Philosophy – The Luxurious Supplement Of Violence?

Stream 17: ‘How To Do Things With Philosophy’

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Abstract

In many of the growing number of accounts of workplace violence there exists a particular sense of certainty; a certain confidence in what violence ‘really’ is. With these accounts, philosophy appears unnecessary – and even luxurious – in the face of the obvious and bloody reality of workplace violence. This paper suggests that one outcome is an absence of a sense of curiosity about the concept of violence in many typical commentaries on workplace violence. Through a turn to philosophy it is suggested, we might possibly enquire into other senses of violence that may otherwise be erased. However, weary of simply ‘adding’ philosophy, this paper also begins to sketch out some possible consequences a philosophy-violence connection might have for doing things with philosophy and organisation.

Introduction

Given the centrality of organisations to many aspects of our lives, it is perhaps, not surprising that a perceived ‘epidemic’ of workplace violence should create consternation amongst organisational members, regulatory and research bodies and the community in general. Yet in the rush to protect against workplace violence it appears that extreme and highly visible incidents of physical violence have come to stand in for what violence ‘really is’. Such an almost metonymical reliance on a ‘self evident’ or ‘obvious’ representation of violence poses a number of problems and limitations that are far from straightforward. Falling back on a self-evident representation of violence to frame discussions risks erasing, normalising or marginalizing other instances of possible workplace violence.

As ‘philosophers’ and members of ‘philosophical institutions’ how we represent violence will have political, ethical and economic consequences for how policy is made, resources allocated and personal relationships enacted. It will have important implications for considering the context in which violence is experienced and ‘tolerated’ or ‘rejected’ by members of society. Yet how are we to address the tensions between recognising the possible linguistic or structural dimensions of violence without denying the incidents of physical violence on the job? And how might recognising these dimensions of violence affect our conceptions of ‘safety’, ‘ethics’, ‘morality’, ‘law’ or ‘justice’? These issues seem to go to the heart of our understanding of our relationship with philosophy.

With these concerns in mind, this paper considers the possible implications of philosophical engagement with the issue of workplace violence. In particular, it considers not only how an engagement with philosophy might contribute to a more critical discussion of workplace violence but also how such an engagement might help us reconsider our relationship with philosophy. This discussion, however, is not limited to how we might philosophise workplace violence. An engagement with a broader philosophical tradition not only offers fruitful lines of critique but can also provide for alternative courses of action. The aim of this paper therefore, is not only to explore the merits of a

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1 See, for example, Richardson & May (1999).
philosophy-violence connection but also to begin to consider the possibilities that disarming this connection might raise.

In pursuing these concerns, this paper is organised into three sections. The first section outlines the absence of ‘philosophy’ in current discussions about workplace violence and its implications. The second section proposes some different representations of violence that may provide headings that encourage us to see violence as other than an outbreak on a peaceful scene. In the final section, the discussion is shifted to consider the impact a philosophy-violence connection might have for our relationship to philosophy.

**Workplace Violence Limited**

In *For an Ethic of Discomfort*, Foucault recollects Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s definition of the central task of philosophy: “never to consent to being completely comfortable with one’s own presuppositions” (Foucault, 1979/1997: 448). Drawing on Foucault’s recollection, we could take up the question, what is philosophy, with the possible response that it is a practice and an ethos, a state or condition of character (Rabinow, 1997). In this sense, we can take up philosophy as a way of posing questions about the constitution of violence. Questions that cultivate our attention to the conditions under which things become ‘evident’, whereby they cease to be objects of our attention and therefore seemingly fixed, necessary and unchangeable (Rabinow, 1997).

Behind such a desire to question things, suggested Foucault in an interview, lay curiosity (Foucault, 1980/1997). Despite any stigma, curiosity, stated Foucault, was a word he liked.

It evokes “care”; it evokes the care one takes of what exists and what might exist; a sharpened sense of reality, but one that is never immobilised before it; a readiness to find what surrounds us strange and odd; a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same things in a different way; a passion for seizing what is happening now and what is disappearing; a lack of respect for the traditional hierarchies of what is important and fundamental (Foucault, 1980/1997: 325).

Taking up Foucault’s comments we could say that there is an absence of curiosity about workplace violence. An absence of questions that cause us discomfort with our presuppositions. Instead, there exists a sense of certainty about ‘what violence is’; a certainty that it not simply disinterested or motivated by reason, knowledge or truth. This sense of certainty, I suggest has disappeared the concept of violence as notoriously contested and subject to historical change (Keane, 1996) while reinforcing violence as a deplorable outbreak on an otherwise peaceful scene.

We could begin to explain such an absence in the face of the obviousness of what violence is. Incidents of workplace violence – especially those involving multiple homicides – are now well documented and publicised by the news

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2 This review first appeared in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in April 1979.
3 This interview first appeared in *Le Monde* (April 6th – 7th, 1980).
media. When we see pictures of the crime, with the tell-tale flashing lights and police “do not cross” tape from the ‘live’ helicopter shot on TV that night, it is instantly recognisable as an example, albeit an extreme one, of workplace violence. Many of the markers of violence are there; a clearly identifiable perpetrator, victim(s), and obvious physical injuries.

Such dramatic coverage of the ‘reality’ of workplace violence is also evident in segments of the management literature. Some articles, for example Armed and Dangerous at Work (Filipczak, 1993), Murder Inc (Windau & Toscano, 1994) and When Charles Manson comes to the Workplace (Segal, 1994) provide sensational titles. Others claim that workplace violence has ushered in the dawn of “the age of rage” (McCune, 1994), while describing the workplace as “the new war zone” (Coco, 1998) or a “battlefield” with “employees waging war” (McCune, 1999). In all of these reports there seems little doubt as to what violence is. Philosophy, it would seem, appears unnecessary – and even luxurious – in the face of the obvious and bloody reality of workplace violence.

In addition to such reporting, there is a growing body of literature offering employers and employees a range of practical and regulatory interventions aimed at solving the problem of workplace violence. A highly prominent (and profitable) ‘industry’, for example, has sprung up in response to a surge in demand for a ‘safe’ workplace. In the United States companies are reported to be hiring “an emerging army of consultants” from a variety of backgrounds including motivational speakers, forensic psychiatrists, and former FBI behavioural specialists (Larson, 1994: A1). These, and other ‘experts’, peddle an array of books, training videos, CD-ROMS, workshops and seminars, all designed (and marketed) to be essential in the battle to protect the workplace. While managers themselves are directly implored to establish anti-violence policies and crisis management teams, to instigate drug and alcohol screening programmes, undertake extensive background checks on prospective employees and to review their security hardware.

The effect of this coverage and responses to it, argue Bulatao & VandenBos (1996), has been to elevate workplace violence into a distinct category synonymous with disgruntled employees or former employees wrecking deadly vengeance on their superiors and co-workers. Similarly, Larson (1994: A1) writing for the Wall Street Journal reports that the merging of shocking statistics and gruesome reporting has infused the common wisdom not only with the conviction that workplace violence is “rampant” but invariably the culprits are “disgruntled workers or ex-employees.” For many writers, then, workplace violence is the scenario whereby the ‘nut with a gun’ singles out for violence their immediate supervisor, the human resource manager or fellow co-worker in an act of revenge or frustration.⁴

We should be wary, however, of any suggestion that the lethal employee is all that there is or that such a representation of workplace violence has not gone uncontested. A number of scholarly, or at least more sensitive, accounts of

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workplace violence have emerged that not only directly challenge this representation but also attempt a much more theoretical reading of workplace violence. Consequently, terms such as ‘organisation-motivated aggression’ and ‘organisation-motivated violence’ (O’Leary-Kelly et al., 1996), ‘organisation violence’, ‘organisation violation’ (Hearn, 1994; Hearn & Parkin, 2001), ‘workplace aggression’ (Baron & Neuman, 1996, 1998; Folger & Baron, 1996; Neuman & Baron, 1998), ‘workplace crime’, ‘work-related violence’ (Bulatao & VandenBos, 1996) and ‘occupational violence’ (Mullen, 1997) are just some of the concepts used to make sense of ‘workplace violence’. Yet many of these accounts seem to leave intact the sense of certainty surrounding violence and thus fail to problematise our confidence in, or familiarity with, ‘what violence is’.

Consequently, we might argue that an absence of curiosity has left us with a very familiar concept of violence. Familiarity, in the sense of violence as interpersonal, physical and illegitimate. A deviant set of behaviours to be eradicated through a series of familiar strategic interventions. Workplace violence becomes reduced to a technically rational set of “procedural issues about workforce selection, early detection of potential troublemakers, adequacy of liability insurance, risk management and effective exclusion of potential as well as actual offenders” (Mullen, 1997: 22). And it is this familiarity that erases questions about the constitution of violence that might lead us to ask other critical questions about the organisation of work and the work organisation beyond individual pathography.

Arguably, the familiarity of violence as interpersonal and illegitimate has encouraged explanations of workplace violence to focus on the individual and the eradication of such deplorable behaviour. In these explanations, the focal point has tended around the exposition of the personality and motivations of the ‘perpetrator’, typically with a view to profiling the violent individual. In an attempt to present a “theoretical profile” and recommendations for “how employers might better respond to problem employees”, Fox & Levin (1994), exemplify some of the erasures. In their profile, Fox & Levin (1994), recognise the ‘structural aspects’ – declining job markets, changing work patterns, radical shifts in demographics – that provide the employment context, but primacy is given to the way the individual deals in a dysfunctional way with these changes. According to Fox & Levin (1994: 24) the problem lies in the way that “in this age of diminished individual responsibility, more and more workers refuse to accept blame for their own incompetence.” In other words, the employee has failed to come to terms with the ‘changing world of work’ and is looking for someone to blame. For Fox & Levin (1994: 26), the problem of workplace violence can firmly be laid at the feet of the dysfunctional, embittered and socially isolated employee; “the middle aged loner who is full of resentment and blame.”

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6 One notable exception, whose insights this paper draws on, is the work of Jeff Hearn and Wendy Parkin who have attempted to carry through on their observation that “putting ‘violence’ and ‘organisations’ together problematises both concepts” (Hearn, 1994: 737).
Representing workplace violence in terms of the dysfunctional, embittered employee, where the analytical focus is on their personality, motivation and rationality, acts to insulate the organisation and the organisation of work from the problem of workplace violence. The violence perpetuated by the dysfunctional individual becomes represented as an unexpected outburst extinguishable by commissioning the right techniques. The broad structural features are either marginalised as an unexamined given, or evacuated as if workplace violence did not take place in a milieu of class, race or gender (Hearn & Parkin, 2001). Organisations are represented as reactive to violence where management knowledge and the managerial response is a positive part of the solution rather than a possible part of the problem (Hearn & Parkin, 2001).

Violence as an individual, isolated and illegitimate moment encourages us to see workplace violence as a problem for organisations rather than a problem of organisation. Focusing on the illegitimate physical violence as an isolated moment risks dissuading us from identifying the conditions of legitimation of any relations of domination, and the violences that are condoned as part of the ‘normal’ and ‘healthy’ functioning of a society such as ours. Violence represented as illegitimate risks making it difficult to resist the ‘good’ structural violence inherent in the status quo but nevertheless experienced as injustice and brutality at particular intersections of race class, ethnicity, nationality, gender and age (Anglin, 1998). Drawing attention to the politics of legitimation of violence, throws off any belief that simply because particular acts are considered legitimate, this is not necessarily sufficient grounds for not seeing them as violent.

Representing workplace violence as illegitimate, cast in a juridical understanding, erases other, perhaps more subtle, yet no less nefarious, expressions of violence as trivial or an accepted or acceptable part of working life. This is often exasperated in empirical studies where data is typically collected by law enforcement or other government agencies. Framing workplace violence in terms of juridical definitions of violence risks rendering workplace violence synonymous with ‘crime at work’. Consequently, the kinds of violences recorded by Yossi Berger (1999) in his time as an occupational health and safety officer where the greatest danger to an employee was not from ‘disgruntled employees’ but from the work itself become an intrinsic, acceptable feature of the daily risks associated with certain occupations (Perrone, 1999). The “occupational reality” (Perrone, 1999: 2) of violence as ‘part of the job’ erases questions related to the potential harm of organisational practices and workplace management, while further reinforcing the impression of organisations being affected by violence rather than possibly constitutive of it.

While focusing on the illegitimate nature of violence may result in respect for traditional hierarchies, the ‘obviousness’ of violence as physical also serves to erase or marginalize other conceptions of violence. The sorts of violence, for example, that does not necessarily leave its mark on the body. The focus on discrete or sensational incidents of physical violence seals off the repeated
and systematic forms of violence, for example the on-going instances of harassment, bullying and mobbing. While privileging physical representations of violence as the ‘real’ instances of violence denies the performative aspects of language. Instances of verbal abuse are considered secondary or in support of the ‘real’ episodes of physical violence.

Along with the representation of violence as physical, illegitimate and interpersonal, it is also not uncommon to see comments that frame workplace violence as a “new” problem. Some even suggest that workplace violence ‘began’ with a particular event.\(^7\) To represent workplace violence as a ‘new’ event serves to deny and evacuate any historical relationship between violence and work. This is not to suggest that the ‘object’ of workplace violence has remained constant throughout time, but to inoculate against any imagined sense that violence has not been present in the organisation of work. Hearn & Parkin (2001: 34), for example, write of early nineteenth century capitalist development centred around industrialisation and the detailed conduct of the labour process of the British mine and factory as “a clearly and openly violent system, not least through the use of violent discipline in the factory.” Edwards (1979: 19) writing of the American context comments that physical violence was also a feature of controlling workers during the nineteenth century. Bosses exercised power on a personal basis by “intervening in the labour process often to exhort workers, bully and threaten them, reward good performance, hire and fire on the spot, favour loyal workers, and generally act as despots, benevolent or otherwise.”

But tracing out the history(ies) of a violence-work connection is more than realising the ‘organisation’ as a site of interpersonal violence. In a project exemplified by Marx, for example, we find a long history chronicling the systematic violence of the working day. Workplace violence as a ‘new’ problem writes out any consideration of the organisation of work as a historical narrative of domination and exploitation. Consequently, the result of accounts of workplace violence that distance themselves from viewing workplace violence as historical and sociological in favour of an ahistorical individual pathology is a continuance of the representation of the organisation as being affected by violence rather than possibly contributing to, constructing or reproducing violence (Hearn & Parkin, 2001).

Thus, if we were to dispense with a sense of curiosity about violence, not only is there a dulling of the critical faculty, but such a move would also appear to break one of the basic rules of method by taking for granted a ‘common sense’ interpretation of the very phenomenon to be analysed. Falling back on a familiar representation of violence is not a turn to the ‘simple’, ‘obvious’ or ‘natural’ but a way of sense making that is, in this case, partial and political. In addition to reproducing an unquestioning of things, an absence of curiosity prematurely foreclose other significant representations of violence.

\(^7\) For examples of workplace violence beginning with a particular event see, for example, Johnson & Indvik (1996a; 1996b).
Supplementary Violences
Restoring a sense of curiosity to discussions about workplace violence through a (re)turn to philosophy might offer more than a moment to destabilise violence as a set of undesirable behaviours. How violence comes to take on the meanings that it does and the material effects that this produces are not issues of irrelevance. A (re)turn to philosophy would seem to firmly locate violence within the various systems of ethics, law and justice. Research undertaken by feminist writers in particular has demonstrated how legal decisions about violence as well as decisions made by other professionals and researchers potentially omit acts which many people in the course of their everyday life understand, and experience as being violent (Richardson & May, 1999).

Thus, although it is possible to take up the notion of philosophy as a way of asking critical questions, we might also take up philosophy as the creation of concepts. Engaging with a broader tradition of writers on violence produces an encounter with a series of influential concepts and currents of thought that have important insights for thinking about workplace violence. In the previous section one of the problems I identified was the way that other possible philosophical configurations of violence had been drained away. Consequently, the issue in this section becomes; what sort of concepts might we reactivate through an engagement with philosophy to imagine alternative representations of violence? Here we might suggest that the importance of problematising our confidence in the concept of violence lies in the potential to facilitate other headings. In what follows, I want to sketch out three such possibilities.

Violent Speech Acts
Despite our temptation to think of violence as physical, violence does manifest itself in non-physical acts. As almost all school children know, words are powerful weapons to be wielded in the classroom and the playground. Words can, in the act of their saying, inflict harm. Words wound.

Within the domain of linguistic philosophy, the theory of speech acts has provided an influential framework for thinking about this kind of violence. One of the key premises within speech act theory is that words do not simply describe, but also act or perform in significant ways. Building on the work of J.L. Austin, words do not merely, ‘describe’ or ‘report’ in the act of merely saying something, but are performative. As Austin (1975: 12 emphasis in original) puts it, there are some cases and instances when to say something is to do something.

It is perhaps in the work of Judith Butler that we find an exemplary use of speech act theory in relation to thinking about violence. In Excitable Speech, Butler (1997: 50) critically analyses the way speech acts can inflict harm, the sorts of harm inflicted by “hateful, racist, misogynist and homophobic speech.”

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8 See, for example Kelly (1988).
Emphasising the contextual nature of violent speech acts, while also problematising suggestions of a sovereign performative, Butler indicates the significance of language not only in the construction of subjectivity, but also in the dismantling of identity by using language to position subjects as inferior. As Butler (1997: 5) writes, “if language can sustain the body, it can also threaten its existence.”

To think of violent speech acts is not to envisage language as utterances that support, justify or legitimate physical violence. Language is not a ‘do nothing’ domain that reinforces or reflects ‘real’ violence. Language is not a promise of things to come. It is the words themselves that attack, wound and injure (Catley & Jones, 2002). As Butler (1997: 9) makes clear, “language is not a substitute for the experience of violence. It enacts it own kind of violence.”

Such a consideration of violence problematises the tradition of language as external to violence. A tradition whereby language is transparent, the route to truth and freedom where speech is the antithesis of violence (Hanssen, 2000). Such a representation troubles the distinction that the solution is simply ‘more communication’, where conflict can be resolved through clearer or more eloquent articulation. Violent speech acts also problematises any suggestion that incidents of bullying or harassment, which might be significantly verbal in nature, are somehow ‘less serious’.

**Structural Physical Violence**

With both physical violence and violent speech acts our attention is drawn to violence as an interperson al and relatively isolated moment. In doing so our gaze risks being diverted from violence that cannot be traced back to an actor. Consequently, it is at least as meaningful to draw out the structural aspects of violence. To begin to identify the sorts of systematic and patterned relationships of violence that might sustain a healthy society; the sorts of violence that inhabit the peaceful scene. This is not a mysterious form of violence.

Such structural physical violence seems to the kind of violence Max Weber is referring to when discussing the relationship between violence and the state. In Weber’s analysis, the state is defined as “a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (Weber, 1919/1947: 78 emphasis in original). Here, with Weber, the ground is shifted from thinking about violence solely in terms of an individualised account of physical violence to include the patterned and structural nature of physical violence (Catley & Jones, 2002). Thus, violence is not limited to individualised instances of, for example, physical assault but includes the violence that is ‘built in’ to structures or institutions.

Perhaps the paradigmatic examples of structural violence might be the kind of violence deployed by an army or police force which for Althusser (1970/1971: 143) functioned “by violence” and therefore considered part of the (repressive) State Apparatus. We might also return to Marx’s (1867/1996) vivid accounts of
the violence inherent in the working day and modern manufacture.\textsuperscript{10} The sorts of violence, wrote Engels, where one “meets a too early and an unnatural death, one which is quite as much a death by violence as that by the sword or bullet” (Engels, 1845/1996: 394) or the sort of violence prevalent in many other physically demanding and hazardous jobs captured, for example, in the evocative photography of Earl Dotter (Dotter, 1998).

Structural physical violence however, as some of these examples indicate, is rarely seen as violence. In part this is due to its repetition, but perhaps more significantly to the way that it is taken to be legitimate. Yet as Garver (1968) argues, the fact that policemen, parents or teachers invoke socially defined roles when they resort to physical violence, cannot erase the violence inflicted. Through Weber we begin to think about the conditions of legitimation of any particular set of relations of domination, and in identifying the violence that is condoned as part of the ‘normal’ and ‘healthy’ functioning of a society such as ours.\textsuperscript{11} Consequently, calling attention to structural physical violence encourages us to attend to the politics of the legitimation of violence, while indicating that the shroud of legitimacy is not sufficient to cover the violence done.

\textit{Structural Symbolic Violence}

While focusing on structural physical violence and the politics of legitimation provides a valuable site for thinking about violence, there is a tendency to privilege the physical and underplay the symbolic aspects of structural violence. Returning to the concerns of the speech act theorists, we might supplement a ‘Weberian’ understanding to offer a broadened conception of violence to include both structural and symbolic violence. Here we might think of Nietzsche’s story of an encounter between Zarathustra and a young man. A story that poetically captures the operation of symbolic violence.

Zarathustra grasped the tree beside which the young man was sitting and spoke with him thus: If I wanted to shake this tree with my bare hands I should be unable to do it. But the wind, which we cannot see, torments and bends it where it wishes. It is invisible hands that torment and bend us the worst. Now it is with men as it is with this tree (Nietzsche, 1883-1885/1969: 69).

It is this type of domain that has been opened up and explored in the works of Pierre Bourdieu.\textsuperscript{12} In Bourdieu’s analysis he focuses on the ways that symbolic practices exercise their own type of violence – “a gentle invisible form of violence” (Thompson, 1984: 43). Bourdieu (1972/1977: 192) argues that “gentle, hidden exploitation is the form taken by man’s exploitation of man [sic] whenever overt brutal exploitation is impossible.” Thus, in symbolic violence, Bourdieu (1972/1977: 192) identifies, “the gentle, invisible form of

\textsuperscript{10} For instances of such vivid accounts of violence see Marx’s (1867/1996: 253 and 484) reporting of Dr Arledge’s comments on the potters of Staffordshire, or the comments by Dr White on the horrific accidents at one particular scutching mill.

\textsuperscript{11} Here we might wish to consider the domain opened up by the question posed by Derrida, “How are we to distinguish between this force of the law, … and the violence that one always deems unjust?” (Derrida, 1990: 927).

\textsuperscript{12} For introductions to Bourdieu’s thinking on symbolic violence, which recurs in many of his works, see, for example, Bourdieu (1972/1977; 1977/1991; 1998/2001).
violence, which is never recognised as such, and is not so much undergone as chosen, the violence of credit, confidence, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, gratitude, piety."

Through the deployment of the concept of symbolic violence, Bourdieu tries “to make visible an unperceived form of everyday violence” (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1991/1994: 266). This violence is the most difficult to see because not only is it taken to be legitimate, it is also not overt or obviously physical. Or, in Thompson’s (1984: 59 emphasis in original) reframing, symbolic violence “is the exercise of domination through communication in such a way that the domination is misrecognised as such and thereby recognised as legitimate.” The resultant domination is, contends Bourdieu “something you absorb like air, something you don’t feel pressured by; it is everywhere and nowhere, and to escape from that is very difficult” (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1991/1994: 270).

In keeping with Bourdieu’s theme, several writers have taken up the concept of symbolic violence to analyse ‘everyday’ interactions. Oakes, Townley & Cooper (1998), for example discuss the introduction and operation of business planning in the management of museums and cultural heritage sites as symbolic violence. Through a process of naming, categorising and regularising, one set of meanings defined by the producers in the field gets replaced with another defined in reference to the external market. The resultant reorientation of values and the ‘necessary’ change in actions had a concrete impact on the identity (curator to entrepreneur) and the manner of control (professional to financial) of those in the organisation.

Violence Unlimited?
In describing alternative ways of representing violence, my intention has not been to offer a definitive typology of what violence ‘really is’ or metaphors that might stand in for ‘real’ violence. Instead, the aim has been to show that a philosophy-violence connection lends itself to more than a familiar rehearsing of what violence ‘really is’. To begin to sketch out some lines of enquiry beyond violence as the realm of the physical and interpersonal. In this sense, to suggest that the concept of violence has no essential simplicity, but neither are the alternative representations of violence mysterious.

At this point we might wish to think about different strategies for deciding between these different representations of violence. To pose alternative representations of violence is not to endorse a view of violence as indeterminate. Rather than any suggestion of unbridled expansion, we might begin to contemplate what enables the ‘truth’ about violence to be determined. Embracing a philosophy-violence connection might encourage us

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14 For a discussion on how it might be possible to navigate a course between an essentialist and indeterminant understanding of violence see, for example, Catley & Jones (2002).
to continue a beginning that invites us to think about why so many of the
violences of today are treated as if they are something else.

In this embrace it might be tempting to consider philosophy as a catalyst for
energising our thinking about workplace violence and organisation. Such a
reaction might lead us to believe that it is only our understanding of violence
that is altered. Philosophy would be safe in its opposition to violence. But what
if that was not necessarily the case? In this last section, I want to conclude by
beginning to consider the impact a philosophy-violence connection might have
for our relationship to philosophy.

**The Violence of Philosophy**

The first section of this paper was organised around the absence – the lack –
of philosophy. Typically, commentaries on workplace violence seemed to
have absent a curiosity about violence that had rendered other
representations of violence missing. Importantly, these omissions are not
trivial or mere oversights nor simply innocent or disinterested. Workplace
violence seemed deficient, leaving out other violations while preserving the
integrity of other sites where violence is reproduced.

In the second section, I proposed that a turn to philosophy through an
engagement with a broader tradition of philosophical reflection on violence
could critically extend discussions on workplace violence. It was suggested
that through a turn to philosophy it might be possible to enquire into other
senses of violence that might otherwise be erased through a privileging of
violence as interpersonal, physical and illegitimate. Thus, an engagement with
some of the influential currents in philosophy provides one active space for
interrogating current practices and facilitating alternative actions.

Consequently we might conclude, the presence of philosophy provides an
important addition, not in the sense of completion but through extension and
action.

It might be possible at this point to read this account in the fashion of simple
binaries. Through an encounter with philosophy we may take some positive,
proactive steps toward confronting the politics of workplace violence and its
possibilities for action. Once again we could demonstrate to any doubter the
performative dimension of philosophy. Doing things with philosophy becomes
more than an optimistic possibility or a luxury removed from ‘reality’. Instead
we have an example of how the knowledge of philosophy can overcome the
ignorance or irrationality of violence. The integrity of philosophy as the
determined foe of violence is thus preserved.

In this paper, part of the engagement with a philosophy-violence connection
has been to recognise the many productive aspects of this coupling. But we
might also want to mark the possible difficulties that may result from
conceptions of philosophy to be outside violence. In other words, we might
want to think about the grounds that make such an opposition possible. This is
given additional emphasis if we are to take seriously the assertion in the
previous section that the structural and symbolic domains are not metaphors
for ‘real’ violence but enact their own forms of violence. Thus, philosophy in
the forms of its philosophical institutions and practices may too exert its own forms of violence. Rather than standing in opposition to violence, philosophy may well reproduce that which it seeks to condemn. The faithful love of ideas harbours an affair with violence.

Here, instead of the metaphor of the catalyst, where philosophy remains outside of violence to invigorate our reactions yet remain impervious to it, we might think of the supplement. As Derrida (1967/1976: 144 emphasis in original) writes of the supplement it harbours within itself two significations.\(^{15}\) “The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the fullest measure of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence.” But the supplement also supplements. “It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself in-the-place of; it fills, it as if one fills a void” (Derrida, 1967/1976: 145 emphasis in original).

In contrast to the catalyst then, the supplement, extends and replaces, it completes and enhances. In this sense, to think of philosophy-violence as a supplement suggests that, like the catalyst, it enhances our understanding, yet it becomes an active part of the concept of violence. Drawing on the logic of the supplement is to problematise the grounds for separating off violence as the excluded other of philosophy. Rather than stand in simple opposition, philosophy takes up some part. Consequently, to think of the supplement is to invite a further set of questions and considerations about a philosophy-violence connection. Importantly, such considerations have the potential to offer a kind of pause before philosophy is ‘added’ in any sort of simple, unreflexive manner. Two such possibly fruitful domains offered by the logic of the supplement that I want to briefly sketch out here encompass the issues of complicity and reproduction. How might philosophy become complicit with that which it opposes? How might philosophy, through the process of extension and replacement, reproduce violence?

At this point it might be possible to catalogue the instances where philosophy has been used to justify and legitimate regimes of interpersonal violence. No doubt, such a move to begin to identify the violence done in the name of philosophy would call into question the ‘purity’ of philosophy or simple notions of philosophy as the guardian of ‘truth’ or ‘freedom’. Yet as I have discussed, knowledge and language are not external to violence but can be inherently violent. Here one might think of the institutionalising of philosophy, where what is included and excluded in the canon is decided. Or the silencing effects of truth, where ‘truth’ is mobilised to close down dissenting positions. Philosophy becomes complicit in the sorts of domination enacted when the arbitrary takes on the status of the natural to close down alternative ways of knowing, courses of action, and subject positions in order to preserve dominant relationships of power.

\(^{15}\) First published in 1967 in the French as *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit).
Or we could think of Derrida’s linking of violence with the structure of writing (Derrida, 1967/1976). For Derrida, the structure of violence is marked by the very structure of the trace of writing where the everyday or ‘obvious’ violence is the reduced and constrained derivative of a more primary and constitutive arché-violence. Such a primordial violence is the sort of violence that makes philosophy/violence distinctions possible. Accompanying this sense of violence is a compensatory violence whose function is to “erase the traces of this primordial violence, a kind of counter-violence whose violence consists in the denial of violence” (Grosz, 1999: 10). As Grosz (1999: 10) takes it up, this “is a violence that describes and designates itself as the moral counter of violence. This is the violence that we sometimes name the law, right or reason.” Derrida argues that the third order of violence – the obvious and explicit violence that we are quite familiar with – rests upon, participates in and is made possible by these two prior sense of violence.

As philosophers of violence and philosophers of organisation then, the fascination with the sorts of explicit workplace violences might provide a link to these other senses of violence identified by Derrida. Perhaps in the way that ‘obvious’ violence rests upon and repeats violence as inscription and the containment of inscription. Or in the way workplace violence affirms the violence of organisation and the necessity for violent organisations. From here we could embark on an exploration of violence as positive and constitutive of politics, of thought, of knowledge (Grosz, 1999).

We might also want to think about the possibility that philosophy goes beyond mere collusion with violence. The supplement also extends by repeating. In this sense philosophy could play a key role in the reproduction of violence. As philosophers of organisation we may wish to enquire into the role that philosophy and a philosophy of organisation has in the reproduction of workplace violence. If we take seriously the logic of the supplement that indicates that philosophy repeats what it opposes, then perhaps we need to think of philosophy as a pharmakon rather than a simple antidote. In this sense philosophy as a pharmakon is both a remedy and a poison (Derrida, 1972/1981). Not only does this lay before us the positivities of philosophy in making sense of workplace violence but it also warns that we can trace back such violence to our own door.

Drawing out a philosophy-violence connection brings to the fore many unavoidable theoretical complexities and considerations. The obviousness of violence and simple programmatic steps to eradicate workplace violence became problematic. Indeed the very notion that philosophers can stand outside violence to denounce it would also seem questionable. However, this should not be taken as invitation to paralysis. As Kondo (1995: 97) argues, “knowing that we are already implicated and complicit, we must nonetheless act.” Grosz, seemingly heeding such a call, takes up the question of what to do with respect to violence:

...[W]e must hone our intellectual resources much more carefully, making many more distinctions, subtleties, and nuances in our understanding than any binarized or dialectically structured model will allow. And we must refuse the knee-jerk reactions of straightforward or outright condemnation before we understand the structure and history of that modality of violence, its modes of strategic functioning, its vulnerabilities, and its values (Grosz, 1999: 13).

Making explicit the links between violence and philosophy has much to offer both our understandings of workplace violence and our relationship to/with philosophy. What I have tried to work through in this paper is that the presence of an engagement with philosophy provides a valuable counter to a reliance on ‘common sense’ or ‘obvious’ conceptions of violence that inform many discussions of workplace violence. Not only does such an engagement question the limits of a ‘common sense’ understanding of violence it does much to inform the possibility of different representations of violence. Doing things with philosophy then is highly practical indicating the limits around what counts as ‘violent’.

But I have also tried to indicate that a philosophy-violence connection is not unproblematic. Philosophy will not provide a simple remedy to the problem of workplace violence and complicity with violence may well be unavoidable. This does not necessarily need to be inhibitive but provides a space to engage with what grounds our decisions as well as their consequences. Consequently, I have not attempted anything a solution to the problem of workplace violence. Instead, I have tried to sketch out some of the possibilities and difficulties of doing things with philosophy.
References


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