiming that it’s not *prima facie* wrong to act in a way that does not involve screaming at your pet cat, for example.) But if Holmes means to be referring to what are traditionally viewed as political acts of non-violence—and he does discuss strikes and economic boycotts in the section from which this claim is taken—then it’s implausible to claim that these kinds of acts cannot be *prima facie* wrong in virtue of being the kinds of acts that they fundamentally are. Recall that we are currently assuming, for the sake of argument, that acts of violence, in the sense articulated by (D), are *prima facie* wrong. This means that it is *prima facie* wrong to exercise physical force, either with the intention to cause harm or where harm is a foreseeable outcome of that exercise of force. But if this kind of activity is *prima facie* wrong, then it’s hard to see how one can plausibly deny that strikes and economic boycotts are *prima facie*

wrong as well. These forms of protest or resistance arguably do not involve the exercise of physical force, but they do involve considerable physical activity. And, for all intents and purposes, they are virtually always undertaken either with the intention to cause harm, or where harm is a clearly foreseeable outcome (even if it's foreseeable only that it is the strikers or the protestors themselves who will be harmed at the hands of their more powerful opponents or oppressors). So given that these traditional forms of non-violence are conceptually tied in this way to the infliction of harm, they seem to qualify as exactly the kinds of acts that ought to be regarded as being *prima facie* wrong. And the mere fact that they do not involve the exercise of physical force seems insufficient to disqualify them from acquiring this status.

So even if it's not true that literally every act is *prima facie* wrong, a great many (and perhaps even most) acts, including a great many acts that are not violent in any traditional sense, are *prima facie* wrong. Perhaps Ross went too far in seeing *prima facie* wrongness literally everywhere. But regardless of the exact scope of the presumption against performing acts that are *prima facie* wrong, we are still left with the substantial worry that this presumption may be too weak to accomplish much of any significance. A presumption that applies to more and more activities is presumably a presumption that can be defeated by weaker and weaker countervailing considerations.

## 1.8 INTENTIONALITY

Recall that (B), (C) and (D) all agree on only one of the problem cases discussed earlier.<sup>49</sup> They all agree that a Benevolent Attacker who assaults a bomber, in an effort to save lives and prevent the bomb from detonating, commits violence against that bomber. But this claim too might be challenged by raising a question about the identity of the Attacker's intentions. What motivates the Attacker, it could be argued, is first and foremost a desire to save the lives of innocent bystanders. This is her goal in acting. This is what she is *aiming* at. And while it is true that the bomber must be harmed in order for the Attacker to achieve this goal, the harm suffered by the bomber is perhaps best viewed as a foreseeable and regrettable *side effect* of the Attacker's plan of action, rather than as something that the Attacker positively *intends* to achieve for its own sake.<sup>50</sup> When a person acts with certain intentions, she must see something of value in the goal(s) towards which she is striving. And in the Attacker's mind, there is nothing of value, in and of itself, in harming the bomber. So this can't be something at which she is genuinely aiming. Unfortunately, however, the bomber must be harmed if the Attacker is to achieve her genuine goal—or realize her genuine intention—of saving innocent lives.

It's not always easy to settle debates about the identity (or content) of an actor's intentions, and sometimes these debates will hinge on conflicting

metaphysical interpretations of exactly what is involved in having (or acting from) an intention. Therefore, substantially different interpretations of OED-type definitions, such as (B), (C) and (D), might very well arise as we consider different accounts of intentionality. So, once again, there are difficult choices, of considerable consequence, on the horizon.

I don't want to delve too deeply into these matters here. However, we do need to make a few assumptions if we are to move forward. So let me begin by saying that I accept that there is a relevant and important distinction between what an agent intends or aims at, on the one hand, and what will follow from her actions as an unintended (and possibly foreseeable) side effect on the other. And, of course, it's quite obvious that the Attacker has a purely benevolent attitude towards the innocent bystanders, and a quite different (and possibly more complex) attitude towards the bomber. It's clear that the Attacker intends to benefit the innocent bystanders. The question now before us has to do with whether the Attacker has an additional intention to harm the bomber.

Here's one way of approaching this question. Recall that the bomber has brought a bomb into a crowd. And we're assuming that the Attacker plans to tackle the bomber in order to prevent the bomb from exploding. So it's likely that—let's assume that there's a substantial risk that—some of the innocent bystanders themselves will be harmed as the Attacker tackles and engages in a scuffle with the bomber. (These are harms, that is, that occur before and are not caused by any possible explosion.) So how are we now to describe the Attacker's attitude towards and relationship with these innocent bystanders who are, in some sense, put at risk by the Benevolent Attacker's plan of action?<sup>51</sup> And, in answering this question, we should be careful not to minimize this risk. It's possible that the scuffle with the bomber runs a substantial risk of inflicting very serious harm upon others. (Perhaps the bomber will use a gun to defend himself. Perhaps he will attempt to detonate the bomb, immediately upon being attacked. Etc.)

One thing, I take it, is clear. We should not blur the distinction between the Attacker's attitude to the bomber, and the Attacker's attitude to the innocent bystanders who might be harmed in a scuffle. Yet it's true of *both* the bystanders and the bomber that the Attacker foresees that these individuals might very well be harmed by her attack. And there's a further parallel in that in neither case is this harm guaranteed. Furthermore, as noted earlier, the Attacker has no interest in producing *any* harm for its own sake.

Nonetheless, it's plausible to claim that the Benevolent Attacker intends to harm the bomber, but that she has no intention to harm any innocent bystanders. After all, all of the Attacker's mental efforts and all of her physical energy are directed or aimed solely at the bomber. Furthermore, the Attacker appreciates that there is nothing of value to be gained in harming an innocent bystander while failing to harm the bomber (in a way that prevents an explosion); whereas there is something of great value to be gained in harming the bomber (in a way that prevents an explosion) without

harming any innocent bystander. So the Attacker far prefers the latter scenario over the former scenario. Finally, since there is no (practical) way of preventing the explosion without harming the bomber, it makes sense to say that harming the bomber is the means that the Attacker has chosen (and indeed must choose) to achieve her paramount goal of saving innocent lives. (Whereas the harming of innocent civilians is not a means to any further goal.) And it's plausible to claim that when we intend to pursue some goal, we also intend to employ all the means necessary to the achievement of that goal. In other words, contrary to the argument expressed at the beginning of this section, one *can* genuinely intend to produce a result that, in one's own judgment, has no value in and of itself.<sup>52</sup>

By this reasoning, then, it's plausible to claim that the Benevolent Attacker actually intends to harm (and doesn't merely foresee that harm may come to) the bomber. So it's plausible to claim that (B), (C) and (D) are stuck with the potentially problematic consequence that the Benevolent Attacker commits an act of violence in attempting to save the lives of innocent bystanders.

These claims may or may not withstand further critical scrutiny. In any case, I will assume, in what follows, that they are correct. Nonetheless, regardless of how we decide to describe the specific case of the Benevolent Attacker, our brief discussion of this case illustrates two important points. First, definitions of violence that appeal to intentions may raise some rather complex and subtle philosophical issues.<sup>53</sup> (Common sense, I believe, confirms that the Benevolent Attacker genuinely intends to harm the bomber. So any defender of a restricted definition of violence, who wants to overturn this claim, may be forced to adopt an artificial or esoteric conception of intentionality—thereby undermining the intuitive appeal of any such definition.) And, second, agents often act not just with a single intention directed towards a single individual, but with a wide variety of different intentions and other relevant attitudes directed towards a multiplicity of individuals. We'll see later, in the next section, how this might possibly impact on our understanding of violent behaviour.

### 1.9 HARM

So far we have focused principally on the Harm (and, to a lesser extent, the Normative) dimension of OED. But even though we've already encountered a number of puzzling complications in exploring that dimension, we still haven't confronted the core issue as to what we mean by "harm" itself. And this introduces a whole new layer of indeterminacy into OED since that definition in effect offers not one, but an entire class of definitions—where a new definition of violence emerges each time we plug in a different substantive understanding of the notion of harm.

To see how this works and why this matters, recall that we're now assuming that the Benevolent Attacker is engaged in a violent act since she acts

from a genuine intention to injure or harm a fellow human being. That claim, however, can be challenged, not by raising any further concerns about the notion of intention, but by asking what is meant by the terms “harm” and “injure.” Yes, the bomber will probably be hurt—he will suffer pain, for example—if he is tackled and knocked to the ground. But he might be better off overall as a result of being injured in this fashion, for any number of reasons. First, he might also be killed in a successful bomb blast. Or he might be killed while attempting to flee the scene of the crime. So this attack could literally save his life. Second, by tackling him, the Attacker might save the bomber from becoming a mass murderer. So the bomber would be better off, from the moral point of view, for having failed in his attempt, and his Attacker may have had this goal in mind as well in attacking the bomber. So a Benevolent Attacker may have benevolent intentions all around, and she may have sought to hurt or injure the bomber only as a way of making the bomber himself better off overall.

We can therefore understand the notion of harm, to which OED appeals, in either a local or a global sense. Quite simply, a *local* harm (benefit) makes a person worse (better) off in some particular respect or other, whereas a *global* harm (benefit) makes a person worse (better) off overall.<sup>54</sup> Clearly, you can suffer a local harm as a result of some other person’s behaviour, even though that same behaviour makes you better off overall, and so does not harm you in a global sense. Typically, your dentist inflicts a local harm when he causes you pain, but he also makes you better off overall.

With this distinction in hand, we can now introduce two parallel senses of violence. (In the interests of simplicity, from now on we’ll focus on the (B) interpretation of OED.) Let’s say that someone commits an act of violence, in the *local* sense, when he exercises physical force with the intention to inflict a local harm upon some victim. And that he commits an act of violence, in the *global* sense, when he exercises physical force with the intention to inflict a global harm upon some victim. Clearly, every global act of violence is also a local act of violence, but not vice versa. Every time you aim to make someone worse off overall, you aim to make that individual worse off in some particular respect or other. However, you can aim to make someone worse off in some particular respect without intending to make them worse off overall, since the infliction of a local harm can be seen as the means by which you will make that person better off overall.

Does a Benevolent Attacker, who aims to harm a bomber by tackling him to the ground, for example, commit violence against that bomber? Well, that depends, of course. Yes, she commits an act of violence, in the local sense, since she aims to physically injure the bomber in a way that will be sufficient to disrupt the bomber’s own plan to inflict harm. And, yes, she commits an act of violence, in both the local and the global sense, if she also aims to make the bomber worse off overall; say, by killing him. But, no, she does not commit an act of violence, in the global sense, if she aims to injure the bomber as a way of saving the bomber’s own life (as well as the lives of others, of course).

There is a sense in which local acts of violence are easier to commit than global acts of violence. By this I don't mean that individuals are generally more willing to commit local acts of violence, or that they will have to struggle harder (or overcome more internal resistance) before committing a global act of violence. These psychological claims may very well be true, but they require empirical confirmation. Rather, I mean to be making a conceptual point to the effect that the commission of a global act of violence requires a more robust (set of) intention(s). Suppose that you spot someone with a bomb in a crowd. In a split second, you decide to act, and you leap at the bomber. Here it's not implausible to say that you acted with an intention to harm the bomber. We can form intentions in a split second, and we can also act on intentions that, for a variety of reasons, we have not fully or carefully articulated in our own minds. It seems clear that, at the very least, in leaping you acted with an intention to frustrate the bomber's own intentions, and we can plausibly count that as an intention to inflict a local harm. Did you also intend to make the bomber worse off overall? That's doubtful, since that's a considerably more complicated matter, and that's the kind of intention that usually cannot be formed in a split second. Furthermore, you probably don't care enough about the bomber to have any kind of belief, one way or the other, as to whether your act will make his life go better or worse overall. Your aim is more tangible and more immediate than this. A Benevolent Attacker may, therefore, lack the appropriate kinds of beliefs and intentions that would allow her to commit a global act of violence against the victim of her attack.

Since we now have two distinct notions of harm before us, an advocate of OED must choose between them (or else admit that his proposal is not quite so clear insofar as a serious ambiguity runs throughout his preferred notion of violence). On the face of it, global harm seems to be the most promising candidate. On this reading, dentists and surgeons typically do not commit acts of violence against their patients when they operate upon them—even when they amputate limbs, for example—since they do not aim to inflict a global harm upon those patients. On the contrary, they typically aim to make their patients better off overall.

But this reading is not entirely unproblematic either. Consider the following potentially worrisome cases. First, are acts of corporal punishment violent? Many people will say yes, and many will regard the corporal punishment of children in particular as being paradigmatically violent—violent, that is, if anything is violent. But the (B) reading of OED that operates with the notion of global harm challenges this assumption, since many teachers and parents who inflict physical injury upon the children in their care do so with the intention to make those children better off overall. And even if these adults are mistaken in the belief that this kind of punishment *will* make children better off in the long run, this doesn't alter the fact that they typically have no *intention* to make the children in question worse off overall. A parent who aims to make her child better off overall, but who succeeds

only in making that child worse off overall, can be thought of as a kind of Misguided Benevolent Attacker. And the actions of a Misguided Benevolent Attacker do not count as being violent according to the construal of OED presently under consideration.

Notice, by the way, that it's therefore possible, on this reading of OED, for an act of violence to produce an overall benefit for its intended victim. If Misguided Benevolent Attackers are possible, then it is possible for Misguided Malicious Attackers to exist as well. Consider, for example, a parent who aims to make her child worse off overall, but succeeds only in making that child better off overall.

Second, are professional sports such as hockey, football and boxing violent activities? And, more specifically, do the participants in these sports commit acts of violence against their opponents? Opinion on these questions is likely to be divided. And it's not at all obvious how OED would resolve this general issue. The only thing that seems to be clear is that a boxer, for example, aims to inflict at least a local harm upon his adversary. But does he also (typically) aim to make that person worse off overall? Perhaps, if that means that the boxer aims to win the match (and therefore aims that his opponent loses the match). But perhaps not, if the boxer understands that his opponent has freely chosen to fight in the match and that he will therefore reap (and welcome) the benefits that accrue from participation in the sport, regardless of who wins this particular match. His opponent would be worse off overall, the boxer might argue, if he had no one with whom to fight.

This example also raises the issue, once again, of how much deliberation, foresight, consideration of others, or cognitive activity in general is required of someone before we can credibly charge him or her with intending to inflict a global harm. Imagine, for example, a thoroughly self-absorbed boxer who aims only at winning the next match, and who has no independent interest in or well-formed intentions directed specifically towards his opponent. In particular, in focusing exclusively on the prospect of personal triumph in the present moment, he is never distracted by speculations about how well his opponent is faring overall (and in the long run). On a global harm reading of OED, this boxer apparently commits no violence against his opponent while beating him to a pulp.

How objectionable are these consequences? And is there anything that a defender of OED can say in his defence? Well, on the face of it, it does seem odd to say that boxing is not a violent sport. And it also seems odd, on the face of it, to say that the corporal punishment of children is not a violent activity. But it's even more strange, someone might argue, to lump these two activities together since it's obviously morally wrong to punish children by beating them, whereas it's not obviously morally wrong for grown men to pummel each other if that's what they decide that they want to do. Unless a defender of OED can differentiate between these two activities in this manner, then his account is in serious trouble.

But, of course, a defender of OED can easily do this. He can begin by making the now familiar point that just because some activity is not violent, it doesn't follow that that activity is morally acceptable. Corporal punishment, that is, is not violent, but it could be morally wrong for some other reason. Furthermore, while the notion of consent does not play any role within OED itself, there's nothing to prevent a defender of OED from appealing to consent when it comes to appraising the moral character of various actions (regardless of whether those actions are violent or not violent). And it's of course true of professional athletes, when they suffer physical injuries during a game or a match, that they have, in an important sense, consented to being harmed or victimized in this fashion. Whereas children—especially very young children—typically do not consent to, and in many cases are not even capable of consenting to, corporal punishment at the hands of their adult caregivers.

In fact, from a structural point of view, boxing is not all that different from dentistry, for example. If you are my dentist, then I allow you to inflict a local harm upon me as a means of bestowing a separate global benefit upon me. That I consent to this procedure is crucial to explaining why it's morally permissible for you to cause me pain. Similarly, if you are my opponent in a boxing match, I allow you to inflict a local harm upon me as a means of bestowing upon me the global benefit that accrues from engaging in this kind of competitive and physically demanding sport. Again, that I consent to this explains why it's morally permissible for you to cause me pain.

But the corporal punishment of children is crucially different. It's possible, of course, to punish children in a violent fashion, that is, with malicious intent. But when there is no intention to inflict a global harm, so this argument goes, then the corporal punishment of children is not violent. Nonetheless, it remains morally wrong since children do not (or cannot) consent to the infliction of local harms (of this nature) as a means of having bestowed upon them some global benefit.

There is a serious problem with this argument, however; namely, that we take children to the dentist without their consent, and yet we don't believe that it is morally wrong to inflict local harms upon them, in this manner, as a means of bestowing a global benefit. Therefore, since it's sometimes permissible to harm children without their consent, this argument doesn't explain why the corporal punishment of children is morally wrong. And this reinforces the suspicion that OED is missing something important in claiming that punishment of this sort is not violent in nature.

One might reply to this counterargument by invoking the notion of hypothetical consent. That is, one might claim that it's morally permissible to take children to the dentist since these same children *would* consent to this practice if they had a fuller or more adequate understanding of why local harms are being inflicted upon them. And evidence for this claim can be found in the fact that later in life, once they become adults, these same

children accept that what was done to them earlier in life, when they were children, was morally permissible.

The main problem with this argument, of course, is that it applies with equal force to the practice of corporal punishment. Many adults who were punished as children accept that this punishment was morally permissible. And this suggests that the punishment *was* permissible, since it counts as evidence of hypothetical consent at the time of punishment.

There's a better explanation of why the corporal punishment of (very young) children is morally wrong. This practice is wrong simply because it seriously damages individuals who are not able to (fully or adequately) appreciate why local harms are being inflicted upon them (by loving caregivers). And this damage is so severe that children, therefore, simply do not benefit from this practice in the long run. Adults who practice corporal punishment will, of course, disagree—since they claim that they punish children solely with the intent of bestowing a global benefit upon them. But this establishes only that the beliefs in question are highly controversial. So, on the line of reasoning that we are currently pursuing, defenders of OED are committed to the uncomfortable conclusion that you are not engaged in an act of violence when you inflict a (serious) local harm upon others, provided that you believe that you are ultimately bestowing a global benefit upon them—even though you know (or ought to know) both that this belief is highly controversial and that it is not shared by those whom you are unquestionably (seriously) harming.

Recall that we're currently exploring the plausibility of the idea that violence consists in the exercise of physical force with the intention to inflict a global harm upon some individual. (And that acting with the intention to inflict merely a local harm does not qualify as violence.) Our discussion of boxing and the punishment of children illustrates two important points. First, the distinction between global harms and local harms is a purely formal distinction that says nothing about what *in fact* makes a person worse (or better) off; either overall or in any particular respect. Many disagreements about the nature of violence may therefore result from disagreements about fundamental questions of value. Two individuals may agree that violence consists in the willful infliction of global harm, for example, and yet disagree over the question as to whether the state commits violence in punishing and incarcerating adults who have been found guilty of breaking the law. This practice is not violent, someone might argue, since not only does incarceration benefit prisoners overall, but that is precisely the intention with which incarceration is forced upon them. Someone else, on the other hand, might believe not only that the punishment and incarceration of adults seriously harms these individuals overall, but that this is so transparently the case that no one involved in the implementation of the existing penal system could sincerely (or non-culpably) believe that this practice actually makes people better off overall. And so the punishment of adults

could very well be violent, according to this individual, if she believes that the penal system is driven and supported by the appropriate kinds of malicious intentions.

So anyone who accepts OED must recognize that there may very well be serious disagreements, within the OED camp itself, about which kinds of activities are violent. The second point that emerges from our discussion (of cases like boxing and punishment) also bears on the issue of disagreement. If we examine OED with an eye on the Normativity dimension of violence, it's clear that OED makes no explicit claim about the moral value (or dis-value) of violence. Nonetheless, given that violence is tied in some fashion to the production of harm, any defender of OED will likely acknowledge that acts of violence are morally problematic in a way that, say, skipping a stone on a lake is not. We know that Holmes, for example, claims that each act of violence is *prima facie* wrong; that is, something that cannot be morally right unless its violent wrong-making characteristic is overridden (or outweighed) by stronger (or more weighty) right-making characteristics. But most defenders of OED employ this definition on the explicit understanding that some acts of violence are morally wrong all things considered; whereas some other acts of violence—acts of self-defence, war and punishment are favourite examples—are morally acceptable, all things considered.

This considerably complicates our appraisal of the adequacy of OED. Suppose it was true, according to OED, that every act of violence is morally wrong, all things considered. Then if someone were to argue that bullfighting, for example, is violent according to OED, and if we were convinced that bullfighting is not morally wrong, all things considered, then we would have a good reason for rejecting or at least being suspicious of OED. But because OED does not say that all acts of violence are morally wrong, any responsible reaction to this hypothetical case must be more nuanced. At the very least, we would need to explore the possibility that we could accept OED's characterization of bullfighting as a violent sport, while appealing to some independent understanding of morality according to which some violent activities (and bullfighting in particular) are morally acceptable nonetheless.

Or suppose that bullfighting is not violent according to OED, but we're convinced that this barbaric activity is morally wrong. Then we can still accept OED's claim if we can find some other way (i.e., without appealing to its apparently violent nature) of explaining why bullfighting is morally wrong. If we can't, then we will likely feel some pressure to challenge OED's characterization of bullfighting as an activity that is not violent. (This scenario, of course, parallels our earlier discussion of the corporal punishment of children.)

In summary, then, even though OED itself embodies only extremely modest normative claims, we can't plausibly assess the adequacy of OED without exploring how well that definition meshes with our independent moral

beliefs about the activities under consideration. Insofar as people disagree strongly over the moral status of a wide variety of human activities, we can expect that disagreement to fuel even further strong disagreements over the adequacy of OED itself.

Perhaps we can minimize, or better focus, our disagreements over the nature of violence in the following way, however. In understanding the relationship between violence and harm, perhaps it's a mistake to think that violent acts aim only at the production of global harms (or, alternatively, only at local harms). Indeed, as it stands, this proposal is almost certainly too simplistic. Any defender of OED will presumably want to allow for the possibility that at least *some* inflictions of a merely local harm can be violent in nature. Dentists typically inflict local harms with the intention of conferring a global benefit. But not all cases conform to this happy model. Imagine a dentist who makes you better off overall but who maliciously inflicts gratuitous suffering along the way. Clearly, some of the actions of this dentist are violent in nature. So it appears that defenders of OED cannot ignore local harms altogether.<sup>55</sup>

So perhaps it's more illuminating to move away from this restricted model that ties violence to the production of just one specific kind of harm, and to recognize instead both that violence can produce different kinds of harms, and that one and the same action may have a number of different violent *aspects*, as well as a number of quite separate aspects that are not violent in nature. So, for example, everyone can agree that the corporal punishment of a child is carried out with the intention to inflict a local harm upon that child. So everyone can agree that this act has a violent aspect. And suppose that the act is also carried out with the further intention to bestow a global benefit upon that child. Then, again, everyone can agree that this aspect of the action is not of a violent nature. Furthermore, everyone can also agree that both aspects of the act in question are highly relevant to its moral appraisal.

Now, it's important to decide whether a specific act of corporal punishment is morally permissible or morally impermissible, all things considered. It's all very well to say that the act has both a right-making characteristic (it aims to bestow a global benefit) as well as a wrong-making characteristic (it aims to inflict a local harm). But at some point we need to decide whether acts of this nature ought to be performed. If it's morally wrong, all things considered, to punish children in this fashion, then we should refrain from doing so.

Arguably, however, there's less of a need to decide whether the act in question is violent *all things considered*. (Recall that, according to OED, even if the act is violent, it may still be morally permissible to perform it.) And perhaps it's actually misleading or counterproductive to insist on a single overall characterization of the act. Debates over the moral status of the act in question, for example, will likely turn on such specific questions as whether this act actually causes, or is intended to cause, various (local or

global) harms or benefits. So the answers to these questions *do* matter. So if we can develop a rich vocabulary that allows us to state, with precision, the various respects in which an act is or is not violent, then this will certainly bring greater clarity to our moral debates, and it may also help to resolve some of our moral disagreements. And it may be prudent to deliberately halt the analysis at this point, and to stop fretting over whether the act is violent or not violent all things considered, as this question may foster a debate that not only serves no useful purpose but may actually distract us from the other (moral) questions that really do matter. If we decide that the act in question is overall not violent in nature, for example, then this may make it more difficult for us to fully appreciate the implications of its various violent aspects.

This strategy may become more attractive as we consider cases of even greater complexity. Suppose that our Benevolent Attacker has been tracking down the bomber for some months now. The Attacker knows that the bomber has killed many people in the past, and she's determined to apprehend and punish him. So the Attacker has an interest in the bomber that is independent of her desire to save lives. The Attacker is also prepared to kill the bomber, if necessary, if that's what it takes to save innocent lives. But the Attacker also believes in the possibility of rehabilitation and redemption, and she's convinced that the bomber would be better off, in the long run, if he could be incarcerated and shown the error of his ways.

Unfortunately, the bomber is on the offensive again, and he's about to detonate yet another bomb in a market crowded with innocent bystanders. The Attacker pounces on the bomber and a frenetic struggle ensues. Is the Attacker's attack violent? Who knows? But six things are clear. First, the Attacker attacks with an intention to inflict a local harm upon the bomber. Second, she also attacks with an intention to bestow a global benefit upon the bomber. But, third, she foresees that she may very well also inflict a global harm upon—she may kill—the bomber. Fourth, the Attacker would prefer to kill the bomber rather than allow him to take more innocent lives. Fifth, the Attacker intends to bestow a global benefit upon the innocent bystanders. But, sixth, she foresees that, in bestowing this benefit upon some of the bystanders, she may inadvertently inflict a local harm, or even a global harm (death) upon some of the other bystanders. Perhaps that's all that needs to be said about our Benevolent Attacker. What, if anything, would be gained in declaring that her action, overall, is (or is not) violent in nature?<sup>56</sup>

It's hard to know how a defender of OED would react to this proposal. On the one hand, the proposal is very much in the spirit of OED in that it places a great deal of significance on the various mental states of the Attacker; that is, her intentions, her preferences, what she foresees, etc. On the other hand, however, this proposal lacks one of the principal attractions of OED in that it fails to deliver a single, clear and unequivocal overall characterization of the act in question.

## 1.10 INSTRUMENTALITY

Further important interpretational questions about OED can be raised with respect to HAVIN's Instrumentality dimension. OED associates violence with the use of physical force; read literally, this means both that violence does not occur when injuries are inflicted without the use of any physical force, and that even very mild, calm or non-vigorous acts of force can qualify as acts of violence. Both results arguably have counterintuitive consequences.

The exercise of physical force often involves the deployment of physical instruments that can be used to move, enter, destroy or alter the shape of physical objects, or to redirect the flow of energy. So you exercise physical force when you use a shovel to move dirt, lift a spoon to enjoy a bowl of soup, operate a windmill to create electricity, or move a mirror to control the direction of a beam of light. Guns, clubs, bombs and knives are familiar instruments of violence in the OED sense, since they can readily be used to cause harm to the human body. And the human body too can become an instrument of violence when we use a fist or a foot, for example, to punch or kick someone with the intention to injure or damage that person. But it's also possible to physically injure someone without using any physical instruments of this sort, and even while remaining perfectly motionless. Imagine, for example, staring at someone—perhaps a stranger on the street or a child performing a difficult gymnastics routine—in a relentless and menacing fashion in the hope that they will become so flustered that they will fall and injure themselves. Since it's a stretch to view this as a case involving the exercise of physical force, presumably acts of this sort are not violent according to OED. Nor, for more straightforward reasons, would you commit violence, according to OED, should you silently curse someone, or pray that harm should come their way. If you believe that your curses and prayers have causal efficacy, then you have formed and acted on a genuine intention to cause someone harm. But this is not violence since these purely mental acts do not involve the exercise of physical force.

It's not clear that these should be regarded as particularly worrisome consequences. These cases will probably provoke a wide variety of different intuitive responses. And while the starrer has certainly engaged in cruel and immoral behaviour, we must continue to bear in mind that many acts that are not violent can still be condemned as being morally wrong on other independent grounds.

Nonetheless, the staring case stands at one end of a continuum of cases that raise difficult questions about exactly what is involved in the exercise of physical force. Rather than staring at someone, imagine instead that you leap into a room and surprise someone, in the hope that they will break out into a cold sweat, or trip and fall, or have a heart attack, etc. Here you have used your body, in a more substantial way, with the intention to inflict injury, but should this count as an exercise of physical force? And

intuitively do we want to regard this as an act of violence? It's hard to say, I suspect, and OED might plausibly tolerate these as difficult and indeterminate borderline cases about which reasonable and well-informed people might disagree.

More serious questions arise, however, when we consider cases involving the movement and manipulation of physical objects beyond one's own body. Imagine that there is an elderly patient in your care and that you want to trick her into taking a lethal dose of some drug so that you can inherit her fortune. There are a variety of ways of doing this, of course. So imagine further that the elderly patient needs to take a certain medicine once a day, and that she also suffers from Alzheimer's.

Now, consider the following four scenarios. In the first case, you simply lie to her and convince her to go to her medicine cabinet, under her own power and on her own accord, to take yet another daily dose of her regular medicine every hour on the hour. "It's time to take your medicine," you cheerfully announce throughout the course of the day. Eventually she dies of an overdose. In the second scenario, the patient is bedridden and so you actually carry a pill to her bedside every hour on the hour, you convince her to take it, and again she eventually dies of an overdose. In the third scenario, one day you calmly and surreptitiously substitute a poisonous pill for one of her regular pills, and eventually the patient dies (in the same manner and over the same period of time as in the first two cases). In the fourth case, your patient is strong, defiant and non-compliant. Since she suspects you of treachery, she's also in the habit of refusing to take her medicine. One day, after a lengthy and strenuous struggle, you succeed in shoving a poisonous pill down her throat, and eventually she dies.

The fourth scenario clearly involves an act of violence, and OED confirms this since you have overpowered your patient, with demonstrable physical force, and with the intention to harm her.<sup>57</sup> The other three cases are less clear, however.

In the first scenario, you manage to kill your patient merely by lying to her. And so this case raises the question as to whether an act of violence can be perpetrated solely through the use of language. Many writers seem to assume uncritically that this is not possible. And since it's clear that we can use language to harm people, this assumption must itself be based on the claim that the use of language does not involve the exercise of physical force. This is hardly obvious, however. The production of speech, after all, is a physical process. (Someone who loses control of his vocal cords, for example, loses the capacity to speak, and so he also loses the capacity to harm people in this specific fashion.) So speech involves the exercise of a physical instrument. And it shouldn't matter that your vocal cords are part of your body since your fists, which can clearly serve as instruments of violence, are also part of your body.

Does speech involve the exercise of physical *force*, however? Well, suppose that we follow Robert Holmes and assume that "the use of force in its

broadest sense is the effecting of change.”<sup>58</sup> Then, in lying to your patient, you use a physical instrument (your body) to effect a change in your physical environment; that is, to move and manipulate another body. As a result of what you have said, your patient walks to her medicine cabinet and takes a pill. So your words have causal efficacy. It’s hard to see, then, how this case does not involve the exercise of physical force.<sup>59</sup> Of course, you didn’t *force* your patient to do anything. You didn’t overpower her in a physical struggle. But that is a very special case of the use of physical force. I certainly use physical force whenever I wrestle with an opponent, even though I rarely overpower my opponent. And I can punch someone in the gut, with the intention to inflict injury, without (intending to or succeeding in) forcing them to do anything.

If this reasoning is cogent then, according to OED, the first scenario involves an act of violence. In order to block this result, defenders of OED have more work to do. They need to explain why the use of language does not involve the exercise of physical force. Or they need to explain, in some other fashion, why *linguistic violence*—violence that results solely from linguistic activity on the part of some perpetrator—is not possible.<sup>60</sup>

There are a number of ways of attempting to block the result that violence can be perpetrated solely through the use of language. But none seem very promising. One might claim, for example, that violence must involve the *skillful* exercise of physical force. But this strategy won’t succeed since the acquisition and exercise of linguistic competence involves a highly complex set of (intellectual and physiological) skills; whereas little to no skill is involved in, say, throwing a punch. And if this suggestion is based on the assumption that language use involves the exercise of mental skills and capacities that do not involve the use of physical force, then this point can be granted without abandoning the notion of linguistic violence. Linguistic competence certainly cannot be *reduced* to the exercise of physical force since linguistic competence requires the acquisition of a great many highly complex skills that are purely mental in nature. But the production of speech nonetheless still requires the (skillful) manipulation of one’s own body. In other words, a body *is* required for the production of speech—the principal sort of linguistic violence that we are considering here—even though a body is not the only thing that is required. Similarly, you require both knowledge and a boomerang if you are to succeed in using a boomerang as an instrument of violence.

Alternatively, it might be suggested that you cannot be harmed or victimized by language (alone) unless you play some kind of active role, or participate in some fashion in that victimization. (*You* must understand the perpetrator’s utterance, for example, if it is to harm you. And, in choosing not to ignore it, you allow it to harm you.) Whereas the victims of violent acts play a purely passive role. (If you’re stabbed by a knife, for example, you can’t help but be harmed.) This suggestion is problematic on a number of fronts, however. First, victims of (what I’m calling) linguistic violence

often do not have a choice. Often they cannot help but hear, understand, and be harmed by what is being said to them. Second, it's not true, at least intuitively, that a victim of violence must be entirely passive—not an active participant—in her victimization. And, in fact, defenders of OED-type definitions have argued that it is possible both to consent to and to participate in the commission of violence upon oneself. (Holmes claims that acts of suicide and assisted euthanasia may still be violent even when performed with the consent of all concerned. And Sara Ruddick argues that one can consent to inflicting violence upon oneself by “choosing martyrdom” or deciding to participate in a hunger strike.<sup>61</sup>) Finally, and most significantly, violence, according to OED, results solely from the *intention* to cause harm (in a certain forceful fashion). So any role played by the intended victim of an act—whether that role is active or passive—has no bearing whatsoever on whether the act in question is violent in nature.

Language—in the form of lying and other more subtle forms of deception—is also involved in the second and third scenarios. So our stance on linguistic violence will affect our treatment of these cases as well. But it seems far more obvious that the second and third scenarios do involve the exercise of physical force. In one case, you actually carry the pills to the patient's bedside and, in the other case, you physically switch pills. Someone who was physically paralyzed, for example, could not perform these acts, though they are hardly strenuous or physically demanding for an able-bodied person.

Why does it matter how these cases are classified? We can answer this question by posing the following dilemma for a defender of OED. If the acts in question are not violent because they do not involve the appropriate kind of physical force, then we need to give some kind of principled account of the difference between violent acts that involve the exercise of physical force, and other acts (like those in the second and third scenarios) that are not violent even though they involve physical processes and aim at the infliction of injury or harm. Furthermore, if, as suggested earlier, society has a special interest in identifying and discouraging acts that intend to harm others, then why are only the former acts identified as having a violent nature? Why do they alone receive this special designation, as well as whatever kind of special consideration may follow from it? In other words, doesn't society have a comparable interest in discouraging both kinds of acts? To underscore the force of these questions, recall that *all* of the acts presently under consideration both aim at, and result in the death of a vulnerable and elderly patient.

On the other hand, if these acts are violent according to OED, then a defender of OED will have to face the consequence that his proposal is perhaps “wider” or less “restricted” than it initially appeared to be. That is, OED, in accepting that the second and third scenarios involve acts of violence, may depart significantly from ordinary linguistic practice and common linguistic intuitions. This problem will be more or less serious, of

course, depending upon how people in fact intuitively react to these hypothetical scenarios. But if a defender of OED also embraces the notion of linguistic violence, then the deviation from ordinary linguistic practice may be very significant indeed. (Since now all of the first three scenarios involve acts of violence.) So a defender of OED who takes this horn of the dilemma may prefer to explicitly deny the existence of linguistic violence. But then he will need to explain why you commit violence when you hand a pill to an elderly patient, but not when you instruct her to take the pill herself. (This will ensure that the second and third scenarios involve acts of violence, but the first scenario does not.)

Some proponents of restricted definitions tackle the first horn of the dilemma by revising OED so that the exercise of physical force must exceed some discernible threshold before any act can qualify as being violent. Robert Miller, for example, stipulates that an act of violence “involves great force.”<sup>62</sup> And Robert Audi argues that “virtually all instances of violence involve vigorous abuse”—that is, a vigorous physical attack upon or a vigorous physical struggle with a person or animal, or the vigorous destruction or damaging of property.<sup>63</sup>

This response provides an effective way of dealing with the malicious caregiver, for example, since his actions, on any of the first three scenarios, clearly do not involve great or vigorous physical force, and are therefore disqualified from being violent on this proposal. But, of course, this proposal is still vague to some extent, and it doesn’t unequivocally rule out the existence of linguistic violence. So it may be plagued by further difficult borderline cases of its own. There isn’t a precise threshold for what constitutes “great” or “vigorous” physical force. And so what are we to make of a caregiver, for example, who shouts in an extremely loud, agitated and abusive voice, demanding of his patient that she must take her pills, and threatening her with serious penalties (the loss of food or shelter) if she chooses not to comply? Does this count as a case of linguistic violence and, if so, how loud and agitated must the shouting become before we can plausibly make this claim?

One can also escape *through* the horns of the dilemma by openly admitting that violence will (or should) always remain a somewhat vague term, under any version of OED, since there will always be hard cases where it’s not entirely clear whether the physical force that has been exercised is substantial enough, or that it is the right kind of force to render an act violent. This move is, of course, compatible with the suggestion made in the previous two paragraphs. (One can usefully reduce the vagueness of a term while acknowledging that it may not be useful to artificially eliminate vagueness altogether.) And this is essentially Coady’s response to this large set of problems. In discussing the use of a slow-acting poison that requires repeated doses and “where the destructive effects are gradual and cumulative,” Coady suggests that this case can be “successfully negotiated” by treating it as “lying on an uncomfortable borderline between violence and nonviolence.”<sup>64</sup> This stance, of course, doesn’t settle the question of what

we are to make of the possibility of linguistic violence. Nor does it directly address OED's (counterintuitive?) consequence that violence cannot occur when no physical force whatsoever is employed—recall our malicious starrer, for example, or those who either curse or pray with malicious intent—since it's not clear whether Coady would want to place these kinds of cases on, or categorically to one side of, his “uncomfortable borderline.”

However, one can also address this set of problems in a more radical fashion simply by dropping the requirement that violence requires the exercise of physical force. The World Health Organization, for example, has adopted a far more encompassing definition according to which violence involves:

(WHO) the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.<sup>65</sup>

This definition is more expansive than OED for a number of reasons. First, it allows for violence to occur not only through the intentional use of physical force, but also through the intentional use of *power*. Second, as the text surrounding this definition makes clear, WHO does not require that violence must involve the intention to cause damage or injury. “A parent [who] vigorously shake[s] a crying infant with the intent to quieten it,” for example, uses physical force intentionally, but not necessarily with any intention to harm the infant. Nonetheless, that parent commits an act of violence according to WHO, both when he actually harms the victim, but also when he does not, simply because his intentional use of force has a high objective probability of causing harm.<sup>66</sup>

Proponents of OED will probably want to dissociate themselves from this second feature of WHO since it radically severs the connection between violence and the intention to cause *harm*. According to WHO, an Unintentional Attacker, for example, can commit violence; again, regardless of whether he actually causes any harm. (Consider the parent discussed in the previous paragraph.) And even a Genuine Accident will be violent, according to WHO, provided merely that the “perpetrator” of the violence has exercised physical force or power, against someone or other, with some intention or other.<sup>67</sup> These consequences will almost certainly be unpalatable to any defender of OED.

Nonetheless, such an individual may well be attracted to the idea of including the notion of power within her account of violence. If we revise OED so that violence involves either the exercise of physical force with the intention to cause harm, or the exercise of power with the intention to cause harm, then OED can very easily accommodate the notion of linguistic violence, since we can obviously use language in a way that exercises power

over and harms other people. Similarly, the starer exercises power with the intention to cause harm to his victim and, in the four scenarios discussed previously, you exercise power with the intention to cause harm to the elderly patient in your care. So we can classify all of these cases as involving acts of violence, without worrying about the precise nature of physical force, or the precise magnitude of force that is required to produce violence. However, “power” is also a highly complex and contested concept, of course, and until more is said about the nature of power—a topic that I will not tackle in this essay—we can’t be certain whether this proposed amendment to OED will spin out of control, and yield an account of violence that is far too expansive for those who are attracted to OED precisely because of its narrow or restricted interpretation.

### 1.11 PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM

The Harm and Instrumentality dimensions of violence are so closely intertwined that claims about violence often run the two notions together in a confusing fashion. A good example of this is Coady’s claim that OED “rules out the possibility of psychological violence.”<sup>68</sup> This claim is confusing since it’s false if “psychological violence” refers to the infliction of psychological harm, but it’s true if “psychological violence” refers to the means by which (any sort of) harm is inflicted. The principle of charity, of course, instructs us to opt for the latter reading. It’s charitable, that is, to interpret an author’s claims in the most favourable light possible—provided that there is no compelling evidence to the contrary—and so it’s fair and reasonable to interpret Coady as making a true (rather than a false) claim. But by sliding over this issue and not telling us explicitly what he means by the phrase “psychological violence,” Coady once again fails to fully disclose the complex and controversial nature of OED.

A great many authors discuss the notion of psychological violence, and this idea is usually introduced to account for the fact that violence can inflict damage on the mind (or the soul) as well as the body.<sup>69</sup> So the term “psychological violence” is standardly used to refer to violence of the sort that results in (or aims at) the infliction of psychological harm.<sup>70</sup> Notice, however, that OED does *not* rule out the possibility that psychological violence is a particular *kind* of violence since, read literally, OED places no constraints on the kinds of harms that may result from acts of violence involving the exercise of physical force. It’s obvious that physical assault, rape or disfigurement, for example, can result in profound emotional trauma. And it’s also true that some kinds of physically forceful acts—some kinds of torture, for example—that cause relatively minor (if any) physical harm can result in overwhelming feelings of shame and humiliation. Furthermore, acts of violence can clearly be undertaken with the *intention* to

produce exactly these results. So Coady's claim about OED is false on the standard interpretation of the notion of psychological violence. It's clear that, according to a literal reading of OED, you engage in an act of violence when you exercise physical force with the intention to inflict any kind of harm, including psychological harm, upon some victim. And since psychological harms are genuine harms that make individuals worse off, we can usefully carry this line of thought one step further and distinguish between local psychological harms that make an individual worse off in some particular respect or other, and global psychological harms that make an individual worse off overall.<sup>71</sup>

Now, it's possible, of course, that Coady might reply that this is simply a blatant misreading of OED, and that what he clearly meant, in endorsing that definition, is that violence involves the exercise of physical force with the intention to cause *physical* harm.<sup>72</sup> If this is Coady's position, however, then he owes us a further explanation as to why we ought to privilege the infliction of physical harm (over the infliction of psychological harm) in this fashion. On this reading, someone who uses (vigorous) physical force solely with the intention to humiliate some victim, without causing them physical harm, does not engage in an act of violence against that victim. (Imagine tearing a person's clothes off and forcing him to parade around naked, on a dog leash, in front of his captors.) Furthermore, on this reading, the psychological trauma caused by (and intended by the perpetrator of) a brutal physical assault is presumably not part of (or at least not a central part of) the violent character of that assault. These troubling results are difficult to accept without further explanation.

Regardless of what Coady intended, however, the fact remains that the Harm and Instrumentality conditions can interact in a wide variety of different ways. Let's simplify matters considerably for the moment and contrast only (a) physical harms with psychological harms, and (b) the exercise of physical force with the launching of a verbal assault—taking verbal assaults here as just one particularly clear, paradigmatic example of the use of an “instrument,” or a method of inflicting harm that does not involve the exercise of physical force.<sup>73</sup> These two simple distinctions generate four different ways in which human beings can aim to harm one another:

- (1) using physical force with the intention to inflict physical harm
- (2) using physical force with the intention to inflict psychological harm
- (3) using a verbal assault with the intention to inflict physical harm
- (4) using a verbal assault with the intention to inflict psychological harm

In claiming that OED rules out the possibility of psychological violence, Coady seems to be restricting violence to scenario (1). But, as we have seen, this has counterintuitive consequences, and such a restriction may seem quite arbitrary. If it's the use of force with the intention to inflict harm that makes violence special, then why should we restrict violence to the infliction

of only physical harm? Why is scenario (1) significantly different from scenario (2)?

I have argued that an alternative, more literal reading of OED acknowledges the existence of violence as it is practiced in both scenario (1) and scenario (2). So OED, on this reading, accepts psychological violence as violence that aims at the production of psychological harm. But this reading too can be challenged as being arbitrary and excessively narrow. If it's the performance of actions with the intention to inflict (any kind of) *harm* that makes violence special, then why should we restrict violence to the exercise of any particular means, such as physical force? Isn't violence present when a verbally abusive husband repeatedly insults his wife, either with the intention to make her physically ill (scenario (3)), or as a way of making her feel worthless and afraid (scenario (4))?

So a defender of OED faces some further significant choices. It's well within the general spirit of OED, I would argue, to conceive of each of (2), (3) and (4) as involving acts of violence, since each involves an interpersonal interaction wherein one party acts with the intention to inflict harm upon another. And it's not implausible to use the term "psychological violence" in association with OED, when referring to an action that either aims to produce psychological harm (scenarios (2) and (4)) or to manipulate (or effect a change in) the mind or the personality of its intended victim (scenarios (3) and (4)). So we can think of *psychological violence*, most generally, in terms of those activities that either aim at the production of psychological harm or that use psychological means in aiming to produce (any kind of) harm.<sup>74</sup>

Arguably, therefore, it's well within the spirit of OED to modify that definition to read as follows.

(OED-M) Violence is the use of speech or the exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on or damage to persons or property.

In this definition, it's understood that the harm to persons may be either physical or psychological in nature.

OED-M classifies each of (1)–(4) as an act of violence. But, of course, a defender of OED might rightly worry about a slippery slope at this point. If we're going to modify OED in this way, then why should we stop with OED-M? Aren't there additional harms, besides physical harm and psychological harm (as suggested in note 73)? And isn't the use of speech but one example of an instrument that does not involve the exercise of physical force but nevertheless can be used to inflict injury upon others? So if we modify OED in one or two respects, how can we non-arbitrarily object to further modifications? And where, if at all, will this process stop?

Coady himself is very much aware of this tension. On the one hand, he's clearly uncomfortable with the result, to which he believes he is committed, that OED "rules out the possibility of psychological violence." This, he admits, is a "problem" that needs to be addressed.<sup>75</sup> And while he

acknowledges only that “there is at least a case for including” psychological violence, this weak statement arguably misrepresents the gravity of the problem since Coady himself substantially modifies OED precisely in order to render more palatable his stance on the impossibility of psychological violence. On the other hand, however, Coady also worries that “there is a tendency in the literature to slide from psychological violence to structural violence”—that is, violence that takes us beyond the context of interpersonal conflict—and Coady is adamant that he wants to avoid any such “confusion.”<sup>76</sup>

In attempting to arrive at a satisfactory account of psychological violence, Coady reflects at some length upon the sad and disturbing case of a young Arizona woman, Linda Ault, who was punished by her parents, in an unusually cruel fashion, for what they considered to be sexually transgressive behaviour. The February 7, 1968 edition of *The New York Times* reported on this incident as follows.

Linda failed to return home from a dance in Tempe Friday night. On Saturday she admitted she had spent the night with an Air Force lieutenant. The Aults decided on a punishment that would “wake Linda up.” They ordered her to shoot the dog [Beauty] she had owned about two years. On Sunday, the Aults and Linda took the dog into the desert near their home. They had the girl dig a shallow grave. Then Mrs. Ault grasped the dog between her hands, and Mr. Ault gave his daughter a 22 calibre pistol and told her to shoot the dog. Instead the girl put the pistol to her right temple and shot herself. The police said there were no charges that could be filed against the parents except possibly cruelty to animals.<sup>77</sup>

Coady’s response to this tragedy is curiously ambivalent. Presumably there is no question that Linda suffered a violent death, that her parents acted in a reprehensible manner, and that they bear a heavy responsibility for driving her to despair and, ultimately, suicide.<sup>78</sup> But in speaking specifically about the “dreadful” acts that Linda’s *parents* performed in punishing her, Coady suggests only that they are “*perhaps* deserving of the name of violence.”<sup>79</sup> It’s hard to know what to make of this reaction, however, since Coady does not explore, in any depth, what an alternative description of this punishment, that better captures its horrendous nature, might look like. But unless we can come up with some other better description of the events that led to Linda’s death, it’s difficult to remain fully satisfied with a bare denial that her punishment was violent in nature. Surely, we feel, there must be something else that we can say—something more positive in nature—that better captures the significance of these punitive acts. If they’re not violent, that is, then what are they?

Nonetheless, perhaps in an effort to appease those who do see violence in the treatment that Linda received at the hands of her parents, Coady offers a

further explanation as to why we might be *inclined* to view Linda's punishment as a series of violent acts. And this explanation is crucially parasitic upon the presumed adequacy of OED.

Coady suggests that it's important to note that Linda's punishment occurred within a broader set of background conditions that were themselves "tinged with physical violence."

In [this] example . . . what strikes one is the sheer immediacy and specificity of the pressure that is brought to bear upon the unfortunate girl with such overwhelming effect. Even if she had not shot herself, we would feel that she had still been the victim of severe and damaging force. The surrounding circumstances of the outrage are tinged with physical violence, for not only was she ordered to kill with a gun, one also imagines that force was used to get her to dig the grave and even to get her to the place of punishment (though we are given no details of this). Consequently, to describe the case as one of quiet violence and hence a "halfway house" to structural violence is unconvincing.<sup>80</sup>

It's not clear exactly what Coady is proposing with these remarks. But it is clear that the question at issue here is whether Linda is a victim of violence in a quite literal, and not merely a metaphorical, sense. And this is underscored by the fact that Coady extends this same line of reasoning to explain why "it would be natural" to describe a siege or blockade "in which no killing or shooting occurred as an exercise in violence."<sup>81</sup> The explanation, of course, is that sieges and blockades occur against a "background" of violence in the OED sense. Sieges and blockades often involve shootings and killings which, of course, (typically) are acts of violence. And even when they do not, they essentially involve "the declared intention to use very considerable violence against anyone who attempts to leave the besieged area." Nonetheless, this isn't literally violence in the OED sense, since the bare *intention*—in this case, that is, the *threat*—to use violence isn't itself violence since it doesn't involve the exercise of physical force. But it's close enough to "colour our attitudes" to a siege that, for example, involves nothing more than "patrolling and waiting for starvation or despair to produce surrender"—an activity that many will certainly perceive to be violent in a literal, and not merely metaphorical, sense.

So I take it that Coady's proposal amounts to the claim that it is "natural" or appropriate or, more generally, that one is justified in describing certain acts as being literally acts of violence, even if they do not literally satisfy OED, provided that they occur within a set of background circumstances that are violent (or are close to being violent) in the OED sense.<sup>82</sup>

This is an interesting proposal. But two critical points need to be made in response. First, it's important to recognize that this is quite a radical proposal that, if taken seriously, departs very significantly indeed from the content of OED, and in fact undermines one of Coady's principal arguments in support of OED. Recall that clarity was supposed to be one of OED's

primary virtues. It's a simple, neat and tidy definition that's easy to apply and that's not encumbered by too much fuzziness or indeterminacy. Furthermore, it captures pretty accurately what most of us mean most of the time when we speak of violence.

But notice what has happened. The assault that Linda Ault endured seems to be a case of violence, but OED doesn't allow us to say this. And sieges and blockades seem to be violent as well, but in some cases OED won't allow us to say this either. Therefore, in an effort to preserve lexical accuracy, Coady allows us to extend the literal use of the term violence beyond a strict and literal interpretation of OED. But in so doing he is forced to sacrifice clarity and simplicity.

What constitutes a set of background circumstances? How do we delineate, either in space or in time, what is part of the background and what is not? How violent does the background context have to be, before that violence spills over onto other acts and transforms them into being violent as well? And if the context is not itself violent, or perhaps not violent enough, then how close to being violent does it have to be, before our attitudes are "coloured" so that we may appropriately see violence where violence is in fact not literally present?

It may seem obvious that most sieges and blockades include shootings and killings, and that therefore it's appropriate to regard *all* events of this sort as being violent in nature. But how far may we legitimately extend this strategy? Consider a domestic spousal dispute that involves no violence in the literal sense—where there is no exercise of physical force and where neither a single shot is fired nor a single punch is thrown, for example. Is it appropriate to view this dispute as being violent in nature provided that most domestic disputes do involve acts that are literally violent? And, if so, how do we identify the relevant reference class? (Should we examine all domestic disputes within the past five years or the past fifty years? Or those within the same city or within the same nation-state? Or those domestic disputes that involve only spouses, or those that involve children as well?) And, more significantly, should a proper characterization of the domestic dispute before us really hinge upon the answer to statistical questions of this sort?

Or imagine further that the domestic dispute includes a number of threats to engage in violent behaviour. As noted earlier, this is not violence in the literal sense, according to OED, but Coady argues that it counts in favour of treating the dispute as being violent in nature. But then couldn't other features of the situation, that are also not violent, function in a similar manner? Does it matter that the husband and wife are screaming at each other? Does it matter that they are insulting each other in a cruel and malicious manner?<sup>83</sup> Should the reasons, causes, motivations or intentions that underlie this behaviour affect our characterization of it? Furthermore, can these sorts of considerations be offset by the fact that, as bizarre as it may seem, all of this antagonistic behaviour can also be occurring, at the same time, within the context of

a truly loving, compassionate and supportive relationship? Does it matter that this kind of dispute, between this particular husband and wife, is a (relatively) rare occurrence within an otherwise (relatively) harmonious relationship?

There are, of course, no simple answers to these questions. And so if we take Coady's proposal seriously, as a suggestion that is supposed to genuinely supplement OED, then we are left with a *much* more fuzzy account of violence, one that introduces a number of highly subjective factors, and that offers no principled guidance as to exactly how these various factors are supposed to operate together, especially when more than one factor applies to a single scenario. (What are we to do if two factors support contradictory judgments, for example? Are certain factors more decisive than others? Or would this merely generate a further borderline case? Etc.) Accordingly, this opens the floodgates to the very real possibility of very substantial disagreement, amongst those who are employing the very same theoretical account, as to what does and does not count as violence. And that's partly because there is no longer any guarantee that anyone following Coady's proposed strategy will honour the boundaries of standard lexical usage. Paradoxically, in an effort to salvage the lexical accuracy of OED, Coady may very well have undermined that very feature of his account.<sup>84</sup>

We can make a second critical point about Coady's proposal by returning to the example involving Linda Ault. Recall that, in an effort to address the issue of psychological violence, Coady argues that we can say that her parents treated her violently because their actions occurred within a set of circumstances that were "tinged with physical violence." However, I think we can extract, from Coady's discussion of this case, two quite separate lines of reasoning in support of this claim. First, as a previous quotation makes clear, Coady speculates that Linda may have been subjected to severe and damaging physical force. She may have been dragged out into the desert, for example, she may have been forced at gunpoint to dig a grave, etc. So she may have been (physically?) harmed by an overwhelming physical force over which she had no control.

Second, as Coady makes clear in an earlier passage, she may have been overwhelmed in a psychological sense as well.

Now if we consider a case in which someone skillfully works upon another's emotions and fears with a combination of words and deeds short of physical force, but with intentionally overpowering effects, then we may well feel that this is close enough to the physical model to be a case of violence.<sup>85</sup>

In other words, Linda may have been the victim of overwhelming psychological force. It may have been easy, with angry threats, accusations, insinuations and other forms of verbal abuse, for Linda's parents to shame her into submissively accompanying them into the desert, and digging a grave,

etc. And because this kind of psychological control closely resembles an act of physical violence, it's natural and appropriate for us to regard Linda as a victim of violence in this case as well.

It's possible, of course, to ask significant interpretational questions about Coady's appeal to context in this case as well. What exactly is the broader set of circumstances in which this event took place? Is it relevant to appeal to Linda's long-term relationship with her parents, or to the kind of marital relationship that existed between the parents themselves, or to the way that they raised or tended to discipline their children over the years? Would it matter, for example, if Linda's parents had habitually controlled her, over many years, in this fashion? Or would their manipulative behaviour, on that fateful weekend, have been even more (or less?) violent if it had been a highly unusual reaction to an exceptional and highly disturbing act of transgression? And would it matter if the aggressive acts of physical and overwhelming psychological force, to which Coady appeals, were frequently interspersed with sympathetic and tender gestures, with hugs and tears, and with quiet and gentle conversation, for example?

Once again, these questions highlight the significant indeterminacy of Coady's proposal. But here I want to emphasize a different point; namely, that Coady has deliberately skewed his description of Linda's treatment with ad hoc embellishments that can just as easily be removed without fundamentally altering the most poignant features of her predicament. That is, even if Coady is correct in his assessment of the case that he constructs, there are many other similar cases, to which his comments simply do not apply, that also raise the spectre of psychological violence.

Imagine, for example, that Linda was instead coaxed or persuaded to go to the desert and to dig a grave. This doesn't entail, by any means, that the event in question was calm or quiet, or that the persuasion was gentle. The whole process may still have been highly volatile and extremely traumatic for Linda, full of wailing, tears, and severe verbal abuse and self-incrimination. But if we can stipulate that physical force was involved in Linda's treatment, we can just as plausibly stipulate that it was not. Furthermore, there's no reason to suppose that the parents, in succeeding in transporting Linda to the grave site, exercised any kind of overwhelming control over her. Perhaps a great many (ineffective) threats were issued, only to be revoked shortly thereafter. Perhaps the parents themselves were traumatized and grief stricken, and very uncertain about how to proceed. Perhaps they issued crazy and conflicting directives at different points in time, and perhaps Linda vacillated between blind obedience and defiant disobedience. In other words, perhaps this was a highly volatile, highly fluid, chaotic, sickening and gut-wrenching experience for all concerned, where the parents' love for their child prevented them from *forcing* her to do anything, and required her instead to make every choice autonomously so that she could begin to take full responsibility for her transgressive actions.

Of course, it probably didn't happen this way. My account is probably no less fictional than Coady's description of this case. But the key point is that neither physical force nor overwhelming psychological force is required to produce grievous psychological harm, and that what is conspicuously absent from Coady's entire discussion is any acknowledgment whatsoever that the *psychological harm* that was inflicted upon Linda Ault has any *direct bearing* on the question as to whether she suffered as a victim of violence at the hands of her parents.<sup>86</sup> And so Coady's attempt to address the issue of psychological violence, whatever its internal merits with respect to those cases to which it does apply, simply ignores a wide range of other highly relevant cases where psychological harm is produced within a context that is (largely) free of the exercise of physical force, or any other kind of overwhelming power. Therefore, many kinds of psychological violence simply fall through the cracks of Coady's analysis.

### 1.12 COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE

Earlier, in section 1.5, I suggested that OED can be used as a political instrument that aims at promoting (a certain kind of) social harmony by discouraging individuals from acting and, more specifically, exercising physical force with harmful intent. The social and political ramifications of OED extend well beyond this, however.

Most significantly, looking now at the Agency dimension of HAVIN, we see that, according to OED, in order for violence to occur, there must exist a perpetrator—that is, some identifiable agent acting with a well-formed intention to inflict harm upon someone or other. This may sound innocuous, but in fact this stipulation has three highly significant political implications.

First, although our discussion of OED so far has focused on interpersonal violence, it's clear that OED nonetheless allows for group or collective violence as well—provided that the group or collective in question is capable of forming, and then acting (through the exercise of physical force) upon some genuine, well-formed intention (to inflict harm). Discussions of the conceptual limits of OED tend to be dominated by examples involving interpersonal violence, and that's probably because the questions of intentionality that OED inevitably raises are much more straightforward at the interpersonal level.<sup>87</sup> But any serious and comprehensive defence of OED must also confront the fact that our personal lives intersect with, and are strongly affected by, a large number of group actors that are capable of causing harm and disrupting social harmony within a wide variety of (local, national and international) settings. A defender of OED, that is, must at some point say something about whether and, if so, how governments, nations, states, peoples (i.e., national populations), ethnic groups, corporations, financial institutions, religious organizations, cultural associations, crowds, mobs and gangs, for example, are capable of committing violence.

Although these questions lie well beyond the principal focus of this chapter, it's clear that they have substantial social and political ramifications and that, accordingly, defenders of OED face further significant politically relevant choices. I'll briefly illustrate this point here with just two examples of some familiar forms of collective discord.

Consider, first, the example of a rampaging mob that has formed spontaneously and is rioting, killing people and destroying property within a densely populated urban centre. Is this mob committing violence? OED, on its own, provides no straightforward answer to this question. Presumably, however, the answer must be no, if these kinds of mobs are simply incapable of forming the kind of (unitary) intention to which OED appeals. But this clashes with ordinary language, and with the relative ease with which we normally speak about mob violence. So if, on the other hand, we want to acknowledge at least the possibility of mob violence, then a defender of OED must provide some kind of substantive account of how it is possible for groups like this to first form, and then act upon, certain specific intentions. Alternatively, a defender of OED might argue that the term "mob violence" is a misnomer—a convenient but misleading shorthand that disguises the truth that the violence of a mob can be effectively reduced to, and properly understood as nothing more than, the totality of the individual acts of violence committed by the individual members of that mob. But this final claim is politically contentious. And, of course, it again places OED in a more critical and less comfortable relationship with ordinary language.

War, on the other hand, is often understood (or even defined) as a highly organized, well-coordinated group activity designed to achieve certain carefully articulated political objectives. And it's true that wars are often conducted with clear aggressive and harmful intentions in mind. So war clearly qualifies as a violent activity, according to OED.<sup>88</sup> Nonetheless, even when a war is fought with clearly discernible intentions, further important questions must be (and often are not) raised about the identity of the perpetrators who have formed and are acting upon those intentions. We often speak of one country going to war against another country, for example. But, of course, the citizens of those countries rarely *commit* the violence that war brings in its wake—both because they are typically not involved in any exercise of physical force, and because many of those citizens may not share (or even be aware of) the intentions that guide the wartime exercise of physical force. Now, this does not mean that these citizens do not share any *moral responsibility* for the war or the violence in question. (That's a separate question.) But these points do indicate that there are serious issues that then have to be resolved about who in fact *is* committing the violent acts that characteristically occur during a war.

Violence, according to OED, has a dual or multidimensional nature—it requires both a certain kind of intention, and a commitment to realize or fulfill that intention through the exercise of physical force. But typically, in

a traditional interstate war, one actor—the government—forms and articulates the relevant intentions that pertain to the overall aims and conduct of the war, while another actor—the military—carries out the relevant exercises of physical force. So this division of labour raises a substantial (and certainly non-trivial) question about who, if anyone, actually commits the violence that occurs during war. Insofar as the relevant intentions and exercises of physical force are distributed over different segments of the population, one might conclude that any perpetrator of wartime violence must therefore also be some kind of distributional entity—some kind of collective spread out over space and time—where it's understood that no single member of that collective necessarily commits any act of violence on his own.<sup>89</sup> This view raises fascinating questions of its own and, to be plausible, must address a number of further complicating factors—including the fact that certain members of the government, as well as certain members of the military, may not share, may not be aware of, and may even vehemently oppose the harmful intentions that, on OED, are constitutive of an act of violence. So what exactly does it mean, then, to say that these individuals are nonetheless bona fide members of a collective that is a perpetrator of wartime violence? Or, if they're not, how are the boundaries of this collective to be circumscribed? And how, if at all, do claims of moral responsibility follow from any resolution of these fundamentally metaphysical quandaries?

Obviously, our answers to these questions will have social and political ramifications. And so we see, once again, just how misleading it is to present OED as a value-neutral claim. And it should also be obvious that there is no guarantee that the conclusions that a defender of OED will reach, as he grapples with these problems, will align neatly with the ordinary language claims that we “normally” or “naturally” make when reflecting on the realities of war and violence. Recall, for example, that, at the interpersonal level, the Unintentional Attacker does not commit an act of violence, according to OED. If we extend this line of reasoning to war and collective violence in general, then we run the risk of having to swallow the deeply counter-intuitive claim that the harm that a warring nation sometimes inflicts inadvertently on innocent civilians—“collateral damage” as it has come to be known—does not constitute an act of violence against those civilians or the nation to which they belong.<sup>90</sup>

### 1.13 AVOIDING VIOLENCE

Turning now to a second kind of political ramification, recall that OED denies that individual human beings commit violence when they unintentionally inflict harm upon others. Now, we encountered this point earlier, on a small scale, when we looked at the isolated act of a drunk driver inadvertently committing homicide. This act is exceptional in the sense that very few people are actually guilty of the commission of this kind of a crime, and

relatively few even engage in negligent behaviour—like drunk driving—that carries a significant risk of inflicting this kind of grievous harm. But everyone is guilty of unintentionally inflicting some kind of harm upon someone or other. In fact, it's arguable that, for each of us, this is quite literally a daily occurrence. For example, every day many of us pass at least one destitute homeless person, living on the street, without giving that individual any money. Assuming that she would be better off—either overall or at least from a financial perspective—if you were to give her some money, in failing to benefit her in this fashion you inflict a (global or local) harm upon that individual. This is what philosophers call an “act” of omission and, according to OED, you have committed no violence since you didn't actively, positively or deliberately intend to harm her.<sup>91</sup> In fact, you may not have given her a second thought, as you walk by and she blends invisibly into the bleak but familiar urban landscape. Nonetheless, you failed to help her when you could (easily) have done so.

Examples of this sort can be multiplied many times over. And you can harm people even when you're being exceptionally generous and attentive to the needs of others. Suppose that you have one thousand dollars at your disposal—money that, you've decided, will go to some deserving charity or other. So you do some research and decide to donate to Oxfam rather than to your local branch of the United Way. Here you have made a deliberate and thoughtful decision, and you know (you can foresee) that some people will be worse off than they otherwise would have been, had you decided differently. (Perhaps your one thousand dollars would have been enough for the United Way to launch a local lunch program for the homeless.) So it seems fair to say that, in *some* sense, you have harmed those individuals.<sup>92</sup> Still, you had no intention—it was no part of your goal or your plan—to harm anyone. So, according to OED, you are not guilty of an act of violence. Nor, by this same reasoning, are you guilty of having committed an act of violence when you donate a thousand dollars to a local opera company, even when you know full well that that money could instead have been used to save the lives of scores of children who, as a result of your decision, will now die prematurely from some lethal but easily preventable disease.

Furthermore, we know that governments frequently make these kinds of choices and engage in these kinds of deliberative exercises, when they explore the economic implications of military expenditures, taxation policies, trade restrictions, international development projects and so on. We know, for example, that Western industrialized nations typically spend vast sums of money on discretionary (or non-vital) health care services for their own citizens, knowing that this money could do much more good, and save a great many lives, if it were earmarked instead for the delivery of primary health care initiatives within severely impoverished developing nations. Again, according to OED, none of this could possibly count as being violent

in nature provided that there is no individual or collective involved that is motivated by a positive intention to harm others.

So there are a number of ways in which individuals and groups can harm others—either through blind neglect and indifference, or through deliberate choices that allow others to suffer in a clearly discernible fashion—without possessing any positive intention to inflict harm upon anyone. The moral status of these various forms of behaviour is not what is at issue in the present discussion. (Perhaps you acted wrongly in donating money to the opera company, but perhaps not. Moral intuitions about this case will surely be strongly divided.) Nor is the fact that the linguistic intuitions of many people will surely concur with OED's ruling that none of the behaviour in question is "violent" in any literal sense.<sup>93</sup> But the points that I *do* want to emphasize here are, first, that this ruling *is* a noteworthy consequence of OED—as we'll see in the next chapter, not all definitions of violence carry this same implication. And, second, an advocate of OED has therefore made at least an implicit choice to highlight or privilege a certain form of harmful behaviour—i.e., the behaviour that OED classifies as being violent in nature—over other forms of behaviour that are in general no less harmful, and that may on occasion result in even greater harm.

This is a large part of what I mean when I say that the adoption of OED has significant social and political ramifications. OED flags a certain kind of intentional behaviour as being violent in nature, and as being deserving, therefore, of some special kind of attention or consideration. Advocates of OED will typically assert or imply that special efforts ought to be made to identify the (OED type of) violence that occurs within our society, and that special steps ought to be taken to discourage, prevent, deter or punish its (future or past) occurrences.<sup>94</sup> No advocate of OED will claim that violent behaviour is unique in this regard. There are many forms of harmful, anti-social and discordant behaviour that are not violent in nature, and plenty of social mechanisms in place for dealing with many of them as well. Robbery, for example, is a harmful, but not an intrinsically violent act, according to OED.<sup>95</sup> But it's also a crime, and so our entire legal apparatus plays a highly visible and effective role in educating people about this crime, and in dealing with those individuals who actually commit robbery. So when we deny that a certain kind of activity is violent in nature, we're not necessarily saying that society can safely ignore it.

However, there are also plenty of (extremely but unintentionally) harmful activities that take place within our society on a regular basis, that are neither violent, according to OED, nor criminal in nature, according to the laws of the land. Therefore, if we don't flag the significance of these activities in some *other* fashion, there is a very real danger that they will slip through the cracks of our conceptual framework and escape our notice. Unless we can *name* or *describe* a harmful phenomenon in some particularly

salient fashion, there is a good chance that we will fail even to *perceive* it, and that, accordingly, we will do next to nothing about it. So we need to be sensitive to the fact that any discussion of violence, along the lines of OED, may well cast a shadow over certain problematic but pervasive social practices—rendering invisible harmful activities that, although not violent in nature, constitute great social ills nonetheless.

There is a third political ramification of OED-like definitions, and this third point further underscores the argument that I have been developing over the past few paragraphs. Because OED requires a (certain kind of) perpetrator, OED also entails that violence cannot occur when individuals suffer a (great) harm that cannot be traced back and attributed to the behaviour of a clearly identifiable (individual or collective) agent. Yet consider the following facts. Afghanistan has one of the highest infant and maternal mortality rates in the world, with over 160 infants dying during the first year of life per 1,000 live births. (The Canadian rate is under 5 deaths.) Over 40 percent of the children in India suffer from chronic malnutrition, and approximately 20 percent of China's children suffer from stunted physical and mental development as a result of the same problem. And the average life expectancy of a Somalian is less than half that of a citizen of any Western industrialized nation. These are statistical claims that don't say anything definitive about the life prospects of any individual in particular, but they do reveal a great deal about the social milieu and the overall quality of life experienced by those living within the societies in question. But no single individual, NGO or national government—nor any set of such agents—can be clearly identified as being (solely or principally) causally responsible for the incredible hardships that many of the citizens of Afghanistan, India, China and Somalia must endure. And so, according to OED, although these people are suffering terribly, they are not the victims of any act of violence. And so, within this intellectual paradigm, there is again a very real danger that nothing will be done about the tragedies, the atrocities and the injustices that quietly persist within the calm and gentle folds of a global economic and political system that (normally) operates smoothly and without the exercise of physical force stemming from any deliberate harmful intent.

In its treatment of violence, then, OED emphasizes what individuals *do* to others, at the cost of ignoring what *happens* to people. OED focuses on how people aim to inflict injury upon others, while ignoring a host of harms that arise in some other fashion (unintentionally, for example, or without discrete and discernible individuals or collectives playing a central causal role). OED's adoption, therefore, profoundly affects our relationships with others, including those who exist in a state of extreme misery and distress. On OED, it's relatively easy, for example, to avoid doing violence to others. It's relatively easy to have a clean record, and a clear conscience on this score. To avoid being an agent of violence, on this definition, one need only refrain from acting in a way that involves the exercise of physical

force directed with harmful intent towards others. And most people, I suspect, have relatively few intentions of this sort. So you can eliminate violence from your own personal life merely by remaining still and inactive, for example. Or, less radically, just by keeping to yourself—avoiding direct contact with others and acting without regard for how your behaviour may impact upon their welfare.

And as a corollary to this point, you can avoid becoming a victim of violence by keeping out of the way of those who are intent on doing you harm. In a particularly telling passage, Coady encapsulates this sentiment as follows.

Life is hazardous in many different ways, and we may be harmed by natural disasters and accidents, or by disease, or the indifference and lack of consideration of our fellows, or by social arrangements that are to our disadvantage. We can sometimes take steps to guard against all of these—we can avoid certain areas, move from certain communities, cultivate friends, and so on. But in addition to all of the hazards mentioned, there is another that many people fear very greatly, namely, the forceful intrusion into their lives of those who are intent upon inflicting harm and injury upon their person. It is not surprising that this should be so and that a distinctive way of speaking should arise to mark the reality to which we react in this way.<sup>96</sup>

This is “the point,” Coady remarks, in having an OED-like understanding of the concept of violence. And this is all very well for those who have the resources that allow them to escape most (or at least many) of life’s natural and social hazards. This is all very well for those who can build or move to gated communities with homes that can withstand earthquakes, who can vaccinate themselves against diseases, and who can grow their own crops on their own land, when others would allow them to starve. As Coady says, there are a fortunate few who “can sometimes take steps to guard against *all* of these” hazards (my italics). But there are many, in turn, who are too poor to be able to take effective steps to guard against *any* of these hazards. And so they have a great deal more to fear than simply “the forceful intrusion into their lives of those who are intent upon inflicting harm and injury upon their person.” In fact, within small and cohesive communities, this may be a relatively minor concern. So OED will be of little use to those who are struggling to make intellectual sense of the fact that, as a result of either deliberate or unintentional neglect, every day many hundreds of millions of people around the world are subjected to grievous harms and forced to endure lives of unconscionable misery—when there is much that could (easily) be done to greatly alleviate their suffering. Of course, defenders of OED may very well agree that this state of affairs is morally intolerable. At the same time, they will also insist that, however we should properly characterize and confront the plight of these unfortunate individuals, it’s a

mistake to see them as victims of any act of violence that we ourselves may have perpetrated.

## NOTES

- 1 I will occasionally—either for emphasis or in the interest of clarity—put the term “violence” in quotation marks (as I just did) when I am referring to the word, or the concept of violence, rather than the actual phenomenon itself. But since it would be cumbersome to follow this convention consistently, I will usually forgo the use of quotation marks, in the hope that the context of my claims will resolve any possible ambiguities.
- 2 If you’re having difficulty identifying coriander in the garden, for example, it’s not helpful to be told just that this herb is also commonly known as cilantro.
- 3 The search for uncontested facts about (or paradigmatic examples of) violence is undermined by the fact that some authors—Wolff (1969) for example—argue that the concept of violence is literally incoherent. For an effective critique of Wolff’s position, see pages 28–37 of Holmes (1989).
- 4 Throughout this text, I will generally avoid the use of the terms “non-violent” and “non-violence”—not because I believe that the concept of non-violence is not important, but rather because the most interesting practitioners of non-violence are clearly interested in promoting personal lifestyles and political agendas that involve far more than the mere rejection of (acts of) violence. For example, it’s often said that a genuine act of non-violence cannot flow from anger or hatred, but must instead be motivated by love, empathy, compassion or a selfless concern for the welfare of others. It’s also true that there is a tradition in thinking about non-violence—a tradition that arguably dates back at least as far as Arjuna’s battlefield discussions with Krishna—that allows for the possibility that one may perform *any* act (even killing another person) non-violently and with compassion and complete “detachment.” (See, for example, chapters two and four of *The Bhagavad Gita*. Of course, this interpretation can be challenged since the term *ahimsa* (non-violence) does not occur within the *Gita* itself.) So it’s extremely misleading to treat “non-violent” as a synonym for “not violent.”
- 5 See Gray (1970) p.12, Garver (1975) p.411 and Jensen (2006) pp.399–400.
- 6 Wade (1971) p.370.
- 7 Arendt (1970) pp.4, 42 and 51. Arendt’s idea here seems to be that, in resorting to violence, we use tools that are designed to artificially enhance our “natural strength” (p.46). (Obviously, this is intended to state at most a necessary and not a sufficient condition of violence.) It’s important to note, however, that Arendt also speaks about the “instrumentality” of violence when she is interested in violence that is chosen, not for its own sake, but as a means to the attainment of some other end. (See pages 51 and 79, for example.) This distinction can certainly be discussed *within* any number of the HAVIN criteria. (Perhaps Agency and Normativity are the most obvious candidates since this issue revolves around whether the perpetrator views violence as an intrinsic good.) But this distinction is not captured, in any direct fashion, by the HAVIN schema itself. Social scientists, such as Englander (2007) and Wieviorka (2009), sometimes use the term “expressive violence” to refer to an act of violence that is chosen for its own sake.
- 8 Coady (2008) p.39. Bok (1998) also endorses OED as a workable “baseline minimal definition” (p.6). “It is hard to think of anyone,” Bok argues, “whose preferred definition [of violence] would not cover at least” everything that counts as violence according to OED (p.7).

- 9 Coady (2008) accuses a number of those who advocate competing definitions with “conceptual carelessness” (p.21), “muddled,” “mischievous” and “confused thinking” (p.28), and with spreading a message that is akin to “propaganda” as they engage in various “exercise[s] in manipulation” (p.29).
- 10 Coady (2008) p.23.
- 11 The 2003 *Oxford Dictionary of English* defines violence as “behaviours involving physical force intended to hurt, damage or kill someone or something” (p.1968).
- 12 Coady (2008) p.23 (my italics).
- 13 And we’ll see later that Coady is very uncomfortable with the idea that violence may cause only non-physical injuries.
- 14 Coady (2008) p.41 (my italics).
- 15 In what follows, I’ll focus on harm to persons rather than damage to property. I’ll also assume that damage to property matters, from a moral perspective, only insofar as that damage somehow affects the well-being of sentient creatures.
- 16 Coady (2008) pp.31–32.
- 17 Holmes (1971) p.109.
- 18 Coady (2008) pp.62–63.
- 19 Coady (2008) p.265 (my italics).
- 20 Coady (2008) p.41.
- 21 Coady (2008) p.42 (my italics).
- 22 On page 42, Coady does say that an act of violence, “even when morally justifiable, should *commonly* be regarded as a matter for regret” (my italics). Notice, however, that even this weak statistical statement about regret makes only a contingent claim that appeals to such factors as the difficulties that may arise in controlling violence in the long run, and the damage that may fall upon the morally justified perpetrator herself—factors that may simply not apply in the case of the Benevolent Attacker or other violent actors. (Curiously, Coady does *not* identify the harm that may be suffered by the *victim* of violence as a source of regret.)
- 23 This also explains why there is something appropriate, after all, in referring to the drunk driver as an *Attacker*.
- 24 Similar comments may or may not apply to the case of the homicidal husband, mentioned earlier, who kills during a psychotic rage. Before we can properly assess this incident, we would need to know, amongst other things, what triggered the psychotic episode; whether the man in question was responsible, in any way, for its onset; whether he had any foreknowledge of the possibility of a future psychotic breakdown; if so, whether he took steps to guard against that eventuality; and so on.
- 25 It’s possible, of course, to claim that there is nothing problematic about the Benevolent Attacker’s intention to harm the bomber since, as a result of his blatantly immoral activity, the bomber now *deserves* to be treated in this way. This claim is plausible, but it seriously complicates the argument currently under consideration since it’s presumably no longer true that every use of force with the intention to harm constitutes the same kind of problematic threat—or, indeed, any kind of threat at all—to social harmony. Nonetheless, someone might argue that *violence* consists in the exercise of physical force with the intention to inflict *undeserved* harm, and that society has a special interest in discouraging precisely this kind of behaviour. On this account, the Benevolent Attacker’s attack is not violent in nature. Clearly, however, this normatively charged definition of violence is very different in character from Coady’s largely empirical interpretation of OED.
- 26 So perhaps we should focus on the idea that the Benevolent Attacker aims to *restore* social harmony, to the community as a whole, in response to the

bomber's acts and intentions that have disrupted that harmony. Nonetheless, even if this claim is true, this doesn't alter the fact that the Benevolent Attacker aims to restore long-term collective social harmony by first creating a local and short-term decidedly *unharmonious* relationship with the bomber. (This is analogous to the popular idea that sometimes we must employ violence ourselves if we are to minimize the total amount of violence in existence.) So, once again, as with the suggestion raised in the previous note, this line of reasoning requires us to condemn certain threats to social harmony, while praising and encouraging other comparable threats that arise from more noble intentions—thus complicating the argument currently under consideration. This line of reasoning also raises the possibility that the bomber's own actions are not themselves violent either since they too may have been undertaken with the aim of righting a previous wrong and restoring long-term social harmony. This obviously further complicates our understanding of the actions of the Benevolent Attacker, whose benevolence is now, to some extent, called into question.

- 27 We'll see some examples of this later in the text.
- 28 Coady, of course, does not claim that OED is completely neutral. But in claiming that it is "the most politically neutral" (p.23) definition under consideration, he appears to be suggesting that the political ramifications of its adoption are neither particularly worrisome nor particularly consequential.
- 29 Childress (1982) p.14.
- 30 Holmes (1989) p.32. In a somewhat similar vein, Sara Ruddick (2001) claims that "in central uses of the term, people or governments act 'violently' when they intentionally or predictably damage others, inflicting upon them serious harm or injury whose effects are prolonged and irreparable" (p.1753). Ruddick, like Holmes, also recognizes non-central cases of violence (e.g., violence resulting from neglect) that fall well beyond the scope of (D). At the same time, in restricting violence to the infliction of serious, prolonged and irreparable harm, her definition (at least of central cases) is narrower than (D).
- 31 An even wider and more liberal disjunctive account is offered by Elizabeth Stanko (2001), who defines violence as "any form of behaviour by an individual that intentionally threatens to or does cause physical, sexual or psychological harm to others or themselves" (p.316). Like (D), this account claims that the Unsuccessful Attacker, the Benevolent Attacker and the Unintentional Attacker have all engaged in acts of violence. However, it also implies, implausibly, that Genuine Accidents (that cause harm) also count as acts of violence.
- 32 Holmes (1989) p.33. Barry Gan's work has been heavily influenced by Holmes's writings, and this interpretation of foreseeability plays a prominent role in Gan's interpretation of violence. Gan (2013) states repeatedly that violence exists "in the mind of the perpetrator" (pp.11, 22). And his canonical definition of violence runs as follows: "one does violence if and only if one acts with the intent to harm or with the intent to perform an action whose consequence is reasonably foreseeable as likely to cause harm" (pp.85–86). Or, more succinctly, "a violent act [is] an act that causes intentional or foreseeable harm" (p.62). Like (D), violence, on this account, does not require the actual production of harm (p.18). Nor does it require an intention to cause harm (p.19). But it does require "acting on [an] intention *with some sort of awareness* that acting on that intention is likely to make another worse off against their wishes" (p.18, my italics).
- 33 This interpretation aligns (D) with the World Health Organization's definition of violence, according to which violence consists in "the intentional use of physical force or power . . . that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury." See Krug et al. (2002) p.5. This definition uses an "objective standard" for assessing the likelihood that an act will result in injury, and does not rely on any subjective notion of foreseeability. Nonetheless, the WHO definition

explicitly acknowledges that a violent act need not produce any injury since it “associates intentionality with the committing of the act itself, irrespective of the outcome it produces” (p.5).

- 34 One could attempt to block this result by arguing that responsible drivers do not commit violence since the level of risk that they impose upon others falls below any threshold of normative relevance. But this proposal seems not only ad hoc but also highly implausible, given the frequency with which traffic fatalities alone are now occurring. According to Honore (2004), the annual number of such fatalities worldwide now hovers around 1.3 million, and the UN predicts that traffic fatalities will become the third leading cause of death worldwide by 2020 (p.8).
- 35 This account is “asymmetrical” in the sense that the notions of intent and foreseeability play very different roles within it. On the proposal under consideration, the exercise of physical force with malicious intent is always sufficient to generate violence (regardless of whether the act in question actually causes any harm). The exercise of physical force that merely foreseeably may cause harm is not sufficient, however, to generate violence.
- 36 Holmes (1989) p.37. Audi (1971)—who does not employ an OED type of definition—claims only that acts of violence are *prima facie* wrong *in most cases* (p.66).
- 37 Ross (1930) p.21.
- 38 Ross (1930) pp.28, 33 and 39.
- 39 Burgess-Jackson (2003) follows Holmes in claiming that violence is *prima facie* wrong (pp.999–1000), and he praises Holmes’s influential definition for exhibiting several important virtues. But, curiously, he doesn’t comment on the fact that their respective accounts of violence are in fact incompatible with one another. For Burgess-Jackson, but not for Holmes, a violent act, by definition, must cause some harm or injury.
- 40 Holmes (1989) p.24. However, in the next sentence he also goes on to say, too hastily, that “it involves harming or killing them and destroying things they value.”
- 41 Ross (1930) pp.20 and 41.
- 42 Ross (1930) p.22. Both Holmes and Ross are self-consciously working within the broadly Aristotelian moral tradition. Both reject utilitarianism, for example, and both rely upon a particularist form of moral epistemology that locates moral knowledge in our perceptions of the rightness or wrongness of concrete individual actions.
- 43 For example, Ross balks at the idea that we have a *prima facie* duty to refrain from *wanting* to harm others, but seems to accept the existence of a *prima facie* duty “to resist [that] inclination” (p.22). So the status of actions that use force with the *intention* to cause harm remains somewhat unclear. Ross’s favourite examples of *prima facie* duty include the duty not to cause harm, the duty to keep promises and the duty to make reparations for previous acts of wrongdoing.
- 44 Using the tools that are currently at our disposal, that is. There is, of course, nothing to prevent us from differentiating between these two cases by appealing to *independent* moral criteria that make no reference to the violent nature (or lack thereof) of the acts in question.
- 45 Ross (1930) pp.33 and 41.
- 46 Holmes (1989) p.38.
- 47 Most significantly, Holmes denies that we can ever successfully defeat this presumption by going to war. This is in fact the main (anti-war pacifist) thesis of his entire book.
- 48 Holmes (1989) p.40.

- 49 Of course, here I'm setting aside the unproblematic case of Genuine Accidents.
- 50 So here I'm setting aside those cases in which the Benevolent Attacker has a separate and independent malevolent desire simply to harm the bomber, regardless of what her attack may achieve beyond this.
- 51 Of course, some of the innocent bystanders are *already* at risk because of the bomber's plan of action. But the Attacker's plan changes the nature of that risk—her plan may subject them to a risk of suffering very different (though likely less serious) kinds of harm, for example. Furthermore, it's possible that the Attacker risks harming some bystanders who, as a matter of fact, would not be harmed in any way were the bomb detonated (sometime later).
- 52 This is a perfectly prosaic point. Suppose that you intend to serve pumpkin pie at dinner this evening. Then you may walk to the bakery with the intention of purchasing a pie, even though there is no value, in and of itself, in handing your money over to the baker. Rather, you intend to perform an action that is of purely instrumental value to you.
- 53 Here's another example of this. Miller (1971) offers an OED-type of definition according to which, very roughly, violence involves the exercise of great force with the intention to inflict damage or injury (p.25). But he also operates with an extraordinarily thin conception of intentionality according to which one intentionally harms someone just so long as that harm is not inflicted "accidentally" (p.17). (I say that his conception of intentionality is "thin" because it requires very little for an act to qualify as an intentional performance. That is, only Genuine Accidents are excluded. Therefore, Miller's account yields a very broad conception of intentional action and, therefore, a correspondingly broad conception of violent action.) Miller, therefore, agrees with Holmes, for example, that an Unsuccessful Attacker has committed a genuine but "unsuccessful act of violence" (p.15). But they disagree about the injurious actions of a mentally deranged individual precisely because they operate with a different conception of intentionality. (For Miller, these actions are violent because they cause harm and are not accidental (p.16). For Holmes, they are not violent partly because the actor is not capable of forming a more robust kind of intention.) Finally, Miller's definition, unlike my reading of either (B) or (C), would allow us to say that the injurious actions of a drunk driver *are* violent—provided merely that they are not accidental in nature. And certainly the injurious actions of a homicidal drunk driver appear to be fundamentally different in kind from the actions of a sober and responsible driver who "accidentally" kills someone after, say, skidding on a patch of black ice.
- 54 A certain action A makes you worse (better) off overall only if it's true that *in the long run* the negative (positive) effects that A has on your well-being *outweigh* whatever positive (negative) effects A may also have on your well-being.
- 55 Whether OED has the conceptual resources to distinguish between local harms that are involved in the commission of violence, and those that are not—while maintaining normative neutrality—is, of course, another question.
- 56 Compare this with Jensen's (2006) interesting comment: "We need more words in English for violence. It's absurd that the same word is used to describe someone raping, torturing, mutilating, and killing a child; and someone stopping that perpetrator by shooting him in the head" (p.399).
- 57 Miller (1971) offers an important refinement of OED-type definitions. Suppose, in the fourth scenario, that you are walking to the patient's bedroom, and thereby exercising physical force, with the intention to shove a poisonous pill down her throat. Clearly, in walking to her room, you are planning to commit an act of violence, but the walking does not itself—even walking with malicious intent—constitute an act of violence. Therefore, Miller suggests, in order for an act to be violent, it's not enough for the act to be performed with malicious

- intent. It's also necessary that the act *itself* be capable of inflicting injury or harm (p.15). And, clearly, in walking to her room, you do not harm your elderly patient in any way.
- 58 Holmes (1989) p.32. See Gray (1970) for a normative (and therefore non-descriptive) account that ties force to the notions of legitimate power and legitimate authority (p.14).
  - 59 This conclusion also follows if we follow Audi (1971) and understand force to involve "the expenditure of energy" (p.68). Certainly I expend energy whenever I speak. Nonetheless, others will surely contest these conclusions. Ray (2011), for example, claims that squeezing the trigger of a gun does not require physical force (p.8). Yet Ray would presumably not deny that I effect change and expend energy when I squeeze the trigger of a gun.
  - 60 For a variety of broader perspectives on the notion of linguistic violence, see Gay (1999).
  - 61 See Holmes (1971) p.109 and Ruddick (2001) p.1754. As mentioned earlier, in note 30, Ruddick uses an OED-type definition to define only (what she calls) "central" cases of violence. Nonetheless, the examples that she offers, of inflicting violence upon oneself, all have an intentional component.
  - 62 Miller (1971) p.25. Miller explicitly notes that this stipulation entails that one does not commit an act of violence in (calmly) lying to someone in a way that causes them harm (p.20). It's also worth noting, however, that Miller implausibly analyzes a "forceful" action as one that is performed with the intention to physically overpower someone (p.33). This means that I do not commit an act of violence when I, say, repeatedly punch you in the gut, knowing full well that this action has no chance of (and therefore could not be performed with the intention of) physically overpowering you. Nonetheless, I both aim at and may succeed in injuring you. Nor do I commit violence when I physically punish or torture you, provided that I do so with no intention to physically overpower you—as presumably would be the case if you were strapped in a chair and were therefore *already* physically overpowered.
  - 63 Audi (1971) p.63. Unfortunately, Audi's account is complicated by the fact that it incorporates, in a confusing fashion, both physical and normative criteria. On the one hand, he notes that the vigorous abuse of persons typically involves "very rough treatment" (p.60). On the other hand, he also argues that vigorous abuse is typically a kind of "improper use" (p.60). So it seems that, according to Audi, it should be possible to commit violence against someone (by using them in some improper fashion) without subjecting them to very rough treatment. Matters are further complicated by the fact that Audi also claims that, in most cases, questions about (the presence or absence of) violence can be settled without invoking any moral judgments (p.66). So it's not at all clear what exactly is involved in a judgment to the effect that some kind of behaviour constitutes an "improper use" of persons, animals or property.
  - 64 Coady (2008) p.41.
  - 65 Kruger et al. (2002) p.5.
  - 66 Kruger et al. (2002) p.5. WHO is also more expansive than OED for the further reason that it is concerned with psychological harm, maldevelopment and deprivation—topics that I explore at greater length in both the next section and the next chapter.
  - 67 Even if there is a very low probability of an accident occurring, any accident that actually causes harm will be violent so long as it results from the exercise of physical force (or power) against someone, with some intention or other. The authors of WHO claim that "most road traffic injuries" are excluded from their definition (p.5), presumably because we don't intend to use physical force *against other people* when we drive a car. Nonetheless, some accidents will still

- count as violence on this account. Think of a (benevolent) surgeon or dentist who accidentally makes her patient worse off overall. Or of a death or injury that occurs during a friendly (non-professional) game of road hockey or flag football. In all of these cases, someone's intentional use of force against another person (accidentally) causes harm.
- 68 Coady (2008) p.39.
- 69 In the interest of clarity, I therefore deliberately attempted, in the earlier sections of this chapter, to restrict my discussion, as much as possible, to scenarios that principally revolve around the infliction of physical (rather than psychological) harm.
- 70 See Galtung (1969) p.169; Holmes (1989) pp.41–42; and Christensen (2010) p.35.
- 71 This is, of course, highly relevant to our earlier discussion of punishment. The corporal punishment of a child typically inflicts both local physical harms and local psychological harms upon that child. But these harms are typically inflicted with the intention to bestow a greater benefit that, in the long run, makes the child psychologically better off overall.
- 72 A later segment of OED (that Coady does not cite) speaks of violence as “treatment or usage tending to cause *bodily* injury” (my italics). But then that same entry goes on to add a clause about “forcibly interfering with personal freedom”—something that arguably has a greater bearing on one's psychological well-being.
- 73 This categorization of harms is not exhaustive. In being incarcerated, for example, you suffer a harm in losing your liberty even if the incarceration does not result in physical or psychological injury. And it's also easy to imagine other methods of inflicting harm that involve neither the exercise of physical force nor the use of language.
- 74 So a typical verbal assault qualifies as an act of psychological violence. Even in scenario (3), where you use language to make someone physically ill, you typically aim to accomplish this by making that person feel tense, anxious or afraid.
- 75 For a stronger rejection of psychological violence, see Betz (1977) who argues that this concept involves a “category mistake” (p.345) since “violence is properly . . . a physical . . . notion” (p.342).
- 76 Coady (2008) pp.39–40.
- 77 Quoted in Garver (1975) p.416. To the best of my knowledge, Garver was the first person to discuss this case from a philosophical perspective. His article first appeared in the June 24, 1968 issue of *The Nation*.
- 78 However, it's not obvious that OED allows us to say that Linda committed a violent act when she killed herself. This claim is false if Linda was in such a confused and deranged state that she wasn't able to form the kind of self-conscious, deliberate and future-oriented intention that is necessary for the commission of an act of violence. Alternatively, it's possible that, in killing herself, Linda was aiming to bestow a global benefit upon herself. Given the coercive choices that were forced upon her—apparently it didn't occur to her to take possession of the gun and walk away—Linda may have thought that death was the best option open to her. It's possible that, in Linda's judgment, killing her dog (or her parents), and living with that knowledge, would have made her worse off overall.
- 79 Coady (2008) p.40, my italics.
- 80 Coady (2008) p.40.
- 81 Coady (2008) p.41.
- 82 There is a weaker interpretation of what Coady is up to in these passages; namely, that he is providing nothing more than a kind of so-called “error theory” that explains, in a charitable way, why people go *wrong* in thinking that the acts

in question are violent. However, I don't believe that this is the most plausible reading of Coady's text. And, in any case, this proposal will be of interest only to those who are already convinced that OED provides an adequate analysis of violence.

- 83 Here, of course, I'm assuming that so-called linguistic violence is not literally violence according to OED.
- 84 Coady is highly critical of the notion of structural violence, for example, and he believes that it's both counterproductive and counterintuitive to speak of poverty and oppression as forms of violence. And yet, following Coady's own strategy, it could be argued that although these conditions are not acts, they are violent nonetheless insofar as they typically occur within a set of background circumstances that are "tinged with physical violence"—overt state violence, that is, or at least the omnipresent threat of state violence.
- 85 Coady (2008) p.39.
- 86 Curiously, Coady also makes no mention of the harm suffered by Linda's dog, Beauty; not even when discussing the background conditions, tinged with physical violence, within which Linda's punishment occurred.
- 87 Both Holmes and Coady recognize and are keenly interested in the practice of state violence, for example. But when analyzing the *concept* of violence, they pay comparatively little attention to violence involving non-personal (or group) actors.
- 88 That is, war is the *kind* of activity that can be violent, according to OED. But Coady fails to consider the possibility that some wars are not violent, according to OED. Coady condemns Wolff's definition of violence for having the "absurd consequence" that two sovereign states "may not be engaged in violence even though they are bombarding each other with nuclear rockets" (p.38). But if we understand violence to involve the exercise of physical force with the intention to inflict a global harm, then even according to OED it's possible for a (benevolent) state to go to war without committing an act of violence. It's possible, that is, to go to war with the aim of bestowing a global benefit.
- 89 Military personnel, of course, often commit acts of violence, on their own, during the course of a combat mission, for example. But how often does an individual soldier exercise physical force, in combat, with exactly the same intentions that motivate the behaviour of his political leaders? So here I'm interested in raising the question as to whether there is a collective form of violence present within warfare that transcends any and all local, purely interpersonal phenomena.
- 90 Unless, of course, one appeals to foreseeable outcomes as well as intentions, or to the violent background circumstances in which these acts occur—suggestions that, as we have seen, lead to problems and complications of their own.
- 91 Nor, of course, did you exercise any physical force against her.
- 92 Someone may object that you haven't really *harmed* any of the homeless in these examples, since no one is actually *any worse off* than they were before you came along, as a result of your behaviour. So "failing to benefit" cannot be equated with "harming." I myself don't see the force of this objection. (Surely I have harmed someone, who is starving to death, if I have the means to feed them but knowingly choose not to do so. It seems irrelevant, and certainly no excuse, to point out that they were bound to die anyway.) Nonetheless, to meet this objection, we need only embellish these examples in the following way. Suppose that the homeless person sees me walk by, or somehow learns about my donation to Oxfam, and is harmed—for example, made to feel resentful or worthless—by that knowledge. So here, although I am merely indifferent to their plight, I have made them worse off than they were before I came along.
- 93 See Coady (2008) pp.30–32.

## 62 *Interpersonal Violence*

- 94 But advocates of OED don't always develop this argument consistently. As noted previously in section 1.4, Coady argues that we have a special interest in preventing those forms of violence that involve a wrongful or malicious intention to inflict harm. But Coady does not object to state or interpersonal violence that aims to protect individuals from this kind of mistreatment.
- 95 Robbery doesn't necessarily involve the exercise of physical force, for example. It's also possible to commit robbery without intending to harm anyone.
- 96 Coady (2008) p.41.

# **The Concept of Violence**

**Mark Vorobej**

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