THEORETICAL/PHILOSOPHICAL PAPER

# On the Politicization of Violence Within Reductive and Non-reductive Accounts of Violence

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## Abstract

In this paper, I reference a Paradigm Case Core Conception of Violence, which each individual has, and can share with others to various degrees. This is shown to imply that because we cannot get at violence itself, and can only interpret violence in relationships that involve humans, we cannot avoid politicizing our conceptions of violence in our empathic, intersubjective relationships. This is demonstrated by outlining various claims concerning violence, and by utilizing Edith Stein's phenomenological account on empathy and intersubjectivity, and Alfred Schütz's characterizations of commonsense constructs and typicalities, as well as theorists who define violence in reductive and non-reductive ways.

**Keywords** Violence · Political violence · Reductive · Non-reductive · Paradigm case core conception of violence

## Introduction

Here, it is argued that because we are situated in empathic, intersubjective relationships, no apolitical conception of violence is possible. To show this, a Paradigm Case Core Conception of Violence (PCCCV) is utilized as a ground from which emerges politicized disagreement concerning what counts as violence. Each individual has their own unique PCCCV constituted by what each experiences and interprets as cases of violence. A PCCCV is a continuously developing, inductive list of instances of actions, events, and relationships that an individual interprets as instances of violence. When a PCCCV is intersubjectively shared to some extent such that the PCCCVs of two or more individuals overlap, their conceptions of violence are politicized. They are politicized because, in relation to the PCCCVs of other individuals, there is disagreement that reflects party views, the endorsement

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of public institutions, and whether particular forms of government organization are desirable. We see politicized PCCCVs emerge from contemporary research on violence, which can be categorized into two approaches. Reductive approaches typically interpret violence instrumentally, causally, or normatively, defining violence in a way that *excludes* possible kinds of violence such as the symbolic, structural, emancipatory, oppressive, and so on. Non-reductive approaches tend toward being inclusive insofar as they intentionally aim to avoid reductively interpreting violence, and instead distinguish between kinds of violence, such as the instrumental, non-instrumental, structural, symbolic, institutional, linguistic, emancipatory, oppressive, and other kinds of violence. There is overlap between both approaches, particularly the common tendency to acknowledge an instrumental view of violence as a means intentionally used to cause harm, injury, or death. However, the thesis of this paper is that no apolitical conception of violence is possible because violence is interpreted and understood in essentially contested, politicized ways. Instead, *violence is that which makes way*, opening the door for diverse interpretations of events and relationships, which are typically politicized.

As noted, no two individuals have exactly the same PCCCVs, since each has unique experiences of and relationships to phenomena interpreted as violence. A PCCCV develops over the course of an embodied life that unfolds within a historically-influenced context in which individuals intersubjectively influence each other in their empathic relationships. Experiences of violence are *contextual*, *perspectival*, and *relational*, as Michael Staudigl argues (2013a, b). He addresses the experiences of a violent actor, victim of violence, and witness of violence as *together* relationally constitutive of the sense/meaning of violence. However, it is significant to add to these the perspective of *second-hand witnesses*. Second-hand witnesses learn of actions, events, and relationships experienced by others as violence after they occur, mediated via the interpretations of others. A second-hand witness can be affected as a result of hearing or seeing second-hand testimonies concerning violence. Their interpretations can retrospectively contribute to the sense of a particular action, event or relationship interpreted as violence. Furthermore, most of the list constitutive of each of our individual PCCCVs is presumably based on paradigmatic cases that were encountered second-hand.

In the following, claims found in contemporary literature on violence are simplified, and a number of theorists addressed based on whether their conception of violence fits a reductive, or non-reductive view. Much more could be said concerning the philosophical and historical nuances of each theorists' claims, and there are certainly more who write on violence than those discussed here. I only aim to show that theorists tend to produce either reductive, or non-reductive conceptions of violence, which are politicizing in relation to communities whose members' PCCCVs overlap. This argument might appear to beg the question whether an apolitical conception of violence is impossible. However, if the political is conceived of in terms of *sustained relationships among members of a community*, and *violence is constituted within relationships* (such as between a violent actor and his victim, or between an economic system and those oppressed by it), then in order for an apolitical concept of violence to be possible, there would have to be a kind of violence that is non-relational, which is absurd. There are means of violence, such as weapons, but these

are not violence itself. It is when harms, injuries, or deaths occur that weapons are then "means of violence". Without the relationship between some sort of means, and particular kinds of consequences, violence cannot be said to occur. But, the means need not be instrumental, but could be systemic, structural, linguistic, or symbolic, for example. So, we cannot access violence itself without accounting for relationships because violence occurs relationally, and these relations are themselves political in connection to political parties, public institutions, and forms of governmental organization.

I first utilize Alfred Schütz's notion of "commonsense constructs," "typicalities," and "the taken for granted" in order to reveal what is shareable among PCCCVs. Then, I discuss Edith Stein on the body and empathy as conditions for intersubjectivity in order to reveal how we influence the development of one another's PCCCVs via empathic relationships, contributing to shared conceptions of violence. Next, I discuss researchers who I argue take reductive approaches to violence, politicizing it. Non-reductive, politicized approaches taken by numerous researchers then follow. I conclude drawing out some implications of this argument, namely that we are challenged by violence: *because we cannot get at violence itself, and can only interpret violence in its relations, which involve humans, we therefore cannot avoid politicizing our conceptions of violence in our empathic, intersubjective relationships*. The theorists discussed here demonstrate the ongoing politicized contest aimed at defining what counts as violence once and for all.

## Schütz on the Typical, Commonsense Constructs, and the Taken for Granted: The Extent to which PCCCVs are Shared

Schütz (1962) provides a ground for framing how shared conceptions of violence are politicized. He argues that there are only "interpreted facts," which are "either facts looked at as detached from their context by an artificial abstraction or facts considered in their particular setting". How facts are interpreted depends on one's "stock of previous experiences…handed down to us by parents or teachers," i.e., our predecessors who teach us "facts". Much of what we are taught is "typical" in the sense that we anticipate that others consider the same things to be "typical". Schütz states,

> By the operation of…constructs of common-sense thinking it is assumed that the sector of the world taken for granted by me is also taken for granted by you, my individual fellow-man, even more, that it is taken for granted by "Us." But this "We" does not merely include you and me but "everyone who is one of us," i.e., everyone whose system of relevances is substantially (sufficiently) in conformity with yours and mine. Thus, the general thesis of reciprocal perspectives leads to the apprehension of objects and their aspects actually known by me and potentially known by you as everyone's knowledge. Such knowledge is conceived to be objective and anonymous, i.e., detached from and independent of my and my fellow-man's definition of the situation, our

unique biographical circumstances and the actual and potential purposes at hand involved therein. (1962)

Commonsense constructs, i.e., "set[s] of abstractions, generalizations, formalizations, [and] idealizations," supersede any individual's private knowledge of the world. We emerge in a world already operating in relation to objective, anonymous knowledge, which constitutes the commonsense constructs that we learn, and take for granted as typical. Shared "common-sense thinking" constitutes a "we" insofar as the "we" is "everyone whose system of relevances is substantially (sufficiently) in conformity with yours and mine". We take for granted that the "typical" understood by others is basically the same as that which we understand as "typical". "Knowledge" of the typical or paradigmatic, however, is contingent; there are only interpreted facts. The objective, anonymous knowledge held by a "we" is historically contextualized.

In light of Schütz's analysis, we can consider what is typical of violence, and thereby reveal ways in which PCCCVs are shared based on what a community considers typical, thereby arriving at historically and biographically contextualized objective, anonymous, shared knowledge concerning violence. For example, most often passed on by predecessors as typical, or paradigmatic cases of violence is an instrumental view of violence, which sees violence only as a means intentionally used to produce harm, injury, or death. However, violence is not essentially instrumental, since a community could share a conception of non-instrumental violence. Systems, structures, cultures, and institutions can be interpreted as violence by a community despite that no means is intentionally used as an instrument toward producing the harms, injuries, and deaths that result nonetheless. However, while violence also cannot be defined from outside of its relationship to consequences, if we require particular kinds of consequences (such as *physical* injury), then we would be reductively excluding possible kinds of violence that produce unforeseen consequences. We can account for what appears to be typical or paradigmatic violence from a theorist's perspective, which is possibly shared by a community of empathic individuals with overlapping PCCCVs. However, the extent to which PCCCVs are shareable, even within a group such as a political party, is limited because each individual experiences their own unique, contextualized life, sometimes empathizing with the experiences of others. Empathy plays a primary role in the development of one's PCCCV, particularly because we often encounter violence as second-hand witnesses.

## Stein on Empathy: A Means to Intersubjectively Overlapping PCCCVs

Stein (1989) describes empathy as an embodied individual's non-primordial experience of another's primordial experience: "In my non-primordial experience I feel… led by a primordial one not experienced by me but still there, manifesting itself in my non-primordial experience" (11). The other's experience is primordial for that other, and the other is primordial in my own experience, but I grasp her experience non-primordially. Empathy is not sympathy, though, since sympathy involves a

primordially experienced *feeling*, which is not required for empathy: "Sympathized and empathized joy need not necessarily be the same in content at all," she writes. Through empathy, which is a relationship between I and you, a "we" is experienced. This is because an embodied individual can know *what it is like* to experience what another experiences.

Also, empathy is the condition for the possibility of intersubjectivity. Stein claims, "the perceived world and the world given empathically are the same world differently seen". I have my own perception of this world, and what I empathize with in relation to another concerns the same world. Their standpoint, however, does not replace my own: "I retain them both at the same time. The same world is not merely presented now in one way and then in another, but in both ways at the same time". Also, the appearance of the world depends on the observer, though the world itself is independent of how anyone perceives it: "the appearance of the world depend[s] on individual consciousness, but the appearing world – which is the same, however and to whomever it appears – is made independent of consciousness". It is because of the "help of empathy" that I am not confined to how the world appears to me. I can "obtain the same world's second and third appearance which are independent of my perception". So, Stein concludes that "empathy [i]s the basis of intersubjective experience [and] becomes the condition of possible knowledge of the existing outer world".

Stein's point is that there is a world that appears to us as individuals, and we can empathize with how the world appears to others. As we empathically relate to how the world appears to others, we acquire ways of interpreting the world that exist independent from our own individual experiences and interpretations. In addition to first-hand experiences, I can empathize with the experiences of violence that others have without replacing my own understanding of violence with theirs, but instead, adding what I experience of their experience to my own understanding of violence. This is why a PCCCV must be an inductive list of paradigmatic cases of violence that is *incomplete*. New cases of violence can always be encountered in one's own experience, or empathically via others, and no case ultimately defines violence. As we encounter others who interpret things as violence, intersubjective agreement can arise via empathic relationships concerning what counts as paradigmatic cases of violence. However, again, the extent to which PCCCVs overlap due to empathic relationships is limited, since individuals typically are already oriented toward their own understanding of what counts as violence, and thus have the potential not to empathize with others, negating the possibility of full agreement concerning what counts as violence.

In relation to the four perspectives on violence mentioned above, the empathic understanding of *what it is like* to experience violence is the relational condition upon which an intersubjectively shared conception of violence can be generated. A violent actor *can* empathize with the pain suffered by his victim, and the victim *can* empathize with the violent actor's intention to cause pain. Both can have an idea of what it is like to experience, from the other's perspective, the violent situation that binds them. First- and second-hand witnesses of violence experience what it is like from their own standpoint. This "*what it must be like*" experienced by empathic individuals in their relationships to violence is

constitutive of what is understood as paradigmatic cases of violence contained within a shared PCCCV. But, it is not necessary that an individual accept or even grasp *what it is like* for violence to be according to some other individual. Intersubjectively, we construct knowledge concerning what counts as violence from our own experience in relation to the experiences had by others with whom we empathize. The more we are violent actors, victims, witnesses, or second-hand witnesses to violence, and share our experiences with others, the more refined our PCCCVs might become, but this does not imply that we could ever completely know violence, or completely agree on what it is in all of its forms. Novel kinds of violence are always possible, given the diversity of dynamically unfolding historical contexts, relationships, and perspectives. These diversities exist in relation to politicized parties, institutions, and governmental organizations rendering an apolitical understanding of violence to be an impossibility.

Because of the primary role played by empathy in intersubjective, embodied relationships that occur within historically embedded and influenced socio-economic contexts in which individuals relate to individuals, communities, structures, parties, institutions, organizations, systems, and states, we should expect that conceptions of violence are typically, non-neutrally political. An individual's interpretation of what counts as paradigmatic cases of violence is intersubjectively, i.e., politically influenced by the social–historical, relational contexts to which the individual relates. This political, intersubjective influence, however, does not imply universally accepted paradigm cases of violence, except for perhaps the instrumental ones, due to the cultural, historical, and contextual character of sustained relationships between members of a community. Two or more individuals might agree that a particular act, such as a rape or murder, counts as violence, but this agreement does not imply that the individuals have exactly the same PCCCV. It also does not imply that they interpret the act within their context in the same way. For example, many might acknowledge that the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were acts of violence, but this agreement ends where politicization begins in relation to parties, communities, public institutions, and governmental organizations. Next we will see reductive and non-reductive approaches politicize violence as a result of their characterizations of phenomena interpreted as violence. Insofar as we have an idea of what it is like to experience what these authors interpret as violence, our PCCCVs overlap, potentially politicizing us as a community in our relationship to interpretations of violence, but the overlaps do not indicate universal agreement, or that a singular, objectively defined PCCCV exists. Alone, we each understand violence in relation to what we have experienced, what we take as typical, or for granted, or as commonsense, and together we empathically construct intersubjective understandings of violence, but we cannot escape the political nature of violence insofar as violence is relational, contextual, and perspectival, and we are always already influenced by others, including predecessors, parties, public institutions, governmental organization, and communities in general.

## Politicized, Reductive Accounts of Violence Produced by Arendt, Greene, Brennan, and Sartre

Arendt (1970) argues *against* the claim that violence is essential to political power. She reductively defines violence as essentially instrumental so that it follows that violence is not essential to political power. She writes, "violence is by nature instrumental; like all means, it always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues. And what needs justification by something else cannot be the essence of anything". Arendt also distinguishes violence from other means to ruling over others, such as "power, strength, force, [and] authority". Relevant here, instrumental violence is inessential to political power because "power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert". Such an act "begin[s] something new" by disrupting a status quo framework. She adds that,

> Violence, being instrumental by nature, is rational to the extent that it is effective in reaching the end that must justify it. And since when we act we never know with any certainty the eventual consequences of what we are doing, violence can remain rational only if it pursues short-term goals. (Arendt 1970)

The PCCCV that emerges characterizes violence as instrumental, rational in relation to short-term goals, and as not essential to political power because it requires justification, and because political power is people acting in concert without violence being necessary to that acting. This reductive view essentializes both political power and violence in their opposition. It is reductive because it excludes the possibility of conceiving of violence in non-instrumental ways. However, whether political power is not essentially violent as an act that begins something new is disputable because political power could be experienced and interpreted by others as a kind of non-instrumental violence. The concerted action of a people could be experienced as an imposition upon those who do not act with them, and thus as a kind of violence. Nonetheless, politicized communities can emerge composed of individuals with PCCCVs that overlap with Arendt's conception of political power and violence, and politicized communities can emerge composed of individuals with PCCCVs that do not overlap with Arendt's conceptions of political power and violence.

Arendt's claim that violence is not essential to political power is not an apolitical claim since the relationship between political power and violence is essential to her definitions, and should be interpreted in that context. For example, Ayyash (2013) claims that violence and politics are *not* separable because "they form a continuum in which relations of domination and power are established, but also continuously resisted, modified, inverted, and negotiated". It follows that we should not attempt to think violence apolitically, since what counts as violence, and kinds of violence depends upon political relationships of domination and power. We cannot understand why violence is interpreted in some way unless we consider the political aspects of "domination and power" that influences violence

being interpreted in that way. The roles of domination and power are Arendt's concern, within the context of the Cold War, "the military-industrial-labor complex," and the possible use of atomic bombs. She politically disagrees with the traditional view that violence and politics are inseparable, thereby situating herself alongside a politicized community of individuals who empathize with knowing what it is like for political power to be nonessentially violent.

Greene (2013) takes a different approach, reducing violence to instrumentality, and a causal relation, naturalizing violence as essentially defined by what our brains neurologically cause us to emotionally reject doing. He argues that humans have a "dual-process" moral brain, which automatically produces emotional gut reactions, and manually reflects upon those automatic reactions, rationally calculating what should be done in relation to others. He utilizes studies in which the brain activity of individuals is scanned when presented with Trolley Problems. In a switch dilemma, a trolley is running down a track, and an individual can throw a switch so that the trolley changes tracks, killing one person rather than five. In a footbridge dilemma, an individual has the option of pushing a man with a large backpack in front of a trolley, saving five. Greene's fMRI evidence shows that only 31% would push the man from the bridge, while 87% would throw the switch. Greene analyzed numerous variations of these scenarios, testing for the accuracy of the claim that the brain neurologically *causes* people not to want to push the man. Some of these variations involve the individual being at a distance from the man on the bridge, and some of them involve the individual's touching or not touching the man when pushing him from the bridge. Greene concludes that it is not spatial distance, but the *personal touching* that turns out to be statistically significant. Individuals typically, emotionally reject directly harming others. So, Greene infers that an "automated antiviolence system in our brains" makes it possible for people to inspect action-plans, assessing possible means to goals, for the sake of avoiding being casually violent. That is, "our conception of violence is *defined* by this automatic alarm system". Most people would rather not engage in actions that are "*prototypically* [i.e., instrumentally] *violent*," such as "hitting, slapping, punching, beating with a club, and…pushing". Thus, Greene reduces violence to an instrumental use of means of personal force, citing paradigmatic, "prototypical" cases, which are defined by our brain's neurologically causal, emotional rejection of engaging in instrumental violence.

Greene politicizes his conception of violence in relation to his "Deep Pragmatism," which is a kind of utilitarianism that aims for whatever *actually* works best (and not what we *believe* works best) toward achieving positive experiences, not only in the short-term, but also in the long-term, and not only for "us" (in opposition to a "them"), but for everyone. The implication is that we should rationally control our emotions that urge us not to push so that we save five. His point is that we *should* use the strategy of rationally overriding the emotional rejection to engaging in violence when doing so works best, which is likely not as typical a view of violence, given that not many subjects were willing to push. In relation to empathic individuals who intersubjectively agree with Greene's Deep Pragmatism, though, politicized communities can emerge, which either do or do not share overlapping conceptions of violence as instrumental, and justifiable when violence works best.

Greene's approach is reductive in that he defines violence based on statistical correlations, which might indicate what is typical, or taken for granted about violence, but ultimately his approach excludes possible conceptions of non-instrumental violence.

Brennan (2016) also politicizes violence within a reductive framework. He aims to demonstrate that, though killing is altogether wrong, it is sometimes permissible in liberal democratic societies for private citizens to kill government officials in self-defense, or in defense of others. He writes, "Violence in self-defense and defense of others is warranted, on commonsense moral grounds, only to protect oneself or others from severe harm or injustice". This reductive, instrumental view of violence explicitly politicizes particular uses of defensive violence. Here, Brennan reductively interprets and then justifies the violence of killing:

> Killing is wrong. However, a person can become liable to be killed by performing certain wrongful or unjust actions. A person is liable to be killed when he is doing something deeply wrong, unjust, or harmful to others, and when killing him would serve a defensive purpose, such as self-defense, the defense of others, or to prevent him from causing greater injustice. Killing is also restricted by a doctrine of necessity: at minimum, when a nonlethal alternative is equally effective at stopping someone from committing injustice, it is not permissible to kill him. (2016)

The evaluation that "killing is wrong" is likely typical to a PCCCV. Brennan's use of a logic of exception is likely less typical. The exceptions that define when a person may be justifiably killed requires that (1) the person has performed a "wrongful or unjust action," (2) the killing occurs as self-defense or in the defense of others, (3) it prevents a "greater injustice," and (4) it is necessarily used as a last resort. When these four conditions exist, government officials may be justifiably killed. However, from the perspective of the individuals, who actually either engage in this defensive violence, suffer it, observe it, or learn of it second-hand, whether an instance of violence fulfills these conditions is contingent upon interpretations, which will bind individuals together in opposed, politicized communities. Whether the killing of a government agent is agreed upon as justifiable is not likely to be widely accepted by everyone. Instead, it is more likely that such killings will generate political disagreement and debate concerning whether the killing was wrong, defensive, or justifiable.

Brennan's conception of justified defensive violence leads to political questions that would require political distinctions that set standards for what counts as defensive violence. In fact, Brennan justifies defensive violence that responds to unjust acts, where "justice" is politically understood in terms of *just authority*. For Brennan, the state's claim concerning the *illegitimacy* of private citizens killing government officials lacks authority because private citizens will not necessarily, obediently submit to government officials, particularly when there is an opportunity to defend themselves, or others from the violence of government officials that is not itself self-defensive, or in defense of others.

Brennan also politicizes violence by arguing that "totalitarian communist regimes do not value individual human life," while using as evidence the assassinations of four US Presidents, thirteen US congresspersons, and the targeting of these kinds of people to indicate that liberal democratic regimes handle these situations better than

totalitarian communist regimes that respond to attempted assassinations by terrorizing their citizens, such as when Fanni Kaplan failed to assassinate Vladimir Lenin in 1918 (this is Brennan's example). This limited set of evidence leads Brennan to politically endorse liberal democratic regimes as superior simply on the assumption that they respond better to violence used against representatives of their regimes. This approach to violence implies politicized communities of empathic individuals with overlapping PCCCVs who evaluate these regimes and defensive violence like Brennan does. Such communities might consider Brennan's outlined conditions for justified defensive violence within liberal democratic regimes to be commonsense. Typically, violence is conceived instrumentally, and evaluated as wrong, but Brennan's reductive account reveals that violence is not essentially wrong, if it can be justified as defensive. So, his assumption that "killing is wrong" does not fit his argument that justifies defensive killing (or using defensive violence). Even if it is agreed that killing is an act of violence, the agreement ends here because once one begins to consider whether a killing is justifiable, one will already be in agreement or disagreement with politicized communities.

The last reductive account of violence discussed here is found in Jean-Paul Sartre's posthumously published *Notebooks for an Ethics* (1992). He claims that a "proper ontological" analysis would account for violence as a relation between people, rather than "as a sin or a crime". He rejects subordinating violence to moral, or legal evaluation, but he primarily, reductively characterizes violence. For example, Sartre explicitly distinguishes violence from force, indicating that "force brings about positive effects by acting with the nature of things," and "violence is characterized by a negative aspect," reducing violence to that which does not occur in accordance with the nature of things. Additionally,

> There is force when the action conforms to some rule (here we are in nature, therefore it is a question of an operation conforming to the internal laws of an object), and violence when the action is external to the law…The action that observes the laws is *composed,* the action that does not do so is *decomposed.* To affirm with force is to remain composed. To affirm with violence is to lose one's assurance. This is natural because all violence, beginning where force leaves off, implies a certain confidence in chance. (Sartre 1992)

This "natural" conception of violence as an action "external to the law [natural or human]," decomposed, and as a loss of assurance reductively defines violence in its relationship to law, both natural and human, thereby politicizing violence in these relations.

Sartre also explicitly characterizes violence as instrumental: "violence is not one means among others for attaining an end, but the deliberate choice of attaining the end *by any means whatsoever.* Which is why the maxim of violence is "the end justifies the means"". He reductively conceives of violence strictly as an instrumental means that is lawless, and destructive. Even when Sartre characterizes violence as an "unconditioned affirmation of freedom," violence is still interpreted instrumentally as a means to attaining a victim's free recognition of the violent actor's violence.

Furthermore, violence is not capable of producing anything but destruction, though it *allows another world appear*. Sartre claims,

> Violence, being destructive, cannot *produce* an object. It can only remove the obstacles that conceal [an object]…Hence violence is Manichean. It believes in an order of the world that is given yet concealed by bad wills. It suffices to destroy the obstacle for this order to appear. (1992)

Violence removes obstacles that impede the emergence of a world, which was always already there. Violence is "Manichean" insofar as violence implies the distinction between the "Good" that is to emerge once the "Evil" that hinders the emergence of this "Good" is destroyed. So, violence is unlawful, unnatural, destructive, Manichean, and an affirmation of freedom, but always instrumental.

This instrumental character is reflected in Sartre's characterization of violence as a right:

> Violence can never be anything other than a right that affirms itself against every form and organization of the universe…All violence presents itself as the recuperation of a right and, reciprocally, every right inexorably contains within itself the embryo of violence…*There has never been any violence on earth that did not correspond to the affirmation of some right*. (1992)

Violence is an instrumental means, and as such, when used, a right is affirmed. As an example, Sartre discusses "symbolic violence," which is essentially instrumental. Symbolic violence occurs as linguistic demands, such as, "you have no right to do so, that was my place," when said to a "sick, old woman". Such a demand instrumentally affirms one's right to that "place," and is therefore instrumental, *but as a nonphysical, linguistic kind of violence*. Sartre's other examples of non-physical, instrumental violence include "prayer, appeal, expectation, proposal, demand, along with the other's response: refusal or agreement. Threats. Defiance". It is likely less typical that individuals interpret nonphysical, linguistic things as violence even if they are instrumental. Whether individuals empathize with such experiences as counting as violence indicates a politicized community in which their PCCCVs overlap. We certainly see this kind of political disagreement today when some things are considered "politically incorrect" to say because some groups, communities, public institutions, and government organizations consider what is said to be harmful, and violent, while others disagree.

Lastly, Sartre distinguishes oppression from violence, arguing that they "must not [be] confuse[d]". His distinction between violence and oppression does not allow for non-instrumental kinds of violence to exist. He argues,

> [While violence is a] vacation from legality…Oppression…can be institutional…[T]he oppressing class legitimate[s] its oppression by law and…the oppressed class, out of weakness, complicity, ignorance, or [for] any other reason, obeys these laws and implicitly or explicitly recognizes them through its behavior. (Sartre 1992)

Sartre characterizes oppression as institutional, but unlike other theorists still to be addressed here, he does not take the next step, and define institutionalized, legalized, and legitimated oppression as violence because he reductively interprets violence only as either a physical or non-physical, instrumental violation of human or natural

laws. For example, oppression, such as in the case of slavery, can be institutionalized in law: "oppression based on slavery was not at first recognized by the law, but it soon becomes institutional". Since slavery came to be institutionalized in law, and violence is by definition unlawful, slavery is not violence. Sartre's reductive account politicizes violence in such a way that empathic individuals can have an idea of what it is like to encounter the paradigmatic experiences and relationships Sartre describes, sharing overlapping aspects of their PCCCVs in relation to instrumental notions of physical and nonphysical violence. However, individuals need not empathize with Sartre's interpretations and descriptions, and can have a PCCCV that does not acknowledge nonphysical, instrumental violence, or that does include slavery as a kind of violence. These differences in interpretations of what counts as violence reflect political disagreement between opposed communities of individuals. Altogether then, though they are politicizing in relation to how violence is reductively defined, justified, and evaluated, the reductive approaches to violence produced by Arendt, Greene, Brennan, and Sartre tend to over-determine what counts as violence, excluding possible kinds of violence. Perhaps an inclusive, non-reductive conception of violence could avoid politicization, but in the following, we will see that this remains impossible.

## Politicized, Non-reductive Accounts of Violence Produced by Merleau-Ponty, Liebsch, Schinkel, and Staudigl

Non-reductive accounts are more inclusive than reductive ones, but they nonetheless politicize violence due to the relational character of violence. For instance, a non-reductive, politicized account of violence emerges from Merleau-Ponty's (1969) analysis of the use of violence by liberalism and communism. For example, liberalism institutionalizes violence: "By hiding violence one grows accustomed to it and makes an institution of it" (Merleau-Ponty 1969). Also, because liberalism "wish[es] freedom for another person [and] it is inevitable that even this wish will be seen by him as alien law;…liberalism turns into violence," (Merleau-Ponty 1969) but this is not an instrumental view of violence. Revolutionary, Marxist violence, in contrast, is not hidden when used as an instrumental means to a future of liberation and humanism. Revolutionary violence aims to create a future humanism, so it necessarily rejects liberal violence, which presupposes an already existing humanism. The issue for both is that "once humanism attempts to fulfill itself with any consistency it becomes transformed into its opposite, namely, into violence" (Merleau-Ponty 1969). Neither can avoid their approach to humanism becoming violence in relation to others.

Merleau-Ponty politically condemns liberalism's rejection of Marxist, revolutionary violence because liberalism is deceived, since it forgets that its own origin lies in revolutionary violence. He states that "all we know is different kinds of violence and we ought to prefer revolutionary violence because it has a future of humanism" (1969). So, Merleau-Ponty produces a non-reductive, politicized account, distinguishing between kinds of violence, which some, but not all individuals will

agree with, depending on their interpretations, and the influences they encounter in relation to the violence of liberalism and Marxist revolutionaries.

Merleau-Ponty also generalizes violence in some ways, though these allow for a non-reductive approach to interpreting violence. For example, violence is essentially evil from the perspective of those who suffer it: "Even if in the end [violence] produces a society without violence, in respect of those whom it crushes today, each of whom is a world to himself, it is absolutely evil". This is because violence is generally a "negation of conscience," and as such, it is "absolutely unacceptable," and Evil in relation to those who suffer it. This "negation of conscience" also occurs as a result of "consciousness [being] originally committed in the world" counting as violence: "As soon as we begin to live, we lose the alibi of good intentions; we are what we do to others, we yield the right to be respected as noble souls," he argues. What we do to others, even unintentionally and non-instrumentally, can result in relationships experienced as violence, i.e. "negations of conscience," such as a negation of ways others could have been had we *not* related to them in the ways we do. By being in the world, an individual's embodied, situated relationships to others are consequential, and can be experienced by others as violence. This "negation of conscience" reductively applies to every kind of violence outlined by Merleau-Ponty, though how conscience is negated by violence depends on the relationships in which it occurs, allowing for non-reductive interpretations of violence.

Another non-reductive, inclusive, and politicized approach to violence emerges from Liebsch's (2013) refusal to define violence based on wrongness. Instead, he argues that what counts as violence is "an experience of violation," which is non-reductive because this conception of violence opens up the possibility for new kinds of violence being discovered, at least at three levels: "the level of the *experience* of violence itself, [the level of the] *political* and [the level of the] *theoretical* interpretations of violence *as* violence". Because there are diverse ways to interpret violations as violence, there is "no *universal form* of [what counts as] violence," Liebsch argues. The issue that arises due to such an account on violence based on violation is that there will likely be disputes concerning which violations count as violence, and in my view, such disputes are politicizing in relation to groups, communities, institutions, parties, and organizations. Acknowledging the possibility of disputes, Liebsch argues that.

> [Because there is an] irreducible instability…[between]…contentious claims based on experiences of violation that demand to be recognized, on the one hand, and normative restrictions of what should count as violence, on the other…we *cannot* generally know and *should* not try to generally determine what has to count as violence and what does not.

That is, because of disagreements concerning which violations count as violence, we cannot know a universal form of violence, and we should not aim for one, since we might then forgo the possibility of discovering new kinds of violence, *despite that the "contentious claims [are] based on experiences of violation"*. So, even if it is generally taken for granted that violence typically involves a violation, we should not reductively define violence in terms of particular kinds of violations. Liebsch intentionally produces a non-reductive account in order to purposefully allow for

novel kinds to be discovered, particularly when victims of violations claim to have suffered violence. The inclusiveness of a non-reductive PCCCV that emerges from this disallows for any reduction other than to the claims of potential victims, and politicizes individuals into communities, etc. that oppose those who are not willing to openly accept, or empathize with a claim that violence has occurred simply because a violation occurred.

Willem Schinkel (2013) likewise politicizes violence in his non-reductive approach that distinguishes between levels of violence. He argues that an individual is constituted within a regime of violence, or "*trias violentiae*," which is composed of private, state, and structural violence that exists prior to the subject's arrival in the world. This regime of violence is controlled by a state's monopoly on legitimate, instrumental violence, which legitimates a state's violence. If we restrict ourselves only to the instrumental view of violence, as reductive approaches typically do, then we would overlook the "regime of violence" that mediates the relationships between individuals and the modern State. The individual is violently constituted within the confines of a state's disavowal of its own foundational and structural violence, particularly that which results from capitalist relationships. Schinkel claims, "violence only ever emerges within a web of social relations that attributes the reference 'violence' to actions, and it only appears within a 'frame' that is to a large extent circumscribed by the State". The State's power lies in its ability to differentiate violence from nonviolence, and legitimate from illegitimate violence. This is "symbolic violence," in Schinkel's view, since it is this power to differentiate that lies at "the source of the State's violence".

As an example of structural violence, Schinkel distinguishes between "*strategies of problematization*" and "*strategies of immunization*" as they occur in the "late capitalist regime of violence". The poor are *problematized* and "socio-spatially relegat[ed]," while the middle-class is *immunized* through "the very opposite of practices of problematization". In relation to whether individuals are problematized or immunized, politicized communities emerge. By taking into account how structural, and symbolic violence work, in relation to private violence, we see the politicizing nature of violence, particularly due to the state's influence upon individuals concerning what counts as violence. Schinkel's non-reductive characterizations are not likely to be shared by all, particularly not by those who reductively define violence as only instrumental. Those who embrace critical views of the state's control over what counts as violence like Schinkel's can emerge as a politicized community in opposition to those who do not.

Lastly, Staudigl (2013a, b) takes a non-reductive, phenomenological approach to violence, arguing that violence is not only senseless, but is both destructive and constitutive of sense, in contrast to someone like Dodd (2009), who argues that violence itself "has no sense" insofar as "it cannot be meaningfully pursued as a theme for consciousness [but]…can only be pursued indirectly, through the various permutations of the turbulence it causes in the world of sense". Dodd means that violence "can only be pursued indirectly" because while, on the one hand, "violence could be identified as the disruption of objective sense," on the other, "this [disruption] is only an association with the objective, and does not demonstrate the objectivity of violence itself". All that an individual perceives of violence is the *disruption*

produced, i.e., violence's senselessness. Violence cannot be objectively identified by consciousness because it only emerges as that which disrupts the objective. So, violence appears "stupid" because it cannot be understood other than as that which destroys or disrupts meaning. Staudigl ultimately shows that Dodd's view is reductive because Dodd does not systematically develop how violence is also constitutive of sense.

For Staudigl (2013b), the irreducible vulnerability of the irreducible body grounds the experiences of various kinds of violence. For example, one's suffering violence, one's exerting violence, and one's witnessing violence are three "different and yet related parts of the same phenomenon, namely of our [embodiment's] irreducible exposure to the irreducible fact of our vulnerability". However, though violence always relates to the body, it also "affect[s] such contexts of meaning, in which the lived self-understanding of the subject, that is, her comprehensive self-referentiality or, traditionally put, her personal identity, is embodied". In terms of integrity (2013a), not only the body itself is vulnerable, but an individual's relationships to "interaffective traditions" and "intercorporal semantics" are also vulnerable. Violence is not "an *exception* to our supposed primordial sociality or, at least, sociability and its normative articulation in culture, morality, and law". Instead, violence participates in the construction of sense, particularly the violence found in the "pre-reflective and pre-linguistic genesis" of the meaning of one's existence in the world.

For example, Staudigl (2013b) argues that violence affects both the body and contexts of meaning because violence is constitutive of social orders insofar as "orders function selectively and exclusively," including and excluding individuals. Additionally, the fact of our "intercorporality" (that we are embodied beings in relations to one another) indicates our vulnerability as a "collective body". And one is also vulnerable to violence within one's "habitual body," i.e., in "those ideal contexts of meaning, which make up the habitualized—and thus potentially reactivatable—scope of my primordial "I can"". In the following, Staudigl describes how contexts of meaning are affected when the body is affected by violence, and vice versa:

> *Physical* violence…not only affects the objective body, but also the lifeworldly idealizations of our "I can" and therefore our habitual openness to the world. Conversely, *psychological* (e.g., verbal) violence always has an effect on our bodily movement in our surrounding social world and on our "orientation" in it. *Structural* violence…interferes in the habit formation of the subject, thereby creating "docile bodies" that silently accept the discriminating social (e.g., legal) structures that shape them and their possibilities of (self-)perception, interpretation, and action. As for *cultural* violence, it attacks the "collective bodily existence" of the subject, i.e., the silently shared patterns of its inter-corporeal existence alongside which the individual ''I can'' primordially develops and realizes itself in a pre-given cultural nexus. Thus, … different forms of violence attack the different ways in which we realize and understand ourselves as irreducibly embodied beings.

So, "the "fact of violence" turns out to be a *constitutively twofold facticity, that is, both affective/bodily and symbolic/meaningful*". Violence always affects, is related to embodiment, and bestows sense, or is itself meaningful, even as that which

destroys. "Violence is not only tied to the physical integrity of our objective body; rather, we are also open to violence in the symbolic articulations and institutions of our existence". So, Staudigl posits that violence is an "*inter-phenomenon*," i.e., an event in which "sense unfolds in the interplay of subjective intentions, inter-corporeal processes of sense-formation, and the dynamic "life of institution," without it being attributable to the sense-bestowing acts of a subject or the structural logic of sedimented "symbolic apparatuses"". The "interplay," or "interlacement" of the bodily and symbolic reveals that violence is a relational phenomenon, and that violence is not senseless.

Staudigl (2013a) also expands upon how violence is not only senseless by pointing to the relationship between "subjectification and de-subjectification," which clearly has politicizing implications insofar as these produce reductions of the "I can" of communities of individuals. He argues that, "the work of subjectification that takes place on the side of the *agents* of violence entails, e.g., racist violence, a kind of de-subjectification within the horizon of an invisible norm (e.g., "white") that is, in principle, impossible to achieve". Also, "the de-subjectification that happens to the *victims* of collective violence entails the possibility of new subjectifications, e.g., as a member of the attacked group (ethnicity, gender, etc.)". Lastly, "the experience of violence on behalf of a *third person* constitutes her as a witness, who becomes capable of actively bearing witness to an event of violence precisely in her irrevocable distance and (possibly traumatic) passivity vis-à-vis this event". In Staudigl's view, these three perspectives in relation to violence can "bring into view the "sense-event" of violence without explaining it away by means of causal, structural, cultural, or action-theoretical interpretations". It seems to me that, in relation to how an individual is subjectified and de-subjectified, their perspectives on a violent act will bind them to politicized communities of individuals whose PCC-CVs overlap in relation to their subjectification and de-subjectification. However, as stated above, second-hand witnesses also reveal relevant perspectives on violence, and in their doing so, their influence upon those who were present when violence occurred can retrospectively alter interpretations. Nonetheless, Staudigl's point is that violence is an "*inter-phenomena*," which should be analyzed in terms of how its sense is relationally constituted at three levels of interplaying relationships of sense-formation. These levels include the "*interplay of subjective acts of sense-bestowal, intercorporal processes of sense-formation and "symbolic institutions" of ideal, i.e., collectively shareable, unites of sense*". Together, their interplay constitutes a "relational genesis of sense" that bears its own relationship to the "constitution of selfhood". The individual's own sense-bestowal in relation to that of others, the intercorporal ways sense is formed, and the shared unities of sense found in "symbolic institutions" influence the construction of an individual's identity. All of this reveals that the self is "a process in which embodiment and symbolicity are chiasmatically folded into one another," which means that the self is vulnerable in various ways, implying various kinds of violence that play a role in constituting selfhood. There is the physical vulnerability of the body, the vulnerability to finding oneself excluded from shared norms, and vulnerability to "the denigration of its practical cultural concretization (in the various forms of, e.g., racist discrimination)". Recipients of violence, violent actors, and witnesses of violence, as *lived bodies*, relate

to violence. Witnesses, due to their "bodily and affective presence," are not "uninvolved observers". Second-hand witnesses might be less involved as observers of the immediate phenomena of violence, but remain vulnerable to violence that they are not present to observe. Excluding second-hand witnesses from playing a role in the constitution of violence means excluding too much, since we often influence one another concerning violence by providing second-hand information that can be empathically related to.

These aforementioned non-reductive approaches to violence reveal that reductive accounts exclude too much from counting as violence. Implied by reductive and non-reductive accounts of violence is the politicization of violence, and of communities in relation to what they agree to be "typical" of violence, and which is intersubjectively shared as a PCCCV via empathic relationships. Likely more common to PCCCVs is the instrumental view, and politicized communities can emerge in relation to it, but in opposition to politicized communities that embrace non-reductive views on violence. Furthermore, if what otherwise appears to be nonviolent (because it is non-instrumental, and lacks a perpetrator who intends to exercise violent) can turn out to be violent, then relationships constitutive of nonviolence, such as Arendt's conception of political power, can turn out to be violent.

## The Politicization of Distinctions Between Violence and Nonviolence

An action's being violent or nonviolent and how that action relates to other things depends upon interpretations that are problematized by politicized disagreement. For example, whether an actual collective action pertains to Arendt's sense of political power is nonviolent depends on interpretations, as shown by Chenoweth and Cunningham's (2013) empirical work, i.e., their Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes Data Project (NAVCO, hereafter). Their work implies that a nonviolent, concerted, political action cannot avoid being interpreted as "mixed" with violence. They define nonviolent resistance as "the application of unarmed civilian power using nonviolent methods such as protests, strikes, boycotts, and demonstrations, without using or threatening physical harm against the opponent". A violent action, in contrast, *uses* or *threatens physical* harm against the opponent. In the introduction to the NAVCO 3.0 dataset, Chenoweth et al. (2018) point out that, unlike the datasets of NAVCO 1.0 and 2.0′s gradational measure of collective political actions in terms of whether they are "primarily violent" or "primarily nonviolent," "NAVCO 3.0 is agnostic about whether campaigns are observably nonviolent or violent," and instead involves "event-based coding [which] allows for a mix of nonviolent and violent actions" (Chenoweth et al. 2018). The issue is that violence cannot be entirely eliminated from empirical analyses of seemingly nonviolent collective actions. Chenoweth, et al. admit that it is difficult to claim that an action is nonviolent. So, they allow for violence to be "mixed" in with what counts as a nonviolent collective action, instead of requiring such actions to be purely nonviolent.

Similarly, this mix of violence with nonviolence is addressed by Vahabzadeh (2019). He non-reductively takes a phenomenological approach, using the term "(non)violence" to indicate that violence and nonviolence are "intimately braided

concepts". He also outlines three kinds of violence: the hubristic, institutional, and structural-epochal, i.e. "phenomenal violence," which are each always phenomeno-logically contextualized within an epoché. However, all violence is hubristic insofar as violence violates by regionally imposing conditions, or imposes a will, and is an "an imposition of one mode of life, in its specific aspects, upon another". Violence also "den[ies] the motility of beings and the possibility of their re-emergence in various ways,…beget[ting] *violence as the reduction of not only the diversity of all but also the inner plurality of one*". So, violence reduces and imposes, and not only in instrumental ways. For example, Vahabzadeh refers to "economic isomorphism" as an example of "phenomenal violence" imposed by capitalism, which eliminates economic, cultural, and human diversity, excluding those who do not aim to achieve what capitalism defines as ideal. This non-instrumental, phenomenal violence reduces and imposes upon individuals experiencing their embodiment and situated-ness in the world as less than they would have been had the violence not occurred.

Vahabzadeh also addresses a collective act as an example of the interwoven char-acter of violence and nonviolence. Collective acts can be nonviolent, but because they bring about a transformation, they produce phenomenal violence, i.e., "dra-matic structural changes". Unlike Chenoweth, et al., who look for *physical* violence mixed with nonviolence, the transformation itself brought about by a nonviolent act, i.e. the unfolding consequences of the collective act, can themselves be experienced as phenomenal violence. The phenomenal violence that a collective action brings about involves both a "deworlding" and a "reworlding," as an individual's familiar-ity with their world degrades, and the individual begins to grasp the newly imposed reality. The collective act's phenomenal violence might not prima facie appear as violence, but is violence nonetheless because it deworlds and reworlds. This view of violence as that which reduces, imposes, deworlds, and reworlds depends on experi-ences of relationships. As Vahabzadeh claims, "all manifestations of violence are… context-specific and epistemologically bound". The non-reductive PCCCV that emerges here is politicized in relation to individuals who empathically, intersubjec-tively relate to experiences of collective actions that count as phenomenal violence. Not everyone will interpret physically nonviolent collective actions as phenomenally violent, but communities can emerge in relation to a shared conception of "(non)violence" contained within the PCCCVs of empathic individuals.

## In Conclusion: Then What is Violence?

I have attempted to outline main points concerning violence produced by a select group of theorists who explicitly characterize violence, and how conceptions of paradigm cases (or what is typical and taken for granted as commonsense) of vio-lence can politicize communities of individuals who empathize with the claims oth-ers make. The PCCCVs that emerge from contemporary literature on violence vary, but are politicizing because, in relation to individuals who intersubjectively share a PCCCV to the extent that they empathize with interpretations of what counts as violence, as kinds of violence, and as its relationship to nonviolence, individuals constitute politicized communities. One's PCCCV might only include instrumental

notions of violence, which leads to disagreement with the politicized community of individuals who also include non-instrumental notions of violence. The instrumental view might be more commonsense, taken for granted, and typical, in Schütz's sense, but a greater variety of kinds of violence, and justifications for kinds of violence can be empathized with, indicating one's association with various political parties, public institutions, and governmental organizations. One's PCCCV might only include negative evaluations of violence, but this ignores ways in which violence is affirmatively constitutive of some of what underlies our human existence. Or, one could approach violence more inclusively, and non-reductively embrace all the characterizations of violence discussed here. In each case, what an individual grasps as violence, and how instances of violence are interpreted, has the potential to bind individuals intersubjectively and politically in relation to other empathic individuals who think *violence* in similar ways.

Four points follow from this discussion: First, we should avoid reducing the concept of violence. If we expand beyond reductive approaches, we see how violence is constitutive of things, and not always in instrumental, or wrong ways. Reductive justifications, or legitimations of violence distract from efforts to ascertain what violence is in itself, and lead to political disagreements. These disagreements demonstrate a second point, namely that from perspectives, violent actions and events are defined *in relationships to other things*, which do not themselves define violence. Violence is a relational phenomena. Third, from the foregoing, we can generate an inductive list constitutive of a PCCCV. Violence can be interpreted in more ways than this list: as with Arendt, violence can be instrumental, and rational in relation to short-term goals; as with Greene, violence can be neurologically defined in relation to prototypical instances, and pragmatically justifiable, though wrong; as with Brennan, violence can be normatively justifiable as defensive violence, despite its wrongness; as with Merleau-Ponty, violence can be liberal or Marxist, an imposed expectation, a negation of consciousness, and evil; as with Liebsch, violence lacks a universal form but can be generalized as a violation, or as an impairment of human life, violation of integrity, violation of vulnerabilities; and as with Sartre, violence brings about negative effects, is unnatural, unlawful, decomposed, an unconditioned affirmation of freedom, an affirmation of a right, Manichaean, a demand, non-physical, linguistic, symbolic; and as with Staudigl, violence can be constitutive of meaning, destructive of meaning, subjectifying and de-subjectifying, and is always related to the body; and as with Vahabzadeh, violence is hubristic, relational, and phenomenal; and as with Chenoweth, et al. and Vahabzadeh, nonviolence cannot be clearly distinguished from violence conceptually, or in practice. Non-reductively speaking, this list constitutive of a PCCCV does not reduce violence to any singular equivalence claim because not one interpretation defines violence. Though we might have a generally shared PCCCV based on what is typical of violence, and based on what our predecessors pass on to us, and based on the experiences of others that we empathize with, any attempt to reduce violence to particular relationships, or not to do so results in the politicization of communities of individuals who share conceptions and evaluations of violence, particularly in relation to their historically-contextualized experiences of phenomena interpreted as violence, and in relation to their empathic relationships to others who have experiences of phenomena they interpret

as violence. Interpretations of and responses to violence are politically non-neutral, as each individual or community interprets individual instances of violence in their own ways, influenced by their situatedness in an unfolding historical context of empathic, intersubjective relationships.

The fourth point is that the ability to empathize with another's distinction between kinds of violence does not in principle mean that one shares with the other precisely the same PCCCV, or political ideology. For example, anarchists and Marxists may have agreed that their revolutionary, instrumental violence against the state's or capitalism's violence is justified as a means, but this agreement does not necessitate that they share the same political ideology, or PCCCV. There need not be an exact congruence between two individual's PCCCVs, since each individual encounters and experiences violence from within their own biographically-unfolding, historically-influenced context. A purely, politically neutral definition of violence would be one that does not favor or depend upon any particular political ideology. However, given that instances of violence are interpreted from within historically-influenced, intersubjective contexts, *a politically neutral definition is not possible for violence*. To suggest that a politically neutral conception of violence exists is to produce a claim that simply enters the continuously developing contest concerning what is violence. As shown by the theorists addressed above, violence is contextualized historically and culturally, and this implies political relationships. The impossibility of a politically neutral definition of violence cannot be proven with certainty, since what counts as violence can only be generalized from an inductive list of instances of violence constitutive of one's PCCCV. However, there is a strong indication that no politically neutral characterization of violence is possible. Based on this, I posit that we could non-reductively generalize violence as that which *makes way* for a flood of meaning and interpretations, or that opens up a void into which individuals assert their interpretations, contributing to the sense of violence. How individuals make sense of violence depends upon their intersubjective, empathic relationships to the historical, cultural influences to which they are exposed, and the politicized communities to which they belong. One way in which the discussed authors' claims concerning violence do agree is that they each participate in a continuously developing *disagreement* concerning violence. The practice of defining violence is itself an engagement in an ongoing battle to define violence for all time, and this engagement could itself be interpreted as a kind of violence insofar as the imposition of a decided upon definition of violence, whether reductively or non-reductively defined, can be experienced as a kind of violence, such as when one's own understanding of what counts as violence is thwarted by the imposition of another's definition of violence.

In conclusion, defining what counts as violence, and favoring instances of violence, or the use of nonviolence, impedes upon the possibility of a politically neutral definition for violence. Rather than endorse particular uses of nonviolence or violence simply because they satisfy our interests, we should look at distinctions between kinds of violence as *essentially contestable*. Acknowledgment that violence is essentially contested, despite generally shared conceptions of violence, enables us to grasp the situated, dynamically unfolding political differences and disagreements between individuals bound together into communities based on the overlapping,

shared paradigmatic cases that are interpreted as violence. Given disagreements beyond a generally shared PCCCV, we cannot know for certain that the violence, or nonviolence that we believe we have a justification to use is *really* what we interpret it as being, since others can always interpret it differently. The apparent inevitability of conflicting interpretations of violence, and of what kind of violence an instance of violence is, reveals the inevitability that conceptions of violence are politicized, particularly due to roles played by embodiment, empathy, and intersubjectivity in our coming to grasp violence. In the broadest sense, *violence makes way*, opening the door for diverse interpretations of actions, events and relationships. *Because we cannot get at violence itself, and can only interpret violence in relations, we therefore cannot avoid politicizing our conceptions of violence in our empathic, intersubjective relationships.*

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