Discussion

VIOLENCE: GARVER’S DEFINITION AND A DEWEYAN CORRECTION*

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Since he published it in the Nation in 1968, Newton Garver’s article, “What Violence Is,” has been frequently reprinted in philosophical anthologies. The editors of these anthologies present the article first in their sections on violence or on violence and something else, in the spirit of beginning the discussion of the topic with a definition of it. This seems consistent with Garver’s aims, for he writes that “what I want to do is to present a kind of typology of violence. . . . Unfortunately, I can’t begin saying what the types of violence are without saying first what it is I’m giving you a typology of. So let’s begin with a definition of violence” (pp. 256–57).

What sort of definition Garver intends to give he does not say. His typology distinguishes four main kinds of violence with about three examples of each. But it would not be fair to say that Garver intends to give a definition by exemplification, because, in the lines just quoted, he explains that the work of defining is prior to the presentation of types and examples.

At one point Garver seems to be attempting a definition by synonym, for he notes that “in many contexts the word ‘force’ is a synonym for the word ‘violence’” (p. 257). But finding ‘force’ an inexact synonym, Garver proposes ‘viola-

*A brief version of this paper was read at the meeting of the Eastern Division, American Philosophical Association, on December 27, 1974, with commentary by Professor Garver. This version profited considerably from Garver’s remarks and questions from the audience.


2. Rachels puts Garver’s article first in a two-article section on “Violence and Pacifism”; Rachels and Tillman put Garver’s article first in a five-article section on “Violence and Social Change”; Bierman and Gould put Garver’s article first in a three-article section on “Violence”; and Wasserstrom puts Garver’s article first in a six-article section on “Violence, Nonviolence, and War.”

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tion' as more nearly exact and of the same etymological origin. The common etymology suggests to Garver "that violence is somehow a violation of something . . ." (ibid.); but in looking for who and what is violated and how, Garver moves beyond the simple business of finding a single synonym to the more complex task of specifying plural properties. He thus decides that violence is the violation of those rights essential to personality.

Garver does not allow that he is defining by genus and specific difference, but what he has written seems so close to this that, in spite of his disclaimer, it seems fair to judge it in the light of this technique and its rules. When so judged, Garver's attempt appears to be deficient. The missing elements which would make for a more complete definition are suggested to me by a little-noticed essay on violence by John Dewey. What I find in Dewey is the specific difference needed to supplement the genus Garver correctly discovers. When my expanded definition is used to examine Garver's typology and examples, the typological framework is challenged and several of his examples rejected.

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Garver's first attempt to define violence considers force as its likely synonym. But he decides that, though force and violence might be the same thing in natural events, "violence in human affairs . . . is not the same thing as force" (ibid.). This is because examples of nonviolent uses of force are easy to find. Artificial respiration, surgery, and dentistry all use force without involving violence.

The more promising direction in which to look for a definition of violence, Garver believes, is suggested by its etymology and the similarity of the words 'violence' and 'violates.' "What is fundamental about violence is that a person is violated." Garver believes that, since persons have rights "which are undeniably, indissolubly, connected with . . . being a person" (ibid.), violence is the violating of personal rights. He holds that rights are of two kinds, attaching, on the one hand, to the body of the person and, on the other hand, to his dignity. Thus one has "the right to one's body," "the right to autonomy," "the right to dispose of or cope with the consequences of one's action," and "the right to the product of one's labor," the last two being expansions of what Garver means by "the right to autonomy" (p. 258).

Since "violence in human affairs comes down to violating persons," there are four different kinds of such violence "based on two criteria, whether the violence is personal or institutionalized, and whether the violence is overt or . . . covert and quiet . . ." (p. 259). As Garver proceeds, it becomes clear that "personal" violence is that perpetrated by an individual acting on his own, whereas "institutional" violence is perpetrated either by an individual or a group by virtue of the power vested in them by the group. Also "overt" seems to mean physical, whereas "covert or quiet" seems to mean psychological. Thus Garver offers these four kinds of violence (with examples): (1) overt personal violence—mugging, rape,
murder; (2) overt institutional violence—war, riots, “police riots”; (3) covert personal violence—violations of dignity, threats, Freudian and Marxian rebuffs; and (4) covert institutional violence—slavery, colonial oppression, ghetto life. These examples will be explained and examined as we proceed.

The problem with Garver’s analysis of the concept of violence arises from the extension implied by his definition. The definition is just too broad.

If violence is violating a person or a person’s rights, then every social wrong is a violent one, every crime against another a violent crime, every sin against one’s neighbor an act of violence. If violence is whatever violates a person and his rights of body, dignity, or autonomy, then lying to or about another, embezzling, locking one out of his house, insulting, and gossiping are all violent acts. But Garver appears to be aware that he is broadening the usual extension of the term and would perhaps accept my contention that these acts are violent on his definition. Thus, as he traces the right to property to “the right to the product of one’s labor,” he remarks that, “if we follow this line of thought to the extent that we consider one’s property as an extension of his person, the scope of the concept of violence becomes greatly enlarged . . .” (p. 258). It is so enlarged that even paternalism counts as violence for him, for it is the violation of a person by interfering with his “right to dispose of or cope with the consequences of one’s action” (pp. 258–59).

But this enlargement of the extension of the term comes at considerable cost, for there is simply no extension left for the term ‘nonviolent social wrong’ in Garver’s account. If what he says is true, our legislatures, judges, and juries are incorrect in punishing what they believe are violent crimes more severely than nonviolent ones. Rapists and little-old-woman tellers who embezzle from their banks to finance their churches’ mission activities are equally violent and deserve the same stringent penalties. The distinction between violent and nonviolent civil disobedience and resistance evaporates. In merely violating property rights as he proceeded, Martin Luther King becomes indistinguishable from H. Rap Brown.

There is a “language game” indicative of a “form of life” essential to civilized attitudes toward law and morality which I think it is important to preserve. It is a game of condemning with particular vehemence some forms of human action. In playing the game, we do not merely call the acts wrong or criminal; we use the word ‘violent’ to label them worthy of extreme obloquy. We are made uneasy by crime, but we worry to an extreme during waves of violent crime. We punish those who do wrong, but we reserve our most stringent punishments for those who do violent wrongs. These species of popular regard are sound, I believe, but my modifications of Garver’s definition of violence are necessary to explain and preserve the sense of them.

Garver’s unmodified account is mistaken, I believe, in proposing that violence may be directly psychological or covert and in holding that “psychological violence” is as much violence as physical violence. He wants his definition broad enough to include various forms of mental cruelty but makes it so broad as to exclude no interpersonal wrongdoing. Garver is mildly critical of the lack of conceptual precision about violence of Tolstoy, Gandhi, and Muste, great “advocates of nonviolence,” because when reading them, “it is not easy to avoid the
impression that 'nonviolence' is really just morality itself" (p. 256). But if my criticism is correct, Garver makes the obverse mistake, believing that violence is really just immorality itself.

Tolstoy, Gandhi, Muste, and Garver do this sort of thing, I suspect, because they are rightly indignant about personal and racial instances of psychological cruelty and injustice and want to condemn them in the strongest possible terms. One denounces his enemy more strongly by calling him cruel and violent than by calling him only cruel. But not all wrongs are violent wrongs, and not all evildoers do evil with violence. Wrong is no less wrong for being nonviolent, however; and those who denounce it should find in my argument why they have to adjust themselves to this, in spite of the rhetorical advantage they lose by making the adjustment.

There is no psychological or covert violence, I would claim, except by analogy and extension, simply because all violence is necessarily and by conventional definition overt or physical. Only this way of understanding violence preserves the condemnatory powers of the concept and the "language games" essential to civilized society based on it. Violence is properly and in its paradigm uses a physical and not a psychological notion. As Garver initially suspected but subsequently denied, violence is properly defined in terms of physical force rather than in contrast to it. He went wrong in arguing that, because they are not synonymous, violence and force are not definitendum and definiens. But no term is synonymous or coextensive with only one of the properties in its definition if it is properly defined by genus and difference. Just as 'triangle' and 'plane figure' are not synonymous, neither are 'violence' and 'force.' Still, a triangle might be a kind of plane figure, and violence might be a kind of force. What Garver needs and what John Dewey suggests to me is a description of the specific difference of violence as a kind of force. How is violence different from other physical forces?

Dewey's answer to this question is contained in his attempt to clarify and "discriminate the three conceptions of [force,] power or energy, coercive force, and violence" (Dewey, p. 488).

1. "Power or energy" is force to Dewey. Force "denotes effective means of operation; ability or capacity to execute, to realize ends. Granted an end which is worthwhile, and power or energy becomes a eulogistic term. It means nothing but the sum of conditions available for bringing the desirable end into existence. . . . It is force by which we excavate subways and build bridges and travel and manufacture. . . . Not to depend upon and utilize force is simply to be without a foothold in the real world" (ibid.).

2. Violence is force, power or energy gone wrong. "Energy becomes violence when it defeats or frustrates purpose instead of executing or realizing it. When the dynamite charge blows up human beings instead of rocks, when its outcome is waste instead of production, destruction instead of construction, we call it not energy or power but violence" (ibid., pp. 488–89).

3. "Coercive force occupies," Dewey believes,
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a middle place between power as energy or force and power as violence. To turn to the right as an incident of locomotion is a case of power [force]; of means deployed in behalf of an end. To run amuck in the street is a case of violence. To use energy to make a man observe the rule of the road is a case of coercive force. Immediately, or with respect to his activities, it is a case of violence; indirectly, when it is exercised to assure the means which are needed for the successful realization of ends, it is a case of constructive use of power. Constraint or coercion, in other words, is an incident of a situation under certain conditions—namely, where the means for the realization of an end are not naturally at hand, so that energy has to be spent in order to make some power into a means for the end in hand. [Ibid., p. 489]

In these three paragraphs, Dewey makes several points about the nature of violence which I believe improve and correct Garver’s account, though reciprocally Garver’s insistence upon talking about rights in matters of violence is an improvement and correction of Dewey.

First, Dewey’s paragraphs abound in examples of physical forces used and abused and thus return the discussion of violence to the exercise of physical force. In my opinion, Garver so spiritualizes violence that it becomes unrecognizable.

Second, Dewey shows that the proper definition of violence as a kind of physical force requires a distinction between the constructive and helpful use of such force and the destructive and harmful use of it. In fact he shows that violent force is customarily distinguished from two different kinds of constructive and helpful force: (1) force used advantageously in building, manufacturing, and other modes of improving natural materials for the service of man and (2) force used judiciously in compelling men to behave, to obey the law, to refrain from hurting others wantonly.

Physical force hurts men when it defeats their ends or purposes, as Dewey suggests. But it also hurts men by violating their rights, as Garver insists, though Dewey’s reference to human ends and purposes might be taken to imply this. The notions we need for an adequate definition of violence are these three: physical force, ends or purposes, and human rights. Violence is adequately defined as physical force defeating ends and rights. The correct genus, I believe, is in part what Garver says it is, the violation of human rights. But the specific difference which marks a violent interference with rights is that physical force is involved, as Dewey’s examples suggest. Moreover, it is often truer to say that violence interferes with one’s ends rather than with one’s rights, so Dewey’s references to human purposes defeated are appropriately part of the genus, too. Moreover, we think of violence as defeating natural as well as human ends, so the definition is appropriately general in stating only that ends are violated and in not stating what kind of ends.

The notions of physical force and purposes or ends suggest Aristotle’s efficient and final causes. In these terms, violence characterizes those situations in which the physical power of efficient causality somehow works against rather than for its proper final cause. Violence involves harmful as opposed to helpful natural or human forces.

There are two kinds of violence, depending upon whether the physical force violating someone’s rights or ends proceeds from a natural or human agent. In cases of natural violence to men, the causes of the force gone wrong are natural
agencies like lightning, floods, and moving masses of matter; and one stresses that human ends are defeated rather than that human rights are violated. Thus the damage done to one's property by a "violent" storm is a case of violence, as is the hurt sustained in an automobile accident or the fall from a cliff. In cases of human violence to men, the causes of the force gone wrong are human agents like robbers or rapists, and one stresses that human rights are violated, though this also means that human ends are defeated. One violates another's right by defeating his ends or by using force to achieve an end to which one has no right but the second man has. There is a close connection between ends and rights in human affairs.

By explaining violence in comparison with what he calls force and coercive force, Dewey helps to differentiate and explain these two sorts of violence. Natural violence compares with Dewey's force, for it is force gone wrong accidentally or defeating natural ends of which men approve. Human violence compares with Dewey's coercive force, for it is force purposely used on people not for their benefit or for the legitimate benefit of others but to defeat individual interests and the interest of society in the security and safety of all. Men as moral agents are ordinarily responsible only for the human violence they cause, though they can be responsible for their negligence in not averting natural violence. Usually, then, when I discuss violence in the remainder of this essay, it is human violence that I am talking about.

When 'violence' is used of natural events, the word is primarily descriptive, but not entirely so, for the notion of a violent storm or death works a powerful reaction in human emotion. When 'violence' is used of human actions, the word is primarily evaluative, but not entirely so, for the notion of a violent act involves a reference to force doing work, be it only the work of a criminal. Moreover, when violence occurs in natural calamities that befall men, it tends to be self-limiting; the men involved who survive take care lest it happen again. But when violence occurs in human crimes or quarrels, it tends to be self-expanding; the men involved tend to seek revenge or to regain the advantage they lost by being forced to suffer.4

Not all observers would call the same natural or human occurrences violent. This is not so much because they would disagree as to the fact that strong force is used or occurs as because they disagree on whether a legitimate end, purpose, or right is defeated or furthered by force. A pansy lover may see the frost which kills her beloved flowers as violent, but those of us with less stake in the consequences of the frost would not. Because men often disagree as to what rights they or others have, they cannot always agree as to whether force used to further those ends or exercise those presumed rights is violent. Discussions as to whether certain acts are violent or not might indicate advance in rights, then; and it might even be true that some social violence, the kind that makes newspaper headlines, might be a good sign, for a certain amount of so-called violence is inevitable and useful in readjusting patterns of rights. The fact that there is so much dispute about what

is violent indicates unsettlement in life and in philosophy as to what rights are and what rights there are.

Human violence involves physical force used to defeat human ends and abridge human rights, but it is not obvious how blatantly physical the force must be for the word to apply. Paradigm cases of it would be mugging, rape, and murder. All these acts involve the application of disabling amounts of physical force to one's body, and the force is applied explosively and quickly so that it attracts our attention and is completed before our attention span is exhausted. But violence may occur without our noticing it and over too long a period of time to be grasped in our brief attention spans. Violence is not always quick, loud, jolting, immediately painful, and unmistakably present. It injures, but not all who are shot are injured by lead bullets, for rubber bullets, air-rifle pellets, and even paper clips can do violence to us. And though the hurling of ever-larger missiles in war is a paradigm case of violence, bacteriological warfare or industrial pollution is violence, too. Thus algae in our water, smoke in our air, and viruses on our hands can all do violence to us, for all involve physical forces which frustrate at least the human end of living.

There are no degrees of rights, but there are degrees of importance among kinds of right and especially degrees of physical force. Accordingly, there are degrees of violence. Great force quickly, directly, and noticeably applied would be of the highest degree, with the lower degrees involving lesser, slower, more indirect, and less noticeable forces. But then, were one to stress the end or right violated, great force directly applied in wrenching away a lollipop would count as less violent than the slow, choking force of coal dust, breathed in over a miner's lifetime, finally causing death from emphysema.

That the force involved in violence is physical means that it affects bodies, however subtly. Ridicule can defeat one's aim to be happy, and fraud can violate one's right to hold property; but neither involves forces which impinge on its victim's body, and so neither is violent. Doing "psychological violence" to a person would be something like pushing his soul down the steps: there is a category mistake involved in both ways of speaking. Violence occurs to living bodies which, of course, behave in ways we call psychological and are explained through the notion of the soul; but what affects the psyche directly and not through the body, though it may be wrong, is not violence.

That there are physical causes which operate unseen and almost unfelt in doing violence to us no doubt encourages Garver and others to speak also of purely psychological violence, for psychological causes too are unseen. Dewey does this also. He "raises the question of whether there is a valid distinction between psychological force and physical force" and answers that "no such clear-cut distinction can be made," for tyrants rely on "psychological control" as well as physical force in ruling their people. He continues that, since "this psychological control is related to the possibility that physical force may be invoked, . . . it isn't easy to say where one leaves off and the other begins."

But Dewey’s argument admits too much. The psychological control he talks of is possible because of the threat of violence as a physical force, but it is not itself violent. Acting to avoid the disastrous effects of a threatened hurricane is not an instance of natural violence; neither is acting to avoid the injurious effects of threatened physical force an instance of human violence, though of course it is closely related. To argue otherwise, as Dewey and Garver do, is to lose the ability to distinguish violent from nonviolent wrong, to include too much in the category of violence, and to dilute hopelessly the condemnatory power of the concept.

What becomes of the tradition of nonviolence or nonviolent resistance in my definition of violence as physical force defeating ends and rights? I believe that absolute pacifists and proponents of nonviolence are in error and that my definition brings out how and why. All good men oppose the violent use of force because it defeats legitimate ends and violates important rights. Pacifists are among those good men, but their opposition is so indiscriminate that they throw out the baby with the bath water. Instead of opposing the use of violent physical force, they oppose the use of physical force, perhaps because they are trying to make themselves as much unlike those they oppose as possible. They take a contrary position more extreme than the contradictory opposition of the rest of us. Since the judicious use of physical force is, in my definition, morally acceptable, coercive force rather than violence, my definition allows for physically effective counterforce, which is not violence itself, to oppose violence. One can be nonviolent in opposing evil men, can still use force, need not abjure the defensive use of weapons, and can still be a moral man untainted by the violence one attacks.

When Garver’s four kinds of violence are examined in the light of Dewey’s three-part distinction and the definition it suggests to me, the reasons why Garver’s description is untenable become clearer. Two of his four kinds of violence, though related to violence, are understood to be not violence at all, though all the examples he uses are significantly helpful in making the distinctions which delimit the concept accurately.

1. Garver’s description of overt personal violence is almost correct. He says that the “overt physical assault of one person on the body of another is the most obvious form of violence” (p. 259). The examples he gives first are mugging, rape, and murder, all “clearly illegal” acts, which means to Garver that the force involved in them is used against personal rights. In my definition, force used to further or defend personal rights is not violent, and Garver seems at first to see this when he calls these acts illegal. But he then goes on to equate violence and force, the very thing he previously said one could not do, and defines any intentional act of force, even those protecting rights, as violent. He thus claims that “some acts of violence are intended as a defense of law or a benefit to the person whose body is beaten—e.g., ordinary police activity (not ‘police brutality’) and the corporal punishment of children by parents and teachers.” Garver considers one’s
act violent "whenever you do something to another person’s body without his consent," but he seems to drop the qualification of consent when he asks "the reader to ponder whether all sex acts are acts of violence" (ibid.). To Garver, then, a policeman restraining a criminal, a parent disciplining a child, and perhaps a person engaging in sex are all violent.

Now surely this is wrong; this is not the way the concept "violent" is commonly or properly used. The phrases 'police brutality,' 'child abuse,' and 'rape' exist in ordinary language to mark the point at which the proper use of these forces is exceeded. If Garver is correct, there is no way of making the distinction between excessive force and the appropriate and nonviolent amount.

Imagine this situation: an armed robber, angered at his victim’s hesitation in handing over his wallet, shoots him. At the same time a policeman, happening on the scene, realizing what is going on, and trying to stop the crime, shoots the armed robber. Both the armed robber and his victim die as a result of being shot, but only the perpetrator of the crime commits the human violence we condemn. The power of the pistol is exemplified in both cases, but the robber uses it to violate a right and so is humanly violent, whereas the policeman uses it to vindicate a right and so is not similarly violent. The activity of the criminal is violently altered in a natural sense, but it is false and misleading to say that the policeman does human violence to him. It is also true that the robber met a violent death, for it was not his purpose to die; but this does not mean that the policeman violently killed him, for it was not his purpose to prey on a right but to protect one. The armed robber does human violence but undergoes something like natural violence, for the policeman justly employs coercive force against him. Garver’s account offers no way to make these distinctions, yet these are the distinctions that matter in the sort of legal actions which typically follow these events.

This is not to say that every use of physical force by a policeman is immediately sanctified or automatically justified. If the policeman in the example above could have stopped the crime by using less than lethal force on the criminal, he was obliged to do so. The Chicago "police riots" at the Democratic National Convention in 1968 seem good examples of police violence, though some people mistakenly saw them as a proper use of coercive force simply because it was the police who employed it. Unfortunately, we sometimes need protection from our protectors. Policemen, like anyone else, may sometimes use physical force to violate the rights of others rather than to vindicate them.

2. The distinction between violence and coercive force also improves Garver’s discussion of overt institutional violence, as exemplified in war. He begins by saying that "in cases of war, what one group tries to do to another group is what happens to individuals in cases of mugging and murder. The soldiers involved in a war are responsible for acts of violence against the ‘enemy’ ” (p. 259). But the question arises: Is the soldier acting like the armed robber, or is he acting like the policeman? If he is the soldier of the aggressor nation, he acts like the armed robber and performs an unjustified and violent act, though he is responsible for this violence only if he realizes that the war is unjust. If he is the soldier of the nation attacked, he acts like the policeman and justifiably uses coercive force. True, there is a sense in which the bullets and bombs of the nation attacked are as
much responsible for violence as those of the attacking nation, for any bomb or bullet signifies energy destroying and wasting rather than developing and furthering human ends and life. The point is, however, that, even if war is naturally violent and involves deliberate human violence, there is a further difference as to the moral quality of the force used in aggressive as opposed to defensive warfare. The aggressor kills by an act of human violence but is killed by an act of coercive force; and any man's death, be he guilty or innocent, can be described as a naturally violent event, since all death can be considered as the defeat of finalities.

3. Since Garver defines "covert or quiet" violence as psychological and tends to say it is nonphysical, it is not violence at all in my way of defining it. Still, Garver's examples are close to violence. His first example concerns a girl who went to a Friday night dance and returned home from it only after daybreak Saturday. She then admitted to her concerned parents that she had spent the night with a married Air Force lieutenant. The parents considered an extreme punishment necessary and, giving the girl, Linda Ault, a .22-caliber pistol, ordered her to shoot her beloved pet dog. Instead of shooting the dog, Linda put the pistol to her right temple and killed herself.

Garver explains the fact that the police filed no charges against the parents by the fact that the latter "did no physical damage to Linda. But . . . they really did terrible violence to the girl. . . . Of course one must agree that Linda did violence to herself, but that is not the whole account of the violence in this case. The parents did far more violence to the girl than the lieutenant, and the father recognized that when he said to a detective, 'I killed her. I killed her. It's just like I killed her myself?'" (p. 261).

Garver talks about three acts of violence here: (a) her parents did violence to Linda; (b) Linda did violence to herself; and (c) the lieutenant did violence to Linda. I submit that there are problems with denoting any of these three acts violent in Garver's intended sense of human violence, even though Linda's death was certainly a naturally violent event.

a) I believe that Garver's main point is that her parents did violence to Linda. But if violence is using physical force on a person to defeat his or her rights or ends, this is not so. The parents did not use physical force on Linda, even though their punishment of her required her to use physical force on her dog for no legitimate end, which would constitute violence to the dog. The parents were wrong in designing an inappropriate and excessive punishment for Linda, not in doing violence to her. Their punishment was unjustified, for it did not fit her offense.

Linda seemed to be reasoning better about punishment than her parents were. She must have seen herself in a moral dilemma in which, from her point of view,

6. I say "tends" because he is not clear, perhaps not consistent, on this point. He holds that forms of covert or quiet violence "do not necessarily involve any overt physical assault" (p. 260). In his first case, the violent persons "did no physical damage to" their victim, though "they really did terrible violence to" her. In his other examples, no physical force is used, though in one of the examples it is threatened. Judging from Garver's examples, then, it would seem that covert violence is necessarily not physical rather than "not necessarily . . . physical."
her death was preferable to that of her innocent pet. Killing the dog would be like
punishing it; yet she committed the offense, so she at least would correct her
parents on the one issue of who should be punished, though her suicide showed
that she was in as much error as they on how she should be punished.

Though it did not in this case, punishment often involves physical force used
on a person against his or her wishes. If it is so bad a punishment as to use
physical force against a person’s rights, rights which the offender did not lose in
committing his offense, then it is no longer punishment but violence. The concept
of violence is thus close to failures to punish correctly, and this explains how one
could be mistaken about whether Linda’s parents were violent to her. It also
suggests that our—or any—penal system which relies heavily on physical force
may often be wreaking violence on our prisoners against their rights rather than
righteously punishing them to protect our rights.

b) Garver also holds that “of course one must agree that Linda did violence
to herself.” If he means human violence, the point is not so certain. In human
violence, a human agent employs physical force to defeat a person’s rights or aims.
If this is so, a person like Linda can do violence to herself only if she has no right
to take her own life or to seek her death. The right to life would then be an
inalienable right, one that a person cannot give up even if she wants to. But
whether the right to life is thus inalienable is disputable; and insofar as it is,
whether Linda Ault did violence to herself is disputable.

There is yet another problem in saying that one can do violence to him- or
herself. It is in the fact that doing human violence implies a dyadic relationship,
an agent and a patient. It is not clear whether the same person can be both agent
and patient and do violence to oneself. This is analogous to the problem of
whether one can be unjust to oneself or deceive oneself.

Even if her parents caused Linda to do violence to herself, it still does not
follow that they did violence to her. Cruel punishments with such violent conse-
quences are indeed horrible but are not themselves violence, though they are
connected with it as cause is to effect. Linda’s father was speaking more accurately
when he said, “It’s just like I killed her,” than he was in his more abbreviated and
hyperbolic “I killed her.” His action was violent only in the extended, analogous
sense of causing violence in another, just as food is healthful in the sense of
causing health in the one who eats it by an analogy of attribution.

c) Garver also claims that the lieutenant did violence to Linda. In the news
item from which Garver gets his information about the case, if he quotes it in its
entirety, there is no suggestion at all that Linda was raped. At most, she was
seduced. If sexual intercourse had been physically forced upon Linda, against her
freedom and right not to consent, the act would be violent and an instance of rape.
But if Linda gave the lieutenant the right to her body, even if her consent was
reluctant and guilt filled, then she was nonviolently seduced. Perhaps it was not
Linda’s better self that consented, the self reflecting on the event the next day; but
if the self of the moment—wheedled, tricked, and mistaken though it was—
consented, then there was no unjust physical force used upon her, no violation of
her rights, and no violence done her.

Besides the Linda Ault case, Garver offers other examples of covert personal
violence, including the "Freudian rebuff" and the "Marxian rebuff." These consist in refusing to take seriously one's opponent's stated reasons for his actions or judgments and in explaining them as the results of his unresolved oedipal conflict or of the dictates of his class interest. Garver is correct in that such treatment violates a person's dignity or autonomy by refusing to accept him as self-ruling and free. Such treatment often begets violence in retaliation, too; but then rebuffs are not violent themselves, even though they cause it. It is important to understand that many of the causes of violence may not themselves be violent. Perhaps because many of the causes of violence are violent, there is confusion about it. But just as the cause of high tides is the moon, not high tides, and the cause of tuberculosis is a bacillus, which does not itself have tuberculosis, the cause of violence need not itself be violent.

Garver's account comes closer to being correct in considering threats to be instances of violence, and threats are psychological rather than physical; but I believe that the account is still wrong. It seems right because the threat of violence is legally as violent as is physically carrying out the threat. But threats are not themselves violence, though they are the frequent antecedents of it, are promises of it, and are so closely associated with violence that they have the same effect as it does. This is why the law classifies a threat of violence as violence, because it has the same illegal effect. The armed robber who threatens to shoot his victim usually has the same success in obtaining his wallet as does the armed robber who does shoot him. Both achieve their illegal and immoral end. Still, the first uses morally preferable means to that end. The man who shoots his victim and takes his wallet is worse than the man who only threatens to shoot to get the wallet, precisely because he is actually violent, whereas the second is only potentially so. Our laws, courts, juries, and sentencing procedures recognize this quite well.

My point that threats of violence cause or promise violence but are not instances of violence themselves can be seen through an analogy. A law or command may be obeyed because those subject to it fear the promised punishment for disobedience. The fear of punishment is quite real. Still, no one would say that the threat of punishment or the fear of it is punishment itself. Neither would it be true that the threat of violence or the fear of it is violence itself.

4. The examples of covert institutionalized violence which Garver uses include slavery, colonial oppression, and ghetto life. They are established by combinations of psychological rebuffs and threats. If so, the supposed violence in them is only violence by extension or analogy, as in threats and rebuffs.

What Garver seems to be saying is that a man who comes to consider himself a natural slave is first made a slave against nature by being constantly put down, not taken seriously as a person, not allowed freedom of choice. If these rebuffs cause reactions in the slave, if he becomes difficult to handle, threats of violence to him complete the job of forcing him to accept his oppressed position. Slaves might vary, then, between accepting their inferior positions voluntarily and begrudgingly, voluntarily because their wills are bent by psychological rebuffs, begrudgingly because whatever self-will remains is subjected to fear by threats. Since the class of slaveholders regularly uses both rebuffs and threats to keep down the class of slaves and since effectively rebuffed or threatened slaves aid in rebuffing
and threatening other slaves, these rebuffs and threats—unlike more personal and occasional ones—do not often call out the reaction of violence. Still, if violence does come, it is the effect of the rebuffs and threats. The rebuffs and threats are not the violence; they are the cause of it. These new cases, then, are correctly analyzed in the same way as the last group, and the same correctives apply to Garver’s analyses. Though it is certainly wrong to make a people, nation, or race think of itself as inferior and without ability, if this wrong is done without physical force, it is not a violent one, even when it leads to the violence of riot or revolution. Otherwise, our moral intuitions notwithstanding, little Miss Eva, who regularly treated her slaves as if they were not her equals, was just as violent as Simon Legree, who regularly mistreated slaves by beating and whipping them.