SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF MAHATMA GANDHI

This special issue on the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi is dedicated to the victims of Hurricane Ian in Florida and elsewhere and to all those who assist with rescue, relief, and recovery efforts in the United States, India, and throughout the world.

FROM THE EDITORS

Douglas Allen, Yarran Hominh, and A. Minh Nguyen

The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi with New Interpretations for Philosophy Today and the Contemporary World

I. GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY OF AHIMSA (NONVIOLENCE), SATYA (TRUTH), AND ETHICS

Douglas Allen

Is Gandhi’s Approach to Philosophy, Truth, and Nonviolence Really “Philosophical”?

Vinit Haksar

Gandhi’s Practical Idealism

Samiksha Goyal

Gandhi and Moral Agency: A Study of Political Literature

Karsten J. Struhl

Gandhi’s Means-Ends Argument Revisited

II. GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY OF SWARAJ (SELF-RULE, INDEPENDENCE, FREEDOM)

Christopher Key Chapple

Gandhi, Thurman, and Lawson: Self-Governance as a Way of Peace and Change
Sanjay Lal

Gandhian Swaraj and Its Incompatibility with Present-Day Populism: Some Philosophical Considerations

Purushottama Bilimoria

Gandhi’s Philosophy of Economics and Nonviolent Strategy for Civil Rights: A Requiem in Two Movements

III. GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY OF SATYAGRAHA (FIRMNESS ON TRUTH, NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE)

Bindu Puri

Satyagraha and Swaraj: Equality Before Freedom

Sanjeev Kumar

Making Sense of Gandhi’s Satyagraha

Vinay Lal

Gandhi, the Last Fast, and the Call of the Conscience

IV. GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY OF SARVODAYA (WELL-BEING AND UPLIFT OF ALL), POLITICS, COSMOPOLITANISM, AND OTHER KEY CONCEPTS

Veena R. Howard

Gandhi’s Constructive Program: Toward a Vision of a Just and Decolonized Democratic Indian Society

Nishikant Kolge

Gandhi: An Imperfect Philosopher

Nalini Bhushan and Jay L. Garfield

Gandhi’s Cosmopolitanism: Glimpses of His Enlightenment Aspirations

BOOK REVIEWS

Pradeep P. Gokhale: The Yogasūtra of Patañjali: A New Introduction to the Buddhist Roots of the Yoga System

Reviewed by Daniel Raveh

Daniel Raveh: Daya Krishna and Twentieth-Century Indian Philosophy: A New Way of Thinking about Art, Freedom, and Knowledge

Reviewed by Anand Jayprakesh Vaidya

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION
I. INTRODUCTION

It is significant that a volume of essays on the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi appears under the title *APA Studies on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies* published by the American Philosophical Association. A volume on the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi published by the APA immediately raises questions. One easily agrees with the statement that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948) has been a very influential spiritual and political figure, with values, principles, perspectives, and action-transformative practices that are significant and often challenging, especially to secular moderns. But is any of this significant or even appropriate for the discipline of philosophy and for a publication in philosophy? Is Gandhi in any way a philosopher? Is his work in any way philosophical? Why should philosophers in the twenty-first century devote their time and attention to Gandhi?

These questions gain force when one considers that Gandhi did not regard himself as a philosopher. An active ignoring and often outright rejection of Gandhi as a philosopher during his lifetime was not simply one of a long list of modern Western colonialist-imperialist assumptions, biases, stereotypes, and conceptualizations dismissing the legitimacy and value of Asian philosophical contributions, but reflects something about Gandhi himself, his writings, and his actions. After all, even his philosophical contemporaries in India usually ignored and sometimes dismissed Gandhi as a philosopher. This included the dominant Vedantists, other skilled practitioners of traditional Indian philosophy, and Indian philosophers who had been influenced by Western philosophies. So why should we, now, think differently?

The fourteen scholars who have contributed thirteen essays, including one jointly written, to this volume on the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi express a wide range of approaches and sensibilities, but they all agree that philosophers should consider Gandhi’s philosophy because it is philosophically significant. This should not be taken to suggest that the fourteen scholars agree in their formulations, interpretations, applications, or evaluations of Gandhi’s philosophy. To the contrary, they often strongly disagree as to the nature, scope, limits, sources, and value of Gandhi’s philosophy of satya (truth), ahimsa (nonviolence), satyagraha (firmness on truth, truth-force), swaraj (self-rule, freedom, independence), and other key Gandhian concepts and conceptions. To this end, this issue presents and analyzes many reasons for taking Gandhi seriously as contributing to philosophy.

Philosophical work on Gandhi may be divided into three non-exclusive categories. First, many contributors place their primary focus on the need to describe and interpret the life, writings, views, and practices of Gandhi as accurately as possible. What did Gandhi write, say, and do during his lifetime? Are there inconsistencies in his writings, speeches, and actions? Even for those scholars who claim that their Gandhi scholarship is completely descriptive and for a publication in philosophy? Is Gandhi in any way a philosopher? Is his work in any way philosophical? Why should philosophers in the twenty-first century devote their time and attention to Gandhi?

Second, many contributors often go far beyond the focus of describing Gandhi’s writings, speeches, and actions during his lifetime, with Gandhi scholars focusing on the need to reread, reappry, and reassess Gandhi’s philosophy today in new, creative, contextualized ways. How can we reformulate Gandhi and Gandhi-informed philosophy in ways that are contextually significant for contemporary philosophy? How can we reformulate Gandhi’s philosophy in ways that are philosophically significant for addressing issues of violence and nonviolence, war and peace, hatred and love, conflict, unifying harmony, oppression, injustice, inequality, freedom, racism, threats to democracy, and environmental sustainability?

Third, many contributors use diverse non-Gandhian approaches and interpretations in presenting and assessing the philosophical significance of Gandhi and Gandhi-informed philosophy. For instance, we find diverse post-modernist, post-colonialist, deconstructionist, feminist,
anti-racist, environmentalist, and other philosophical approaches that offer selective positive or negative readings and interpretations of ways that Gandhian philosophy can be reformulated to contribute to their non-Gandhian perspectives. Diverse non-Gandhian approaches and interpretations that include Gandhi offer a wide range of new, creative reformulations of Gandhi's philosophical significance.

All this is context for the present volume, which consists of thirteen essays on the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and two book-review essays on Indian philosophy. The thirteen Gandhi-focused essays are grouped under four general themes: (1) Gandhi's Philosophy of Ahimsa (Nonviolence), Satya (Truth), and Ethics; (2) Gandhi's Philosophy of Swaraj (Self-Rule, Independence, Freedom); (3) Gandhi's Philosophy of Satyagraha (Firmness on Truth, Nonviolent Resistance); and (4) Gandhi's Philosophy of Sarvodaya (Well-Being and Uplift of All), Politics, Cosmopolitanism, and Other Key Concepts.

When taking stock of this issue, it is important to realize that the articles overlap and that several could be listed under all of these headings. This is consistent with Gandhi's organic holistic methodology and philosophy emphasizing the unifying interconnected nature of all of life, existence, truth, and reality. In Gandhi's philosophy, one could start with any of his major categories (values, principles, practices) and then show how they are integrally interconnected with all of the other major Gandhian concepts: "the individual" (whether Gandhi’s diverse formulations of the autonomous nongegoistic self, the social individual, the spiritual and cosmic individual, etc.), satya (truth, what is real), ahimsa (nonviolence, love), satyagraha (firmness on truth), swaraj (self-rule, freedom), sarvodaya (well-being, uplifting of all), swadeshi (self-sufficiency using one’s own local and national goods), aparigraha (non-attachment, non-possessiveness), "the Constructive Program" ("constructive work"), and more. The four themes should be taken not as separating or dividing up the essays so much as giving the reader an initial orientation for reading these essays together as a single issue.

II. GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY OF AHIMSA (NONVIOLENCE), SATYA (TRUTH), AND ETHICS

The four essays under this heading consider the complex, diverse, interrelated philosophical, ethical, spiritual, political, nonviolent, and truth relations that structure Gandhi’s philosophical approach and reveal its philosophical significance.

In “Is Gandhi’s Approach to Philosophy, Truth, and Nonviolence Really ‘Philosophical?’” Douglas Allen raises many of the general philosophical concerns found throughout this volume. Gandhi, on Allen’s reading, emphasizes the primacy of action-oriented transformative practice and has little interest in abstract philosophical theorizing. Disciplinary philosophers, including admirers and critics of Gandhi, tend to ignore Gandhi, viewing his contributions as not philosophically significant. Allen instead submits that Gandhi offers an approach to philosophy, ethics, truth, violence, and nonviolence that is surprisingly open-ended, complex, nuanced, at times contradictory, and of great philosophical significance. What is needed in providing us with the philosophical significance of Gandhi’s philosophy today is to engage Gandhi-informed approaches through open-ended, selective, and creative readings, interpretations, and applications and dynamic, contextually relevant, and novel rereadings, reinterpretations, and reapplications. This will contribute to our philosophical understanding of issues like violence and nonviolence, war and militarism and peace, oppression, exploitation, sustainability, and human and planetary flourishing.

In “Gandhi’s Practical Idealism,” Vinit Haksar focuses on the tension between the two concepts contained in the title of his article: practicality and idealism. Gandhi considers himself an idealist, yet he repeatedly acknowledges that his absolute philosophical ideals, especially ahimsa (nonviolence), are unattainable by embodied human beings. This tension leads to Gandhi’s philosophy of “practical idealism,” by which Haksar aims to capture Gandhi’s support for a broad range of compromises intended for Gandhi’s admirers, followers, opponents, and even Gandhi himself. In describing and analyzing necessary compromises, Haksar emphasizes Gandhi’s distinction between nonviolence as a creed (an absolute total way of living, “the nonviolence of the strong”) and nonviolence as a policy (relative contextualized expediency, strategic, “the nonviolence of the weak”). In diverse changing ways, Gandhi not only supported numerous compromises for nonviolence as a policy, intended for most of his followers, but also granted compromises when upholding nonviolence as a creed. When Gandhi allows, albeit reluctantly, necessary departures from absolute principles of nonviolence, the departures are not moral or just, and the departures should remind us of our duty to promote and live up to nonviolent ideals and principles in all contextualized areas of life.

In “Gandhi and Moral Agency: A Study of Political Literature,” Samiksha Goyal focuses on Gandhi’s picture of moral agency. Goyal argues that Gandhi’s philosophical moral concepts are still not theoretically articulated in the dominant political theoretic literature on his thought. Many contemporary political theorists claim that Gandhi upholds an exclusive focus on nonviolent means and rejects any focus on ends. Such contributions are sometimes necessary but never fully sufficient for understanding Gandhi’s practical thought, Goyal contends, since they lack a proper conception of moral agency in his thought. They thus, at best, present an incomplete picture for understanding how Gandhi’s notion of moral agency forms the basis for his philosophical framework, the underlying moral philosophical basis of his ideas, and the necessary interrelations between nonviolence, truth, sarvodaya, and other key Gandhian concepts like swaraj. Truth, nonviolence, and developed detachment as a virtuous character trait reveal the potential for essential moral agency in Gandhi’s thought.

In “Gandhi’s Means-Ends Argument Revisited,” Karsten J. Stuhr describes how Gandhi uses different—but different—analyses for the relation between means and ends as an argument for Gandhi’s position that
resistance to oppression must always be nonviolent. Struhl examines the significance and assesses the strengths and weaknesses of these analogies as an argument for nonviolent resistance (satyagraha). Gandhi’s means-ends philosophy, Struhl argues, cannot be divorced from certain political, psychological, and spiritual assumptions, such as the assumption that violence always leads to escalating cycles of retaliation whereas nonviolence and nonviolent resistance are self-limiting and the assumption that the force of love and sacrifice is stronger than physical force. The conclusion is that we may recognize the many strengths of Gandhi’s philosophy and practice of nonviolence while acknowledging their contextualized limits.

III. GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY OF SWARAJ (SELF-RULE, INDEPENDENCE, FREEDOM)

The three essays in this section examine how Gandhi’s conception of swaraj was taken up by other advocates for freedom and self-determination in India and across the world, and its potential for addressing our contemporary political, economic, and other related problems.

In “Gandhi, Thurman, and Lawson: Self-Governance as a Way of Peace and Change,” Christopher Key Chapple emphasizes how Gandhi advocated self-governance, which, for him, is informed by swaraj and anchored in Yoga philosophy. Gandhi’s vision for India’s self-governance and independence is seen in his favorite passage in the Bhagavad Gītā, chapter 2, verses 54-72, expressing his view of how to put into practice the training of freedom fighters in practicing this yogic technique. As Chapple outlines, Gandhi inspired Howard Thurman, who met Gandhi in India in the 1930s, brought this technique to the African American community, and deeply influenced Martin Luther King, Jr. In the 1950s, James Lawson learned about self-governance and techniques for change from Gandhians in India. These experiences led him to train nonviolent resisters during the Civil Rights Movement and Lawson continues to train others in the Gandhian method and message even today.

Freedom constitutes the core of Gandhi’s message and is not possible without primary focus on Gandhi’s (and the Gītā’s) notion of a “person of steady wisdom,” self-governing, with disciplined renunciation of attachment to desires, realizing steady informed peace and equanimity, and resisting and transforming all forms of tyranny.

In “Gandhian Swaraj and Its Incompatibility with Present-Day Populism: Some Philosophical Considerations,” Sanjay Lal examines how the rise of populist tendencies in constitutional democracies—as seen in the emergence of Donald Trump in the United States and Narendra Modi in India, among others—poses a threat to the realization of democratic ideals. Lal presents a Gandhian philosophical framework with its emphasis on true freedom (swaraj) as providing a way for synthesizing the ideals of democracy with legitimate concerns driving emerging anti-democratic populist tendencies. On both descriptive and normative levels of analysis, the Gandhian self, Gandhi’s true nonhierarchical and nonviolent self, is presented as essential for the realization of the dominant liberal democratic ideals and values and for the assessment of angry, violent, and anti-democratic forms of populism.

In “Gandhi’s Philosophy of Economics and Nonviolent Strategy for Civil Rights: A Requiem in Two Movements,” Purushottama Bilimoria rejects certain limited interpretations of Gandhi’s philosophy, which emphasize the obvious centrality of ethics and spirituality but ignore the centrality of economics in his philosophy. In the first major part or “movement,” Bilimoria presents Gandhi’s emphasis on economics, integrally interrelated with ethics, swaraj, and swadeshi, and the contributions of J. C. Kumarappa, Gandhi’s economic mentor, who coined the term “Gandhian economics.” Gandhian economics rejects dominant modern economic approaches that universalize avarice, top-down power-driven inequality, commodity fetishism, consumerism, and capitalist corporatism. Gandhi’s economics offers a radical paradigm shift in approaching economics, with emphasis on inclusive egalitarianism, decentralized self-empowerment and freedom, and ethically grounded ways of realizing the true nature of wealth and the well-being and meaningful existence of all.

In the second “movement,” on Black Satyagraha and the Civil Rights Movement, Gandhi’s philosophical messages and practices are presented as deeply influencing King, Thurman, and other African American leaders and their movements. Bilimoria’s essay thus usefully leads us to the next set of essays that focus on satyagraha.

IV. GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY OF SATYAGRAHA (FIRMNESS ON TRUTH, NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE)

The three essays in this section provide different readings of the key Gandhian concept and practice of satyagraha.


In Gandhi’s philosophy, satyagraha is a firmness (agaha) on truth (satya) that rejects the imposition of “force,” as the term is typically used. Gandhi maintains the inseparability of truth and nonviolence (ahimsa), in which nonviolence is love and is transformational as necessary to dissolve hate and anger, overcome judgmental and separational ego, and realize truth. Satyagraha is Gandhi’s method for securing rights through the necessary experience of tapas (self-suffering), as grounded in Gandhi’s interpretation of the Bhagavad Gītā and other Indian scriptures and as based on the priority of absolute equality over liberty and other modern values and concepts.

In “Making Sense of Gandhi’s Satyagraha,” Sanjeev Kumar observes that we are living in a contemporary world of alarming and growing violence, intolerance, and hatred, with the demise of humanism and the lack of morality. Gandhi’s satyagraha (firmness to truth, truth-force, soul-force), as a central component of his moral philosophy of satya (what exists, is true, is real) and ahimsa (nonviolence, love), offers us an attractive normative alternative that might aid us in responding to these trends. Much more
than a significant political weapon to challenge British rule, satyagraha expresses the message that Gandhi intends to rid Indian society of social and economic prejudices and hierarchical violent and untruthful structures of domination and oppression. In satyagraha, voluntary disciplined self-suffering can move the heart, leading to greater understanding and change. Gandhi’s philosophical worldview, deeply grounded in his moral philosophy of satyagraha, can serve as an effective countervailing tool and method that helps us understand, transform, and overcome the dominant culture of violence today.

In “Gandhi, the Last Fast, and the Call of the Conscience,” Vinay Lal focuses on Gandhi’s last fast (January 1948) and uses knowledge of the historical and contextual framework in order to understand Gandhi’s philosophical approach. Lal presents and analyzes Gandhi’s view of fasting as a last resort of the principled nonviolent resister (the purified and disciplined satyagrahi), with a “fast unto death” as the extreme means to overcome violent conflicts and as informed by the purified “conscience” or “inner voice.” Gandhi’s fasts, often falsely presented as hunger strikes, are motivated by his view of “the inner voice,” “conscience,” the voice of truth, the voice of God, the higher power imposed on him. Readers may be challenged by Gandhi’s very diverse, perhaps inconsistent, and certainly controversial writings and actions to examine the nature of Gandhi’s many fasts and his last fast and his bold and controversial claims about the absolutely “true inner voice” that is “conscience.” These claims, for him, can be distinguished from false claims about inner voices and anti-Gandhian views of conscience, God, and higher voices of ultimate truth.

V. GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY OF SARVODAYA (WELL-BEING AND UPLIFT OF ALL), POLITICS, COSMOPOLITANISM, AND OTHER KEY CONCEPTS

The three essays in this last set consider Gandhi’s vision and its significance today: his positive constructive alternatives for society, integrating the philosophical and the political, and the strength of Gandhian cosmopolitanism. They connect many themes explored in earlier essays and point toward some other directions for philosophical inquiry.

In “Gandhi’s Constructive Program: Toward a Vision of a Just and Decolonized Democratic Indian Society,” Veena R. Howard examines the eighteen elements of Gandhi’s Constructive Program that are key to realizing his philosophy of sarvodaya (the uplift of all). Gandhi critiques much of traditional India, modern India, and the modern West for not promoting or attaining the well-being or uplift of all. Gandhi’s Constructive Program offers action-transformative ways of expressing his moral philosophy with its nonviolent social, economic, educational, and other structures. Howard groups the elements of the Constructive Program under four headings: human dignity, economic equality, native knowledge systems, and education and health care. In his formulations of religious communal unity, removal of untouchability, economic equality, and other elements, Howard argues, Gandhi offers an approach for pursuing the moral path that will ensure the freedom and uplift of all in a just, decolonized, democratic India.

In “Gandhi: An Imperfect Philosopher,” Nishikant Kolge examines a key question: How did Gandhi integrate the philosophical and the political aspects of life? In providing a holistic interpretation of the interconnectedness of the integrated philosophical (moral, spiritual) and the political, Kolge argues that we cannot understand Gandhi’s philosophy without seeing it as a reflection of Gandhi, the complex and total person. While acknowledging the contributions of many philosophers and other scholars, Kolge focuses on his claim that all of the noted scholars accept diverse interpretations of the two separate Gandhis: Gandhi the philosopher and Gandhi the politician. Kolge challenges this dichotomization. He contends that we can only understand the two Gandhis as integrally interconnected aspects of one conceptual framework in which we integrate both the imperfect philosophical and the imperfect political while remaining true to both aspects of life.

In “Gandhi’s Cosmopolitanism: Glimpses of His Enlightenment Aspirations,” Nalini Bhushan and Jay L. Garfield challenge typical interpretations of Gandhi and his philosophical approach as expressing reactionary parochial Indian nationalism, romantic nostalgia for a return to a superior idealized premodern India, and rejection of the primacy of reason that characterizes modern Western Enlightenment and modern cosmopolitanism, especially as exemplified in a figure like Immanuel Kant. Such a Gandhi misleadingly appears to reject everything embodied in that modern Western tradition. In addition, the philosophy and practice that such a Gandhi champions are radically different from Rabindranath Tagore’s seemingly more enlightened embrace of reason and cosmopolitanism. Instead, using selectively appropriated and reformulated passages in Gandhi’s writings and acknowledging legitimate differences, Bhusan and Garfield creatively argue that Gandhi shares many of modern Kantian Enlightenment features and offer an insightful reading of a Gandhian cosmopolitanism. This reformulated Gandhi emphasizes public space for individuals as citizens to reflect and debate matters of public concern and to engage in the collaborative project of soul-making. Indeed, on Bhusan and Garfield’s reading, Gandhi is a cosmopolitan thinker and action-oriented practitioner who is, in many ways, more creative and radical than Kant and other modern proponents of cosmopolitanism.

We live in times of alarming local, national, and global conflicts, hierarchical domination, exploitation, oppression, violence, war, hatred, divisiveness, injustice, lack of freedom, and destruction of human and other life on the planet. Gandhi’s life, writings, speeches, and actions challenge us and offer us open-ended, contextualized, creative ways for responding to these existential, moral, social, economic, political, cultural, spiritual, environmental, and other contemporary crises. Even when we disagree with Gandhi’s specific proposals or with specific features of his philosophical approach, the essays in this volume challenge us in significant meaningful ways. They provide us with Gandhi-informed ways for broadening our philosophical horizons and for rethinking our philosophical and other understandings, commitments, and practices.
I. GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY OF AHIMSA (NONVIOLENCE), SATYA (TRUTH), AND ETHICS

Is Gandhi’s Approach to Philosophy, Truth, and Nonviolence Really “Philosophical”?

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ABSTRACT

Gandhi does not regard himself as a disciplinary philosopher. He emphasizes the primacy of action-oriented transformative practice and has little interest in abstract philosophical theorizing. Disciplinary philosophers also tend to ignore Gandhi as offering contributions that are philosophically significant. I submit that Gandhi offers an approach to philosophy, ethics, truth, violence, and nonviolence that is surprisingly open-ended, complex, nuanced, at times contradictory, and of great philosophical significance. For example, he greatly broadens and deepens our usual understandings in the philosophy of violence and nonviolence by focusing on violent and nonviolent multidimensional and structural relations. What is needed in providing us with the philosophical significance of Gandhi’s philosophy today is to engage Gandhi-informed approaches through open-ended, selective, and creative readings, interpretations, and applications and dynamic, contextually relevant, new rereadings, reinterpretations, and reapplications. We need to integrate critically selective Gandhi-informed approaches, perspectives, philosophies, and practices with selectively reinterpreted and reapplied complementary non-Gandhian philosophical approaches. This will contribute to our philosophical understanding of violence and nonviolence, war and militarism and peace, oppression and exploitation and injustice, class, caste, race, gender, religious and ethnic conflict, science and technology, egalitarian democratic empowerment, economic and environmental sustainability, and human and planetary flourishing.

During his lifetime, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948) is aware of many distinguished Indian philosophers. He has the closest relationship with Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975). Gandhi admires Radhakrishnan as a distinguished scholar of Indian philosophy, who serves as the President of India when I first come to India, and Radhakrishnan admires Gandhi as a remarkable moral, political, and spiritual leader. In recognizing distinguished Indian philosophers, Gandhi confesses that he is not a philosopher and that he has limited ability and little interest in abstract, rational, critical, disciplinary, and scholarly philosophy. Why not take Gandhi at his word and accept that he is lacking in “philosophy” and is not “philosophical”?

On the one hand, critics of Gandhi interested in philosophy not surprisingly agree with Gandhi that he is not a philosopher. Gandhi’s “philosophy” is uncritical, irrational, superstitious, muddle-headed, and full of contradictions. On the other hand, most admirers of Gandhi interested in philosophy usually agree with Gandhi that he is not a philosopher. They do not include Gandhi in their approaches to philosophy while often admiring Gandhi for nonphilosophical reasons. This rejection of Gandhi as philosopher is repeatedly confirmed during my youthful formative yearlong immersion in Indian philosophy.

GANDHI IS NOT A PHILOSOPHER: EARLY CONFIRMATIONS

From many possible examples confirming that Mahatma Gandhi is not a philosopher, I’ll cite two confirmations: my immersion in post-graduate (PhD) courses in Indian philosophy at Banaras Hindu University (BHU) during 1963–1964 and my exposure to Contemporary Indian Philosophy, the best source I had conveying the state of Indian philosophy during Gandhi’s lifetime.

First, I was fortunate to receive a special student-teacher Fulbright, to be assigned to the sacred Hindu Banaras (Varanasi, Kashi) on the Ganges, and to be based at BHU. Required to teach one advanced course in the Department of English, I decided to immerse myself in post-graduate (PhD) courses in BHU’s renowned Department of Philosophy. Arguably the outstanding philosophy department in India at that time, the BHU department was dominated by proponents of traditional Advaita (nondualism) Vedanta, as were all of the leading Indian philosophy departments at that time. My primary mentor was T. R. V. Murti, Head of the Department of Philosophy, who served that year as President of the Indian Philosophical Congress. Professor Murti was an orthodox South Indian Brahmin, a follower of Shankaracharya (founder of Advaita Vedanta), and the author of the influential The Central Philosophy of Buddhism. From Murti, I studied the traditional philosophies of India and was instructed as to why Shankara’s Advaita Vedanta formulates the highest level of Indian or Western philosophical understanding. To mention only one other professor, the orthodox Advaïta R. K. Tripathi not only taught me Advaita Vedanta at BHU, but he also kindly opened doors for me to remarkable Indian philosophical and spiritual contacts. These included the renowned yogi Yogiswar Sri Kalipada Guha Ray (with whom I met regularly) and the renowned scholar of Sanskrit, Tantra, and Kashmiri Shaivism Gopinath Kaviraj.
Without developing my narrative of formative philosophical influences at BHU, in Banaras, and elsewhere in India, I’ll offer my first confirmatory claim: In all of my advanced work at BHU, with Murti, and with other professors and scholars of Indian philosophy, I do not recall M. K. Gandhi ever being mentioned. It is not as if professors of Indian philosophy considered and rejected Gandhi’s philosophy. While Gandhi’s presence at the time was ubiquitous in the wearing of khadi and Gandhi caps, the ceremonial invocations of Gandhi slogans and ritualized homage to the exalted Mahatma as Bapu (Father) of the nation, even granting that much of this was empty and often hypocritical, Gandhi’s presence in scholarly and disciplinary Indian philosophy was nonexistent. One easily acknowledges that Gandhi is not a philosopher and his contributions are not philosophical.

Second, Contemporary Indian Philosophy is a collection of twenty-five essays, each averaging twenty-five pages, by most of the leading Indian philosophers of the time. We know from his correspondence that Gandhi recognizes the value of philosophy, believes that his principles and practices are philosophically significant, and leaves it to competent Indian philosophers to analyze and interpret what he contributes to philosophy. When Radhakrishnan invites Gandhi to contribute to Contemporary Indian Philosophy, we know that Gandhi at first declines, pleading incompetence. Later, he reluctantly agrees to respond to three questions posed by Radhakrishnan by submitting his untitled one-page “essay” featured as the first contribution in the volume.

Very revealing are the three questions Radhakrishnan sends to Gandhi: What is your religion? How are you led to it? What is its bearing on your social life? These questions strike one as rather “nonphilosophical” and certainly not the kinds of questions that would have been sent to “philosophers” of Indian philosophy in the collection. Even more revealing are Gandhi’s three brief responses: His religion is Hinduism that includes the best of all religions; he is led to his religion through Truth and Nonviolence and in which Truth is God and other expressions of the truth in all of us; his religion bears on his daily social life, dedication to social service, losing himself in service to all life, and recognizing that all is one.

That is Gandhi’s contribution to Contemporary Indian Philosophy. One can easily conclude that Mahatma Gandhi is not a philosopher, and his contributions are not philosophical.

**GANDHI’S APPROACH TO PHILOSOPHY**

We may delineate two major characteristics defining and structuring Gandhi’s approach to philosophy. First, Gandhi emphasizes the primacy of practice. We noted Gandhi’s lack of interest in abstract decontextualized philosophical theorizing. This has often led to the misconception that Gandhi is a “practical” person with no philosophy.

Gandhi’s philosophical approach does indeed emphasize the primacy of practice with philosophy understood as action-oriented, transformative, lived philosophy. Philosophy, with its concepts and theories and relational values, is necessary and significant. Integrally interrelated moral, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions of existence are constitutive of human development and flourishing. But this is only true and real when philosophy is experienced as arising from contextualized practice, informing action-oriented transformative nonviolent and truthful practice, and being experimentally tested, verified, and falsified in terms of new practice. For Gandhi, philosophy is essential morally, epistemologically, and ontologically when it is grounded in practice and provides the direction for new transformative practice.

Second, Gandhi’s approach to philosophy is holistic and organic, emphasizing the dynamic, open-ended, experiential realization of the interconnectedness and relational unity of existence, truth, nonviolence, nature, the cosmos, and reality. In Gandhi’s philosophical presuppositions, values, and methodological framework for interpreting meaning, what connects and unifies us is more essential than what separates and divides us. But Gandhi’s perspective is unlike some Advaitin and Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Derrida, and Rawls than on Ramanuja or Nagarjuna. In these emerging contextual changes, Gandhi continues to be largely ignored as a philosopher worthy of philosophical consideration.

In recent decades, there has been some change in reassessing Gandhi’s philosophy and philosophical value. “The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi” is sometimes included in the course curriculum of departments. Philosophy professors write articles and books on the philosophical significance of Gandhi’s ethics, principles, ontology, and practice. PhD students write dissertations on Gandhi’s philosophy. In my own situation, I am often invited to deliver lectures and publish in India and in the West on Gandhi’s philosophy. Nevertheless, the widespread view persists that Gandhi is not philosophical.

By way of contrast, what follows is a rather brief attempt suggesting why Gandhi, while not a traditional or disciplinary “philosopher,” offers us an approach, theory, and practice of great philosophical significance. A selectively and creatively reformulated interpretation of Gandhi’s approach to philosophy has much to contribute to contemporary philosophy when addressing issues related to ethics, violence and nonviolence, war and peace, exploitation and oppression and injustice, alienation and dehumanization, value-based human flourishing, egalitarian structures and democratic empowerment, and sustainable economic and environmental relations.

**GANDHI AND INDIAN PHILOSOPHY: CHANGING TIMES**

Over the next fifty years, views about philosophy, Indian philosophy, and Gandhi change radically. With notable exceptions, leading departments of philosophy in India change and are no longer dominated by the traditional absolute idealism of nondualistic Advaita Vedanta. Major Indian philosophers increasingly identify with developments in analytic philosophy while others identify with developments in continental philosophy. Philosophers in India are more likely to be doing advanced work on
other philosophies, as well as some dominant religious, economic, political, military, scientific, and technological approaches, that uphold doctrines of essential unity and oneness through hegemonic impositions of one’s theory rejecting the truth and reality of diversity and differences.

In Gandhi’s philosophy, one upholds essential unity while recognizing the philosophical significance of contextualized differences. Others have different contextualized experiences, interpretations, and philosophical formulations that we do not have. Indeed, when we engage with these others in moral, nonviolent, truthful dialogue and action-oriented transformative practices, we develop our own philosophical understandings. This engagement with others constitutes the open-ended, complex, dialectical process of transforming our relational selves and our world. In Gandhi’s holistic philosophical approach, this action-oriented engaged philosophy of truth and nonviolence expresses a view of philosophy as a dynamic transformative force, a nonviolent force, a truth-force that brings about the unifying integration of harmonious relations of body, mind, and heart (sometimes identified as soul) in human existence.

GANDHI’S APPROACH TO TRUTH

In Gandhi’s holistic philosophical approach, all of his major concepts are dynamically and relationally interconnected. Nevertheless, in hundreds of passages, he affirms that his two key foundational concepts are satya (truth) and ahimsa (nonviolence).

Satya is the essential concept expressing the presuppositions, relational values, and principles structuring Gandhi’s epistemological, moral, spiritual, and metaphysical/ontological approach to reality. Satya is derived from the Sanskrit sat: what is the true essence; what is enduring and unchangeable; what is true, really existing, being, and real. But for Gandhi, satya is not some abstract, immutable, philosophical essence, as found, say, in various Vedantic, other Hindu, Daoist, and some other Asian metaphysics, as well as in much of Platonic and other Western metaphysics.

Although not always consistent, Gandhi usually expresses satya as the essential dynamic truth-force, the action-oriented transformative truth-force, the most powerful, value-constituting, unifying force possible. For Gandhi, satya is the essential truth-force that motivates us toward moral, nonviolent, spiritual living and that provides us with the deepest moral and philosophical insights. It brings value-based, meaningful, harmonious relations and structured order to what is normally and falsely experienced and constituted in our ego-driven, temporal, impermanent, fragmented, chaotic, illusory existence and is devoid of the deeper truth and reality.

Interpreters of Gandhi’s philosophy often focus exclusively on dramatic passages on satya as Absolute Truth. In such passages, Absolute Truth is often used interchangeably with that which is Real, Being, the Unconditioned, the Infinite, the Eternal, God (Rama, Krishna, Allah, and countless other conceptions), the Soul, the Spiritual Self, and Ahimsa (Nonviolence, Love, Compassion).

What these interpreters disregard is Gandhi’s repeated claim that while he maintains his position with respect to his experience, belief, and faith in absolute truth, he remains a limited imperfect human being who, at most, has temporary imperfect “glimpses” of the absolute. His insightful linguistic conceptualizations of absolute truth and reality are always limited, imperfect, and inadequate human constructions. What interpreters ignore is his primary focus in his life, writings, and practices on contextualized, temporal, historical, economic, political, social, cultural, religious, and other situated experiences and expressions of relative truth and untruth. This distinguishes what is philosophically significant in Gandhi’s philosophy from many traditional Hindu and other metaphysical philosophies and religious positions that claim knowledge of absolute truth and absolute reality and devalue or reject as false our causal, conditioned, spatial, temporal, mutable, historical, economic, social, political, cultural, relative existence.

Gandhi’s philosophy, with bold claims about truth, raises many questions, substantial issues, and complex controversial interactions during his lifetime and for us today. Not addressed in this brief treatment, I examine them at length in my books and longer essays. For now, I’ll simply delineate several key questions and issues regarding a Gandhi-informed approach to truth.

As expressed in the title of his Autobiography, Gandhi views his life in terms of Experiments With Truth.7 How can Gandhi justify his claims to knowledge of absolute truth when he repeatedly confesses that he, at most, has temporary inadequate “glimpses” of such absolutes, and he repeatedly acknowledges that his experiments with truth have often been failures (even “Himalayan blunders”)? In passages of great philosophical significance, Gandhi claims that we are able to engage in the imaginary construction of absolute ideals of Truth (Nonviolence, Love, Pure Ethics, Perfect Religion, etc.), and these imaginary ideals inform and are integrally related to our limited, experiential, contextualized worlds of relative truths. How can Gandhi justify this philosophical approach to truth when others claim that his imaginary constructed absolute ideals are irrelevant or even illusory escapes from truth and reality?

To provide one other serious issue, how does Gandhi’s philosophical approach to truth respond to non-Gandhians and anti-Gandhians, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, modern scientists, skeptics, materialists, relativists, and others who do not share his view of Absolute Truth and its integral relations with relative truth? How does his philosophical approach to truth respond to these others who do not share his inclusivist perspectival view of multiple legitimate truthful paths to the one unifying Truth? And how does a Gandhi-informed philosophy of truth respond to these others who sometimes claim that Gandhi’s philosophical approach Hinduizes, Vedantizes, and violently and untruthfully imposes its philosophy on their philosophical positions?

In my work, I claim that Gandhi did not during his lifetime and does not today have simple answers to such questions and issues. Nevertheless, he continues to challenge us to
engage deeply, reflecting upon and struggling with such philosophical concerns, and he offers extremely valuable philosophical insights and contributions.

GANDHI’S APPROACH TO NONVIOLENCE: BROADENING AND DEEPENING OUR UNDERSTANDING

Mahatma Gandhi is most often identified with nonviolence. There is no topic that receives more attention in the 100 volumes of The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi than ahimsa (nonviolence). Mahatma Gandhi is certainly the best-known and most influential modern proponent of the philosophy and practice of nonviolence. Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, writes how Gandhi is the major formative influence in King’s journey toward realizing his moral and spiritual philosophy with the essential characteristics of nonviolence and his engaged practices of nonviolent organizing, noncooperation, and resistance, including civil disobedience. It is most appropriate that October 2, the date of Gandhi’s birth, is recognized as the United Nations International Day of Nonviolence.

All of the topics, concepts, questions, and issues formulated in the previous section on truth (satya) can be reformulated as central to Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolence (ahimsa). Even more than with my earlier formulations of Gandhi’s philosophy with his primacy of practice, his essential characteristics of philosophy, and his philosophical approach to truth, I cannot do justice in this brief essay to the insights, depth, complexities, and controversies in Gandhi’s philosophical approach to nonviolence. Formulations, interpretations, and issues that follow are largely undocumented, although extensive documentation from Gandhi’s life and writings, my treatments, and the approaches of Gandhian and anti-Gandhian writers on Gandhi’s nonviolence can be found in my longer publications.

In contrast to most stereotypical versions of Gandhi’s nonviolence, including essentialized oversimplified formulations by admirers and critics, Gandhi’s understanding of nonviolence is surprisingly experimental, self-critical, open-ended, dynamic, complex, and nuanced in his contextualized philosophy and engaged practices. The best way to clarify his philosophy of nonviolence is to begin by focusing on the meaning of his foundational concept of ahimsa.

Ahimsa is Sanskrit meaning no-harm, no-injury, usually translated in English as nonviolence. It is found in many ancient Hindu scriptures and philosophical works, is at the foundation of Jain philosophy, and is featured in Buddhist scriptures and many later philosophical formulations. Gandhi is deeply indebted to these ancient and other traditional philosophies of ahimsa, but he is also critical of such philosophical approaches to nonviolence. According to Gandhi, they are usually too passive, overemphasize renunciation of and liberation from the contextualized world, and lack his approach of engaged, action-oriented, creative, nonviolent resistance and transformation of ourselves and our world dominated by so much himsa (harm, injury, violence). What is Gandhi’s ahimsa philosophical approach to violence with his constructive alternative of nonviolence?

Gandhi claims most who profess ideals of peace, love, compassion, and other nonviolence are violent, either overtly or covertly. We lack understanding of violence and nonviolence, avoid nonviolent struggle, and benefit from or are complicit with the perpetuation of violence. We usually restrict our opposition to violence to explicit overt violence: killings, torture, terrorist bombings, rapes, domestic violence, bullying, etc. These are significant for Gandhi. He opposes violent acts by anti-colonial Indian terrorists, acts of overt class, caste, and gender violence, and horrendous killings and rapes at the time of India’s Partition. He is assassinated on January 30, 1948, in an act of overt violence. Nevertheless, in Gandhi’s philosophical approach, such acts of overt physical violence express a very small part of overall violence.

In my research, I attempt to analyze how Gandhi remarkably broadens and deepens our understanding of violence (and integrally related nonviolence) by means of two key concepts: the multidimensionality of violence and the structural violence of the status quo. First, Gandhi submits that in addition to overt physical violence, we experience and express inner psychological violence (hate is violent), linguistic violence (language used to shame, control, and dominate others is violent), economic violence (equivalent to exploitation and in which poverty and economic relations of inequality and domination are violent), social and political violence, educational and cultural and religious violence, and technological and environmental violence. In Gandhi’s holistic interconnected philosophical approach, all of these multidimensional presuppositions, values, principles, relations, and practices interact and mutually reinforce each other so that we become entrapped in vicious, causal, relational cycles of violence.

Second, Gandhi focuses on the dominant systemic structural violence of the status quo. As constituted by the dominant economic, political, social, cultural, religious, scientific, technological, ideological, and other contextualized forces and relations, this is expressed as what is “normal,” business as usual, human nature, the will of God, the law of karma and rebirth, etc. In his philosophy of nonviolence, Gandhi contends that even when the dominant economic, political, and other systems are functioning efficiently without resistance and disruptions, they are inherently, essentially, and structurally violent. That is why Gandhi’s nonviolent theory and practices focus on disrupting structural violence, raising consciousness, and engaging in the action-oriented transformation toward greater structural nonviolence.

When we dynamically and contextually integrate the multidimensionality of violence with the structural violence of the status quo, we become aware of how Gandhi deepens and broadens our understanding of violence and the need for transformative nonviolence. For example, we will no longer restrict our “normal” limited approach to terrorist violence. We will include corporate, capitalist, and globalized multidimensional and systemic structural violence in which billions of human beings live daily lives characterized by
insecurity, fear, terror, suffering, and death and are violently prevented from living full, developed, moral, nonviolent, truthful lives of human and societal flourishing.

**GANDHI’S APPROACH TO NONVIOLENCE: THE ABSOLUTE AND THE RELATIVE**

Most often known for his philosophy and practice of absolute nonviolence, it is typically claimed that Gandhi unconditionally rejects all thoughts, feelings, language, and acts of violence. He is even willing to die in upholding this absolute. In hundreds of bold dramatic passages, Gandhi expresses his unconditional commitment to absolute, perfect, pure nonviolence. For followers, this expresses the life and teachings of Gandhi as the inspiring, exemplary, uncompromising, sometimes deified Mahatma, who provides us with the perfect philosophical, moral, and spiritual nonviolent blueprint for overcoming all violence. For critics, this expresses the nonviolent absolutist approach of the rigid, uncompromising, dogmatic M. K. Gandhi, who provides us with his nonviolent blueprint that is irrelevant and is even an obstacle when addressing actual multidimensional and structural violence.

Once again and without providing detailed analysis and documentation, Gandhi’s philosophical approach to absolute nonviolence and to relative violence and relative nonviolence is surprisingly experimental, open-ended, complex, and at times contradictory. Expressed briefly, Gandhi upholds the ideal of absolute nonviolence, but he emphasizes that even he, at most, has imperfect temporary glimpses of absolute nonviolence. To claim full perfect knowledge of absolute nonviolence is arrogant, false, exclusivist, intolerant, and dangerously violent.

Gandhi’s major focus is on understanding and transforming our spatial, temporal, conditioned, moral, psychological, economic, political, and civilizational relations of relative violence toward greater imperfect nonviolence. In our existential mode of being in the world and in how we exist as situated contextualized beings, we are necessarily violent. Obtaining food, practicing hygiene, and building roads and houses involve some level of doing injury and harm to other living beings. Even with the best of nonviolent intentions, we sometimes misunderstand, miscalculate, and engage in failed experiments that result in violence. And we sometimes find ourselves in extremely violent situations in which there are no effective nonviolent options, such as being attacked by other humans or nonhuman animals, encountering acts of rape or shootings in schools, facing Nazi genocide or 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York or 26/11 terrorism in Mumbai.

In focusing on typical anti-Gandhian refutations relating to his nonviolent philosophy and practices responding to such examples as ongoing genocide and terrorism, I devote detailed analysis in several publications to creatively reformulating Gandhi's approach in which some violence may be allowed or even necessary. This more complex Gandhi-informed approach usually surprises devotees, admirers, and critics, who uncritically accept the view of the rigid Gandhi of absolute nonviolence who never allows for any violence.

Almost all of the time when we are violent, there are nonviolent alternatives. However, there are extreme cases in which we uphold the ideal of absolute nonviolence while responding with limited violence, because that is the most nonviolent response contextually possible. In such cases, violence is a last resort. Never glorify the violence that is tragic, that is not moral, and that reveals human failure. Limit the intensity and duration of the violence that is necessary to stop the ongoing violence. Then do everything possible to transform the root causes, values, beliefs, fundamental relations, essential structures, and practices that gave rise to the extreme violence. Without such an essential nonviolent philosophical multidimensional and structural transformation, we’ll be trapped in replicating the vicious means-ends cycles that gave rise to the extreme violence.

In Gandhi’s nonviolent philosophy of the absolute, the relative, and means-ends relations, all of his ontological/metaphysical claims previously presented under his philosophy of truth apply most dramatically to his ontology of nonviolence. Not only do violent means lead to violent ends, but such violence also contradicts the nature of truth and reality. Ahimsa is that active powerful nonviolent force, truth-force, love-force, soul-force that brings meaningful order out of fragmented chaos. It allows us to realize the basic unity and interconnectedness of existence and reality. It thus allows us to live value-informed, meaningful, compassionate and loving, self-disciplined and egoless lives of service that are the developmental means for realizing the nature of reality.

In addressing all of the above concerns, issues, and questions regarding nonviolence, Gandhi’s primary focus is on how we can address our contextualized existence of so much relative violence, limit our voluntary and other forms of violence, and move toward contextualized lives of greater relative nonviolence, closer to but not fully realizing the perfect ideal of absolute nonviolence. In that regard, the greatest philosophical value of Gandhi’s approach involves preventative nonviolence. He offers invaluable insights regarding short-term preventative ways of defusing and transforming violence. But his most significant philosophical contribution involves his long-term vision of preventative nonviolence in which we uncover and transform the basic root causes and essential structures of economic, social, political, environmental, and other violence and transform them into root causes, basic determinants, essential structures, presuppositions, values, and practices expressing more permanent dimensions and structures of nonviolence.

**GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY: CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS**

As previously indicated, Gandhi’s approach to philosophy and especially his philosophy of nonviolence does not present us with the perfect solution of absolute nonviolence and truth to all of our challenging crises. But his approach is philosophically significant in addressing such violence today and in offering insightful and challenging nonviolent alternatives. Contemporary philosophers present many philosophical works on violence and nonviolence. They often formulate impressive technical, philosophical approaches
and treatments that may be too limited and restricted, extremely narrow, and lacking depth. As suggested in previous sections, contemporary philosophers may benefit from engaging with a selectively and creatively reformulated Gandhi and with various Gandhi-informed approaches and treatments. Gandhi-informed contributions may greatly broaden and deepen our philosophical understanding.

Gandhi not only offers us philosophical theoretical formulations, but he primarily also offers philosophically significant transformative practices challenging us to broaden and deepen our consciousness, engage in action-oriented moral, nonviolent, truthful resistance, and create Gandhi-informed contemporary alternatives. Unlike some followers, I do not think that Gandhi's primary legacy is to serve as the comforting Mahatma, who gives us freedom from suffering and despair, peace of mind, and faith in some perfect future of world-transcending absolutes. Instead, Gandhi primarily serves as a Socratic gadfly, a revolutionary catalyst, disrupting our normal comfort levels and challenging us not to accept our dominant modern life that is multidimensionally and structurally immoral, violent, and untruthful. We are then philosophically motivated to rethink, reimagine, reconceptualize, and reapply how to live morally, nonviolently, truthfully, spiritually, and sustainably.

What is needed in providing us with the philosophical significance of Gandhi's philosophy today is to engage Gandhi-informed approaches through open-ended, selective, and creative readings, interpretations, and applications and dynamic, contextually relevant, new rereadings, reinterpretations, and reapplications. In doing this, we need to integrate our critically selective Gandhi-informed approaches, perspectives, philosophies, and practices with some selectively reinterpreted and reapplied complementary non-Gandhian philosophical approaches. These non-Gandhian philosophical approaches, when integrated with Gandhi-informed contributions, contribute to our philosophical understanding of violence and nonviolence, war and militarism and peace, oppression and exploitation and injustice, class and caste, race and gender, religious and ethnic conflict, science and technology, egalitarian democratic empowerment, economic and environmental sustainability, and human and planetary flourishing.

NOTES
2. These two examples are described and analyzed in several of my books, most recently in Gandhi After 9/11, especially 19–20, 35–36, 41–42. See S. Radhakrishnan and J. H. Muirhead, eds., Contemporary Indian Philosophy (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1936; revised and enlarged edition, 1952). Gandhi's letter of January 23, 1935, to Radhakrishnan, which appears as his one-page contribution to Contemporary Indian Philosophy, 21, is published in Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol. 60, 106–07.
5. In my experiences and interpretations, there has been a radical change in the views of some leading Indian philosophers not unrelated to significant contextualized changes in how Indians regard India, their world, and their own work. In recent decades of an emerging powerful post-colonial India, there has developed greater self-confidence among Indian economic, political, cultural, scientific, technological, medical, and academic elites. A minority of Indian philosophers, who had previously dismissed Indian philosophy and felt the need for Western philosophical validation, now are motivated to return to Indian philosophy, even sometimes expressing chauvinistic views of the exceptional superior Advaitin and other Indian philosophical perspectives. In such a context, there is more openness to considering Gandhi's philosophical significance, even granting how Gandhi is increasingly used (misused) by the power-elite for dangerous anti-Gandhian purposes.
6. For example, see Gandhi After 9/11, 7–10, 27–34, 44–54, 77–81.
9. For example, see Gandhi After 9/11, especially 5–7, 21–34, 63–82, 118–21, 151–73, 240–49.
10. There are hundreds of pages in Gandhi's writings in which he sadly and reluctantly allows for such violence, even granting that killing may count as ahimsa. I formulate Gandhi's nonviolent approach that allows for such violence in several publications, including "Terrorism and Violence: Gandhi After 9/11 in the USA and 26/11 in India," in Gandhi After 9/11, 138–80.

Gandhi's Practical Idealism

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ABSTRACT
Gandhi called himself a practical idealist, yet at least some of his ideas were unattainable. So life for him was, as Radhakrishnan said, "a perpetual compromise between the ideal and the possible." The need for compromise led him to follow Tolstoy in commending a second best in many areas of life. I examine the role of compromise in Gandhi's practical idealism. In particular, I discuss Gandhi's distinction between nonviolence as a creed and nonviolence as a policy. I examine some of the compromises that he made. These include supporting certain wars and collaborating with people who did not really accept nonviolence as a creed. He was also a man of principle, but sometimes even principles may have to be compromised. Sometimes necessity compels us to depart from our principles, but we must not justify these departures. At best such departures are excused and they should remind us of our duty to promote our ideals and principles in different walks of life, according to our capacity and our judgment.

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Gandhi feared that his message of nonviolence might be rejected by many people because they view nonviolence as a counsel of perfection which is too demanding, suitable only for saints or rishis; it must be accepted in its entirety or not at all. Gandhi made it clear that this is not so. Nonviolence admits of degrees and complete nonviolence is impossible to attain as long as we are embodied beings. Since, according to Gandhi, it is part of the human condition that ideals, at least unattainable ones, cannot be realized in their entirety in this world, compromise with ideals becomes essential. He described himself as a practical idealist and so his life was, as Radhakrishnan says, a “perpetual compromise between the ideal and the possible.”

Compromises were made with his opponents as well as with his followers and even with his own ideals and principles. Of course, satyagraha was very demanding, and one had to meet very strict standards in order to become a satyagrahi. But one could follow ahimsa to a considerable degree without being a satyagrahi. Gandhi also commended in several spheres a second best for those who were not able to reach the highest levels of moral perfection.

Gandhi was born and brought up in the Bania caste, where compromise was encouraged. However, for Gandhi, compromise was not just a modus vivendi but based on principles. One should not violate one’s principles when reaching a compromise. Nor should one impose a compromise on one’s opponent against their principles. This is reflected in the working of the Indian Constitution; if a practice is essential to a religion, but its absence is not essential to another religion, then the latter gives way to the former. Nonviolence, for Gandhi, was an ideal and it is permissible to compromise with ideals. But, for Gandhi, it is also a principle and so there is a problem for Gandhi: How can one justify departures from nonviolence? Gandhi’s answer was that we cannot justify them but, in cases of necessity, we can at best excuse or pardon them.

Central to Gandhi’s philosophy is the distinction between nonviolence as a creed and nonviolence as a policy or expedience. Gandhi, like Tolstoy, believed in nonviolence as an unattainable ideal. As long as we are embodied creatures, some degree of violence is inevitable. Our duty is to minimize the amount of violence around us. “When violence is unavoidable, it must be spontaneous, must be the lowest minimum, must be rooted in compassion, must have discrimination, restraint, detachment at its back and lead us every moment to the path of ahimsa.” This quote is essential to understanding Gandhi’s practical philosophy and it goes a long way to making his philosophy a viable practical option. This quotation from Gandhi acknowledges the need for physical violence. But he insists that such violence must be administered in a spirit of compassion, maintaining total nonviolence as an unattainable ideal that is there to inspire us to move towards it as much as one’s capacity allows it.

So even the person who believes in nonviolence as a creed cannot avoid some degree of violence. The difference between nonviolence as a creed and nonviolence as a policy or expedience is that, according to the former, nonviolence is a way of life, to be followed in all walks of life (at least all walks of human life), and every time one is compelled to commit a violent act, it is a reminder that we have a duty to bring society nearer to the ideal of nonviolence. This is implied by Gandhi’s view that violence is never justified though sometimes it may be excused. The person who believes in nonviolence must show his commitment to nonviolence even when it is necessary and thereby excusable to commit a violent act.

According to Gandhi, those who believe in nonviolence as a policy, but practice nonviolence in a certain sphere only, like non-cooperation with the British, have no commitment to nonviolence in general. For instance, they may continue to mistreat the weaker members of their society or family. And even their non-cooperation against the British was expedient in the sense that they were too weak to offer violent resistance. Nonviolence as a creed is the true nonviolence, according to Gandhi. But Gandhi was aware that there are degrees of commitment to nonviolence, even when one believes in it as a creed. Not all those who believed in it as a creed had Gandhi’s commitment and Gandhi admitted even he himself did not practice perfect ahimsa.

Gandhi did not expect all sections of the Indian National Congress to be committed to nonviolence in all spheres of life, such as one’s dealing with non-human life. For he could not reasonably expect the Muslim members of the Congress Party to be committed to vegetarianism, and he added, “even amongst Hindus only Vaishnavas and Jains would be left to participate in it.” But he did expect them all to be committed to nonviolence as a creed with regard to our dealings with all human beings. He was aware that while the Congress professed nonviolence as a creed, what it practiced was nonviolence as a policy or expedience, which he said is not true nonviolence.

Gandhi repeatedly said that nonviolence practiced by the Indians against the British Raj was largely “nonviolence of the weak.” The weak have neither the ability to be violent in the relevant sphere nor the will. The truly nonviolent person has the ability to be violent but not the will. Gandhi sometimes used “nonviolence of the weak” interchangeably with “nonviolence of the coward.” But this was unfair. Admittedly, most Congressmen, including most of their leaders, believed in nonviolence as a policy. They may well have abandoned nonviolent resistance if they felt that violent resistance was more effective. But this does not necessarily make them cowards. Many of them got beaten up by the police, went to jail, and showed considerable bravery, self-restraint, and self-sacrifice. A coward would have stayed at home and not joined the Non-Cooperation Movement against the British.

In his more generous moments, Gandhi granted that nonviolence as a policy achieved quite a lot but very little compared to what it would have if nonviolence had been their creed. So it was different from cowardice, which Gandhi repeatedly put below the bravery of those who resort to violence in order to defend their honor. The bravery required by those who believed in nonviolence as a creed, according to Gandhi, was the greatest. No wonder there were not many volunteers for the nonviolent army!
Gandhi’s Non-Cooperation Movement against the British certainly captured the imagination of the people of India. Many (though by no means all) of those who did not join the movement wished it success. Getting rid of imperial rule, restoring self-respect, and making India self-reliant had a popular appeal. But there was fear amongst the minorities (e.g., many Muslims and Dalits) of being more vulnerable in independent India. Even amongst the majority communities, there was a lack of confidence in the nonviolent creed as a method of dealing with India’s defense, economic and social problems (such as communalism, class exploitation, violent caste, and gender oppression). For example, most Indians would have much preferred to rely on the proper army than on the nonviolent army as a method of defense. Of course, Gandhi worked wonders during the partition riots. About the partition riots, Mountbatten, the Viceroy of India, famously said, “In the Punjab I have 55,000 troops and riots on my hands. In Calcutta I have one man [Gandhi] and peace. May I pay my tribute to my one-man boundary force?” But there was only one Gandhi and he could not be everywhere.

Gandhi faced a dilemma. Either he includes in his Non-Cooperation Movement only those who believe in nonviolence as a creed. But this will restrict the movement to a “handful”; sometimes, he would say, he would be left with a nonviolent army of one. Or he could include those who believed in nonviolence as an expedience or policy in the hope that they will gradually come to practice nonviolence as a creed. He chose this second option. The volunteers of the Congress Party, which was at the forefront of the Non-Cooperation Movement against the British Raj, repeatedly pledged themselves to nonviolence in thought, word, and deed. Gandhi rightly dismissed these pledges as only existing “on paper.” He was very disappointed when, under the Congress Ministry in the United Provinces in 1938, police and military were called to stop a communal riot, instead of what he had hoped would be a nonviolent army of satyagrahis.

It is true that nonviolence as an expedience or policy achieved quite a lot, as even Gandhi granted. It is remarkable how little violence there was against the British people during the independence struggle. But, of course, there was enormous communal violence, especially during the partition of India. This fact can be explained on the Gandhian view by the fact that nonviolence as a creed was never practiced except by a very small minority. Gandhi took personal responsibility for this, for he had encouraged people to join his movement in the hope that many of those who joined his nonviolence as a policy would eventually begin to practice nonviolence as a creed, and the power of their example would spread to others, and eventually the whole of India would be a shining example of nonviolence to the rest of the world.

This was the hope, but he had to face the bitter truth that there were not really enough volunteers for the nonviolent army and in any case the majority of the population would be reluctant to leave their defense to a nonviolent army. As Gandhi stressed, nonviolence is not something that can be imposed by compulsion; he even conceded that he can conceive of occasions where he would be duty-bound to vote for the military training of volunteers. And even when the people needed and wanted a nonviolent army to defend themselves, the volunteers of the nonviolent army should arise locally. For instance, during the Quit India Movement, he felt the volunteers for the defense of Assam, in the event of Japanese invasion, should primarily come from Assam, not from other parts of India. This was one reason he gave for not being able to raise the nonviolent army.

In general, he favored a bottom-up approach and was against the nonviolent army being raised by a centralized authority. The members would be chosen locally as the local people would know best who the suitable persons would be for their needs. The volunteers would need to be impartial, especially between different religions, have impeccable character, and be capable of self-sacrifice. The members chosen would not only have to deal with cases of violence but also prevent such cases from arising in the locality. So they should have knowledge of the locality and be known and respected in the locality. Such people must have a living faith in nonviolence as a creed and be prepared to lay down their lives if necessary.

Gandhi was aware that the Congress only paid lip service to such suggestions, for he knew all along that the Congress did not believe in ahimsa as a creed. Towards the end of his life, he suggested that, having gotten rid of the British Raj, the Congress should cease to be a political party and devote itself to social service, but the Congress ignored his advice. He had broken formal ties with the Congress in 1934 when he resigned from membership of the Congress to devote himself to constructive work, but his informal association with the Congress, especially its leaders, continued. He himself confessed to practicing imperfect ahimsa. In placing civil disobedience above constructive work, he showed that he had not profited from his Himalayan blunder at Chauri Chaura in 1922. In 1940, he even attributed his inability to profit from his Himalayan blunder to his fear of alienating his co-workers. But why was he afraid of alienating the co-workers when he knew they were not truly interested in such pursuits? He says there was always the hope that a significant proportion of them might eventually see the light.

He chose Jawaharlal Nehru as his “political heir” even though he knew that Nehru did not believe in nonviolence as a creed or a way of life. There were deep disagreements between Nehru and Gandhi, but the two greatly respected each other and influenced each other. There was also deep emotional bonding between them and Gandhi had great faith in Nehru. In a speech to the All India Congress Committee (AICC) in January 1942, he claimed that “ever since he fell into my net Nehru has been resisting me. He says what is uppermost in his mind but always does what I want. When I am gone he will do what I am doing now…. he will speak my language.”

Gandhi’s prophecy about Nehru was not borne out by the facts. They both needed each other in the nationalistic struggle against imperial rule. But once this struggle was over, things would be different. In fact, Nehru had predicted this some years earlier. As Leela Gandhi says:
By the end of his life, as a result of the Nehruvian intervention in the shaping of independent India, Gandhi is transformed from the symbol of the hope of Indian independence into a perceived threat to the aspirations of the nation state. His assertions are frequently characterized as the impossible ramblings of a mad idealist who must be held in check. In another statement he (Nehru) declares “... often we discussed his fads and peculiarities and said, half-humorously, that when Swaraj came these fads must not be encouraged” (An Autobiography, 72–73).

Actually, Nehru, earlier in the same paragraph, had praised Gandhi as a “glorious leader, and... we gave him an almost blank cheque, for the time being at least.”

Nehru is right that, in practice, Gandhi often adopted extreme positions, such as expecting complete transparency and total integrity from politicians. For Gandhi, commitment to truth implies living a life of integrity. But Gandhi’s practical idealism has, as we have seen, some flexibility built into it. Truth and nonviolence are two sides of the same coin. He used “ahimsa” in a wide sense to include lying, and so when the politician is not transparent, he commits violence. We have seen that violence can never be justified, but it can, under certain conditions, be excused, according to Gandhi.

One of the things Nehru did share with Gandhi was his passion for secularism and communal harmony. But the marginalization of Gandhian principles and ideals in mainstream independent India started in Nehruvian India and has continued to grow. For instance, when Nehru became India’s first Prime Minister, Gandhi suggested that Nehru and his team should live simply, but Nehru moved into the former commander-in-chief’s bungalow and lived in some style. It is not for nothing that he was known as the last viceroy of India! Gandhi had warned about the hollowness of independence where the brown sahibs replace the white ones. Again, his advice that the new India should consist of self-regulating villages was ignored. Instead, Nehruvian India went for centralized economic planning, heavy industries, grand dams, a strong army, and other such trappings of the modern nation state.

Gandhi wanted to spiritualize politics not in the sense of spreading any one religion in India; he believed in spirituality in the sense that was at the basis of all (great) religions and, he might have added, all morality. Gandhi believed that political power is inherently corrupting and his ideal was to move towards a minimum state and eventually to “enlightened anarchy.”

I have argued in this paper that compromises were essential to Gandhian philosophy. The trouble with Nehru, from a Gandhian standpoint, was that some of his compromises were Machiavellian and un-Gandhian in the sense that they were not “rooted in compassion.” Take, for example, his connivance in the imprisonment of Sheikh Abdullah, the popular leader of Kashmir, and his refusal to condemn the Soviet Union for the invasion of Hungary soon after loudly and rightly condemning the British and French invasion of Egypt in 1956. Such actions may be defended on Machiavellian grounds and all countries do such things, but Gandhi’s hope was that India would set exemplary standards for state conduct rather than emulate other countries in such respects.

In spite of being marginalized, Gandhi would continue until the end fighting for the various causes dear to him, such as Hindu-Muslim unity and the emancipation of Dalits. He took personal responsibility for the failures of schemes he had encouraged. He distinguished his failures from failures of ahimsa. He never lost faith in true ahimsa which never fails. He asked people not to become Gandhites but ahimsaists. He tried to purify himself and others close to him. He tried to get as near to the ideal person described in the Bhagavad Gita, a Stithprajna, a person of total self-mastery, with a steady wisdom who has all passions and desires under control and never lets his passions sway his steadiness; he is also a true satyagrahi. Such a state, according to Gandhi, not only is good in itself but also has its wonderful effects through the power of example. Gandhi repeatedly talked of the great powers of the person who has attained such heights: “It is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire.” Again, “[i]f a single individual holds out to the end victory is certain.”

Gandhi confesses that he is far from that state of the Stithprajna. But he ceaselessly strives for it. His striving took many forms, including fasting and Brahmacharya and his controversial experiments with women. He has been much criticized for these experiments and they may have been misguided, but I think his motives were pure. It is not as if he had coerced the women; many of them were competing with one another for the privilege of sleeping with him. It was broadly in the Tantric tradition but characteristically he gave his own twist to it. As Nicholas Gier argues in his illuminating paper “Was Gandhi a Tantric?” Gandhi was neither in the left-handed tradition of Tantrism, which encourages sex, nor in the right-handed tradition of Tantrism, which asks people to avoid intimacy. He chose his own method.

Bernard Shaw said somewhere that the best way of conquering temptation is to give in to it. Gandhi thought the best way is not to run away from it or to give in to it (à la Shaw) but to face it head-on. Hence, the women he slept with (without any “lust” as he would say) were naked. But was it not unfair to the women to use them for his experiments? Gandhi was a paternalist and he genuinely thought that these experiments were also good for the purification and self-mastery of the women he slept with; and with purification and self-mastery, which involves conquering the brute within us, comes enormous power to do good. Gier says Gandhi’s experiments were self-indulgent. But there is no evidence that Gandhi consciously was self-indulgent here. The idea was to promote purity and self-mastery, which, as Gandhi conceived it, is far from self-indulgence. He believed that his practical idealism would be furthered by such self-mastery, by increasing the realm of the possible.

Like Tolstoy, Gandhi believed that unattainable ideals had an awe-inspiring quality that inspire us much more than ordinary attainable ideals. In fact, Gandhi achieved a lot...
If taken literally, this last claim is false. And according to Gandhi, although the application of ahimsa only reflects his failure, he being a poor practitioner of ahimsa. At other times he implied that such statements of the power of individuals should not be taken literally; he often said that the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life.

Actually, he has the resources to show that such statements of the power of individuals can be literally true if the statements are taken as hypothetical statements. If an individual were to practice ahimsa in its entirety, he would have great powers, but if one cannot show any such individual in this world, it is because no one has practiced ahimsa in its fullness. This is consistent with the view that if someone does practice ahimsa in its fullness, they will be a force greater than all the forces of violence. Gandhi said this to Sue Bailey Thurman, the first African American woman to have interviewed him. But Gandhi also, in this interview, claimed something more. To Thurman’s question—“Is such an individual possible in this world?”—he replied, “Certainly.”

If taken literally, this last claim is false. And Gandhi’s practical idealism is based on the assumption that some degree of violence is inevitable as long as one is a human being and that perfect ahimsa is not realizable in this world. Gandhi often admits that “nobody can practice perfect nonviolence.”

Perhaps some of Gandhi’s extreme statements are like unattainable ideals; their function is to inspire us. Sometimes they frightened his associates but, in general, he remained a compromiser. Gandhi’s tendency to compromise with his ideals can be seen clearly in the case of war. Gandhi supported the British government’s war effort during the Boer War, the Zulu Rebellion, and the First World War but not during the Second World War. Instead, he launched what came to be known as the Quit India Movement. He justified his support of the earlier wars on the grounds that, at that time, he was not convinced that the British rule was on balance evil; he thought it would help India achieve swaraj (self-rule). So he did not non-cooperate with the government, but instead enjoyed its benefits. Therefore, he felt an obligation to support the war effort.

Soon after the First World War, he was convinced that the British rule was on balance evil and he launched his famous Non-Cooperation Movement. Before that, his civil disobedience was directed against specific evils, but the Non-Cooperation Movement was directed at the total removal of the British Raj. In 1942, he launched the Quit India Movement when the British government needed Indian co-operation in the war effort. Gandhi felt that India should be given freedom or at least be allowed to move towards freedom if it is to participate in the war effort.

After India gained independence, during the Kashmir War, he went on a fast unto death. He protested over the fact that India would not be fighting the war honorably as long as Pakistan was not given its share of the assets. Once India agreed to give the assets, he reluctantly agreed to the Kashmir War even though violence was against his dharma. This was because, again, there was no nonviolent army or peace brigade in existence and, in any case, the people of Kashmir would not have accepted a peace brigade instead of the army. After his death, some peace brigades were formed, but they did not have the grandeur of the ones Gandhi had envisaged. They supplemented rather than supplanted the use of the military and police, but they did achieve moderate success in some cases.

There has, of course, been some important Gandhian work done after his death in India and elsewhere. Gandhian nonviolence has inspired non-governmental organizations, resistance movements, and protest movements all over the world. But those who wield political power have tended to pay only lip service to Gandhian ideals. A striking example is Aung San Suu Kyi said she was inspired by Gandhi when she led the resistance movement. But she only seems to have believed in nonviolence as a policy, as is shown by her behavior towards the Rohingyas when she achieved political power.

Gandhi admits that good and evil are relative terms in the sense that what is good for one person can be evil for another who faces different conditions. An agriculturist may sometimes have to kill an animal; especially during a famine, it would be a sin not to kill animals in order to save the crop from being eaten up by animals. And it is no better to employ someone else to do the killing. In a somewhat similar manner, Gandhi claimed, as we saw earlier, that it is consistent for him to have supported some wars but not others when he appears to be confronted with different situations. But this sort of relativism is consistent with his claim that truth and nonviolence are the supreme principles and that violence is always wrong, even when we have a duty to commit it. A follower of nonviolence has a duty not to commit violence, a duty to minimize violence, a duty not to impose nonviolence by compulsion. Sometimes these duties conflict and this leads to moral dilemmas. Gandhi provides us with a way of dealing with such dilemmas. Broadly, it is that each time we have a conflict of duties, we should try our best to promote a nonviolent society and conditions where such dilemmas will occur less frequently in the future.

According to Gandhi, although the application of ahimsa may be relative, ahimsa itself is infallible and an eternal law of our species. That is one reason why he asked us to become ahimsaists rather than Gandhiites.

Gandhi believed that if there is any country in the world that in the future would follow the path of nonviolence and provide an example for the world to follow, it was India. Was this optimism justified? It is true that India has a great heritage of teaching of nonviolence, but it would be naïve not to recognize that nonviolence as a creed or a way of life (in the sense of love and compassion in all areas of life) was not generally practiced in India. The fact that certain virtues are preached in a certain society is often because the corresponding vices prevail in that society.

Gandhi himself was aware that, besides a great heritage, India also has a history of practices such as untouchability, gender exploitation, class exploitation, religious conflict, and animal sacrifice. But he maintained until the end that
the nonviolence of the brave could overcome such evils. The tragedy was that “India was not ready for the lesson of the ahimsa of the strong than that no programme had been devised for teaching.”20 The reason he gave in support of this view was that nonviolence of the strong (or brave) required qualities that were difficult to produce in a culture associated with debauchery, drunkenness, gambling, black marketing, etc.

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NOTES
3. Haksar, Gandhi and Liberalism, chapter 3.
6. But Gandhi also uses nonviolence as a policy in a way that brings it much closer to nonviolence as a creed, almost co-extensive with it: “Himsa does not merely mean indulgence in physical violence; resort to trickery, falsehood, intrigue, chicanery and deceitfulness—in short, all unfair and foul means—come under the category of Himsa, and acceptance of Ahimsa, whether as a policy or a creed, necessarily implies all these things” (The Law of Love, 82, emphasis added). This is not the sense that Gandhi requires when he says people who are nonviolent in one sphere but not in others are displaying “nonviolence of the weak”; it is such people, according to Gandhi, who constituted the bulk of the Non-Cooperation Movement.
thought, the moral concepts appear rather tangentially in the said literature. So, I extract Gandhi's moral concepts from these theoretical discussions. I take two related steps in extracting these moral philosophical ideas. First, I highlight how Gandhi's conceptions have underlying moral ideals; for instance, his conception of truth is not mere truth-telling but a search for objective principles, which may be understood only with detachment from selfish interests. Second, I suggest how some of the characterizations proposed in this literature are insufficient to establish the necessary inter-relations in the concepts proposed by Gandhi. For example, a Gandhian case for political realism cannot be construed on the basis of nonviolence while ignoring Gandhi's concept of swarāj (self-rule), the ideal society whose conception is essentially grounded in nonviolence. A framework view of Gandhi's different moral conceptions is necessary to appreciate his moral universe.

My view is that a notion of moral agency forms the basis for Gandhi's framework of thought. By moral agency, I simply mean to suggest that the concept of an agent holds a central space in Gandhi's moral thought in the sense that most of Gandhi's ideas make better sense when read as characteristics of moral agents. That is, in Gandhi's scheme, truth is desired by someone, satyāgraha and nonviolence are states of mind, swarāj is attained by free agents, and so on. I will show that the literature I survey attempts to reach Gandhi's notion of moral agency from several directions, even though individually their respective directions seem insufficient. The task is to place these attempts in a coherent framework grounded in detached moral agency. It must be noted that I do not provide a detailed characterization of Gandhi's notion of detached moral agency in the present paper. Such characterization falls outside the scope of the present paper mainly because the literature I survey does not itself engage with the said notion.

II. NONVIOLENCE AND MORAL AGENCY
Political theorist Karuna Mantena argues that Gandhi's ideas constitute "transformative political realism," which basically means constructing political ideas as means rather than as ends. Mantena encourages transformative political realism in contrast to some problematic aspects of classical political idealism. She points out that, in political idealism, particular decisions are guided by ideals like justice and equality. Since these ideals as ends are fixed, their achievement often leads to "unintended consequences" such as violence for attaining justice. Mantena contends that Gandhi's insistence on nonviolence and "means over the ends" shows that Gandhi was aware of these unintended consequences of idealism in politics. Thus, Mantena regards nonviolence as the central conception in Gandhi's moral and political thought to offer a strong contrast to classical political idealism. She argues that Gandhi's insistence on nonviolent means, instead of certain idealized ends, induces sensitivity towards the context in the actions undertaken.

With a similar emphasis on Gandhi's insistence on means, Uday Mehta argues that Gandhi's nonviolence articulates "a contempt towards instrumentality of actions." In Mehta's view, political idealism treats particular actions as mere instruments to arrive at pre-decided ideals like justice and equality. Extending the scope of Gandhi's emphasis on means, Faisal Devji argues that Gandhi's insistence on means and the adjoining principle of nonviolence prevents the sacrifice of the present morality for future virtues. For instance, war is an archetypical example of promising future peace by killings in the present time. In fact, Devji contends that Gandhi reverses this trend and sacrifices the future for present morality.

There are two implications of such an articulation of Gandhi's notion of nonviolence. First, it demands moral concern in each social and political action, and second, it suggests, especially in Devji's work, that Gandhi's thinking is possibly not directed to the future or an ideal. I appreciate the first, but I find the second to be a limited reading of Gandhi's moral thinking; I will explain my reasons for this after discussing the first implication. Nonviolence, as focused on the present (means) rather than the future (ends), is meant to underline that Gandhi's moral view is uncompromising of the morality in each action.

As noted, a moral justification of the use of authoritative violence is often couched in terms of ideals like peace and justice. Gandhi perceives this as straight contradiction. He asserts that the goal of a moral society cannot be based on achieving it by immoral means, and thus his well-known rejection of violence even to overthrow oppressive rule follows. This has radical consequences for moral responsibility. Under this scheme, the morality of action is contained within itself, and the immorality of actions cannot be justified in terms of future morality. So, Gandhi's requirement of nonviolence demands moral responsibility on the part of the agent; the agent is asked to judge at every point whether or not the requirement of nonviolence is met.

This idea of nonviolence as moral responsibility can be located in Gandhi's rejection of just-war views advanced in the classical Indian text the Bhagavad Gītā (henceforth, the Gītā). Kṛṣṇa motivates Arjuna not to focus on the morality of the present action and prescribes killings, even of loved ones, for securing a just kingdom. Gandhi opposes this view in his translation and lectures on the Gītā. He says that a just action "must not mean indifference to the results." Gandhi says, "[I]n regard to every action one must know the result that is expected to follow, the means thereto [adopted to perform that action], and the capacity for it." As against pre-ordained injunctions from caste or society, Gandhi advocates a need for reflection and knowing one's responsibility. Gandhi observes that "we have to reflect to discover what our duty is."

Attention on the morality of each action turns the focus on responsibility and agency in that the performance of each action demands reflection and responsibility on the part of the agent. In contemporary debates in moral philosophy, the primacy of agency is often preferred to a principle-based approach to action; the latter is often criticized for its lack of focus on the agent and the individual. If agency is indeed central for Gandhi, we need to find out which kind of agency brings about nonviolent action. I will attempt to uncover the aspects of Gandhi's notion of agency in the later sections of the present paper. For now, I turn to
the second implication—Gandhi’s thinking is possibly not directed to the future or an ideal.

This second implication suggests that Gandhi’s nonviolence is concerned only with the present (means). Such a view considerably ignores Gandhi’s celebrated ideal conceptions, namely, swarāj (self-rule) and sarvodaya (welfare for all). Swarāj as an ideal makes for ends in the Gandhian scheme. Gandhi used the term swarāj rather broadly, which includes not only the moral condition of self-rule but also political freedom of individuals from excessive control of government, economic freedom of individuals and self-sustenance of the poor, national freedom from British rule, and so on.13 Swarāj, as political, economic, and national freedom, is regarded as the utopian state of society, which comprises morally self-governing individuals; these individuals constitute a society based on the principle of sarvodaya, meaning upliftment of all. Thus, Gandhi’s swarāj has at least two visible components: the moral component of self-rule and the ideal component of political and economic freedom, which are the goals of such morally governed individuals.

In her comments on Gandhi’s notion of swarāj, Mantena refers to swarāj as self-rule, which appears to accommodate the cherished goals within self-rule as follows: “Abstract ends need grounding in immediate, intimate, and precise practices as a way to ward off the temptation to look for ‘short-violent-cuts’ for temporary but ultimately self-defeating gains.”14 Mantena regards the ideal aspects of swarāj as abstract, which are reliant on the immediate aspects. Mantena’s interpretation of the ideal aspects of Gandhi’s swarāj as subservient to the immediate can be questioned. To repeat, Mantena’s main claim is that swarāj is grounded in immediate actions, but this claim alone does not give us reasons to give up the ideal aspects of swarāj. Gandhi’s own use of swarāj as an ideal (society) doesn’t provide a basis for such claims of Mantena either. On the contrary, it seems more reasonable to claim that, for Gandhi, the future morality is consistent with the morality of the present rather than subservient to it.

Here, I am only suggesting an alternate way to relate means and ends. That is, it need not be the case, as Mantena seems to propose, that the end is built into the means. The case for means to relate to ends could be that only a careful selection of means is suited for the end. In this alternate reading, nonviolence is a necessary condition for swarāj, not the sufficient one. In my view, Mantena ignores the classical ideal aspects of Gandhi’s thoughts due to the demands of her position as a political realist. The position appears to be such that political realism is incompatible with political idealism. That may well be the case with the forms of Western political idealism Mantena addresses, but as suggested, Gandhi’s political idealism does not suffer from the same problem.15 I will not pursue this matter any further because debates in political theory are not my basic concern.16

Once we appreciate the significance of Gandhi’s notion of nonviolence as a means to attain some distant ideals, both the role and the goal of the moral agent in Gandhi’s scheme become perspicuous. With reflection and knowledge, Gandhi’s agents are meant to adhere to the principle of nonviolence at every step to attain swarāj and to reach sarvodaya. Once we see the nonviolent agent as engaged primarily in the welfare of others, a more specific notion of moral agency emerges. The following discussion on Gandhi’s notion of truth is expected to throw more light on this aspect of moral agency.

III. TRUTH AND AGENCY
Another prominent moral concept in Gandhi’s thought is satya (truth) and its complement satyāgraha (desire or quest for truth). Interestingly, Mantena translates satyāgraha as nonviolent action and does not directly incorporate the concept of truth.17 The notion of satyāgraha as search for truth is often understood as reaching for the ideal. So, it could be that Mantena misses out on the truth aspect of satyāgraha due to her commitment to political realism.18 However, if truth is not included in Gandhi’s frame of thought, then the intrinsic connection between truth and nonviolence in Gandhi’s thinking will be lost. Gandhi tied the two together in the following remarks: “ahimsā is the means and truth is the end” and nonviolence and truth are like “the two sides of a coin.”19 I will presently develop this connection.

Unlike Mantena’s virtual denial of truth in satyāgraha, Shruti Kapila regards truth to be the key to understanding Gandhi’s politics. Kapila argues that Gandhi’s politics requires “attachment to the truth,” which is a close paraphrase of the idea of satyāgraha.20 But Kapila doesn’t explain what it means to hold such an attachment and how an agent forms it. Needless to say, Kapila views attachment as a positive idea since it concerns truth. Interestingly, the notion of attachment also appears in Mantena’s reading of Gandhi, but in a sense almost contrary to Kapila’s use of “attachment.” These apparently contrary notions of attachment take us closer to Gandhi’s idea of moral agency. Let’s see how.

Modern politics generally aims to advocate resolution of conflicts that arise due to attachment to interests, such as class interests and territorial interests. Mantena claims that Gandhi countered modern politics by replacing attachment to interest with detachment from interest.21 Under “interest,” Mantena includes class interests, property interests, caste interests, and the like.22 Mantena claims that, in Gandhi’s view, “principled conviction (in one’s own interest) is an alibi for violence.”23 In this sense, attachment (to interests) is a negative idea, according to Mantena, since it is the source of violence. In contrast, detachment (from interests) is a positive idea as a source of nonviolence because detachment takes the form of “selfless action that aims[s] at actively minimizing harm and suffering.”24 Thus, selfless action, according to Mantena, promotes nonviolence in the form of non-harm.

When put together, Mantena and Kapila’s analyses throw significant light on the notion of agency as a satyāgrahi. Mantena contends that nonviolence asserts renunciation of selfishness, and Kapila asserts that Gandhi demands attachment to, or conviction for, truth. Given that both the aspects of attachment to truth and detachment from selfish interests are indeed present in Gandhi, agency emerges as
a common prerequisite. That is, the aspects of conviction and detachment illustrate the moral psychology of the agent.

Furthermore, the two aspects seem to reinforce one another such that the agent is required to set aside her own interests while pursuing moral truth. This sounds about right even in apparently non-moral contexts in which some sense of objectivity or truth is sought. For instance, a scientist is required to set aside her personal interest in, say, getting early tenure while conducting experiments; anxiety about her personal deadlines cannot be allowed to influence the course of experiments. We can extrapolate this example to show how attachment to interests like class, caste, and religion can be a hindrance to moral truth.

However, neither Kapila nor Mantena by themselves explain this connection between truth, nonviolence, and detachment in their individual narratives on Gandhi’s thought. Mantena is unable to incorporate truth into her extensive narrative on nonviolence due to her non-ideal conception of morality. Kapila, in contrast, does not align her narrative on truth to the significance of nonviolence in the form of selflessness. It is worth underlining that, apart from being incomplete, these studies on Gandhi are disjointed due to the absence of a bridging concept; no concept relates nonviolence (Mantena) and truth (Kapila).

When we adopt a more comprehensive view of Gandhi’s moral concepts, three aspects of Gandhi’s characterization of agency emerge: moral responsibility of adhering to nonviolence, detachment from selfish interests to make possible the exercise of moral responsibility, and attachment to truth. Let’s see if there is any narrative in the existing literature which coherently ties these features together.

IV. DETACHMENT AND AGENCY

Independently of the literature discussed so far, the concept of detachment seems to bridge the concepts of nonviolence and truth in Gandhi, as hinted. There are indeed some suggestions in political literature that directly refer to a concept of detached agency in Gandhi’s thought. Faisal Devji’s analysis of Gandhi’s thought is useful here. Devji criticizes modern politics as sacrificing present morality in order to reach some ideal in the future. According to Devji, Gandhi presents a contrasting picture to such a view of politics. Devji argues that Gandhi insists on the present and ignores the future. Devji invokes the concept of disinterest to elaborate on one aspect of Gandhi’s opposition to modern politics.

As noted, modern politics is sometimes understood in terms of conflicting interests. According to Devji, Gandhi alters the interest-based conception of politics with the notion of disinterested social relations. “Disinterest” means repudiation of one’s interests, especially those of prejudice, for instance, the prejudice of mild enmity between Hindus and Muslims.

Devji argues that Gandhi’s opposition to modern politics is a special case of the more general notion of detachment invoked by Mantena.

Thus, Devji’s notion of disinterest can be seen to comprise two main features: (1) disinterest as an ideal aspect of social relations and (2) disinterest as the setting aside of one’s own interests in approaching the other being/person. But there are limitations in trying to arrive at a conceptual understanding of disinterest from one social context alone, as explained by Devji. If disinterest is mainly a feature of social relationships, then it tells us little about how it constitutes a feature of agency in Gandhi’s thought; for example, it is unclear what notion of prejudiced social relationship is involved in moral engagements with animals and the environment. It only seems that disinterest as setting aside of one’s selfish interests is an aspect meaningfully applicable to an agent.

Nonetheless, the concept of disinterest reinforces the idea of nonviolence as detachment from selfish interests in the case of social relationships. In a way, disinterest instantiates the concept of detachment from one’s own interests in seeking social bonds. However, even here, Devji’s characterization of disinterest is restricted. Devji restricts the scope of disinterested friendship to the relationship between the minority and the majority, and thus excludes the relationship with oppressed groups such as Dalits, people of the lower caste in the caste hierarchy. Devji says that one should relate with Dalits via service rather than in terms of disinterested friendship.

Contrary to Devji’s suggestion, a close look at the idea of service suggests that it presupposes disinterest in that a disinterested person alone can render genuine service to others. Disinterest as a lack of selfish interest seems like a necessary prerequisite of genuine service, more than in the case of friendship for which Devji invokes the concept of disinterest.

When disinterest is seen in a frame broader than proposed by Devji, the scope of disinterest in Gandhi’s scheme expands at once. Disinterest can be possibly understood as a disposition that one requires to relate to the other. For this, I have a preliminary proposition. It’s possible to use disinterest not merely as a kind of relationship but as a virtue. By “virtue,” I simply mean a positive character trait that one acquires and develops through practice.

As a virtue, disinterest not only explains the ideal relation between fellow beings, but it also fits together the features of agency culled in the previous sections, namely, moral responsibility, detachment from selfish interests, and
attachment to truth. Given the limited scope of the present paper, it is best that I postpone the task of developing the proposal to interpret disinterest as a virtue to another occasion. But this at least makes clear how it is possible to develop Devji’s somewhat restricted idea of disinterest in terms of detached moral agency in Gandhi’s thought.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS
As anticipated in the introduction, several aspects of these historical-political studies, individually and collectively, signal the underlying conception of moral agency. Shruti Kapila asserts the importance of self-transformation and attachment to the idea of truth by the agents. Faisal Devji refers to disinterest as a particular form of social relation, that is, disinterested friendship. But references to agency are rather vague and restricted in these accounts of Gandhi’s thoughts. The common feature that restricts these analyses in directly discussing agency is that these accounts are preoccupied with political and historical perspectives instead of a moral perspective. For instance, Devji’s analysis of Gandhi’s moral conceptions is limited to the historical contexts of Gandhi, Mantena’s discussion to her defense of political realism, and Kapila’s narrative to political judgment; none seem to directly appeal to the idea of moral agency.

However, my main purpose in this paper has been to show that even if there are various ways in which we reach crucial ideas like attachment to truth, detachment from selfish interest, moral responsibility, and social disinterest, the notion of moral agency is a possible common ground where all these ideas can meaningfully sit together. Agency as a common ground to Gandhi’s various concepts can be articulated as follows: The agents retain moral responsibility, ideas of attachment and detachment meaningfully ascribe to individuals, and agents are disinterested.

Needless to say, the idea of detached moral agency needs much explanation and scrutiny. In the present paper, my main aim has been restricted to underlining the primacy of moral agency in Gandhi’s moral framework. My sense is that once we appreciate such primacy of moral agency in his thought, various other aspects of Gandhi’s thinking appear to expand to the general aspects of moral philosophy. For example, we can now appreciate how there is a possibility to see a version of virtue ethics in Gandhi’s thinking. The idea of detached moral agency as a virtue leads to the necessity of nonviolence. Also, in a very preliminary manner, such a notion of agency reveals the metaethical possibility of viewing the goal of the welfare of the other as the content of moral truth. For Gandhi, satyagraha is intrinsically connected to satyavodaya.

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NOTES
1. Earlier objections to this biographical approach were made by Akeel Bilgrami, “Gandhi the Philosopher,” Economic and Political Weekly 38, no. 39 (2003): 4159–65. There are many challenges to the theoretical articulation of Gandhi’s moral concepts. I have discussed some of the methodological challenges to a metaethical study of Gandhi in my “Approaching Gandhian Metaethics: Some Methodological Issues,” in History of Indian Ethics: Gender, Justice, and Ecology, ed. Purushottama Bilimoria and Amy Rayner (New Delhi: Routledge, forthcoming).
3. The centrality and the features of Gandhi’s notion of detached moral agency were discussed in Samiksha Goyal, “Moral Agency in Gandhi’s Thought,” Annual Meeting of the American Philosophical Association Pacific Division, April 9, 2021, virtual presentation.
18. Mantena contends that Gandhi’s conception of truth is “multidimensional” such that our grasp of truth can only be fragmented and limited to local contexts; as a result, we cannot have much conviction in our views. Bilgrami rejects this view of truth in Gandhi’s epistemology in “Gandhi the Philosopher.”


27. Devji associates the idea of disinterest with Gandhi in terms of a close study of the Khilafat movement.


29. A positive character trait is one of the commonly discussed features of virtue in moral philosophy. For more on an account of virtue, see Julia Annas, Intelligent Virtue (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Gandhi’s Means-Ends Argument Revisited
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ABSTRACT
“The means may be likened to a seed, and the end to a tree; and there is just the same invariable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree.” Gandhi uses this analogy as well as several other analogies for the relation between means and ends as an argument for his insistence that resistance to oppression must always be nonviolent. In this paper, I will attempt to unpack the significance of each of these analogies as an argument for nonviolent resistance. I will also argue that Gandhi’s means-ends argument cannot be divorced from certain political, psychological, and spiritual assumptions, and I will discuss the significance of these assumptions.

I. INTRODUCTION
The United States invaded Afghanistan twenty years ago. The rationale of then-President George W. Bush was that even though the Taliban was not itself the perpetrators of the attack on the World Trade Center, members of the Taliban were still responsible because they had “harbored” those who had helped to organize the attack. The ensuing fighting over the last twenty years has cost the lives of 2,442 American soldiers and almost 170,000 Afghans, of whom one-third were civilians. The United States has also spent $2.313 trillion on operations in the war. It had also put the United States on a trajectory in which it sanctioned torture, kidnapping, and targeted assassinations with the use of drones. Now, after spending twenty years fighting the Taliban, the United States has completely withdrawn its military from Afghanistan, and President Joseph Biden conceded that the United States has indeed lost the war.

Only a few days before withdrawing from Afghanistan and completing the evacuation process, two suicide bombers at the Abbey Gate of the International Airport in Kabul killed at least thirteen American soldiers and perhaps more than 170 Afghans hoping to be evacuated. In his comments to the press concerning this attack, President Biden said, “To those who carried out this attack, as well as anyone who wishes America harm, know this: We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will hunt you down and make you pay.” Subsequently, the United States military launched a retaliatory drone strike that killed two ISIS militants and wounded another, although it was not known whether they were themselves involved in the attack at the Kabul airport. And on August 29, 2021, one day before the United States announced that it had completed the evacuation of American troops, an American drone strike was reported to have killed ten civilians, including seven children, an aid worker for an American charity organization, and a contractor for the US military. Thus, the logic of war prevails. When violence occurs, the response must be retaliatory violence, even in defeat.

Gandhi is undoubtedly the most well-known critic of the logic of war and advocate of nonviolence in the twentieth century. His advocacy, of course, took the form of a nonviolent practice that developed powerful mass movements in both South Africa and India. Gandhi also constructed a number of eloquent arguments for his claim that resistance to oppression and injustice should remain nonviolent. In this article, I will revisit what I consider to be his most powerful argument for nonviolent resistance—Gandhi’s means-ends argument. I will, however, attempt to demonstrate that this argument cannot be divorced from certain practical political, psychological, and spiritual assumptions.

Before proceeding further, it is important to make clear what Gandhi is arguing for. Nonviolent resistance, which Gandhi calls Satyagraha, must be distinguished from simply being nonviolent in the face of oppression or injustice. In the ordinary use of the term, one can be “nonviolent” by doing nothing or by running away from danger. For Gandhi, this is not genuine nonviolence. Furthermore, doing nothing or running away from danger is unacceptable, as he insisted that there is an obligation to confront and resist oppression and injustice. Or a group of people may resist nonviolently because they are not yet strong enough to challenge the oppressors with violence. Here again, this is not Gandhi’s understanding of nonviolent resistance, as it is precisely when a group is strong enough to use violence against the oppressor that it can demonstrate its commitment to nonviolence. Nonviolent resistance is not “passive resistance,” although Gandhi in his earlier writings sometimes uses that term, but active strategically planned non-cooperation. Furthermore, nonviolent resistance may also involve more direct forms of intervention—obstruction, e.g., sit-ins, or symbolic self-sacrifice, e.g., hunger strikes. What it must not do, however, is initiate violence. It must
not direct violent attacks against the agents of oppression, against the leadership of an oppressive regime, or even against symbolic representations of the oppressive regime. Furthermore, the participants in Satyagraha campaigns must allow blows to be inflicted on their bodies by the agents of oppression without striking back.

II. THE ARGUMENTS

Gandhi’s means-ends argument is actually a complex of interconnected arguments, all of which attempt to demonstrate that using violence as a means against an injustice cannot produce a just result. In contrast, most revolutionaries historically have subscribed to the assumption that when an unjust regime uses violence to maintain its power, it must be met with violent force. A more moderate version of this assumption can grant that there are occasions when violent force may not be necessary, but it still insists that revolutionaries must at least be prepared to use violence. In both these forms, the revolutionary logic remains within the orbit of the logic of war.

The most direct formulation of his means-ends argument appears in Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj*, which is translated literally as “home rule.” This was written by Gandhi in 1909 as he was returning by ship from England to South Africa, after having failed in his attempt to get the British to end its anti-Indian legislation in South Africa. *Hind Swaraj* is addressed to Indian nationalists of various persuasions, and it is organized as a dialogue between a “Reader” who poses questions and an “Editor” who, in effect, gives Gandhi’s answers to these questions. A number of its chapters contain a critique of the West’s obsession with technology and material goods, while other chapters were addressed to those who sought independence from the British Empire through violent force and often by acts of terrorism.

Gandhi allows that it is possible to drive out the colonial oppressors through violent force, but he argues that this will not produce true independence, as such violence only replaces one form of tyranny with another. “My patriotism,” Gandhi proclaimed, “does not teach me that I am to allow blows to be inflicted on their bodies by the agents of oppression without striking back. Furthermore, the participants in Satyagraha campaigns must allow blows to be inflicted on their bodies by the agents of oppression without striking back.”

In the chapter entitled “Brute Force,” Gandhi has the Reader pose what is perhaps the central question of the relation of means to ends. “Why should we not obtain our goal, which is good, by any means whatsoever, even by using violence? Shall I think of the means when I have to deal with a thief in the house? My duty is to drive him out anyhow. You seem to admit that we have received nothing, and that we shall receive nothing by petitioning. Why, then, may we not do so by using brute force?”

Gandhi’s reply takes the form of three analogies, which constitute an extended argument for the relation between means and ends. Here is the first analogy.

Your belief that there is not a connection between the means and the end is a great mistake. . . . Your reasoning is the same as saying that we can get a rose through a noxious weed. If I want to cross the ocean, I can do so only by means of a vessel; if I were to use a cart for that purpose, both the cart and I would soon find the bottom.

Here is the second analogy, which is the best-known of his analogies.

The means may be likened to a seed, the end to the tree, and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree. I am not likely to obtain the result flowing from the worship of God by laying myself prostrate before Satan. . . . We reap exactly as we sow.

In the third analogy, Gandhi considers the difference between stealing a watch, buying a watch, and being given a watch as a gift. Gandhi here argues that while, in one sense, the end seems to be the same since the individual is now in possession of a watch, if it is, in fact, quite different. Specifically, he argues that “according to the means I employ, the watch is stolen property, my own property, or a donation. Thus we see three different results from three different means.”

While each of these analogies has a superficial plausibility, we need to unpack them and consider how good they are as arguments for the conclusion that resistance to oppression and injustice must remain nonviolent. Consider the first analogy—that we cannot get a rose through a noxious weed or use a cart to cross the ocean. The point of the analogy is to highlight that only certain structural forms can produce certain desired results and that only certain tools will accomplish certain goals. However, if that is all that is meant by the relation of means and ends, then no one would disagree. As an argument for nonviolence, it begs the question, for what we want to know is not simply that we need some appropriate method to challenge oppression but what form of activity will be effective in doing so. Furthermore, as explained above, Gandhi concedes that it is possible to drive the British out of India through violent means. The problem, for Gandhi, is not that violence cannot be effective in decolonization but whether, in the process of using this tool, the end will be undesirable. Gandhi’s claim is that decolonization achieved through violence will not lead to true independence. In other words, what we need to know is why violent resistance cannot lead to this end.

In the second analogy, the claim is not merely that we need an appropriate means to accomplish the task but that the activity is internally related to the goal achieved, as a seed to a tree. In other words, the end is not something that awaits the result of the activity but is itself organized and shaped by the activity. Thus, what we call the means and the ends are segments of a continuous process. If the means are unjust, then the result will have that injustice built into it. Notice, however, that the analogy assumes that violence is inherently unjust. In contrast, an advocate of violence might well argue that if violence is used in pursuit of a just cause and is used judiciously with attention to certain moral norms, it is not unjust. In other words, the advocate of just revolutionary violence might appeal to the just war tradition and argue, by extension, in favor of
certain reasonable moral criteria of revolutionary warfare.\textsuperscript{15} In fact, even if those moral norms were not respected, it is not clear why revolutionary violence will inevitably corrupt the new society to be created.

The last analogy raises a different kind of problem. Clearly, if one steals a watch, one has in their possession a stolen watch. Nonetheless, the watch that is stolen functions just as well for telling time as a watch that is purchased or is a gift. In other words, while the thief has done something wrong, the goal achieved—possessing a reliable watch—is not affected by the activity which has led to its possession. In all, the three sets of analogies need some more additional premises to be successful as arguments for nonviolent resistance.

There is an additional argument in this same chapter of Hind Swaraj embedded in a thought experiment that Gandhi constructs. This thought experiment is his answer to the Reader’s question about the need to drive the thief out of the house by any means. Gandhi considers two scenarios. In the first, he imagines that you are so angry that you gather your neighbors together to attack the robber, and then she and her associated robbers retaliate in kind. The result is a continual escalation of violence. In the second scenario, you put your anger aside, take pity on the robber, and decide instead to destroy her motives for stealing. When the robber comes again, you make your possessions easily accessible. While she may steal again, she becomes confused and agitated, appreciates your loving heart, returns your things, and gives up stealing. While Gandhi admits that robbers will not always act in this way, he insists that the difference between these two scenarios demonstrates “that fair means alone can produce fair results and that . . . the force of love and pity is infinitely greater than the force of arms.”\textsuperscript{16}

I live in New York City and making my possessions more accessible to thieves will not likely produce the results that Gandhi imagines. In fact, both scenarios seem unlikely even in a small village or in almost any other real situation. However, I assume that the thought experiment is not an attempt to account literally for the behavior of actual thieves but rather a parable concerning the logic of violence. I began this article with reflections on the war in Afghanistan and the inability of the United States government to consider opting out of the retaliatory logic of war, even in defeat. The point of these two scenarios as a parable is to consider how we are trapped ideologically in that logic and what alternatives are possible to move us away from it. I now want to consider Gandhi’s implicit assumptions, two of which are suggested by this parable, and the way that these assumptions can ground Gandhi’s arguments and move us away from the logic of war. The two assumptions highlighted by this parable are that violence leads to escalating cycles of retaliation and that “the force of love and pity” is stronger than physical force.

III. VIOLENCE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

“To use brute force . . . means that we want our opponent to do by force that which we desire but he does not. And if such a force is justifiable, surely he is entitled to do likewise by us. And so we shall never come to an agreement. We may simply fancy, like the blind horse moving in a circle round a mill, that we are making progress.”\textsuperscript{17} Each side in the struggle draws sustenance and legitimation from the violence of the other side against it. In fact, being attacked violently is not just a loss of human life but is also experienced, by those who remain alive, as psychological humiliation; and so, to compensate for that humiliation, each side needs to increase its violence. Eventually, one side may lose. But whatever the gain of the other side, the logic of war is reinforced; and it may only be a question of time before there is a new war, often initiated by the descendants of those who were defeated. When Germany was defeated in World War I, this paved the way for its reassertion of military power, leading to World War II. The US invasion of Afghanistan has led to an endless cycle of violence and ultimately, twenty years later, to the Taliban’s return to power.

However, as bad as the continual cycles of violent escalation are, the problem is deeper. Even if the ostensible goal has been reached and is not in immediate danger of being reversed, violence brings about several additional problems. The first is that, whatever the advocates of just war or just revolution may claim, violence is almost never self-limiting. Ronald Terchek puts the point this way: “Part of Gandhi’s brief against violence stems from his view that violence cannot be easily contained. Too often, he argues, it invades, like a cancer, anything that stands in its hungry way. Justifying the use of violence to serve some higher end, those who practice violence often extend its use to anyone and anything they believe get in the way of their goals.”\textsuperscript{18}

Furthermore, violence has a number of unintended spin-off effects that spread out over time. Michael N. Nagler uses as an analogy an “event cone” in physics. “Even the tiniest event—say the emission of a gamma from a decaying particle—ramifies into the future, changing patterns and altering seemingly unrelated events at a great remove in time and space. When you see its event cone, the working of violence begins to look a lot less ‘surgical.’ It too can create a ‘butterfly effect’ of cascading disorder.”\textsuperscript{19}

Finally, there is an even more serious problem to which Gandhi alludes in the second and third analogies. Let us assume that the revolutionaries are successful and that they attempt to organize the society according to their ideal of justice. However, they have themselves been changed through their use of violence. The agent cannot be separated from the action. The watch that is stolen is not just a watch, but the agent is also now a thief who is in possession of a watch, and the revolutionaries, who have achieved their goal through violence, are now violent human beings in charge of a new regime. It is not surprising that, in societies created through revolutionary violence, those who are now in control often attack each other, that violent factional disputes often occur, and that violent repression to maintain order becomes the norm. In short, the end created by violent means is not the ideal just society envisioned by the revolutionaries but a society which is within the logic of war, with all its continued violent consequences. Thus, what is created by a violent revolution is an endorsement of the logic of war. “For Gandhi,” writes Karuna Mantena, “when coercion is deemed rightful conduct against recalcitrant opponents or
enemies . . . the result is that . . . all become accustomed to and accept competitive domination as the preeminent mode of modern politics.”23 In other words, when violence succeeds, what is also established is the acceptance of the legitimacy of violence. Nagler puts it this way: “every time we use violence to solve a problem, we send the signal that violence is the way to solve problems.”24

IV. THE POWER OF NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE: THE POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS

In contrast to the tendency of violence to have no limits, nonviolent resistance is self-limiting. To quote Mantena again: “The novelty of Gandhian satyagraha (nonviolent action) lies in its self-limiting character; it is a form of action that seeks both to constrain the negative consequences of politics and work toward the reform of existing political relations and institutions.”25 Nonviolent resistance is self-limiting in several ways. First, it keeps the possibility of dialogue with the opponent open. Second, it opts out of the logic of war with its escalating cycles of violence and unintended consequences. Third, the discipline of nonviolence is itself a form of self-limitation.

However, Gandhi recognizes that nonviolent resistance will also escalate when those in power refuse to concede their just demands, but this escalation does not lead to violent conflict without limits. If the momentum is maintained, consistent nonviolent resistance will destabilize the oppressive regime and bring about a just resolution to the conflict: “If a regime intends to remain in power indefinitely, it will require extensive, long-term interaction with those it rules . . . the broader the regime’s system of control, the more vulnerable it is, because it depends on too many actors to ensure that violence against resisters will always work.”26 The oppressive regime is vulnerable because, when challenged, it depends on violence to maintain control.

Furthermore, as Gene Sharp has argued, the power of the ruling body is never monolithic and depends “intimately upon the obedience and cooperation of the subjects.”27 The power of the rulers requires the tacit consent of their citizenry. If enough citizens withdraw their consent, the regime collapses. If the regime responds to nonviolent resisters with violence, they undermine their moral authority, and more people will be likely to join the resistance. If they do not respond, then the nonviolent movement is perceived as winning, and again more people will be willing to join it. What gives the nonviolent resistance its power is precisely its ability to remain nonviolent in the face of the violence of those in power. This was a point recognized by a secretary to General Smuts, who, as head of the South African government in Transvaal, was Gandhi’s main adversary. “I often wish that you took to violence like the English strikers, and then we would know how to dispose of you. But you will not injure even the enemy. You desire victory by self-suffering alone . . . and that is what reduces us to sheer helplessness.”28 Richard Gregg has described this strategy as a “moral jiu-jitsu.” “The nonviolence and good will of the victim [the nonviolent resister] act in the same way that the lack of physical opposition by the user of physical jiu-jitsu does, causing the attacker to lose his moral balance. He suddenly and unexpectedly loses the moral support which the usual violent resistance would render him.”29 However, while we can explain the effectiveness in such political and psychological terms, Gandhi believes that Satyagraha embodies and manifests a deeper spiritual truth.

V. THE POWER OF NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE: THE LAW OF LOVE AND THE LAW OF SACRIFICE

At the spiritual level, Gandhi called nonviolent resistance “truth-force,” “soul-force,” and “love-force.” The truth, for Gandhi, is that there exists “some deeper, permanent power or force that allows us to experience the meaningful interrelatedness and unity of all reality.”30 Human beings are interconnected on some fundamental spiritual level, what Gandhi sometimes refers to as “heart unity,” and the utilization of this deeper spiritual connection is what Gandhi terms “the force of love.” Thus, “the force of love is the same as the force of soul or truth.”31 Given this deep spiritual interconnection, the force of love entails ahimsa (non-harm), and, therefore, opposition to oppressive institutions cannot intend to harm those who occupy the seats of power or their agents. Furthermore, this force must be understood to work in certain ways, which Gandhi calls “the law of love,” and those who would harness this force effectively must do so by recognizing how this law works. “The law of love will work, just as the law of gravitation will work, whether we accept it or not. Just as a scientist will work wonders out of various applications of the law of nature, even so a man who applies the law of love with scientific precision can work great wonders.”32

What nonviolent resisters do is develop a strategy by which they can connect with their opponents even as they oppose them. Their nonviolence then becomes a form of communication, since it expresses a respect for the humanity of their opponents and makes clear that while they seek to destroy the oppressive system, they do not wish to destroy the human beings who are the agents of that oppressive system. They, therefore, offer the agents of oppression the opportunity to understand the way in which they too are trapped within the system of oppression. This opens the possibility of destabilizing not just the regime but the logic of war and, therefore, provides an incentive for the oppressors themselves to change.

The law of love works through the law of suffering. Those who refuse to cooperate with the oppressive system will suffer the consequences, e.g., loss of position, prison, or some other form of punishment. If blows are struck, they will receive them without violently responding. Gandhi argues that such suffering is not a byproduct of nonviolent resistance but an essential component. “Progress is to be measured by the amount of suffering undergone by the sufferer. The purer the suffering, the greater is the progress.”33 Gandhi offers several reasons for this position. First, any significant change involves suffering. “No country has ever risen without being purified through the fire of suffering. Mothers suffer so that the child may live. The condition of the wheat growing is that the seed grain should perish.”34 Second, since we can always be mistaken about our cause, better to sacrifice oneself than
to sacrifice another. “If this kind of force is used in a cause that is unjust, only the person using it suffers.” Third, it opens a potential heart-unity communication with the oppressor. Gandhi assumes that in the long run “the sight of suffering on multitudes of people will melt the heart of the oppressor and induce him to desist from his course of violence.” Finally, nonviolent resisters communicate to their opponent the strength of their conviction in a way that violence cannot, as they demonstrate that their suffering is a conscious choice. “Nonviolence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but it means pitting of one’s own soul against the will of the tyrant.” In all, the law of love and the law of suffering are united in nonviolent resistance as a spiritual means to attain a just end.

VI. CONCLUSION: THE LIMITS OF NONVIOLENCE

If Gandhi’s analysis is correct, nonviolent resistance is the only way to attain a reasonably just end. However, there are situations in which violence may seem unavoidable. How can we respond nonviolently to an oppressor whose intent is genocide? What kind of nonviolent resistance is possible against a terrorist group? Even if Gandhi is correct that violence always corrupts the end, it would sometimes seem that we have no choice but to be violent.

It may come as a surprise to some readers that Gandhi himself recognized that complete nonviolence is not always possible. Gandhi insists that if the choice is between cowardice or opposing injustice with violence, then violence is preferable. When Gandhi’s son asked what he (his son) should have done had he been present when his father was almost killed, Gandhi replied “that it was his duty to defend me even by using violence.” There are, therefore, no easy answers to these questions. There may be some situations where there are no opportunities for effective communicative nonviolent resistance and where the use of violence against an immanent attack may be the least violent response. However, if we do choose to use violence, we must be clear that there are no other options, we must restrict the violence to a minimum, we must attempt to use it in a way that allows for the possibility of nonviolent interaction in the future, we must not glorify the violence, and we should not deceive ourselves into thinking that we are doing something that is anything more than a tragedy.

Before concluding, I want to consider whether Gandhi has anything reasonable to say about a current example—the Ukrainian violent resistance to Russia’s invasion. As I am finishing this article, the war in Ukraine has been going on for over four months with huge casualties on both sides. However, only one country—Russia—has invaded the territory of the other country, and all the fighting and, with rare exceptions, all the bombing has taken place within the territory of Ukraine. Furthermore, Russia has employed massive terror bombing, sometimes using cluster and phosphorous munitions and often directly targeting civilians, hitting residential buildings, markets, and train stations that have no discernible military purpose, as well as hospitals, schools, theaters, and civilian shelters. Finally, there have been credible reports of significant human rights abuses by Russian soldiers, abuses that, in some cases, appear to have been organized from above. Russia’s goal, at least initially, seemed to be the occupation of the whole territory of Ukraine and the erasure of Ukraine as a country and as a culture. Thus, it would be reasonable to say that the Ukrainian military resistance was a fight for the self-determination of Ukraine as both a political and cultural entity, a goal to which Gandhi would certainly have been sympathetic. However, insofar as the Ukrainian resistance is a massively violent one, could there be a reasonable nonviolent alternative?

Gandhi developed his analysis of nonviolent resistance in the context of the colonial occupation of South Africa and India and not as a means to defend one state against the invasion by another. However, in the weekly journal Harijan in 1940, Gandhi did briefly consider how India, once it achieved national independence through nonviolent means, could respond to the aggression of another state without resort to violence. While recognizing that it is unlikely that modern states could, in general, accept nonviolence as a policy, Gandhi, in that article, offered his own suggestions for what a people committed to nonviolence might do. The first is that the representatives of the state would let the occupiers in without resistance, but then they would make clear that they would not cooperate in any way with the occupiers, even if that meant death. The second is that the people, having been trained in nonviolent resistance, “would offer themselves unarmad as fodder for the aggressor’s cannon. The underlying belief is that in either case even a Nero is not devoid of a heart.” In this same passage, Gandhi imagines that the invaders would be forced to relent when they confront “the unexpected spectacle of rows and rows of men and women simply dying rather than surrender to the will of an aggressor.” The first scenario, if applied to the current situation, would mean that Ukraine would simply surrender, that it would allow Russia to occupy the whole country, and only then would they begin the struggle for self-determination through nonviolent resistance. But that would mean that they would first need to give up what they already have—national self-determination—in the hopes that they could, at some point in the distant future, regain it (and with the possibility that they might not succeed in doing so or even of genocide). The second scenario would make no sense in the context of modern warfare, and, especially in this case, where those under bombardment, often at a great distance, are not directly seen by those who are bombing them, where Putin and the leadership of Russia have no interest in avoiding the killing of ordinary civilians (and may, in fact, intend to kill civilians as a terror tactic), and where, through extensive propaganda and censorship, much of the Russian public is unaware of the horror inflicted upon the people of Ukraine.

I conclude, therefore, that nonviolent resistance in this kind of situation is not a reasonable, effective means to a just end. This, however, does not mean that Gandhi’s analysis has no relevance. As suggested above, Gandhi’s analysis entails, I believe correctly, that it is important not to glorify the violence and that we should see such violence as nothing more than a tragic necessity, that it be used in a way that holds open the possibility of negotiations and nonviolent solutions in the future, and that the territory
of the other country—Russia—and the lives of the people who reside within them should be respected. Furthermore, as a cautionary note, those who are violently resisting should recognize that violence has a tendency to generate unintended spin-off effects, that it cannot not be easily limited to its intended goal, that those engaged even in necessary violence can be easily corrupted, and that the use of such necessary violence today should not be used to legitimize the logic of war in the future.

NOTES
4. I borrow the term "the logic of war" from Jonathan Schell, who, following the analysis of Carl von Clausewitz, uses it to describe the way in which "violence, although initiated in pursuit of political goals, can take on a life of its own, which distracts from the original goals, and may eventually compete with them or supplant them entirely." Jonathan Schell, The Unconquerable World: Power of Nonviolence and the Will of the People (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2003), 132.
5. Satyagraha literally means "holding on to the truth."
6. Marx, for example, allowed that there might be situations where socialism could be brought about through democratic means, although he assumed that in most situations violent force would be necessary.
8. Gandhi, in fact, had an admiration for the courage of such advocates of violence, including some terrorists, even as he strongly disagreed with their methods.
14. Martin Luther King, with this argument clearly in his mind, puts the point this way: "[E]nds are not cut off from means, because the means represent the ideal in the making, and the end in process . . . in the final analysis, means and ends must cohere because the end is preexistent in the means, and ultimately destructive means cannot bring about constructive ends." This quotation is from King's Christmas sermon on peace delivered in 1967 in Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. The full text of the sermon can be accessed at https://onbeing.org/blog/martin-luther-kings-last-christmas-sermon/.
15. The just war tradition has argued that the practice of war is just so long as certain criteria are met. These are the criteria of jus in bello (justice within the war)—noncombatant immunity, humane treatment of prisoners, and proportionality (the measures taken should not be more violent than is necessary to achieve the military goal). In this way, the advocate of violent revolutionary action might argue that the action is just so long as it refrains from intentionally harming civilians and does not inflict unnecessary harm on the agents of the unjust regime.
30. Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha), 113.
31. Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha), 112. I would add that work needed for any significant goal requires suffering.
33. Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha), 362.
34. Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha), 134.
35. Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha), 132.
36. I am indebted to Douglas Allen for these last reflections. Allen has creatively formulated a Gandhian response to terrorism that allows for a carefully delimited violence against it. See Douglas Allen, Gandhi After 9/11: Creative Nonviolence and Sustainability (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019), chapter 7.
37. Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha), 386.

II. GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY OF SWARAJ (SELF-RULE, INDEPENDENCE, FREEDOM)

Gandhi, Thurman, and Lawson: Self-Governance as a Way of Peace and Change

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ABSTRACT
Mahatma Gandhi advocated self-governance for India. Gandhi anchored this vision in Yoga philosophy. This essay will explore how the call for radical independence from the influence of others can be seen in Gandhi's favorite passage
in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, chapter two, verses 54–72. These verses give practical instruction on how to remain unruffled in the midst of resistance. By finding sovereignty within oneself, worlds can change. Gandhi trained the freedom fighters of India in this yogic technique. He inspired Howard Thurman, who brought word of this technique to the African American community after his meeting with Gandhi while living in India in 1934 and 1935. Two decades later, James Lawson learned from Gandhians while teaching school in Nagpur. Lawson, who taught Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rosa Parks, continues to train people in the skills of social and economic analysis and thoughtful, direct actions to effect change. Freedom comprises the core of Gandhi's message. Society must become free of all forms of tyranny: interpersonal, corporate, and self-imposed.

Until philosophers rule as kings and leading men genuinely and adequately philosophize, that is, until political power and philosophy entirely coincide . . . cities will have no rest from evils . . . there can be no happiness, either public or private, in any other city!

**SELF-GOVERNANCE, SVARĀJ, SOVEREIGNTY**

Mahatma Gandhi was a person in turmoil. While in India, he struggled within his father's home, feeling selfish and lustful as a teenaged newlywed, seeking his own pleasures even when his father was mortally ill. In England, he struggled adapting to a foreign culture. In South Africa, he suffered the indignity of personal insult because of his race. In India, he felt the vast suffering of a nation under the thumb of colonial domination that inflicted famine and misery on millions. In each instance, at home, in England, in South Africa, and back in India, he sought agency first for himself and then for India as a nation. The term rāj refers to kingdom or governance; the prefix sva indicates self. Combined, their meaning can be translated as self-governance or sovereignty. Echoing the words of Socrates, Gandhi insisted that without personal transformation, an entry into and adherence to a philosophical view, there can be no social change. For Gandhi, that philosophy was nonviolence.

As is well-known, while in England, Gandhi discovered the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which for him became the touchstone, the narrative through which his own story could take on greater meaning. One portion of the text in particular spoke to him deeply: the last eighteen verses of the second chapter. According to his secretary Narayana Desai, Gandhi recited these verses every day, finding inspiration in their simple meaning: Be the best person you can possibly be, at all times and in all circumstances. In these verses, Gandhi found a template for the hero, a person capable of self-rule who can also serve as an example for others.

**THE STEADY SAGE OF THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ**

The *Bhagavad Gītā*, one of the most translated (and revered) texts of world literature, provides a roadmap for moving away from dualistic, us-vs.-them reactivity. Krishna gives the following instructions:

Be the same in success or failure.
This “sameness” is called Yoga.

Mahatma Gandhi gravitated toward the iconic “person of steady wisdom.” He saw that such immovable souls were able to endure great suffering and bring about lasting change. He trained himself to become such a Yogi and trained millions of Indians to endure the merciless beatings meted out by the British army. His method changed the course of world history. Colonial rule collapsed throughout the globe. People regained their self-rule, their sovereignty. By adhering to the principle of nonviolence, even in the face of physical harm, they sparked the conscience of their oppressors.

The following verses became Gandhi’s anthem and are translated here in their entirety to give a full sense of Gandhi’s emphasis on steady wisdom as the key to the transformation of self and society. This poem—within-a-poem can be parsed into four basic messages: the acknowledgment of one’s ignorance, the changeability of the world, the consequences of entering a downward spiral, and the freedom option.

This discourse opens with Arjuna’s question. Arjuna has been utterly paralyzed by his situation. He feels miserable, defeated, confused, and impotent. His world has been so radically shaken by treachery committed by his own cousin-brothers that he cannot move forward. Likewise, Gandhi, in his autobiography, grapples with his own lust, his feelings of “less-than,” his rage at his own mistreatment of his family, and his feelings of “less-than,” his rage at his own mistreatment and the mistreatment of others, and the seeming enormity of the insurmountable task of changing the world, the consequences of entering a downward spiral, and the freedom option.

II:54. Arjuna asks Krishna:
How can the person of steady wisdom be described,
that one accomplished in deep meditation?
How does the person of steady vision speak?
How does such a one sit and even move?
The second message of this passage asks for a reconsideration of the fixity of the external world. The external world “arrives” because we say it is so, because of agreed-upon conventions about right and wrong, tasty and disgusting, worthy and unworthy. Krishna provides a measured critique and analysis of this habitual way of engaging the world. He calls into question the relationship between the senses and the objects of the senses. Krishna urges his listener to “dial it back,” to recognize that a sense object does not exist before the sensory organ (indriya) “lands” upon it, seizes it, and makes it real. Careful direction of the senses can help shape one’s emotional relationship with the world. By learning to step back into a place of consideration before, in Nietzsche’s words, “going...
under,” in this case under the thrall of the senses, one can gain a measure of mastery that ultimately leads to self-understanding and self-control.

55. The Blessed One responds: When a person leaves behind all desires that arise in the mind, Arjuna, and is contented in the Self with the Self, that one is said to be steady in wisdom.

56. The person who is not agitated by suffering (duḥkha), whose yearnings for pleasures have evaporated, whose passion, fear, and anger have evaporated, that sage, it is said, has become steady in vision.

57. One whose passions have been quelled on all sides whether encountering anything, whether pleasant or unpleasant, who neither rejoices or recoils, such a person is established in wisdom.

58. And when this person can draw away from the objects of sense by recognizing the senses themselves like a tortoise who draws in all five of its limbs, such a person is established in wisdom.

64. By giving up desire and hatred even in the midst of the sense objects through the control of the self by oneself, a person attains peace.

65. This peace generates for that person the end of all sufferings (duḥkha). The one with a peaceful mind indeed attains steady intelligence.

Third, Krishna articulates a cascade of unfortunate consequences that can result if one does not gain self-control. Attachment leads to desire. thwarted desire leads to anger. Anger confuses the mind. A confused mind knows no tranquility. The emotional fallout from uncontrolled desire not only can ruin one's day but also can take down entire families, villages, and nations.

66. There is no intelligence if one is not disciplined. Without discipline there is no meditation. Without meditation there can be no tranquility. Without tranquility, how can there be happiness?

Fourth, Krishna emphatically declares the possibility of freedom. If one can reverse the outflows of the senses through managing one's emotions, one can become like a still ocean. One can be wakeful in the midst of ignorance. Echoing the description of freedom found in both Buddhism and Samkhya, one can move away from ego fixity and obsession into a state of no ego, no possessions, no lust for the things that bring bondage. In short, the Prajña Sthiti, the person established in wisdom, becomes godlike, Brahmī Sthiti, and enters the divine abode of Brahma Nirvana, a clever mash-up of ascent to a heavenly realm characterized as a place where the winds of desire no longer blow.

71. The person who abandons all desires moves about free from lust, free from possessiveness, free from ego. That person attains tranquility.

72. This is the godly state, Arjuna. Having attained this, one is not deluded. Staying in this even up until the time of death, one reaches Brahma Nirvana.

This final verse has often been heralded as acknowledging the wisdom of the Buddhist tradition and showing the commonality of freedom across India's many faiths.

HOWARD THURMAN: DEALING WITH DECEPTION

Martin Luther King, Jr., drew deep inspiration from the work of Howard Thurman (1899–1981). He read nightly from Thurman's book Jesus and the Disinherited (1949), which was on his nightstand in the Memphis hotel at the time of his death. The book, a rhetorical masterpiece, opens by emphasizing that Jesus as a person lived on the margins. Fully human, his struggles mirrored the struggles of all enslaved people: facing the "three hounds of hell" described by Thurman as fear, deception, and hate. At the midpoint of the book, Thurman turns to Gandhi as he seeks a way out of the tenacity of deception. Rather than acquiesce, rather than compromise, Thurman calls for a third solution: "complete and devastating sincerity." 44 From a philosophical point of view, he calls for an uncompromising speaking of truth. Thurman, who met with Gandhi in India in 1936, quotes Gandhi's letter to Muriel Lester: "Speak the truth, without fear and without exception. . . . You are in God's work, so you need not fear man's scorn. If they listen to your requests and grant them, you will be satisfied. If they reject them, then you must make their rejection your strength." 45 Gandhi's philosophy called for drawing strength from the opposition and scorn of others. On the salt marches and other protests, the Gandhian refusal to strike back when hit by the British police signaled the marchers' and protestors' steadfast resolve, a state of being established in an equanimity that soon caught the attention of the world. Ultimately, equipoise won out over aggression.

Well aware of the ongoing work of Gandhi, Thurman writes: "[B]e simply, directly truthful, whatever may be the cost in life, limb or security. . . . In the presence of an overwhelming sincerity on the part of the dispossessed, the dominant themselves are caught with no defense, with the edge taken away from the sense of prerogative and from the status upon which the impregnability of their position rests. They are thrown back upon themselves." Thurman goes on to critique the very basis of power itself:

The experience of power has no meaning aside from the other-than-self reference which sustains it. If the position of ascendency is not acknowledged tacitly and actively by those over whom the ascendency is exercised, then it falls flat. . . . That advantage due to the accident of birth or position is reduced to zero. Instead of relation between the weak and the strong there is merely a relationship between human beings. . . . The awareness of this fact marks the supreme moment of human dignity.

This passage outlines the nonviolent strategy that eventually prevailed in the Civil Rights Movement. Make the world aware of the plight of the oppressed. Reveal the techniques used by the oppressor, whether low wages, exclusion from real estate wealth, voter suppression, overt targeting by the police, failing schools, and more. But rather than develop hate, exercise love. Disarm the enemy. In recognizing their humanity, they must reciprocate.
Thurman recognizes the difficulty of this undertaking: "Love of the enemy means that a fundamental attack must first be made on the enemy status . . . an ‘unscrambling’ process is required."47 Thurman points to the ultimate goal: a dignity that is "universal, knowing no age, no race, no culture, no condition."48

Thurman met with Gandhi in 1936. Independence for India followed more than a decade later, in 1947. Gandhi’s long struggle, from the start of the satyagraha campaign in 1918 to the salt marches that began in 1930 to the final push in 1942, took nearly thirty years. It provided a roadmap for others not only to overthrow colonial rule but also to seek civil rights for all people.

Eleanor Roosevelt (1886–1962) was moved deeply by the sufferings she witnessed in her childhood and through both World Wars. She was well apprised of Gandhi’s successful work on behalf of not only India’s freedom but also the freedom of India’s disenfranchised, including women, religious minorities, and persons of low caste. She chaired a drafting committee within the newly formed United Nations that issued the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The document relied heavily on the wisdom of an international team of philosophers and legal experts, including representatives from Lebanon, China, and India. Its preamble states that “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world.”49 Many have worked to fulfill the ideals of this document, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, and Jimmy Carter. Roosevelt’s advisors included the Confucian philosopher P. C. Chang, who employed the term “dignity” as a rough translation of the Confucian term “ren” or human-heartedness. Hansa Mehta, from India, insisted that Roosevelt strengthen the advocacy for women in the document. The general attitude set forth in the Declaration set the stage for important civil rights work in the 1950s and 1960s, which took inspiration from the notion that dignity must be accorded to all persons. It is important to note, however, that whereas Eleanor Roosevelt emphasized the individual, Gandhi, as noted by Douglas Allen, “repeatedly qualifies the valuable proposals for universal individual human rights by asserting that it is what is most needed is a universal declaration grounded in Dharma (duties, obligations).”50 Sudha Reddy serves as the Asian representative to a movement advocating for an expansion of the concept of rights to include this view, as found in the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities.51

REV. JAMES LAWSON: OVERCOMING PLANTATION CAPITALISM

Rev. James Lawson (b. 1928) avidly supported the nonviolent campaign of Mahatma Gandhi. Upon his release from prison for refusal to serve in the Korean War, he moved to India, where he taught school for three years in Nagpur, near Gandhi’s Sevagram Ashram. One of the most joyous moments of his life took place while he was in India and saw a front page headline: “Blacks in Mississippi Stage Bus Boycott.”52 He conferred with Gandhians to learn the techniques of nonviolent resistance and consulted with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. When he returned to the United States to undertake graduate studies at Oberlin College in Ohio, Martin Luther King, Jr., implored him to move south. Lawson moved to Nashville. In the late 1950s, Lawson conducted workshops in Gandhian nonviolence, training young activists such as Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., John Lewis, and hundreds of others on how to withstand abuse without flinching. At the Tuesday night workshops, “the group discussed nonviolence from the perspective of . . . Henry David Thoreau, Reinhold Niebuhr, A. J. Muste . . . Mo Ti and Lao Tzu. The participants debated ‘every aspect of Gandhi’s principles.’ In particular, they studied Gandhi’s concept of satyagraha, which was considered by John Lewis to be ‘a grounding foundation of nonviolent civil disobedience, of active pacifism.’53 Satyagraha requires speaking truth, holding truth, and, in the words of Thurman, dwelling in “overwhelming sincerity.”

Hundreds flocked to the south to support the freedom rides and the lunch counter sit-ins, and hundreds of thousands attended the mass demonstrations in Washington, D.C. Eventually, the nonviolent movement prevailed. Ground-breaking legislation passed, including the Voting Rights Act. Programs such as Head Start and the distribution of food stamps were implemented to help redress educational and wealth inequalities.

James Lawson continues to train activists in Los Angeles and beyond. His words convey the essence of how to apply this strategy of staying tranquil while effecting social change:

One of the things I lifted up, and still do in teachings and trainings . . . is that religion at its best tries to get human beings . . . to accept their fundamental humanity and take responsibility for the management and control of their anger, for their fear, for their animosities. Do not pretend it comes from somebody else. Develop a spiritual life. You can be in a very hostile situation, but you can still try to shape your own life. Life is a gift. And you can mold it. Meet hate with love and strategic action.13

Lawson eloquently calls for self-governance, sovereignty within oneself, as an essential ingredient for making social change.

James Lawson continues his decades-long offering of monthly workshops, accessible to all who register for electronic access. In the rhetorical style of an experienced preacher, on July 24, 2021, Rev. James Lawson offered the following oft-heard phrases: “Love the enemy.” “Be generous.” These simple precepts echo the wisdom of the Bhagavad Gītā: Treat all individuals as if they were the same. The first statement can serve to counter racism. The second statement can affirm the need for supportive governmental policies that seek to undo the ravages of inequality.

Lawson advises against fighting fire with fire. When meeting an opponent, he counsels, “Don’t imitate their language. Don’t adopt their theologies and idols.” He advocates being strategic and patient: “Explore the pathway of a humanity
being fully alive. Identify yourself with the human family, the potential for life.” All humanity, particularly the outcasts, hold promise for the future. Rather than dismissing and rejecting the homeless, the ill, and the poor, Lawson urges us to see the other within ourselves.

Lawson criticizes anarchy and destruction. “Nonviolent philosophy proposes that how we do our journey is as critical as our destination.” He asserts that “methodology, strategy, behavior determine consequences.” He points out that, in the Black Lives Matter demonstrations of 2020, the mainstream marchers remained nonviolent; only the police exerted force. Lawson distinguishes between the looters and the demonstrators, noting the clear difference between a destructive riot and a peaceful demonstration.

Lawson’s most enduring critique calls out Plantation Capitalism, the economic system made possible by slavery that continues to disadvantage people with less power. He proclaims that this form of economy, by its very nature, is violent: “I see violence as the misuse of power. It is not just done by a fist or a gun or hitting someone over a chair, it is done by economic structures . . . systematic power, structural power.” At a celebration of his work in October 2021, he commented on the travesty of low wages. The federal minimum, followed by many states, is currently $7.25. A fair wage, allowing people to buy food and pay rent at current costs, would be $30 per hour. Only this can lead to the uplift of all persons.

Lawson warns that advocates for social justice and equality must always comport themselves with dignity: “Do not use bad language, bad philosophy, bad tactics.” Following the precepts of Jesus, Lawson urges that love must prevail. He paraphrases the letters of St. Paul: “Feed the enemy. Nurture, serve, and treat the enemy as a human being.” Rather than ascribing to a worldview that divides, Lawson teaches that we must see the universal sameness of human needs.

Veena Howard, a contemporary scholar of Lawson’s work, writes that “Lawson’s method of training points to his unique grasp on the challenges of nonviolent struggle, requiring deep philosophical understanding of the method, building strategic alliances, and planning precise strategies.” She continues, noting that “Through his deep study of theology, Gandhi’s life and philosophy, and the history of nonviolence, Lawson concluded that nonviolent action requires three main components: discipline, self-sacrifice, and strategic techniques of confrontation.”

CONCLUSION
Socrates urged that all political leaders must be philosophers. Though Gandhi, Thurman, and Lawson rejected holding political office, their example inspired many people of good will to enter the public sphere, to effect change not only on the street but also through effective legislation designed to bring about the uplift of all people (sarvodaya). As we encounter the challenges of the twenty-first century, including ecological degradation, ongoing awareness of social inequalities, and a seeming overall diminishment of human well-being because of mistruths, we need to heed the wisdom of Socrates, Krishna, Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt, Thurman, and Lawson: Be reflective, speak truth, and uphold the dignity not only of the human person but also of the earth herself. Self-control holds the key to being effective in the process of making change. To thwart desire, anger, and delusion through the steady practice of understanding oneself provides the great gift of allowing a goal and mission to become primary, styming selfish ego and greed. This power moves mountains.

DEDICATION
This essay is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Joseph Benedict Prabhu (1946–2021), who taught philosophy and religious studies at California State University, Los Angeles for more than thirty years.

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Gandhian Swaraj and Its Incompatibility with Present-Day Populism: Some Philosophical Considerations

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ABSTRACT
In recent years, major political events have underscored the value of treating the topic of populism as worthy of serious philosophical attention. From the rise of Trumpism in the United States to the Brexit vote to Narendra Modi’s ascent to the unprecedented degree of success attained by Marine Le Pen’s party in France, it is clear that populist tendencies (especially within constitutional democracies) remain a serious worldwide impediment to genuine realization of democratic ideals. In what follows, I will use a Gandhian framework (which necessarily entails special emphasis on the notion of swaraj) to discuss matters concerning populism. I aim to show that the rich and complex conception of freedom central to Gandhian swaraj helps provide a way by which the ideals of democracy can be successfully synthetized with legitimate concerns of engendering populist tendencies (tendencies that ultimately undermine the democratic project).

INTRODUCTION
In recent years, major political events have underscored the value of treating the topic of populism as worthy of serious philosophical attention. This is the case in spite of the reassurance many may feel because of Donald Trump’s electoral defeat as well as by the United States’ ability to survive his presidency. The facts, however, remain: Trump was able to come to power within a democratic, constitutional system (replete with supposed safeguards and balances) that has long been seen as an international model and approximately 75 million citizens of a so-called liberal democracy voted for him to continue as president in what was (despite Trump’s cries to the contrary) a free and fair election. Additionally, as has been widely noted, if not for Trump’s incompetence, the United States very likely might not have survived his presidency. The rise of Trumpism in the United States is but one of many recent political occurrences in the world that indicate the need for greater reflection on populism. From the Brexit vote to the dominance of the Fidesz Party in Hungary to Narendra Modi’s ascent in the country that gave the world Gandhi, it is clear that, even without Trump in the White House, populist tendencies (especially within constitutional democracies) remain a serious worldwide impediment to genuine realization of democratic ideals. Thus, it is incumbent on those concerned about the future viability of liberal democracy to seriously reflect on both the threats populism poses to that viability and on why exactly it is antithetical to the realization of true democracy.

I will use a Gandhian framework (which necessarily entails special emphasis on the notion of swaraj) to discuss matters concerning populism. I aim to show that the rich and complex conception of freedom central to Gandhian swaraj helps provide a way by which the ideals of democracy can be successfully synthetized with legitimate concerns of engendering populist tendencies (tendencies that ultimately undermine the democratic project).

While some scholars have emphasized Gandhian intercultural discourse in addressing the challenges of populism, I hold that explication of the Mahatma’s conception of freedom is necessary as a kind of preliminary, “ground-clearing” exercise before any such philosophical discussion can genuinely be fruitful. For me, this conclusion naturally follows given the central importance of individual freedom to democratic societies. It is my hope, therefore, that this work can serve as a supplement to other scholarly insights regarding populism that are found within the existing Gandhian literature.

My arguments will be predicated on my interpretation of Gandhi’s understanding of certain concepts (e.g., freedom, the individual self, social harmony) that I take to be central to the topic of populism. Though I will show that my interpretations are in keeping with Gandhi’s overall thought, people can, of course, reject his views (which has indeed largely been the case ever since he began his famous “experiments” with truth) and still affirm many of the values that are central to my arguments. In this article, I will mainly be content to leave the plausibility of Gandhi’s ideas as well as the accuracy of how he understands key conceptual notions to the reader. Instead, I will aim to show the implications that follow from these ideas and understandings for how we should think about populism. I’m comfortable with this approach both because there is an obvious lack of serious consideration in our world of populism from a Gandhian perspective and because there is no shortage of scholarly works that seek to establish the philosophical viability of the traditional Indian schools of thought which Gandhi always saw his most significant ideas to align with. Moreover, for me, it remains to be seen whether any other thinker can succeed in balancing the ideals of democracy with concerns that arise from populist tendencies as well as I take Gandhi to have done.

A SEEMINGLY INHERENT TENSION WITHIN THE DEMOCRATIC PROJECT
More than two thousand years ago, Plato nicely captured the tension between the egalitarian impulses of democracy and sound political judgment in Book VI of The Republic. The great ancient Greek thinker, who was clearly not interested in the realization of social equality, argued that democracy is an inferior form of government on the grounds that it is ultimately antithetical to the expertise required for a society to be properly governed. His concern that, under such a system, those who are expert in only attaining electoral success (or capturing popular sentiment) will become leaders seems to have clearly been borne out in recent times. Plato’s concern is in line with Cristiano Gianolla’s claim that “populism is a modern political category that could not emerge without liberal democratic regimes.”

If the honoring of individual freedom (which is implied by the value of social equality) is understood purely in negative
This is the case because, debated questions of human free will for centuries the matter of moral responsibility. Philosophers have, of course, debated questions of human free will for centuries and personal desires and proper motivations. It is here, however, that Gandhi’s understanding of “swaraj” (self-rule) can be seen as a particularly useful conceptual tool by which advocacy of the democratic project can be significantly bolstered.

DECONSTRUCTING GANDHIAN SWARAJ
In explicating his understanding of swaraj, Gandhi states:

The root meaning of Swaraj is self-rule. Swaraj may therefore be rendered as disciplined rule from within . . . independence has no such limitation. Independence may mean license to do as you like. Swaraj is positive, independence is negative. Swaraj is a sacred word, a Vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraints. 

Additionally, we read:

If we become free, India is free. And in this thought you have a definition of Swaraj. It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves. It is, therefore, in the palm of our hands. Do not consider this Swaraj to be like a dream. Here there is no idea of sitting still. The Swaraj that I wish to picture before you and me is such that, after we have once realized it, we will endeavour to the end of our lifetime to persuade others to do likewise. But such Swaraj has to be experienced, by each one for himself.

Gandhi’s assertions above are predicated on a metaphysical conception of the self that is common within traditional Indian philosophy. Specifically, Gandhi means the notion of an all-pervading Universal Self that is identical with Absolute Reality. For Gandhi, this Self is one’s true being and personal swaraj is ultimately the same as a state in which the True Self is realized by the individual. Genuine national swaraj, Gandhi holds, can only be obtained once the individuals who comprise the nation have attained self-rule. For the purposes of this article, I will focus on what Gandhi’s words imply about freedom for the individual. These points, in turn, will help illuminate important insights pertaining to the proper objectives of the democratic state. Ultimately, in the process of seeking to give this illumination, I maintain that much insight can be gained on how the above tension that Plato captured can be adequately handled by proponents of democracy.

While it can be said that Gandhi’s conception of freedom (as I understand it) has clear religious overtones (which seemingly preclude its advancement in liberal society), I see his conception to be ultimately not so different from the one certain nonreligious writers on free will have put forth (conceptions that emphasize notions like higher order desires and proper motivations). This is the case even though Gandhi, in contrast to the typical academic commentator on free will, does not give much consideration to the implications his understanding of freedom has for the matter of moral responsibility. Philosophers have, of course, debated questions of human free will for centuries and it is unlikely any great philosophical resolution on the matter is forthcoming. The fact, however, that certain theorists on the topic have advanced positions that can be seen as compatible with Gandhian swaraj indicates the availability of significant philosophical resources which can be helpful to anyone who seeks to better illuminate Gandhi’s understanding of freedom within the context of contemporary Western society. Indeed, it seems to me that a society which succeeds in developing individuals who are free in the ways envisaged by certain writers on free will would be a society whose members embody (at least to a very significant extent) Gandhian self-rule. It bears reiterating that, for Gandhi, a nation cannot genuinely attain self-rule until the individuals who comprise it have attained it.

Ultimately, these points indicate that Gandhian swaraj can be explicated in a way that is acceptable to large segments of a diverse, liberal society partly by way of conceptual tools that are prevalent in mainstream Western (secular) philosophy. Accordingly, I hold that discussions of swaraj need not be hampered by perceived religious considerations. This conclusion indeed underscores the all-inclusive character of Gandhian thought (in which even God is understood as “the denial of the atheist”).

RECONSIDERING FREEDOM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SWARAJ

In reflecting on the above paradox, it seems we can attribute much of its force to the particular conception of freedom that is commonly supposed within our culture. This conception is indeed evident when we consider the high degrees of deference given in democratic societies to voters regardless of the lamentable choices they so commonly make. It is indeed a negative reflection on a country’s national situation when significant (though non-majority) segments of the electorate openly affirm their preference for Trump. Even more disconcerting from a Gandhian perspective, however, would be when a country in such a situation is more concerned about whether its voters have had their preferences interfered with than whether its people have attained genuine freedom (which, for Gandhi, necessarily entails responsible decision-making).

When it is clear to us that someone’s freedom (in the sense of non-interference) is being denied, we can more readily see that there is a justified basis for concluding a wrong has occurred. When making this kind of moral judgment, however, it is problematic to apply a conception of freedom that accords with the dominant Western cultural supposition that freedom can be understood solely in terms of what it is not (in other words, negatively). The notion that freedom is equivalent to non-interference is a prevailing one both in Western political theory and in everyday discussions within modern Western society. However, in keeping with Gandhi’s statements, I believe it is a mistake to think the kinds of situations in which one’s pursuits are interfered with can exhaustively illustrate the value of freedom. To reiterate, “Independence may mean license to do as you like. Swaraj is positive, independence is negative.” I want to argue that, from a Gandhian perspective, it would behoove us to go beyond valuing non-interference and incorporate a notion of self-rule in our conception of freedom. When freedom is understood more in terms of developing the ability to
better align one’s thoughts and actions with a deeper self (however this concept is understood), then we can, in fact, resolve the kinds of tensions I discussed above.

Consider, after all, that when freedom is conceived primarily as the ability to understand and follow the dictates of a deeper self, the connection that character development has to the realization of freedom can be clearly seen. Thus, it would follow that genuine promotion of freedom entails use of pedagogical techniques that aim to develop human character.

It is worth noting, in fact, that what I take to be the Gandhian conception of freedom (having the ability to align one’s thoughts and actions with a deeper self) accords nicely with Plato’s view that reason is a separate motivator distinct from both the passions and the appetites. This is the case even though, as will be discussed below, Gandhi—in contrast to Plato—does not endorse a hierarchical model in which reason dominates the emotions. This point is noted by Douglas Allen in his discussion of Gandhi’s critique of socialisms:

Gandhi does not believe that the real is the rational alone. The whole human being is more than a rational being and includes the non-rational, the pre-reflective, the emotions, and the imagination. True socialism must do justice to the whole person as a harmoniously integrated mind-body-heart (or soul) being.7

Gandhi would agree that when individual freedom is conceived solely in terms of the unimpeded pursuit of passions and appetites, Plato’s concerns become both understandable and serious.

In contemporary constitutional democracies, the tireless efforts of civil libertarians have, at the very least, kept concerns about government intrusion (which is seen to go hand in hand with government interference) front and center among the wider citizenry. That, in the modern world, no comparable work can be noticed that is devoted to enabling citizens to be free in the ways Gandhi emphasized is a lacuna of a most serious magnitude.

Ultimately, on the Gandhian model, freedom from external interference is best regarded as a kind of worthwhile addition to the life of one who has attained self-rule. Attainment of self-rule, however, should be taken as necessary (though perhaps not entirely sufficient) for well-being. Furthermore, it is likely that Gandhi held that, without genuine self-rule, freedom from interference, by itself, can have no great value and is actually conducive to engendering a morally regrettable state of affairs. The examples that abound in both the contemporary world and throughout history of “free” people having little regard for civic responsibility and duty adequately substantiate this point.

Even though the denial of freedom from interference is commonly a strong motivator for uprising and protest, there is no reason to suppose that pursuit of this kind of freedom can ever truly be worthwhile if that pursuit does not include (as an integral component) the seeking of inner rule. Indeed, the challenges that confront the individual who pursues freedom from external interference can legitimately be regarded as opportunities by which greater progress can be had in the quest for inner self-rule. Without the latter, genuine freedom will always be elusive.

FEATURES OF THE GANDHIAN SELF AND THEIR RELEVANCE FOR ASSESSING POPULISM

In the rest of this article, I will elaborate on two specific features of Gandhi’s understanding of the true self, the one whose nature he sees free actions to be aligned with: first, its non-hierarchical relation with respect to the affective dimensions of human existence; and, second, its nonviolent nature. My aim is not only to show the commensurability of the Gandhian self with dominant liberal democratic values but also to better flesh out the implications that such an understanding has for the assessment of populism. More specifically, I will argue that these features of the Gandhian self show that that conception of the self is ultimately antithetical to the dividing of society into categories of “us and them” as well as to the harnessing of anger, both of which are seemingly essential aspects of populism.

That Gandhi conceives of the true self in a manner which eschews the standard presumed hierarchy between reason and the emotions is underscored by the method of satyagraha that he so famously championed. As is well-known, Gandhi saw this method to be the most effective for advancing reform (both within the individual and the larger society). The practice of satyagraha entails not only the disavowal of force but also the moving away from reliance on purely rational argumentation. Instead, practitioners of this method must develop the willingness to suffer at the highest levels for their sincerely held convictions. Gandhi states:

I have come to the fundamental conclusion that if you want something really important to be done, you must not merely satisfy the reason, you must move the heart also. The appeal of reason is more to the head, but the penetration of the heart comes from suffering. It opens up the inner understanding in man.8

It is within the context of understanding satyagraha that we can perhaps most clearly notice how Gandhi’s approach to truth contrasts with the ones that have dominated in modern times. Gandhi does not regard reason as the sole means available to us for more fully grasping truth. Therefore, unlike so many in the modern world, he avoids giving it an overly exalted place—something that is entailed by the presumption that reason is the only tool by which diverse, disagreeing communities can realize social closure and harmony. Gandhi instead sees reason as an important tool that is genuinely helpful for attaining truth only insofar as it works in a way that is congruent with (and not in opposition to) the emotions.

Furthermore, we should remember that, for Gandhi, it follows that when one advances in her grasp of truth, she necessarily (to the same extent) comes closer to full self-
realization (which necessarily involves affirming a sense of oneness with all). Gandhi, we should remember, sees Truth (which is understood to be a unified oneness underlying the everyday world) as equivalent with the real Self. Thus, someone who advances in her grasp of truth and comes closer to attaining genuine freedom would experience greater feelings of unity with all others. It is worth noting here that my interpretation of the place of reason in regard to the emotions in Gandhi’s philosophy is consistent with arguments he makes affirming the existence of God as well as the validity of religious experience.9

Crucial for my purposes here are the implications this understanding of reason’s place has for engendering the feelings of sensitivity and identification that should underlie genuine affirmations of social equality. This kind of affective response, which is characteristic of a more advanced realization of Truth and is manifested in attitudes of acceptance and understanding directed toward the perceived others in society, cannot be evoked solely by reason. It follows, then, that since populism necessarily supposes divisions between one’s own group and others, populist movements cannot engender the kinds of affective responses that Gandhi sees as necessary for more fully realizing not only social equality but also truth and freedom.

Gandhi’s conception of the true self clearly recognizes the affective dimensions of human existence. He conceives of this self as inherently nonviolent. This is indicated by his declaration, “I am certain that nonviolence is meant for all time. It is an attribute of the atman (universal self) and is, therefore, universal since the atman belongs to all.”10 As I argue elsewhere,11 Gandhi sees the overt promotion of nonviolence to be essential for anything like the democratic project to succeed. Consequently, for Gandhi, it would follow that, to achieve and exhibit greater degrees of self-realization (i.e., freedom), a person must manifest nonviolence in her everyday actions. While Gandhi acknowledges that violence is an unavoidable aspect of bodily existence,12 he clearly holds that attainment of fuller self-realization requires us to actively seek limiting our violence to the furthest extent possible.

The connection Gandhi sees between nonviolence as a civic virtue and the flourishing of a pluralistic society is indicated by his conviction that violence entails a degree of certainty about what one holds to be true that is ultimately unattainable for us given the limitations of embodied human existence. The violent individual, after all, is so convinced of particular conclusions, which are all ultimately based on a limited and fallible grasp of reality, that he has no problem with imposing his understanding on those who may not share it (even if it means causing them intense suffering). Furthermore, when we inflict violence on others, we presume significant distinctions between them and us. As a result, we become less able to see the truth as it appears to them and thus hamper our own ability to identify with all. Consequently, we also hamper our prospects for full self-realization. This state entails a sense of unity with all and is also one that requires a fuller grasp of truth than any of us currently have. Thus, in explaining the “metaphysical basis” of Gandhi’s conception of democracy, Margaret Chatterjee states, “if all we have is a fragmentary view, we have no right to impose our fragment on others.”13

Given these points, we can conclude that the anger which is also so integral to populist movements ultimately conflicts with engendering what Gandhi conceives to be genuine freedom. Nonviolence, for him, applies to thought, word, and deed and if it is (at the very least) difficult to conceive of how the psychological state of anger can coexist with nonviolent thought (questions about anger’s utility for motivating action notwithstanding). Anger, after all, commonly underlies and motivates the most conspicuous acts of violence. Thus, for Gandhi, it would follow that any movement which depends on the perpetual fostering of anger cannot exist harmoniously with the genuine pursuit and realization of democracy. To reiterate, for him, a truly democratic society must comprise truly free (i.e., self-realized) individuals.

Furthermore, it is clear that the emotion of anger moves one away from a holistic state of equanimity in which neither the rational nor affective side of the individual dominates. The seeking of such a state aligns with a common notion in Indian thought that the world of everyday things began as a primal state of equilibrium among the gunas (or fundamental strands that comprise the eternal string of nature). This state is also entailed in the description of the integrated one with steady wisdom (sthitaprajna) who is extolled in The Bhagavad Gita—the text Gandhi referred to as his “Eternal Mother.”14 Clearly, then, anger (an integral component of populism) is inherently incompatible with the attainment of Gandhian self-rule. This point is underscored by Gandhi’s famous decision in 1922 to suspend a satyagraha campaign after the events at Chauri Chaura (in which an angry mob set a fire that killed twenty-five people in a police station).

It is true that anger is commonly thought of as both a justified and valuable response to injustice. However, given (among other realities) the difficulties we have in productively controlling anger once it is allowed to manifest as well as the effectiveness of other, less damaging emotions in motivating moral action, Gandhi’s assessment of anger is at least worthy of serious consideration.15

It is also worth noting here that, in the context of accepting the importance of eradicating emotions like anger, we can notice that in Gandhi’s thought there exists a very real place for valuing the place of experts (a matter which Plato brings up in his indictment of democracy). Though Gandhi was leery of regarding himself as a moral exemplar, it is clear that he saw such experts of ethical practice to be indispensable role models for the development of good character (which, for him, entails freedom from anger). This point is evident in the defenses he offered of the legitimacy of religious experience as well as in his remark that “[a] Sannyasin (ideal religious teacher in the Hindu tradition) having attained Swaraj in his own person is the fittest to show us the way.”16 Thus, especially given the significant consensus that seemingly exists among members of diverse communities on who the moral exemplars are, we can further notice the relevance Gandhian insights have for overcoming problems inherent for the democratic project.
CONCLUSION
In recent years, the well-known challenges that the prospects of populism pose for the democratic project have perhaps never been clearer. However, rather than providing a basis for abandoning this project, these challenges can spur consideration of ways in which genuine democracy can be bolstered. Gandhian notions of freedom give us both a starting place and a framework for pursuing such worthwhile work. By refusing to separate considerations of national freedom from those of individual freedom and by conceiving of individual freedom in a way that goes beyond a simple emphasis on non-interference, Gandhian swaraj is a promising and rich conceptual resource by which we in the contemporary world can strengthen the pillars of democracy.

NOTES
15. For further discussion on this topic, see Court D. Lewis and Gregory L. Bock, eds., The Ethics of Anger (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).
therefore, argued that it would be advantageous to the country to patronize through other means indigenous industry, whether big or small. Decentralized indigenous industry with minimal state capital support would at least provide much-needed employment, however limited, to the unemployed masses. So that the Indian capitalist interests may not take advantage of the swadeshi (home-grown self-sufficiency) movement to ruthlessly exploit the consumer—as was done during the Bengal Partition in the early years of the last century—and for many other economic and sociological reasons, Gandhi advocated “the revival and encouragement of cottage industry.” Hence, khadi became the symbol of both the non-cooperative rejection of foreign-manufactured goods—albeit shewn from Indian raw and source material—and the embracing of indigenous industry in microscale forms, symbolized by the proverbial charkha (carkhā). What was foremost at the back of the moral and social reformer was the stark poverty of the masses.

Modern industrialization inexorably leads to imperialism as the industrial capitalists backed by their governments seek to ravage and exploit imperial markets. The scramble for these outposts among the industrial nations leads to wars, as we have had in the last two centuries and right up to this present moment, globally. Nothing much has changed since the East India Company set foot in India or the VOC in Indonesia. And it is India that bore the larger percentage of the liability for public debt—including footing the bills for British war efforts and developing her industries in situ, as also post-independence for the railway system. Industries that were established during the wars evaporated as soon as a war was over; the big business bosses in the Westminster and India Office steered the entirety of the commercial, industrial, and financial policy of the Government of British India.

Consider that the policies of governance and industrial development of India were first formulated in the East India Office, the London headquarters of the East India Company until it was taken over by the British government. The key architect of the policies was none other than John Stuart Mill, who worked in the company’s office from age seventeen, 1822 to 1858. It was in these prodigal years that he was influenced both by his father, James Mill, who wrote the three-volume work on The History of British India (1817), intended for civil servants working in India, and by Jeremy Bentham’s ideas of “the doctrine of utility.” John Stuart Mill was working on his magnum opus Utilitarianism while in the company’s office, which he published as essays three years after the abolition of the company in 1858. Although he criticized British expansion into India, it was his own mandates that helped establish the imperial-industrial complex of British India on the principles of utility that he wrote on in tandem.

In the 1930s, 73 percent of the population was dependent upon agriculture; other than being engaged in producing raw material as fodder for the mills and factories in England, and perhaps in the bigger cities of India, there is no way industrialization could reach and benefit the masses whose village crafts and home industries had all but been eroded. There could be no svarāj (self-rule) unless a way was found to mitigate the hardship and horrors of the grinding poverty of the masses. Gandhi’s vision was that of a free India where the mobilized peasantry in villages would successfully resist the spread of agro-industrial capitalism and oppressive violence of the colonial state.

The second divide was totally internal, namely, the growing urban-rural divide. Urban industrial schemes used the villagers for their cheap labor and raw material, which did not help to mitigate poverty in the least. Furthermore, the introduction of urban values, an urban economy and technology, and an urban way of life in the villages led to the destruction of traditional forms of sustenance, the village life, and the values that go with it. Gandhi was keen to free the village economy from the dominance of not only urban technology and urban finance but also urban values and ways of life. So the idea of progress and reform had to be circumscribed within the context of the rural environment and rural needs, which entailed the reconstruction of villages along moral and social freedom over and above political freedom. Hence, character building, self-improvement, self-sufficiency in essential goods for discriminate needs, and encouragement of village crafts and home industries are integral to swadeshi or “ethical economics.”

“Swadeshi” had become the popular slogan in India after the Partition of Bengal. Gandhi made a distinction between “political swadeshi” and “genuine swadeshi.” Political swadeshi meant an artificial barrier on the flow of goods from one place to another imposed by political divisions of the world. It could not contribute to world peace. These artificial barriers would ultimately foster battles and reprisals among competing territories. Gandhi thus felt the need for “genuine swadeshi.” It meant denying “to ourselves the enjoyment of goods not manufactured with our approval and within our knowledge.” Gandhi held that only thus would human beings become fully sensitive to the social repercussions of each of their transactions and pave the way for world peace. Kumarappa called this the “Economics of Peace”; “peace” here references the corollary moral principles of truth (satya) and nonviolence (ahimsā), which are integral to rethinking Gandhian economics as is noted by commentators on Gandhi’s economic philosophy.

To clarify this clarion call further, on October 27, 1934, the Indian National Congress passed the following resolution:

Whereas much confusion has arisen in the public mind as to the true nature of Swadeshi and whereas the aim of the Congress has been from its inception progressive identification with the masses, and whereas village reorganisation and reconstruction necessarily implies revival and encouragement of dead or dying village industries besides the central industry of hand spinning, and whereas this work, like the reorganisation of hand spinning is possible only through concentrated and special effort unaffected by and independent of the political activities of the Congress, J. C. Kumarappa is hereby authorized to form, under the advice and guidance of Gandhiji, an association called the All-India Village Industries Association as part of the activities of the Congress.
Perhaps the best articulator of Gandhian economics in the grand vision for the nation-in-the-making was the aforementioned J. C. Kumarappa, who wrote his Master’s thesis at Columbia University, New York, entitled “Causes of Indian Poverty Through Public Finance.” Kumarappa was a considerable force behind the Sarvodaya Movement (welfarism based on social affections and care for others) such that he coined the nomenclature “Gandhian Economics.” Kumarappa drew on the urban-village divide and argued that the urban industrial schemes use the villagers for their cheap labor and raw material as well, which does not help to mitigate poverty. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, urbanization leads to the destruction of traditional village forms of life. Gandhi wanted to free the village economy from the oppressive dominance of urban finance and the engine of modern technology. Such a distributive means and character of production would be managed not by the state but under what Gandhi called trusteeship (structural social equality, derived from John Ruskin), wherein private property ownership is shunned (for each is but a custodian of their possessions), whereby moving wealthy individuals and corporations to voluntarily share and distribute their wealth among the needy and the masses. Such a move would then pave the way for grām swaraj. So the idea of progress and reform had to be circumscribed within the context of the rural environment and preferential social necessities with reasonable access, not our modern-driven indiscriminate wants or avarice.

Meanwhile, classical economists continue with the myth of economic growth, increasingly in the post-industrial, secular age; economic philosophers such as Amartya Sen and Partha Dasgupta argue that GDP by itself should not be the sole measure of economic and social well-being. Actual welfare coupled with literacy and productive education, and not mere GDP or GNP, constitute the real measure of quality of life, which encompasses respect for human rights and dignity along with social engagement, advocacy, and activism. Changes in institutional arrangements and social attitudes rather than reforms simply effected through legislation or universal charters are needed if these rights and concomitant capabilities are to be realized.

We know that, for Gandhi, the operational concept of swadeshi coupled with svāraj forms a universal(izable) principle. Hence, outside of India, the message of swadeshi was carried by C. F. Andrews to southern parts of America where the only-just-freed slaves and their descendants were looking for a scheme that would empower their own industriousness in areas, particularly, of agriculture and crafting of small goods. Booker T. Washington, a Black educationist and social reformer, set up the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in a shanty dwelling in Alabama and enquired from Andrews about Gandhi’s organization of labor and trade and about how the rural and unemployed worked towards self-sustainability. Washington deployed a modified scheme among his own people, who were trained with meager resources in job skills such as carpentry, printing, brick making, agri-and-pharma culture, cotton cultivation, soil enrichment, waste management, and home economics. Not surprisingly, having to make do with little of the modern amenities at their disposal, since white America would not share their modern gadgets (even gas or electricity) with Tuskegee, the Black craftspeople invented some amazing amenities and gadgets, including an early form of solar battery, washing handset, and recycling. This was an experiment in self-sustainability that drew wide attention and won the accolades of at least two sitting Presidents of the United States. At Washington’s death, Tuskegee had more than one hundred well-equipped buildings, 1,500 students, and a two-hundred-member faculty teaching thirty-eight trades and professions. In recent times, newly independent nations such as Botswana have adopted the swadeshi model.

ATMANIRBHAR: ECONOMICS FOR SELF-RELIANT INDIA

Since, as we have demonstrated via Kumarappa’s insights, swadeshi is a dynamic and integral part of Gandhian economics, what does the strategy of swadeshi mean and entail for atmanirbhar (self-reliant economics in the Indian context)? To reiterate a point made earlier, Gandhi had emphasized trusteeship and economic independence over and above political independence. This would entail cooperative industry that would enable the uplifting of the most downtrodden (in terms of caste, class, gender, and perhaps habitat as well) by disengaging capital and labor in a way that would give equitable value to labor, kaarigari (modelled on the efficacious service of artisans, not as a mere commodity for profit). Such a socialized economy would systematically work toward freeing every individual from the yoke of poverty and catering for the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, and education for their offspring. Gandhi distrusted the state to achieve these goals, because a state is an impersonal machinery increasingly in the hands of an oligarchic party powerhouse, lacking in empathic concerns for suffering agents. Such is the limited fate of modernity vis-à-vis traditional wisdom of economics or artha in Arthaśāstra and Puruṣārtha (kingdom-of-ends).

It is obvious that tradition meets with difficulties when it attempts to negotiate the demands of a democratic, open, inclusive, and pluralistic society, that is, when it encounters modernity. But Gandhi’s sanguine point is taken. A holistic and de-hierarchized model of life and the world, where duties, roles, and functions are stressed within an overarching order of right, is a better model when social and moral ideals, such as freedom, justice, and equality, are relativized to this larger order. As Gandhi had stressed, an economics that disregards moral values is untrue. This extension of the law of nonviolence in the domain of economics means nothing less than the introduction of moral values; Gandhi used the adjective “moral” as synonymous with “spiritual.” In that regard, economics is tied closely to ethics, but ethics not conceived along the lines of quantitative or mechanistic formulae, such as came to grip the West since the nineteenth-century British empiricists’ reworking of classical moral philosophy. What is interesting about the Gandhian model of economics is that, in this technē, exploitation is replaced by service, acquisitiveness by renunciation or minimalism, global by local self-regulation, and state-controlled development by decentralization. “The economic system, politically
nonviolent and democratic, should be cooperative and constructivist instead of [being] exclusive, competitive and militant.” Gandhi eschewed reliance on luxurious and superfluous goods and the entertainment fetishism that provides no moral or intellectual succor and does not help with the development of character and virtues. This does not, however, preclude public utilities on larger-scale plans, or centralized and capital-intensive public services as utilities for other needs, provided there is a measure of balance with small-scale, labor-intensive, decentralized, and community-based trusteeship or cooperatives that provide for the diverse needs of human beings and animals in a protected ecological environment. To be sure, economic equality never meant, for Gandhi, the acquisition of the same amount of wealth and goods by each individual. What it does mean is that “everyone will have proper house to live in, sufficient and balanced food to eat, and sufficient khadi with which to cover himself. It also means that the cruel inequality that obtains today [by the exigencies of caste and colonialism] will be removed by nonviolent means.”

There have been a few bold thinkers who have delved into moral and legal texts—as well as the exemplary teachings of contemporary social-reform leaders, such as Vivekananda, Vidyasagar, Ramabai, Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Vinoba Bhave, the Dalai Lama, E. F. Schumacher, Arne Naess—in order to distil ideas into what the Kolkata-based theorist S. K. Chakraborty dubbed “Spiri-nomics” (“spirituality-cum-economics”). This is a messianic scheme, but is rather timely and is making the rounds, at least in India’s management and business arenas. However, what is lacking is a decisive set of projects and policies at the micro and macro levels that would successfully foster and nurture these values. It may, in the long run, bring changes to economics on the management and operational fronts for much-needed attitudinal shifts towards the care and well-being of people, sarvalokadaya.

II. BLACK SATYAGRAHA: IMPACT ON AFRICAN AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENTS

Gandhian thought is being increasingly recognized and applauded within the African American milieu, but it has a longer history that is not well-known, as we saw earlier with the influence via C. F. Andrews on Booker T. Washington. Little did the well-attired English-trained lawyer thrown off the train at the Pietermaritzburg railway station in Natal Province in 1893 realize that his chance encounter the next day with “an American Negro who happened to be there” would have long reverberations across two continents. But the generosity shown by a powerless Black American, who brought to his attention the plight of others, led to a steady stream of them on conference and lecture tours of America. They were joined in the mid-1920s by C. F. Andrews and Madeline Slade, two close English emissaries (who visited the Tuskegee Institute and conversed with Booker T. Washington), followed by the American journalist-activist Gertrude Emerson, whom Gandhi and Tagore sent abroad to correct the misleading

In the deep south of sub-Saharan Africa, Gandhi drew world attention in 1907 as he led the first-ever successful satyagraha, or active resistance based on principled nonviolence. This movement would gradually sweep across the rest of the world, beginning with its adoption for the nationalist freedom struggle in India under Gandhi’s own leadership. It also motivated the Black-led civil rights campaign in the United States and reached a culmination not so long ago with South Africa’s emancipation from apartheid under Nelson Mandela. Gandhi often made a point of inquiring with deep empathy about the struggles of the “Negroes” in America, whom he thought suffered the same horrid social astigmatism as did the “untouchables” at the lowest rungs of India’s caste system. He held high hopes for the spirit of the American “Negroes” to be able to overcome the obstructing social and political barriers, which in some ways were less traditionally embedded than in India’s own weighty past. But how did Gandhi reach, or reach out to, African America?

It happened over a period of time, partly through the convergent ingenuity of itinerant Indian freedom fighters and preacher-advocates of a home-grown peaceful voice against the proscription of “Negroes, Jews, and women” from mainstream American life. Inspired by the ideas of John Ruskin, Leo Tolstoy, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau, Gandhi’s radical journals from the humble printing press in Phoenix Settlement outside Durban reached America, usually through contacts in Britain and Europe. African Americans began to attend Pan-African and Colored Peoples’ Congresses in Paris or in London, where followers of Gandhi articulated the irrationality of the common plight of “Brown and Black races.” Among the American participants was W. E. B. Du Bois, whose acquaintance—and that of the other flamboyant all-African leader, Marcus Garvey—with expatriate Indian nationalists led to a steady stream of them on conference and lecture tours of America. They were joined in the mid-1920s by C. F. Andrews and Mirabai (née Madeline Slade), two close English emissaries (who visited the Tuskegee Institute and conversed with Booker T. Washington), followed by the American journalist-activist Gertrude Emerson, whom Gandhi and Tagore sent abroad to correct the misleading
polemics by the British (and their American imitators) about the nationalist, or better, patriotic, cause in India. A spate of Indian National Congress delegates also followed. These included Har Dayal (the founder of US-Hindoo Ghadar Movement), Tarak Nath Das (who led the Indian Immigrant Movement for India’s Freedom), Rabindranath Tagore (who lectured on Indian patriotism and swadeshi), Sarojini Naidu, Vijaya Laxmi Nehru (who visited Punjab-led freedom centers), Manilal Parekh (who lectured on Gandhi at Black colleges), and the long or short stays in America of Lala Lajpat Rai, Madan Mohan Malviya, Shyama Charan De, Anup Singh, Syud Hossain, Krishnal Lal Sridharani, and Ram Manohar Lohia, along with J. B. Kripalani, R. R. Dwivedi, and V. S. Srinivasa Sastri. The lectures of these Indian compatriots, their various publications or press coverages, and the time they spent in Morehouse or Spelman college libraries, with Hubert Harrison in Harlem, at the Tuskegee Institute, or with Du Bois in New York and at Howard University, all went toward reinforcing the African American intellectuals’ growing admiration of and appeal to Gandhi, the “lean agitator in loin-cloth,” as Winston Churchill was to caricature the impervious leader. What was the specific message of Gandhi to which they seemed attracted? Again, the incisive analysis that Gandhi was offering both in his much-publicized words and politically-nuanced resistant strategy of the excessive, oppressive mentalité of sovereign colonial powers—of which the United States, by inference, was no exception within its own racialized or segregated spaces—was grist to the mill for a community that until late found it difficult to draw on resources from within its own comparatively short and troubling history in America sufficient to stand up against a mighty “White Power” at home. The passive resistance that Thoreau had offered and that the Quakers had instilled in African American minds, and the kind of militancy adopted by the antislavery abolitionists like Mary Allen Pleasant in cohorts with John Brown, either were not empowering enough or proved to be suicidal for the community; the Gandhian active resistance was a far better and, in the long run, more productive alternative. From Gandhi’s exemplary moves, they also learned that there were various other avenues they could avail themselves of in their struggle, such as not resisting arrests as a show of nonviolent protest, taking their grievances to the courts and engaging in legal battles, seeking electoral representation and fighting for voting rights, pleading for educational opportunities or support for their own home-grown initiatives, working towards self-sustaining rural and social institutions, and, last but not least, drawing on the spiritual wealth of the community’s own nativist, religious, and cultural heritages. As early as 1920, the Black pacifist John Haynes Holmes likened Gandhi to a “Social Jesus” of modern times, fighting for the wretched of the earth. In 1922, Richard Bartlett Gregg spent 18 months in Gandhi’s ashram and wrote a major book, The Power of Nonviolence, which was read by budding civil rights advocates in America, including those who became teachers of Martin Luther King, Jr. By 1932, Du Bois had declared in the pages of the Crisis: “There is today in the world but one living maker of miracles, and that is Mahatma Gandhi. He stops eating, and three hundred million Indians, together with the British Empire, hold their breath until they can talk together, yet all that America sees in Gandhi is a joke, but the real joke is America” (Crisis, November 1932). Such approbations were not intended to flatter Gandhi or urge him along in his struggle, but to shine a mirror at their own community’s weakness in not being able to rise to the occasion even while there was a world leader who was charting out strategies that all oppressed people anywhere could well adopt and find of consequential use. Each major step in Gandhi’s struggle—his imprisonment, virtual impeachment for sedition, jubilant court-case speeches, fasting, and successful satyagrahas such as the Salt March—alongside his and India’s first Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore’s personal messages to “The Negroes of America,” was noted in the leading Black papers, magazines, and independent church newsletters. In particular, the Crisis (subtitled “A Record of Darker Races,” a journal of the NAACP, stamped for some time with seven Hindu swastikas, edifice since 1910 for twenty-five long years by W. E. B. Du Bois), along with (Garvey’s) the Negro World, Atlanta Daily World, Chicago Defender, Christian Century, and others, stepped up coverage of Gandhi in the 1920s and 1930s. Articles featured the increasing traffic between Gandhi’s India and the American South, beginning with the first African American delegation to meet Mohandas Gandhi in 1936 (led by Howard Thurman). Gandhi’s moving interview with Sue Bailey Thurman is reported in Howard Thurman’s autobiography With Head and Heart, alongside a rare photograph of Gandhi, now deep in India’s crisis, with Sue Bailey. It was to Mrs. Thurman that Gandhi shared his hope and, indeed, premonition that his philosophy of nonviolence in the struggle towards equality, freedom, and an end to oppressive social-political governance will be successfully realized among “the Negros” more than among his own people in India because of certain deeply embedded historical contingencies and the bedeviling hierarchical caste structure, which in certain ways was even worse than racial stereotyping. As an act of reciprocation and gratitude, in 1947, Black America joined in the celebrations of India’s hard-earned independence with a delegation led by Mordecai Johnson (of Howard) and Benjamin Mays (of Morehouse). A Black delegation also attended Gandhi’s memorial rites after his assassination.

In the following decade, the pastor and educator James Lawson spent two years near Pabna (Wardha) and studied Gandhian nonviolence strategies, which he later drew upon and utilized towards coordinating the Freedom Rides that drew the Kennedys’ state intervention. A generation of Civil Rights Movement leaders—Martin Luther King, Jr., Jesse Jackson, Whitney M. Young, Andrew Young, Vincent Harding, Fannie Lou Hamer, and James Farmer—came under the spell of the powerful educator-cum-preacher in Howard Thurman (whose personal collection on Gandhiana was far ahead of any college library collection in America). Women inspired by Gandhian ideals and especially the exemplary life of Kasturbai (Kasturba Gandhi) played some of the strongest roles throughout the history of the Civil Rights Movement—e.g., Mary McLeod Bethune, Pauli Anne Murray, Rosa Parks, Lou Fannie Hamer, Angela Davis, and Alice Walker—each of whom in their unique ways paved the struggle and roadmap towards racial and gender equality. Thus, African Americans were the first observers outside of India to appreciate Kasturbai’s exemplary role as a woman in the struggle for social justice, so much so that, in 1999,
Morehouse College posthumously conferred an honorary doctorate degree on Kasturbai while the cathedral’s organ bellowed out to set music (choreographed by the present author) Gandhi’s two favorite songs (bhajans) to a packed audience.

Eleanor Roosevelt also harbored a deep interest in Gandhi and things Indian; indeed, she honored the first Indian Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru’s invitation to her to visit India a few years after India’s Independence. Eleanor struck a lasting friendship with Pauli Murray, who, as I have shown elsewhere, while having close contact with communist workers, became a feminist gay Episcopal priest and steered herself gradually towards Gandhian nonviolence, which she had been studying. At a staged protest, she held up a hand-drawn placard: “India. Am. Negro.” A commentator later explained its significance, and I quote:

She [Murray] noted that Indians constituted a majority in their own country, while the “Am. Negro” constituted a minority “living side by side” with white people. She admired the Indians for a “willingness to sacrifice . . . to change heart of the enemy” and contrasted their activism with white people’s criticism that African Americans “move too fast, upset friendly relations between the races.” While the Indians made up a “well-disciplined movement,” Murray lamented that African Americans suffered from the lack of a grassroots movement. . . . In the weeks before Easter, Murray had met Gandhi follower Krishnalal Sridharani and read his War without Violence. She set out for home armed with nonviolent ideas, but they took her only as far as Virginia.27

Pauli Murray, freshly graduated from Berkeley Law School, also served as junior clerk to Thurgood Marshall, later appointed to the Supreme Court, in the legal battle against desegregation that was won in the landmark Brown v. Board of Education in 1954.

Martin Luther King, Jr., himself had a virtual conversion to the Gandhian way after hearing the sermons of Mordecai Johnson; at Morehouse College, he acquainted himself with the writings of Howard Thurman, who began lecturing at Howard University in the 1930s. King, to his utter surprise, observed a fledgling group of student protestors (SNCC) versed in Gandhian tactics successfully stage a civil disobedience campaign. Then occurred the arrest of Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her seat allocated for whites, which sparked the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955, coordinated by the Montgomery Improvement Association. A marginal Baptist minister then, who reluctantly endorsed the civil disobedience campaign, King found himself coordinating the boycott in full vision of the (inter)national community. King narrates the following:

While the Montgomery boycott was going on, India’s Gandhi was the guiding light of our technique of nonviolent social change. So as soon as our victory over bus segregation was won, some of my friends said: “Why don’t you go to India and see for yourself what the Mahatma, whom you so admire, has wrought?”28

Thus drawn to nonviolence and civil disobedience, in 1959, he and Coretta Scott King traveled extensively in India, reliving Gandhi’s memory: he called this his pilgrimage to nonviolence. The tenor of the swan-song speech on All India Radio as he was leaving India is captured in the quote heading this paper.

King’s absolute conviction in the efficacy of “the Indian philosophy of nonviolence” to achieve racial justice was set out most forcefully in his 1958 book, Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story. With young, nonviolent activists in tow, King eventually mobilized a mass movement, systematically enacting satyagraha-style sit-ins, nonviolent human barricades, civil disobedience, marches, rallies, noncooperation strikes, and pickets, spiced with passionate speeches, while risking arrests or police beating. In his 1963 classic “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (echoing parallel sentiments in Gandhi’s letters from his incarcerations): “[O]ne has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws.”

Also in 1963, King, along with A. Philip Randolph, the flamboyant Bayard Rustin, and John Lewis (later to become a noted Congressman), orchestrated the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (arguably the largest mass nonviolent protest-campaign of its time outside of India), which heralded the federal civil rights bill under the Kennedy Administration.

We could surmise that, in Martin Luther King, Jr., (Black) America found the matured spirit of an indigenous Mahatma, prepared to lay down his life for an all-out struggle against the continuing oppression of its “untouchables.” The ongoing process of reconciling nonviolence with violence-prone authorities and racist institutions, however, was a long time in the making in racialized America, as in British India. This is how the fervently productive and politically significant threads were woven between the Indian Freedom Movement with its transnational advocates and a fledgling Black liberatory consciousness, beginning with Pan-African advocates like Du Bois and Garvey, and continuing well into the post-World War years, through to Indian Independence and the Civil Rights Movement in the South. We can hear whispers of Gandhi’s call to justice, truth, defying unjust laws, and nonviolent resistant action in the recent emergence of the Civil Rights Movement, Black Lives Matter, Anti-Voting Suppression Campaign, Australian Native Land Rights, and various indigenous people’s rights movements across the globe.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES


2. Kwame Anthony Appiah, “There Is No Such Thing as Western Civilisation.”
14. Problematic here is Gandhi’s idea of truth (or “Truth,” as Gandhi’s use of “Sathyâ” is translated, apparently from the Upanisadic sat for “that which is” or the ultimately real). He does acknowledge that “It is difficult to know what is Truth, when to defend it to the point of Civil Resistance, and how to avoid error in the shape of violence in one’s pursuit after Truth” (*Young India*, March 30, 1922); he might have said rhetorically “what Truth is.” But even more confounding is that on the theoretical side "Truth" defies systematic philosophical articulation and otherwise propositional or logical defence, as has become the mainstream of contemporary epistemology; in that regard Gandhi’s oeuvre towards truth has been controversial, arousing much debate. For a recent summary, see Bindu Puri, “Gandhi’s Truth: Debating Bilgrami.”
26. See Purushottama Bilimoria, “Eleanor Roosevelt and Pauli Murray on America’s Civil Wrongs, Gandhi and India.”
28. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence."  

BIBLIOGRAPHY


III. GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY OF SATYAGRAHA (FIRMNESS ON TRUTH, NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE)

Satyagraha and Swaraj: Equality Before Freedom

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ABSTRACT

This paper will examine Gandhi’s satyagraha as a method of securing rights by an agraha/firmness on truth. The paper will argue that, though satyagraha was a method of securing freedom/rights, it would be a mistake to align Gandhian freedom/swaraj with the liberty of the liberals. While the liberal tradition strove to maintain a just balance between the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity, Gandhi seemed to have accorded primary value to equality and put its concerns before freedom. In this context, the paper will also address and counter critics like Ajay Skaria and Aishwary Kumar who have argued that Gandhian satyagraha as soul force involved “the vehement extension of force itself.”

SATYAGRAHA AND SWARAJ: EQUALITY BEFORE FREEDOM

The experience of being thrown out of a train in South Africa brought Gandhi into dramatic confrontation with injustice and a realization of the importance of rights. One can revisit the birth of satyagraha as a method of pressing for rights in Gandhi’s retelling of this story:

The constable came. He took me by the hand and pushed me out . . . I refused to go to the other compartment . . . and sat in the waiting room . . . winter in the higher regions of South Africa is severely cold.1

What is significant in this retelling is perhaps how Gandhi stepped back from the anger that injustice inevitably provokes:

I began to think of my duty. Should I fight for my rights, or go back to India, or should I go back to Pretoria without minding the insults, and return to India after finishing the case? It would be cowardly to run back to India without fulfilling my obligation.2

Gandhi responded by constructing a method to secure rights: “Passive resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering.”3 The term “passive resistance” itself came in for much scrutiny and was found to be inadequate, for it did not rule out the use of violence.4 Gandhi’s choice of satyagraha as the appropriate designation seemed to have been primarily guided by the insight that satya-graha/firmness on truth would maintain absolute nonviolence as an equality of deference/respect between the victim of injustice and the oppressor. This last is evident from the choice of self-suffering/tapas instead of that of meting out suffering to the oppressor: “[I]n satyagraha there is not the remotest idea of injuring the opponent.”5 Gandhi’s choice of the term swaraj instead of “liberty” or “freedom” (to indicate the end sought by Indians) also indicates a commitment to nonviolence as an equality of deference/ respect. This paper will argue that Gandhi’s conception of satyagraha as a method, and indeed his very selection of the term satyagraha itself, rested upon the priority he accorded to the claims of equality over those of liberty in the trio of equality, liberty, and fraternity.

In this context, the first section will bring out the foundations of satyagraha in an absolute equality between all existent things and in Gandhi’s argument that satyagraha protects swaraj. The second will examine the purva paksha or the contrary view (Skaria, Kumar), which envisions satyagraha as abiding in the notion of the proper, as it were, as an extension of the use of force. In the conventional use of the term, “force” is nothing if not the affirmation—an affirmation made possible by the sheer exercise of power—that the one against whom it is being exerted has no right to his/her truth-untruth. And, in the context of satyagraha, falls short of or is unequal to the one who is exerting the force of truth/satyā. In this connection, this section will suggest that satyagraha was an agraha/firmness rather than “force” as that term has been understood in the European and Anglo-American traditions of thinking of coercion and power.


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The concept of firmness/agraha in satyagraha emerged from an alternative tradition and alternative understanding of transformation (of both self and the “other”) through tapas/austerity associated with the miraculous aspects of asceticism, which seeks to convert without domination, coercion, or the will to power over others.

I. SATYAGRAHA PROTECTS SWARAJ: SAMATA, SAMADARSHANA, AND SAMABHAVA

In Gandhi’s conception of it, satyagraha was quite literally an agra or firmness on satya/truth. It is significant that as a noun, agra has the sense of both insistence/perseverance and also of respectful encouragement. As a method of pressing for rights, satyagraha was an insistence that encouraged both oneself and the other to transform from an intolerant perspective—to grow in love, perhaps—and, as such, it involved as complete a nonviolence as was humanly possible. This was because the association of agra and satya in satyagraha derived from Gandhi’s insight into the inseparability between truth and nonviolence:

Ahimsa and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle . . . them . . . . Nevertheless, ahimsa is the means; Truth is the end . . ., we may not give up the quest for Truth which alone is, being God Himself.\(^{11}\)

Leaving aside the connection between truth and God for the moment, one might well ask why Gandhi should have thought that ahimsa/nonviolence is the only means to truth. The clue lies, perhaps, in understanding what Gandhi meant by truth and what he meant by ahimsa. For Gandhi, there was absolute truth/satya (as complete transparency), which was the end of the moral life, and relative truths (the everyday truths), which informed the means to “Absolute” truth. Truth (as Absolute and relative) could be arrived at by the practice of non-injury inspired by a dispassionate love of all beings. The reason Gandhi had connected the search for truth with the practice of nonviolence perhaps derived from his understanding that ahimsa/nonviolence was nothing but love.

Drawing on Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra, as much as from Rajchand Bhai’s Moksamala (and discussions on compassion/daya dharma therein), Gandhi not only worked with an expansive understanding of ahimsa but also believed that love alone had the power to dissolve hatred and anger. These last, Gandhi thought, were powerful sources of untruth. There may be good reason to accept Gandhi’s insights if one considers how such emotions (of anger, hatred) can obstruct the search for truth in terms of their close association with the individual ego and its deceptions. Witness that if one is to think of oneself as better than anyone else, one needs to deceive oneself about imperfections that make one both lesser than one thinks one is and lesser than other people, who, on their part, could often be hostile to one’s inflated self-images. Gandhi was well aware of such deceptions and their power to obstruct the truth: “I may not know that I am myself altogether free of self-deception . . . very likely what I say may be just a picture of my elongated self before you.”\(^{12}\) For Gandhi, the elongated self provoked anger and violence against those who broke its spell.

Gandhi had often argued that it was only nonviolence as love that could make for a non-egoistic response to the “other.” On consideration, it might seem apparent (from a healthy parent-child relationship, for instance) that love is the one emotion that can help to overcome ego-inspired self-centeredness. Gandhi had credited Patanjali with the discovery of the transformative aspect of love:

*Ahimsapuratishtaya tatsa thirddho veratya “HATE DISSOLVES IN THE PRESENCE OF LOVE” (Patanjali yogadarshanam ii.35).*\(^{13}\)

With love dissolving hate and anger, an individual would be better able to arrive at truth. It would, however, remain impossible to arrive at Absolute truth in the human condition and consequently all humans would remain equally distant from such truth. An appreciation of this equidistance from truth perhaps strengthened Gandhi’s reasons for thinking that nonviolence was the only appropriate path to truth and, as such, the only means to press for rights or justice.

One needs to add a caveat to specify that Gandhian nonviolence qua love should not be confused with romantic love, which is necessarily directed towards a chosen other. Quite to the contrary, the love Gandhi invoked as ahimsa was love emancipated from confinement within the boundaries of a relationship or even a set of relationships. It was only once the satyagrahi could practice a non-possessiveness/aparigraha (equally about people as about things) and respond with love to “others,” as if they were his/her kin, that such “others” could be met with complete nonviolence.

It now becomes important to note that Gandhi’s selection of nonviolence/truth-force or love-force as the only appropriate means to arrive at truth (and thereby justice) between human beings derived not only from the connection between truth and love but, more importantly perhaps, also from Gandhi’s connection between equality and freedom. Gandhi’s oft-quoted critique of modernity notwithstanding, he had shared the liberal concerns for liberty (and rights), equality, and fraternity. However, one could go wrong if one took this to mean that Gandhi simply reiterated the liberal account of these values. Gandhi’s understanding of liberty and equality and indeed the relationship between them was quite his own and often drew on insights from traditional texts like the *Bhagavad Gita*. In conceiving satyagraha as a method of securing rights by tapas/self-suffering, Gandhi had drawn primarily upon the notions of samata, samadarshana, and samabhava as they had appeared in the verses of the *Bhagavad Gita* with which he was familiar, both from his own commentaries and from those of other scholars. Consider, for a moment, why Gandhi should have recommended the choice of suffering in one’s own person as the method of securing rights from unjust others. An answer could appear if one would recall that Gandhi was familiar with the miraculous power of self-suffering/tapas/austerity to transform oneself (and others equal to oneself) both from relations in the family and from myths about the power of austerity in the Indian
tradition. However, Gandhi’s choice of tapas/self-suffering as the appropriate method for arriving at freedom/rights can be traced to the priority he accorded to equality over liberty and from the connection he had made between means and end. I am reminded here of Akeel Bilgrami’s foundational insight about the integrity in Gandhi’s ideas and his point that Gandhi’s political strategies often drew from seemingly far removed and “abstract epistemological and methodological commitments.”

The present connections become a case in point, for Gandhi chose ahimsa as the appropriate method to press for rights on account of the priority he accorded to equality. Gandhi thought that self-assurance about having possessed the absolute truth involved an assumption of superiority that denied the status of equality between oneself and the other who appeared unjust. This self-righteous denial of equality justified violence, which in turn ensured one’s distance from the truth. On this view, no one could be both non-violent/egalitarian and self-righteous about having arrived at absolute truth. The satyagrahi was accordingly always required to remain deferential to the equal right of his/her opponent to be close to truth. One might consider that the only way for the satyagrahi to maintain an equality of deference for the truth-untruths of the other and yet keep up the insistence on his/her truth-untruth was by practicing austerity/tapas for the sake of truth. Such self-suffering demonstrated both the seriousness of the satyagrahi’s insistence and the fact that such insistence did not and could not (in its humility) involve any disrespect to the truth-untruth of the equal “other.” However, quite in keeping with the integrity in Gandhi’s ideas, there was another consideration at work here—that of the relationship between means and end. One could not attain rights by using means that neglected the performance of (what Gandhi saw as) the human being’s swabhavika/own-most duty of deference to the equability/samabhava that was owed to the opposing other. The use of unjust means (neglecting the duty of equability) would make it impossible to qualify the “end” achieved as true/just. One might consider here that the end (arrived at by unjust means) would be unjust because the means used would go against the swabhava/own-most nature of being human. Gandhi had often spoken of the own-most nature/swabhava of the human being in terms of “the unilateral obligation” incumbent on each individual “to own kinship” with all human/non-human others. Owning such kinship involved accepting that all beings were (like members in a family) equal.

The answer to the question why Gandhi should have thought that satyagraha as a form of self-suffering was the only means open to one who sought rights perhaps derived from another question. One indeed that lay buried in the Indian tradition, in an ancient text and a copious number of commentaries and interpretations thereof. This was Arjuna’s question to Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. One might recall that question and, more importantly, Gandhi’s interpretation of Sri Krishna’s reply. It was in his Discourses on the Gita and Anasaktiyoga that Gandhi initiated the discussion on absolute equality (not only between human beings, hostile beliefs, and opposing worldviews but also between all that exists). Gandhi wrote about Arjuna’s question in his Discourses on the Gita, radically re-interpreting Sri Krishna’s answer to Arjuna’s question in line with samabhava/having the attitude of equality to things as they are/exist. He suggested at the very start of his commentary that:

It is important to consider what Arjuna’s question was and what the circumstances were in which he raised it.

It was in interpreting Arjuna’s question that Gandhi made his first argument about the absolute equality of the Gita. Gandhi recounted the scene and the question:

Arjuna requests Shri Krishna to station his chariot between the two armies, so that he may see the warriors on the field.

He sees that all of them are relatives and friends, whom one cannot easily bring oneself to kill.

Arjuna says: "I do not see any good in killing one’s kinsmen." The stress here is on "kinsmen" .

Reminding the Hindus about the ethical implications of the espousal of a metaphysics of a vedantic oneness (reaffirmed by his own equation of Truth with God), Gandhi observed:

The first thing to bear in mind is that Arjuna falls into the error of making a distinction between kinsmen and outsiders. Outsiders may be killed even if they are not oppressors, and kinsmen may not be killed even if they are. . . .

Perhaps a comparison with Tilak’s commentary on the Gita (which Gandhi had studied) might serve to bring out the Gandhi who appeared radically insurrectionary to conservatives. It is important to make this point, especially given the argument by critics like Kumar that Gandhi was an upholder of limits/maryada dharma. One might recall (with profit) Tilak’s interpretation of Arjuna’s question and Sri Krishna’s reply:

The blessed Lord is telling Arjuna to fight, having regard to what his “dharma” is, . . . it is better to die performing one’s caste duties; following the duties enjoined on another caste is dangerous.

There is clearly a radical shift between Tilak’s interpretation that Sri Krishna asks Arjuna to shake off his despondency and perform the duties enjoined by his caste and Gandhi’s alternative reading that Sri Krishna asks Arjuna to abjure all discrimination between one’s own kinsmen and “others.” It is in this radical shift that one might locate the source of discomfort that Gandhi might have caused to the conservative proponents of the Hindu dharma. The orthodox were discomfited by Gandhi, perhaps because he brought the notion of equality down from the rarefied plane of atmans/souls without bodies to that of embodied being. Gandhi affirmed an absolute equality which could be practiced as an equality of regard between one’s own and others. He did this by bringing it home to the Gita, too close for comfort, as it were:
He (Arjuna) simply raised the question of distinction between kinsmen and others, in the same way that a fond mother would advance arguments favoring her child.\textsuperscript{23}

Gandhi remained emphatic that, in his very first response to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna had enjoined that it was incumbent on those who sought truth or God to see every “other” (human or animal) with samadarshita/an equal eye. Gandhi brought a radical fervor to his arguments about equality when he had observed (somewhat uncharacteristically) in this context:

. . . should it be necessary to cut off, with a sword, one’s father’s head, one must do so . . . if one would be ready to cut off anyone else’s head in similar circumstances.\textsuperscript{24}

As he explained, the “extreme example”\textsuperscript{25} had been used only to bring home the lesson of an absolute equality of deference:

. . . those who interpret the teaching of the Gita to mean that one ought to kill the wicked . . . should kill their . . . relatives if they are wicked. In practice, they will not be able to do so. Naturally, then, it would occur to the reader that where destruction is prescribed the work contemplates some other form . . . the Gita advises us not to make any distinction between our own people and others.\textsuperscript{26}

Such an interpretation of Arjuna’s question inspired Gandhi to think of a method of pressing for rights/justice that constitutively prioritized the claims of equality over those of liberty. He demanded that the satyagrahi, like Arjuna, needed to maintain an equability between (the truth-)untruths and person of (the victim and the oppressor. For Gandhi, in fact, the satyagrahi was one who held “enemy and friend in equal regard.”\textsuperscript{27} Gandhi often emphasized the samadarshita of the satyagrahi: “In every step that he takes, the satyagrahi is bound to consider the position of his adversary.”\textsuperscript{28} Gandhi insisted:

Even as the eye lashes automatically protect the eyes, so does satyagraha, when kindled automatically protect the freedom of the soul.\textsuperscript{29}

In part, this connection was made on account of the way Gandhi thought of swaraj. Freedom as Gandhian swaraj was both self-rule and home rule with the caveat that one could arrive at the second only to the extent that one actualized the first. One might consider that Gandhian swaraj as “self-rule” was based upon one’s control of the over-assertive self. Self-rule involved a progressive realization of humility which entailed the practice of equability between oneself and others. Perhaps it is because the term swaraj does not quite keep to the sense of “autonomy” (in the liberal usage of the term) that commentators, like Skaria, are led to suggest that the restraint in Gandhi’s “self-restraint” is nothing but a confinement in maryada/hadh/limit. This then takes me straight into the next section on the purva paksha.

II. THE FORCE IN GANDHI’S SOUL FORCE: THE PURVA PAKSHA

While much has already been said about the satyagrahi maintaining an equality of deference, little has been said of the truth which the satyagrahi sought. Bilgrami has argued that Gandhi could make a connection between truth and ahimsa because he thought of truth (like the pluralist anekantavadi Jains) as relative to the seeker.\textsuperscript{30} I have taken issue with Bilgrami,\textsuperscript{31} making the point that Gandhi had made a distinction between Absolute truth/ God and truths that might be relative to one’s point of view and about which one might be deceived. In fact, to hold truths with humility was central to the search for truth itself, which could never be found without ahimsa as utmost humility/equability towards all. Gandhi’s very making of the distinction between absolute and relative truth demonstrates that he did not think of truth as relative. Further, the fact that Gandhi was involved in fasts to death for the sake of truth indicates that he was not content with a relativism about truth as an end of human life.

In more recent years, perhaps taking off from this Gandhian distinction between absolute and relative truth, Skaria does away with Gandhi’s “Absolute truth or God” altogether by speaking of the death of God in Gandhi. While one might accept Gandhi’s equation between Truth and God as indicating that morality can be quite independent of religion, Skaria takes these insights in another direction. He argues that, just as there is no absolute truth, Gandhi’s equality too cannot be absolute, for it rests upon a sharing of “finitude itself”\textsuperscript{32} and, from such sharing, it becomes an equality of limits. From here, it becomes easy for Kumar\textsuperscript{33} to go on to argue (as he does) that the agraha in satyagraha is about a force and imposition of such limits/ maryada dharma on the “other.” Skaria has argued that the “apprehension of the death of God”\textsuperscript{34} is important, for:

It is rather the very impossibility of God as a sovereign being that sustains the emphasis on a universal love. Because of this very different starting point, even same or similar phrases such as “universal love” or “equality before God” rotate on very different trajectories.\textsuperscript{35}

The difference of starting point, as it turns out, is fairly significant as it somewhat dismantles equality itself:

even though Gandhi emphasizes universal love, in his writings such love becomes inseparable from swadeshi (staying with one’s desh—country or place).\textsuperscript{36}

This happens (according to Skaria, of course) because “this absolute equality is satya . . . that . . . makes satya synonymous with justice... now the demand for equality and against inequality is ownmost to being. To this seizure Gandhi gives the name satyagraha.”\textsuperscript{37}

In order to understand what satyagraha as seizure involves, one needs to attend to Gandhi’s interplay of the two senses of swaraj, and Skaria argues that this interplay brings in the question of limit/hadh:
Swaraj here names the rule of the self, and in the process wrestles with the questions: What is proper to rule? What is proper to the self?  

This leads naturally enough to the position that  

Even if satyagrahi’s claim no sovereignty over the other, this is so because they submit to the sovereignty of the proper over the self. That grounding violence also implicitly imposes the sovereignty of the proper over the other too.  

Taking off from the point that satyagraha involves the imposition of reciprocity, limits, and the proper/theekana on both oneself and the other, Aiswary Kumar argues that “satyagraha allowed Gandhi to conceptualize force as the fulcrum of every day virtue and action.” One might now recall that it was the death of God that made for a starting point which necessitated “the insuperable vow of self-sacrifice in which the immanence of being had to be circumscribed by a transcendentalism of disciplinary limit.” Further, Gandhi’s “rhetoric of spirit” made for the complicity between the classical idea of the state and the injunctions of the moral law. Choosing to locate Gandhi’s soul-force within the lineage of the European tradition, Kumar, in fact, argues that Gandhi’s “spirit” veered close enough to Hegel’s phenomenological elaboration of the “modern autonomous self,” which acquired its form “in the shadows of force alone.” Hind Swaraj was not as untimely as it looked. “Gandhi was most modern, even if not decisively humanist, in ascribing this spiritual invincibility to force. For he had placed himself consciously or otherwise, within an early modern tradition in which the discourse on spirit had returned and, as it turned out, had been given, “at least since Hegel, a spiritual sanctity.”  

What this came to mean, as Kumar argues, was that “satyagrahic fanaticism” was centralizing rather than egalitarian and that it appropriated and silenced the other by “the imposition of limits on the unequal’s faculties.” Sathyagraha itself remained “an ethical demand rooted in the . . . groundless recesses of faith.”  

To take issue with this set of arguments involves some talk not only of Gandhi’s agarha but also, and perhaps more importantly, of Gandhi’s truth/satya. To begin with, one needs to ask if there is sufficient warrant to say that Gandhi’s assertion—“I have come to the conclusion that for myself God is Truth. But two years ago, I went a step further and said Truth is God”—rested upon insights into the death of God. This last is what lends support to the argument that Gandhi was seeking to impose limits emerging from the finitude in the immanence of being on to the unequal other through an agarha/firmness which could be read in the lineage of Montesqueieu’s 1748 Spirit of the Law. Is Gandhi’s prioritization of truth sufficient to conclude that his writing evidences (like Nietzsche’s) the death of God? If it is, then God has been dead in ancient Indian thought from its earliest beginning, for Gandhi’s selection of truth as the appropriate name of God came in continuity with the satyam jnana anantam (Truth Bliss Infinity) of the early Upanishadic tradition. More importantly, much that Gandhi said (and did) went against the idea that he had based his moral edifice on the death of God. It is important to note that while Gandhi perhaps sought to clarify that moral life was not dependent upon God, he not only spoke of devotion to a personal God, dwelling in his commentaries on the Gita on Sri Krishna’s divine form, but also listened to the voice of God/inner voice at many critical moments of his life. Note the following from Gandhi:  

But He is no God who merely satisfies the intellect, if He ever does. God to be God must rule the heart and transform it. . . . This can only be done through a definite realization more real than the five senses can ever produce. Sense perceptions can be, often are false and deceptive. . . . Where there is realization outside the senses it is infallible. It is proved not by extraneous evidence but in the transformed conduct and character of those who have felt the real presence of God within.  

Yet this is much more than a question of what Gandhi said. What is more important is that Gandhi did not, and could not, consistently locate himself as espousing a “groundless” faith.  

In this context, it is important to recall that, for Gandhi, there could be no faith which was held by the faithful to be groundless. Faith to be faithful had to be grounded in the humbling belief in that which was beyond itself and transcendent to human reality. It is also important to understand that in the worldview of the ancients—within which Gandhi was self-consciously located—a lot followed from being a part of a wider cosmos where order emerged from a ground other than human. Gandhi’s faith rested in absolute humility and on a God whose voice he heard (and responded to) and of whom he spoke in his comments on the Gita. Perhaps then, one need not go back to the European tradition to interpret the agraha in satyagraha. For satyagraha could well rest on what Gandhi claimed it rested upon—the power of love to effect conversion of hearts—one that derived from the human being’s love for Truth or God. It might then seem unnecessary to read agraha as part of the more modern will to power of a spirit in Hegel’s phenomenological account of the self. What then of Kumar and Skaria’s account of the “force” in satyagraha? The force could dissipate if one considers that one cannot be compelled (in the conventional sense of the term) into transformation, which indeed is what Gandhi sought to effect through love. Gandhi responded to critics who accused him of coercion:  

If my fast . . . is to be interpreted as pressure, I can only say that such moral pressure should be welcomed by all concerned.  

It is significant to consider that if all moral encouragement/agraha and transformation are to be assimilated to the will to power, one would need to be open about the complete dismissal of the moral life in modern moral philosophy. This perhaps is not something modern moral philosophy would welcome. Consider what remains if moral encouragement is understood as an exercise of power and not goodness. So it may come to pass that one need not turn to Hegel to locate the genealogy of Gandhi’s emphasis on a conversion of the
heart. One need only recall traditional Indian accounts of tapas as making for miraculous transformations:

There was a certain rshi; the fire emitted from between his brows put an end to all suffering. The point of this text is that, when the soul becomes alive, all miseries end and so the injustices perpetrated by the government will be no more when we become alive in our soul…. We want happiness in place of the present misery; if so we should suffer voluntarily and lay down our lives for the sake of truth.24

Perhaps then satyagraha emerged from within a very different tradition—one which could not, and need not—be read from within the European and Anglo-American traditions of philosophy.

NOTES
10. Kumar, Radical Equality.
32. Skaria, Unconditional Equality, 14.
33. Kumar, Radical Equality.
34. Skaria, Unconditional Equality, viii.
35. Skaria, Unconditional Equality, xiii.
36. Skaria, Unconditional Equality, xiii.
37. Skaria, Unconditional Equality, xvi.
38. Skaria, Unconditional Equality, 3.
40. Kumar, Radical Equality, 61.
41. Kumar, Radical Equality, 62.
42. Kumar, Radical Equality, 69.
43. Kumar, Radical Equality, 72.
44. Kumar, Radical Equality, 73.
45. Kumar, Radical Equality, 79.
46. Kumar, Radical Equality, 79.
47. Kumar, Radical Equality, 87.
48. Kumar, Radical Equality, 90.
49. Kumar, Radical Equality, 91.
52. Kumar, Radical Equality.

Making Sense of Gandhi’s Satyagraha
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ABSTRACT
The 153rd Anniversary of the birth of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is as much a cause for celebration as for reflection on the future of this globe we inhabit. The global spurt in the incidence of violence, intolerance, and hatred in the twenty-first century has given rise to vast cultural and moral chaos. This phenomenon has its roots in the sad demise of humanitarianism and the concomitant history of moral decomposition the world over. At this crucial juncture, Gandhi’s worldview invariably activates the moral impulse towards building a nonviolent social order. Gandhi’s worldview in its pristine form represents an idea of an accommodative truth built not merely on mutual tolerance...
but on acceptance of the other as an equal and dignified soul. Gandhi's life journey evolved through experiments for building a humane society based upon the troika of truth, nonviolence, and satyagraha. This paper aims to deliberate upon Gandhi's worldview grounded in his moral philosophy of satyagraha and show how it can work as an effective countervailing tool and method to understand the growing culture and discourse of violence today.

INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi had an abiding faith in the unfailing power of nonviolence and ultimate victory of truth. It was out of this faith that Gandhi evolved his satyagraha (the exercise of soul force) against all injustice and exploitation. For Gandhi, satyagraha was not just a useful method of political action and social change and the satyagrahi was considered far more than a mere practitioner of certain skills. The satyagrahi was the embodiment of an ideal, and the satyagrahi's lifestyle was a lifestyle worth emulating.

The centrality of satyagraha to Gandhi's cosmology makes the alternative he proposed in normative terms very attractive. Satyagraha involved a relentless search for truth with steadfastness, commitment, fearlessness, and willingness to act. Gandhi suggested that the philosophy is not a weapon of the weak. On the other hand, it demands tremendous moral strength and fortitude, because satyagraha is not a physical force. The idea behind the satyagrahi is not to coerce or inflict pain on the adversary and seek his destruction. The satyagrahi's object is to convert him or win him over by love, sympathy, and patience.

In the use of satyagraha, there is no ill will whatever. "It is often forgotten that it is never the intention of a satyagrahi to embarrass the wrong-doer. The appeal is never to his fear; it is must, always to his heart." For Gandhi, "suffering love" was the best way to do this and formed the inspiring principle of his new method. As he rightly puts it: "I have come to this fundamental conclusion that if you want something important to be done, you must not merely satisfy the reason, you must move the heart also. The appeal of reason is more to the head, but the penetration of the heart comes from suffering. It opens up the inner understanding in man. Suffering is the badge of the human race not the sword."2

Gandhi's satyagraha, thus, was "unique [as] a method of securing rights by personal suffering." Self-sacrifice is essential to satyagraha. Ajay Skaria quotes Gandhi as saying:

If I do not accept...[a] law and suffer [bhogiy] the penalty for breaking it, then I have used soul-force or satyagraha. In satyagraha, I give myself in sacrifice [aapbhog aapu chhu]. To give oneself in sacrifice [aapbhog aapvo] is better than giving the other in sacrifice [par bhog], this all say. Besides, if the satyagrahi's fight is wrong, then only he who fights suffers [dukh bhogvey chhe]. So, for his own error, he himself suffers...No man can say with certainty that a certain activity is bad. But when he thinks it bad, then for him it is bad. In such a situation, he should not do it, and should suffer the consequences of this. This is the key to satyagraha.3

In the words of Bhikhu Parekh, satyagraha, thus, was "a surgery of the soul," "a way of activating soul force." Parekh writes:

The satyagrahi's love and moral nobility disarmed his opponent, weakened his feelings of anger and hatred, and mobilized his higher nature. And his uncomplaining suffering denied his opponent the pleasure of victory, mobilized neutral public opinion, and created in him a mood conducive to calm introspection. The two together triggered the complex process of critical self-examination on which a satyagraha relied for its ultimate success.4

It may be recalled that Gandhi's steadfast commitment to working satyagraha in practical life saw him introducing very strict canons of moral discipline for the satyagrahi (vow of Truth) at his Sabarmati Ashram in 1916. A satyagrahi, according to Gandhi, must strictly adhere to the following eleven maxims:

1. Satya (Truth)
2. Ahimsa (nonviolence or love)
3. Brahmacharya ( chastity)
4. Asvad (control of the palate)
5. Asteya (non-stealing)
6. Aparigraha (non-possession or poverty)
7. Abhaya (fearlessness)
8. Ashprushyata Nirvan (removal of untouchability)
9. Sharer Shrama (bread labor)
10. Sarva Dharma Samabhav (tolerance or equality of religions)
11. Swadeshi (self-reliance)

Considering not all Indians in his satyagraha movements could live up to the expected moral standards, Gandhi subsequently, in 1939, stated the list of seven guiding factors that he held essential for all satyagrahis in India.5

1. A satyagrahi must have a living faith in God.
2. He must believe in truth and nonviolence as his creed and, therefore, have faith in the inherent goodness of human nature, which he expects to evoke by his truth and love expressed through his suffering.
3. He must be leading a chaste life and be ready and willing, for the sake of his cause, to give up his life and his possessions.
4. He must be a habitual Khadi wearer and spinner. This is essential for India.
5. He must be a teetotaler and be free from the use of other intoxicants in order that his reason may be always unclouded and his mind constant.
6. He must carry out with a willing heart all the rules or discipline as may be laid down from time to time.
7. He should carry out the jail rules unless they are specially devised to hurt his self-respect. The qualifications are not to be regarded as exhaustive. They are illustrative only.

TRUTH AND NONVIOLENCE

Among the above-outlined seven principles, nonviolence and truth clearly foreground Gandhi’s ideas of satyagraha. The other principles can be deduced from these two central tenets. Satyagraha was formed by combining two words—"truth" (satya) and “firmness,” “insistence,” or “determined pursuit” (agraha). Satyagraha, thus, literally meant “holding on to truth” or “truth force” and entailed that nonviolence (“of the strong”) would be adopted as the exclusive means for pursuing truth.

In comparison between truth and nonviolence, truth stands at a very fundamental level from the ontological point of view, whereas nonviolence is pivotal to the moral point of view in which truth itself is discovered. Nonviolence forges the way for the discovery of and the ultimate encounter with truth. Therefore, nonviolence is the moral way to truth and leads us to the ultimate victory of truth over untruth. Gandhi admits:

My study and experience of nonviolence have proved to me that it is the greatest force in the world. It is the surest method of discovering truth and it is the quickest because there is no other. It works silently, but almost imperceptibly, but nonetheless surely. It is the one constructive process of Nature in the midst of incessant destruction going on about us. Thus, nonviolence pervades the entire space of human activities and makes man morally responsible and responsive to truth. Truth as the law of existence remains undiscovered in the absence of nonviolence. While nonviolence is the law of our species, truth is the law of all existence. In this sense, truth is to be treated as the ontological principle, while nonviolence is to be treated as the moral principle.

Gandhi had defined his personal goal as seeing God face to face. Gandhi, at the same time, was aware of the fact that the human mind cannot know the Absolute fully. To have found the Truth completely, Gandhi believed, would mean that one has realized oneself and reached one’s destiny; in other words, one has become perfect. Being aware of human beings’ inability to know the Truth wholly, Gandhi insisted on the importance of being open to those who differ with us. Although Gandhi never claimed to have known the Truth, he did claim to have found the way to it. Gandhi believed that humans could only realize Truth/God by pursuing ahimsa or nonviolence. Thus, realization of truth warrants an action rooted in nonviolence. Thus, for Gandhi, ahimsa or nonviolence is the means; truth is the end. Both are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate them. Truthfulness is the prerequisite for a pursuit of ahimsa.

The Power of Nonviolence

Unlike the commonsensical understanding of nonviolence as non-injury or avoidance of physical violence, Gandhi expands its use to include a number of different meanings. In Gandhi’s philosophy, ahimsa is not primarily refraining from physical injury. Rather, he argues that ahimsa should be a principle guiding humans in their thoughts, words, and deeds. “Ahimsa,” Gandhi writes, “is not merely a negative state of harmlessness, but it is a positive state of love, of doing well even to the evil-doer.”

“Nonviolence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evildoer, but it means the putting of one’s whole soul against the will of the tyrant.” The general thrust of Gandhi’s injunction was that ahimsa cannot be realized unless you can calmly tolerate your opponent. Gandhi had observed, “It is the acid test of nonviolence that in a nonviolent conflict there is no rancor left behind, and in the end the enemies are converted into friends. That was my experience in South Africa with General Smuts. He started with being my bitterest opponent and critic. Today he is my warmest friend. The principle of ahimsa, therefore, involves respect and sympathy for the opponent, freedom from hate, and a desire for peace. Moreover, for Gandhi:

a votary of ahimsa cannot subscribe to the utilitarian formula (of the greatest good of the greatest number). He will strive for the greatest good of all and die in the attempt to realize the ideal. He will therefore be willing to die, so that the others may live. He will serve himself with the rest, by himself dying. The greatest good of all inevitably includes the good of the greatest number, and, therefore, he and the utilitarian will converge in many points in their career but there does come a time when they must part company, and even work in opposite directions. The utilitarian to be logical will never sacrifice himself. The absolutist will even sacrifice himself.

Gandhi’s creed of nonviolence has no room for cowardice or weakness. Gandhi writes:

Nonviolence cannot be taught to a person who fears to die and has no power of resistance. A helpless mouse is not nonviolent because he is always eaten by pussy. He would gladly eat the murderer if he could, but he never tries to flee from her. We do not call him a coward, because he is made by nature to behave no better than he does. But a man who, when faced by danger, behaves like a mouse, is rightly called a coward. He harbors violence and hatred in his heart and would kill his enemy if he could without hurting himself. He is a stranger to nonviolence.

Where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, Gandhi advised violence. Thus, when he was almost fatally assaulted in 1908, his eldest son asked him whether he should have run away and seen him killed or whether he should have used his physical force to defend him. Gandhi categorically responded that “it was his duty to defend him even by using violence... I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honor than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a
Thus, for Gandhi, an ability to use physical force is necessary for a true appreciation of satyagraha.

Gandhi observes: "He alone can practice ahimsa who knows how to kill, i.e., knows what himsa is." Gandhi continues:

It is my practice of ahimsa and failure to get our people even to understand the first principles of ahimsa that have led to the discovery that all killing is not himsa, that, sometimes, practice of ahimsa may even necessitate killing and that we as a nation have lost the true power of killing. It is clear that he who has lost the power to kill cannot practice non-killing. Ahimsa is a renunciation of the highest type. A weak and an effeminate nation cannot perform this grand act of renunciation, even as a mouse cannot be properly said to renounce the power of killing a cat. It may look terrible but it is true that we must, by a well-sustained, conscious effort, regain this power, and, then, if we can only do so, deliver the world from its travails of himsa by a continuous abdication of this power. . . . I do believe that we shall have to teach our children the art of self-defense. . . . I am most anxious that you should understand this new view of ahimsa. It is not a fall but it is a rise. The measure of love evoked by this discovery is infinitely greater than ever it was before.11

Perfect nonviolence, according to Gandhi, is impossible so long as we exist physically. As he himself opines:

Man cannot for a moment live without consciously or unconsciously committing outward himsa. The very fact of his living—eating, drinking and moving about—necessarily involves some himsa, destruction of life, be it ever so minute. Thus, for food we take life, vegetable and other, and for health we destroy mosquitoes and the like by the use of disinfectants, etc., and we do not think that we are guilty of irreligion in doing so . . . for the benefit of the species, we kill carnivorous beasts.12

Gandhi further states: "In certain cases, taking life may be a duty. Even man-slaughter may be necessary in certain cases. Suppose a man runs amuck and goes furiously about, sword in hand, and killing anyone that comes in his way, and no one dares to capture him alive. Anyone who dispatches this lunatic will earn the gratitude of the community and be regarded as a benevolent man."13

But Gandhi believes nonviolence is infinitely superior to violence. He writes:

[F]orgiveness is manlier than punishment. Forgiveness adorns a soldier. But abstinence is forgiveness only when there is the power to punish; it is meaningless when it pretends to proceed from a helpless creature. A mouse hardly forgives a cat when it allows itself to be torn to pieces by her. I, therefore, appreciate the sentiment of those who cry out for the condign punishment of General Dyer and his ilk. They would tear him to pieces if they could. But I do not believe India to be a helpless creature. Only I want to use India's and my strength for a better purpose.14

SATYAGRAHA AS PRACTICE/ACTION
Although Gandhi never laid down a handbook of principles or procedures, based on the experience of satyagraha campaigns in India, one could draw a certain code of discipline, fundamental rules, and steps in a mass satyagraha campaign. Joan V. Bondurant explains these as follows.15 First, a code of discipline.

CODE OF DISCIPLINE

1. The following points were laid down by Gandhi as a code of discipline for volunteers in the 1930 movement:16
2. All satyagrahis had to willingly suffer the anger of the opponent without any retaliation.
3. All satyagrahis had to refrain from obeying any orders from the opponent even when threatened with severe punishment.
4. All satyagrahis had to refrain from insults and swearing. They also had to protect opponents from insults or attacks even when the satyagrahis’ lives were at risk.
5. All satyagrahis were required not to resist arrest nor to resist the attachment of property unless they were holding the property as trustees. They were also expected to refuse to surrender any property held in trust even at the risk of their lives.
6. All satyagrahis were expected to behave in an exemplary manner when taken as prisoners.
7. As members of a satyagraha unit, all satyagrahis were required to obey the orders of their leaders and resign from the unit if any serious disagreement arose. They were required to be prepared not to expect any guarantees for the maintenance of their dependents.

FUNDAMENTAL RULES

1. Self-reliance at all times. Outside aid may be accepted but should never be counted upon.
2. Initiative in the hands of the satyagrahis. Satyagrahis, through the tactics of positive resistance, persuasion, and adjustment, must press the movement ever forward.
3. Propagation of the objectives, strategy, and tactics of the campaign. Propaganda must be made an integral part of the movement. Education of the opponent, the public, and participants must continue apace.
4. Reduction of demands to a minimum consistent with truth. Continuing reassessment of the situation and the objectives with a view to possible adjustment of demands is essential.

5. Progressive advancement of the movement through steps and stages determined to be appropriate within the given situation. Direct action is to be launched only after all other efforts to achieve an honorable settlement have been exhausted.

6. Examination of weakness within the satyagraha group. The morale and discipline of the satyagrahis must be maintained through active awareness of any development of impatience, discouragement, or breakdown of nonviolent attitude.

7. Persistent search for avenues of cooperation with the adversary on honorable terms. Every effort should be made to win over the opponent by helping him, thereby demonstrating sincerity to achieve an agreement with, rather than a triumph over, the adversary.

8. Refusal to surrender essentials in negotiation. Satyagraha excludes all compromise, which affects basic principles or essential portions of valid objectives.

9. Insistence upon full agreement on fundamentals before accepting a settlement.

**STEPS IN A MASS SATYAGRAHA CAMPAIGN**

1. Negotiation and arbitration. Every effort to resolve the conflict or redress the grievance through established channels must be exhausted before the further steps are undertaken.

2. Preparation of the group for direct action. Before any direct action is taken in a conflict situation, motives are to be carefully examined, exercises in self-discipline must be initiated, discussions are to be conducted within the group regarding issues at stake, appropriate procedures to be undertaken, the circumstances of the opponent, the climate of public opinion, etc.

3. Agitation. This step includes an active propaganda campaign together with such demonstrations as mass-meetings, parades, and slogan-shouting.

4. Issuing of an ultimatum. A final strong appeal to the opponent should be made explaining what further steps will be taken if no agreement can be reached.

5. Economic boycott and forms of strike. Picketing may be widely employed, together with continued demonstrations and education of the public. Sitting dharna (a form of sit-down strike) may be employed, as well as nonviolent labor strike and attempts to organize a general strike.

6. Non-cooperation. Depending upon the nature of the issues at stake, actions such as non-payment of taxes, boycott of schools and other public institutions, ostracism, and even voluntary exile may be initiated.

7. Civil disobedience. Great care should be exercised in the selection of laws to be contravened. Such laws should be either central to the grievance or symbolic.

8. Usurping of the functions of government.

9. Parallel government. The establishment of parallel functions should grow out of step and these should be strengthened in such a way that the greatest possible cooperation from the public can be obtained.

Whether a campaign could be called satyagraha or not can be determined by applying the above-mentioned standards. What specific action is to be undertaken in a satyagraha movement greatly depends on the nature of circumstances, but a successful satyagraha campaign depends largely upon the discipline, leadership, steadfast purpose, and equally upon the opponent will’s to reciprocate as well. Gandhi himself was aware of the idea being abused in cases where it easily becomes duragraha.!

A study of most of the satyagraha campaigns initiated by Gandhi in India would indicate that they were largely successful. In those mass struggles, Gandhi introduced several forms of pressure such as economic boycott, non-payment of taxes, non-cooperation, and hartal. In addition to these and other methods, Gandhi introduced the highly controversial method of fasting. He knew that his fasts caused considerable unease among his critics and followers and went to great lengths to defend them. According to Parekh, his fast was a form of suffering love and had a three-fold purpose:

First, it was his way of expressing his deep sense of sorrow and hurt at the way in which those he loved had degraded themselves and disappointed him. Second, as their leader he felt responsible for them, and his fast was his way of atoning for their misdeeds. Third, it was his last desperate attempt, an “intense spiritual effort,” to stir their “sluggish conscience,” to “sting them into action,” and to mobilize their moral energies.!

Altogether, Gandhi employed a wide range of methods, from the most negative to the most positive and comprehensive work of reform and social service involving the Constructive Program in later years. The Champaran Satyagraha stands out as the first satyagraha conducted by Gandhi on the soil of India. It established Gandhi’s leadership even though it was a non-political struggle. In this arduous tussle with the European indigo planters, his aim was to “promote peace between the planters and the ryots so as to secure to the ryots the freedom and dignity that should belong to all mankind.” It ended in complete success and established a measure of goodwill on all sides. The twelve months
or so from April 1917 to mid-1918 saw the application of satyagraha by Gandhi in three different engagements: with the landlords in Champaran, with the capitalists in Ahmedabad, and with the government in Kheda. The Champaran Satyagraha was of course an important episode in Gandhi’s life, but the mill-workers’ strike in Ahmedabad and the Kheda Satyagraha were not less important.

All three campaigns, none of them political in the strict sense of the term, were conducted with precisely defined objectives in view. They constitute classical demonstrations of satyagraha in different situations and against different adversaries. All three ended successfully. Through these campaigns India was introduced to mass satyagraha as an effective instrument for fighting against injustice and oppression and for securing rights without resorting to violence under any condition. The campaigns were effective demonstrations that the poor, the weak, and the dispossessed could stand up to defy the might of powerful indigo planters in Bihar, the mighty mill owners of Ahmedabad, and the government officials in Kheda.

During the nationalist movement in India, the most frequently employed methods of a satyagraha campaign were non-cooperation and civil disobedience, apart from submitting memoranda of demands to the authority. While non-cooperation (hartal, strikes, boycotts, andfasts unto death) was a mechanism for indirect pressure on the opponent, civil disobedience (picketing, non-payment of taxes, and defiance of specific laws) entailed several positive steps to confront the ruling authority face-to-face. Simultaneously with these two contrasting designs for political action, Gandhian satyagraha also entailed a Constructive Program (for the promotion of communal harmony, removal of untouchability, adult education, promotion of social and economic equality, and devolution of power through schemes of political and economic decentralization).

Thus, satyagraha was not merely a political weapon to challenge the British rule. It was also a detailed scheme to rid Indian society of the age-old social and economic prejudices. In other words, satyagraha was a continuous exercise with clear social and economic messages relevant to the underprivileged and exploited, apart from the political opposition to the British rule.20

SATYAGRAHA: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

Satyagraha was a theoretical construct of conflict resolution as well as a practical doctrine of political mobilization during the freedom struggle in India. In the narrow sense, satyagraha was strictly a method of political struggle, drawing on moral reasoning; in the wider sense, it was an extremely humane and creative way of dealing with disagreements and conflicts involving the ruler and the ruled as well as the socio-economically unprivileged and the wealthy. What is most distinct in Gandhi’s conceptualization is the importance of “rational” discussion and persuasion and their obvious limitations in radically altering the existent moral relationships between individuals in different socio-economic locations. Hence, satyagraha was to be a continuous process, seeking to transform the individuals involved by appealing to their humane moral values.

Notwithstanding the noble significance of satyagraha, the doctrine has invited certain criticisms. Gandhi maintained that satyagraha could prevail anywhere because it could convert anyone. Critics, however, argue that satyagraha will work provided the opponent also adheres to a certain level of morality. The efficacy of satyagraha in all situations is often questioned. It has been pointed out that Gandhi’s nonviolent campaigns could only succeed because of the benign and liberal British government; such campaigns could have been easily crushed under a strong, brutal regime like the Nazis.21

Questioning the strength of Gandhian beliefs and his failure to understand the nature of totalitarianism, George Orwell pointed out that:

Gandhi believed in “arousing the world,” which is only possible if the world gets a chance to hear what you are doing. It is difficult to see how Gandhi’s methods could be applied in a country where opponents of the regime disappear in the middle of the night and are never heard of again. Without a free press and the right of assembly, it is impossible not merely to appeal to outside opinion, but to bring a mass movement into being, or even to make your intentions known to your adversary. . . . Moreover the assumption, which served Gandhi so well in dealing with individuals, that all human beings are more or less approachable and will respond to a generous gesture, needs to be seriously questioned. It is not necessarily true, for example, when you are dealing with lunatics. Then the question becomes: Who is sane? Was Hitler sane?22

Even satyagraha becomes monstrous when it generates fear as a response rather than surrender without subordination. After the Chauri Chaura incident, thus, Gandhi says: “I know the only thing that the government fears is this monstrous majority that I appear to command. They do not know that I fear it still more than they do themselves. I am literally sick over it. I would feel myself on surer ground if I were spit upon by them.”23

Parekh believes “Gandhi was wrong to think that all or even most social conflicts could be resolved by touching the opponent’s heart. They sometimes occur because men of goodwill take very different views of what human well-being consists in. On the basis of the principle of the sanctity of human life, some find abortion, euthanasia, and war morally unacceptable while others reach the opposite conclusion.” Parekh continues:

Gandhi was probably right to argue that human beings are generally affected by the suffering of others and regret that suffering even if they are unable or unwilling to do anything about it. However, he overlooked the fact that, if they thought the suffering deserved, their reaction would be different. Not the suffering per se but one’s judgement of it determines one’s response to it, and hence it has different effects on different individuals, depending on their beliefs and values.
The Sharpeville massacre left many a white South African unmov ed, the pictures of the Vietnamese victims of American napalm bombs did not disturb the consciences of many Americans, and the brutal Nazi treatment of the Jews had no effect on many a German.14

CONCLUSION

Gandhi’s satyagraha had its limitations but is a very powerful, novel, moral method of political action and social change. Gandhi’s vision of satyagraha suggests a way of ethical, moral living, which demands purity of thought and action, love and compassion, courage and humility, and self-restraint to pursue the ends that gives strength to resist evil with conviction and truth. Elaborating upon the significance of satyagraha, Neera Chandhoke remarks:

The Gandhian philosophy of satyagraha is historically contextual insofar as it was forged as a political weapon against a deeply unjust colonial state. Satyagraha is also theoretically contextual inasmuch as the concept is grounded in precepts taken from the spiritual traditions of at least four major religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Christianity. Yet the Gandhian philosophy of satyagraha, and the overlapping theories of civil disobedience and nonviolence has proved highly relevant for struggles against injustice in other parts of the world.25

The idea of satyagraha has been borrowed and tried out in different countries with suitable adjustments to local circumstances. Gandhi’s legacy of nonviolent resistance has inspired movements and leaders across the world to promote equality, dignity, and justice for all. It was invoked with much success in South Africa and in the United States and inspired movements and leaders including Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Abdul Gaffar Khan, Cesar Chavez, Desmond Tutu, Václav Havel, Dalai Lama, and Aung San Suu Kyi to create a just society. MLK, for example, once aptly remarked, “Christ gave me the message. Gandhi gave me the method.”

NOTES

2. M. K. Gandhi, Young India, November 4, 1931, 341.
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Gandhi, the Last Fast, and the Call of the Conscience

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ABSTRACT
Mohandas (“Mahatma”) Gandhi was the modern master of the “political fast.” Less than three weeks before his assassination on January 30, 1948, he commenced what would become his last fast in an attempt to bring peace to the strife-torn capital of Delhi. Fasting, Gandhi had often said, was the last remedy available to the satyagrahi or the principled nonviolent resister—and a “fast unto death” was a still more extreme step. I suggest that an account of what moved him to undertake a fast, which must perforce be distinguished from a hunger-strike, that is riveted only around a political and historical narrative cannot suffice. Gandhi speaks of “the inner voice,” which is but the same as “conscience” and the voice of truth, as what impelled him to fast; indeed, on every occasion when he undertook a public fast, it was, by his own reasoning, imposed upon him by a higher power. Paradoxically, immersed as Gandhi was in political life, the entire arc of his life suggests his radical disavowal not only of instrumental rationality but also of politics itself.

I. THE LAST FAST
At his prayer meeting on the evening of January 12, 1948, Mahatma Gandhi stunned the nation into silence with his announcement that he would commence, at noon on the following day, a fast of an indefinite duration. It was to be his last fast: Gandhi may even have had a premonition of this and not merely because of his advanced age and the fact that there were some people baying for his blood. The likelihood that he might not outlive a fast unto death was all the greater since, to some, it seemed that Gandhi had lost his zest for life, even as he was publicly saying that he had more than enough to do with his principled adherence to nonviolence being put to the sternest test. Months earlier, on August 15, India had finally freed itself from the yoke of colonial rule, but the country that arose from the raging embers of the anti-colonial struggle of which Gandhi was the principal architect had been deeply divided and ultimately vivisected. The Muslim-majority state of Pakistan had been carved out of India and bloodshed ensued as Hindus and Sikhs had been left behind in Pakistan. Similarly, Muslims who found themselves in India after the Boundary Commission had done its work fled across the borders to the apparent safety of numbers. People saw only an enemy around a political and historical narrative cannot suffice. Gandhi speaks of “the inner voice,” which is but the same as “conscience” and the voice of truth, as what impelled him to fast; indeed, on every occasion when he undertook a public fast, it was, by his own reasoning, imposed upon him by a higher power. Paradoxically, immersed as Gandhi was in political life, the entire arc of his life suggests his radical disavowal not only of instrumental rationality but also of politics itself.

What, then, moved Gandhi to undertake a fast unto death at the advanced age of seventy-eight? The conventional view on this matter has hewed to the political events of the time and his extreme unease with the political climate in India in an attempt to discern Gandhi’s thinking and motives. No sooner had India attained independence and Pakistan been birthed than the two countries had gone to war over the disputed territory of Kashmir. Gandhi was astute enough to know that the nation-state is nothing but the most organized and efficient entity that claims a legitimate monopoly over the use of violence, but what pained him especially was the blood-letting between Hindus and Muslims. No cause had been dearer to him or consumed more of his energies than Hindu-Muslim unity. Gandhi would not have been the first person to advance the view that the thousand-year-old presence of Islam besides Hinduism had produced an Indo-Islamic cultural synthesis
Gandhi had arrived in Delhi on September 9, 1947, in an attempt to quell the violence. The air was thick—and not just with smoke from burning houses and vehicles, and sometimes human flesh, but also with rumors. His two closest associates during the freedom struggle—Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhai Patel—now occupied the two highest positions in the government, prime minister and deputy prime minister, respectively, and there was talk that the disagreements between the two were so severe that the government might collapse. Patel tendered his resignation but Gandhi would have nothing of it: though he occupied no official place in the government, his word was the law of the father. He prevailed upon Nehru and Patel to keep the peace between themselves and work in unison for the good of the nation. Still, there were also rumors that Patel was hostile to Muslim refugees who had come streaming into Delhi from other parts of north India in the hope that they would be more secure in the capital city of the country that they were not prepared to disown, and it was being said that the houses abandoned by the Muslims of Delhi who had made their way to Pakistan were being handed down to Hindus who had fled Pakistan. These rumors were harder to repress and Gandhi was extremely disturbed by the obvious implication that the Muslims of India could not repose trust in their own government. It pained Gandhi that the Muslims felt they were unwanted in the country of their birth.

There was yet another delicate matter, one that a legion of commentators has described as the catalyst that finally moved Gandhi to take up a fast. In consequence of the war that had broken out between the two countries, India decided to withhold the amount of Rs 55 crores, amounting to about $200 million of the gold reserve, that was Pakistan’s share of the assets of undivided India. The members of Nehru’s cabinet were strongly in agreement that to hand over the money to Pakistan at this juncture would be imprudent in the extreme, as these assets would be used by Pakistan to advance its interests in Kashmir and cultural riches of Andalusia, but he was surely singular in adhering, as I believe is the case, to the radical view that the Muslim in India was incomplete without the Hindu just as the Hindu was orphaned without the Muslim. To make matters worse, Delhi was the seat of some of the most horrific violence, but it was also “the Eternal City” and the “heart of the country,” the capital city to which everyone had an equal right.6

Three days into his fast, the government announced that it had decided to release the money, and the communiqué issued by the government noted that “it is anxious to remove as far as possible, without detriment to the national good, every cause which leads to friction between India and Pakistan.”7 The writer Manohar Malgonkar, in his book on the plot to assassinate Gandhi, states that when the assassin Godse and his collaborator, Narayan Apte, heard the news of Gandhi’s decision to fast as it came out over their office teleprinter, they “made up their minds to kill him,”8 and their resolve was strengthened when news of the government’s “capitulation,” as they would have seen it, had gone public.

II. FASTING AND HUNGER-STRIKING

I first wrote at considerable length on Gandhi’s last fast over three decades ago.9 The politics of the fast receives a far more extended treatment in my earlier essay and I also discuss its outcome. Five days into the fast, Gandhi called it off when the leaders of virtually every religious community in Delhi, political luminaries, and members of a peace committee representing all the constituencies and organizations in the city, some of whose members had partaken in killings, arson, and the looting of Muslim-owned homes, stood before Gandhi and pledged to lay down arms, restore peace, and furnish guarantees of safety to the Muslims. Interesting as all that may be to students of history and politics, it now appears to me that I was insufficiently attentive to what Gandhi variously called “the inner voice,” “conscience,” and what the Quakers know as the “still small voice” within oneself when he decided to subject his flesh to the torments of an indefinite fast. I recognized at that time that Gandhi’s use of fasting was on each occasion “an attempt to hone the public conscience and its guardians to an acceptance of the place of moral values in political and social life.” To a Sikh friend who had written to him asking him to explain his conduct, Gandhi replied: “My fast is against no one party or group exclusively, and yet it excludes nobody. It is addressed to the conscience of all, even the majority community in the other dominion.”10 But conscience is a prickly thing. Gandhi would not have been unaware that at least some members of the cabinet who acceded to his view that withholding from Pakistan its share of the assets of undivided India was morally unjustified did so because in all likelihood they did not want to have Gandhi’s death on their conscience.

Discussions of Gandhi’s deployment of fasting have, on the whole, revolved around its place in the grammar of satyagraha alongside acts of civil disobedience, noncooperation, the boycott, and other expressions of nonviolent resistance. Another strand of literature, displaying a theological bent, has been more sensitive to fasting as a form of self-purification not only in Hinduism but also in early Christianity, Catholicism, and Judaism. Among Jains, the practice of starving to death has been known since antiquity, though the rite, known as santhara or sallekhna, is only undertaken by monks, nuns, and very rarely by lay followers when a person is in the last stages of a serious illness or otherwise desires to shed the coils of the mortal body in consequence of the fulfillment of all earthly obligations.12 As I shall shortly argue, there is something quite distinct in Gandhi’s recourse to fasting
since he spoke of being directed by his “inner voice” or what is sometimes called “conscience,” but some other characteristics of the literature must perforce be addressed before we can turn to Gandhi’s invocation of the “inner voice.” Gandhi was one of history’s greatest exponents of fasting and the modern master of the political fast. George Orwell wondered whether Gandhi was moved by vanity, “by the consciousness of himself as a humble, naked old man, sitting on a prayer mat and shaking empires by sheer spiritual power,” and he was not alone in marveling at the fact that all of India, and sometimes much of the world, seemed to come to a standstill when Gandhi went on a fast.12 The great poet of the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes, could barely contain himself and the sentiments of his people towards Gandhi when in 1943 he wrote a little poem, “Gandhi Is Fasting.”

Mighty Britain, tremble!
Let your empire’s standard sway
Let it break entirely—
My Gandhi fasts today.

You may think it foolish—
That there’s no truth in what I say—
That all of Asia’s watching
As Gandhi fasts today.14

From the philosophical standpoint, however, there is a problem of categories in thinking about Gandhi’s deployment of fasting over nearly the course of a lifespan. To the world at large, Gandhi was an astonishingly adept performer of hunger-striking, but Gandhi himself disavowed the entire tradition of hunger-striking as he understood it and remained adamant in distinguishing between the fast and the hunger-strike. Consider, for example, that the widely used educational portal, history.com, commences an article in its “this day in history” section entitled “Gandhi Begins Fast in Protest of Caste Separation” with this line: “On September 16, 1932, in his cell at Yerwada Jail in Pune, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi begins a hunger strike in protest of the British government’s decision to separate India’s electoral system by caste.”15 The editors who are credited as the authors of the piece move effortlessly between “fasting” and “hunger-striking,” displaying no awareness that Gandhi was a rigorous critic of hunger-striking and earned the opprobrium of many in India who were repulsed by his refusal to support left-wing “revolutionaries” who resorted to political hunger-striking.16 One might be inclined to put this error down to the ignorance of editors writing in an age of mass consumption and little reflection, but scores of scholarly works fare no better. The author, a political philosopher, of a recent lengthy piece hosted on a blog site run by Columbia University Law School on “Gandhi’s Fasts” describes it as her ambition “to investigate the meaning and different characteristics of the hunger strike, understood as a tactic within the repertoire of actions that constitute satyagraha,” and then states, rather baldly, that “it is well known that Gandhi went on a hunger strike many times between 1913–1948.”17 Yet Gandhi gave it as his firm view, as he wrote in an article in 1939, that “the majority of fasts do not at all come under the category of Satyagraha fasts and are, as they are popularly called, hunger-strikes undertaken without previous preparation and adequate thought. If the process is repeated too often, these hunger-strikes will lose what little efficacy they may possess and will become objects of ridicule.”18 The “hunger strike was,” Gandhi held, as David Hardiman explains, “a form of moral blackmail, [but] the fast—properly conceived—was carried out above all for self-purification.”19

The category error, however, runs deeper than the tendency to confuse hunger-striking with fasting. If fasting is for Gandhi only or at least principally a form of self-purification, then all that distinguishes his public fasts, as they are called, from the fasting that is intrinsic to the religious practices of countless millions of Hindu women and men is his transformation of a practice confined to the domestic sphere to an act of political resistance and theater. By his own admission, Gandhi first learned about fasting from his mother, a pious woman who, much like many other Hindu women, fasted, to take only one instance, in the hope that her own penance would benefit her husband. Although it is not possible within the confines of this essay to dissect the politics of the distinction between women’s fasts, which are generally held to be private and domestic affairs, from the “political fasting” which is largely though not exclusively the prerogative of men, there is no gainsaying the fact that one of Gandhi’s gifts was to take institutions and practices that had long informed social life and religious practices in India and endow them new forms and meaning. The changes that he wrought to the asham, which is generally understood to be a form of communal living, or a repose—often in forested areas or mountains—where spiritual instruction is handed down from a venerable teacher to his students, is another case in point. There is a large body of literature that similarly testifies both to a long history of “political fasting” in India and to its place in practices of self-purification, but nevertheless Gandhi brought something quite distinctive to his understanding of fasting. To this end, it becomes necessary to turn to his unswerving—and what to his detractors and admirers alike was unnerving, even annoying—faith that he could not ignore the summons of his “inner voice” or “conscience.”

III. “CONSCIENCE” OR THE “INNER VOICE”

Gandhi had performed what history remembers as “the miracle of Calcutta” before he descended upon Delhi on September 9, 1947, for what would become the last mission of his life—to bring calm to the strife-torn capital city of the new and fledgling nation-state of India.20 When independence dawned upon the country, and Nehru famously intoned in Parliament on the midnight of August 14–15 about India awakening to freedom while the world slept, the architect of its liberation from servitude was in fact in Calcutta trying to keep the peace between Hindus and Muslims. He refused to join in the celebrations, informing a group of political workers from the Communist Party of India who came to see him, “I can’t afford to take part in this rejoicing, which is a sorry affair.” On August 31, the home where he was staying was attacked, and Gandhi could hear people who held him responsible for the partition shout, “Gandhi muredabad” (“Death to Gandhi”). There, too, he went on a fast from September 1, and by all accounts it had an electrifying account on everyone in the city. The scholar and writer Amiya Chakravarty was
present in Calcutta and noted that all ears were tuned into the radio, which had frequent bulletins on Gandhi's health, and in many homes the women, though they cooked for their families, gave up eating; when asked why they had done so, they replied it was not possible for them to eat "when Gandhiji was dying for their sins." An acclaimed biographer of Gandhi, in his cryptic account of events at Calcutta, reports that "the Muslims were moved, the Hindus shamed. Not even the hooligans of Calcutta could bear the thought of having his blood on their conscience." Peace descended upon the city; within two days the killings and acts of arson had ceased entirely. The most famous tribute came from Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of British India and the first Governor-General of independent India, who characterized Gandhi as the "One-Man Boundary Force": "In the Punjab we have 55,000 soldiers and large-scale rioting on our hands. In Bengal our forces consist of one man, and there is no rioting."  

A mechanical reading of the events that transpired in Delhi would suggest that Gandhi undertook to do there what he had seen his fast achieve in Calcutta. He had been contemplating for days what course of action he should undertake. He was deeply disturbed at the thought, though this was far from being the first time that it had come to him, that the nation had followed him on the path of ahimsa (nonviolence) for nearly three decades from expediency rather than from any real conviction. "Our moral downfall has been so rapid," he said at his prayer meeting on the evening of January 11, "that now I realize that our satyagraha, our struggles were all non-violence of the weak." At the prayer meeting on the following day, Gandhi revealed that, as a "votary of ahimsa," he had no other "remedy" left but fasting—but this realization came as something of an epiphany, as the summons of his conscience:

Though the voice within has been beckoning for a long time, I have been shutting my ears to it lest it might be the voice of Satan, otherwise called my weakness. I never like to feel resourceless; a satyagrahi never should. Fasting is his last resort in the place of the sword—his or others. . . . I have been brooding over it for the last three days. The final conclusion has flashed upon me and it makes me happy. No man, if he is pure, has anything more precious to give than his life.  

The fast would end when Gandhi could be satisfied "that there is a reunion of hearts of all communities brought about without any outside pressure, but from an awakened sense of duty." While conceding that he had friends who did "not believe in the method of the fast for reclamation of the human mind," Gandhi urged them to desist from trying to dissuade him: "if there is clear indication, as I claim there is, of the Inner Voice," then he had but to follow the path shown to him: "I do not embark upon it for the sake of the result it may bring. I do so because I must."  

Time and again, Gandhi would aver, particularly in reference to his fasts, that he was called upon to resort to this supreme remedy when his conscience beckoned; indeed, they were imposed upon him by a higher power. The circumstances that led him to fast days before his death have been discussed at some length and we need not be detained by such details in considering the general tenor of his writings on other similar occasions. In 1939, when he fasted during a stand-off with the ruler of Rajkot, he rejected unequivocally the charge that he had come determined to fast: "It came upon me all of a sudden and out of the intense agony of the soul. The days preceding the fast were days of deepest prayer. . . . The morning following [the night of the deepest anguish] told me what I was to do, cost what it might. I simply could not have taken the resolution but for the belief that God wanted me to take it. So much for the Rajkot fast." Gandhi is commonly viewed as having suffered a defeat on this occasion since the ruler remained intractable. Could it be that his conscience had deceived him and that "Satan" had been testing him? Or does his crushing failure in the princely state of Rajkot, of which Gandhi was practically a native, merely offer unimpeachable evidence of the credibility of the aphorism that no one is a prophet in their own land? Six years earlier, while confined in jail and restrained by the government from carrying out his activities on behalf of (as they were then called) the untouchables, he offered an elaborate account that, in his Collected Works, is titled "All About the Fast." He had been wracked by uncertainty, anguish, and a feeling of deep hopelessness, crushed by the awareness that he was unable to discharge his responsibilities. When all seemed lost, "what I did hear was like a Voice from afar and yet quite near. . . . The hearing of the Voice was preceded by a terrific struggle within me. Suddenly the Voice came upon me. I listened, made certain that it was the Voice, and the struggle ceased. I was calm. The determination was made accordingly, the date and the hour of the fast were fixed. Joy came over me." To those eager to know what he may have meant by the Voice, or whether it could be understood in other registers of vocabulary, Gandhi had this to say: "For me the voice of God, of Conscience, of Truth or the Inner Voice or ‘the still small Voice’ mean one and the same thing."  

If the voice of God, the inner voice, and the conscience are but the same as truth, the student of Gandhi is faced with an interpretive task that is nothing short of Herculean, considering both that the sinews and pores of the Gandhian universe are drenched in the language of truth and that there is a gargantuan scholarship on Gandhi’s quest for truth. I would, in conclusion, like to suggest, if even greater—though I hope tantalizing—brevity, some seemingly tangential lines of inquiry in the hope that future researchers might come to this subject with an awareness of other modes of thinking about Gandhi’s politics—and in particular the politics and ethics of fasting. First of all, we have been wholly inattentive to the aural dimensions of Gandhi’s thinking. It is significant how often he speaks of the imperative to hear and to listen. Secondly, though Gandhi’s affinity for some dissenting thinkers within the Western intellectual tradition—among them Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Leo Tolstoy, and Edward Carpenter—is well-known, his embrace of these thinkers has as much to do with their propensity to prioritize the conscience as it has to do with what people recognize as their critique of modern industrial civilization. Seventeenth-century European thinkers such as John Locke argued
that to adhere to one’s conscience was to retreat into a state of nature; as the will of the people could be asserted through the legislature, the subjects of the state perforce were required to relinquish their private judgment or “conscience.” Thoreau famously rebelled against this idea, asking with searching probity: “Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience then?” I do not think that previous commentators have noted that Gandhi was also drawn to the Quaker idea of listening to the “still small voice” within oneself and it is not accidental that he had a large following among British and American Quakers. Thirdly, and finally, though a recent strand of scholarship has correctly suggested that Gandhi was rigorously critical of the idea of political rationality, that argument can be taken much further. Howsoever paradoxical it sounds, I have sought to demonstrate in my analysis of Gandhi’s last fast that even as we think of him as thoroughly immersed in political life, the entire arc of his life suggests the radical disavowal of politics.

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NOTES

3. CWMG, 75:177–78.
5. Harijan, February 18, 1933; CWMG 59:302.
8. Desai, My Life is My Message, IV:466.
16. Gandhi was consistently critical of hunger-striking, whether by revolutionaries or other protestors. During the 1924 satyagraha at Vykom in the South Indian state of Travancore, where an attempt was being made to give lower-caste Ezhavas access to the roads leading to the Shiva Temple managed by upper-caste Nambudiri Brahmins, some of the agitators turned to hunger-striking to force the issue. According to the historian David Hardiman, when Gandhi “heard of the hunger strikes, he sent a telegram advising them to stop it, as when applied in such a way it was in his opinion a form of violence.” See David Hardiman, “Changing Hearts and Minds through Non-Violent Protest?” Economic and Political Weekly 50, no. 51 (December 19, 2015): 32.
21. This is related by Nirmal Kumar Bose, a renowned social scientist who was one of Gandhi’s companions at this time, in My Days with Gandhi, reprint edition (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1987 [1974]), 229.
29. Harijan, July 8, 1933; CWMG 76:218–22.
IV. GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY OF SARVODAYA (WELL-BEING AND UPLIFT OF ALL), POLITICS, COSMOPOLITANISM, AND OTHER KEY CONCEPTS

Gandhi’s Constructive Program: Toward a Vision of a Just and Decolonized Democratic Indian Society

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ABSTRACT
This paper analyzes various aspects of Mohandas K. Gandhi’s philosophy of Sarvodaya (uplifting of all), which he articulated through a practical Constructive Program. Gandhi, who neither accepted the title of philosopher in the Western sense of the term nor held any official political position, presents us with a social philosophy for a decolonized democratic society. He provided the path to Sarvodaya through the eighteen steps of the Constructive Program. An analysis of the historical evolution and taxonomy of the Constructive Program, including religious unity, removal of untouchability, economic equality, adult education, and health and hygiene, reveals that his program offers a path to decolonize and purge religious discriminatory laws to build a just, equitable, and democratic society ensuring “complete freedom” for all, founded on moral principles.

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The recent events of racist violence, its global repercussions, and the health crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic have shown the shortfall of the promises of justice, equity, and dignity, especially in the developed democratic states. They have also uncovered the prevailing systems of racism, violence, and economic and social inequalities, once systematically executed by colonial regimes as well as by traditional religious and social structures. In the development of Western democratic systems, political and social philosophers have rarely wielded political power, but their theories regarding equality, justice, individual rights, and the role of state and economic systems exude influence in imagining and executing systems for free and just societies. Political power players, despite holding power in democratic states in recent history, have seldom articulated a systematic moral vision of a just and free society. Mohandas K. Gandhi, who neither accepted the title of philosopher in the Western sense of the term nor held any official political position, presents us with a social philosophy and practical steps for his vision of a decolonized democratic society with nonviolent social and economic structures. He communicated his ideas through his notion of Sarvodaya and the catalog of eighteen steps of the Constructive Program.

Gandhi used unconventional moral strategies of nonviolent action and civil resistance to rid India of the colonial regime. Unlike other Indian revolutionaries, he also confronted the autocratic, sexist, and racist elements within India’s religious and social systems along with imperial subjugation. He rejected the colonial power’s methods of military warfare to confront racial violence and developed alternative moral and strategic methods of mass civil resistance. In a 1922 article, Gandhi differentiates India’s methods from the Western modes of exercising power: “Our present effort is to win deliverance from this slavery. If this land of Bharat [India’s original name before colonization] wishes to end her slavery, she can do so only with the help of her old weapons of non-violence and truth.” Gandhi uniquely insisted on the “weapons of nonviolence and truth” to fight slavery and, because of this insistence, he was met with criticisms from his fellow freedom fighters.

Gandhi’s moral philosophy and methods of satyagraha to build nonviolent revolutions have been theorized by scholars to mobilize the dismantling of unjust structures of power. Prominent social scientists such as Gene Sharp and Erica Chenoweth have focused on the strategic and pragmatic nonviolent civil resistance that has been used all over the world by various groups. However, Gandhi’s Constructive Program—a plan to build a just, fair, and independent citizenry and social, economic, and educational systems—has not received adequate attention in the areas of Gandhian studies and social or political philosophy. Although the Constructive Program seems counter to modern progress, its components can be reimagined for our current times. In this paper, by classifying the elements of the Constructive Program, I show that for Gandhi, a free and democratic society must internally rid itself of the colonial forces of “racism, sexism, militarism, and plantation capitalism,” using the apt classification by the prominent civil rights leader the Reverend James M. Lawson, Jr.

First, I provide the history and evolution of Gandhi’s Constructive Program that he based on Indian philosophical principles and Western social paradigms of labor and gender equity for Sarvodaya. Second, I examine Gandhi’s reasoning behind the Constructive Program and the list of various elements found in India’s indigenous sustainable and spiritual systems, which he considered necessary for building a progressive and harmonious society. Third, I analyze the taxonomy of Gandhi’s Constructive Program for Sarvodaya that sets him apart from social philosophers and politicians: he offers not simply a theory but an action plan for developing a decolonized democratic society uniquely based on both individual rights and responsibilities, as well as social systems free from autocratic, capitalistic, sexist, violent, anthropocentric, and racist ideologies of the colonial powers. Finally, I argue that Gandhi’s program challenges the workings of democratic nations that tout self-rule (parliamentary freedom) with laws for justice and equality but have failed in true self-rule (swaraj) built on the principle of Sarvodaya. Furthermore, it becomes clear how the overarching philosophy behind this program offers...
tools for correcting the moral failings of traditional systems as well as confronting modern-day problems.

HISTORY OF THE CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAM
In the era when American political thinkers such as John Rawls theorized conceptions of a “well-ordered society” and social institutions in terms of fairness and justice, Gandhi also considered these issues and developed the constructive action plan that ran parallel to strategic defiance of the British rule in India. This program was oriented to maintain a sustainable lifestyle, social networks, equitable economic structures, and native systems of knowledge in response to oppressive and unjust foreign laws and systems. However, it was not until 1941 that Gandhi organized all the elements in a pamphlet and published it with the title: “Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place.” The comprehensive plan addressed all aspects of life for achieving “complete freedom.” Gandhi warned that the goal of equality would require building “brick by brick by corporate self-effort.” His program included measures for social reconstruction in the areas of education, health, sustainable economic programs, as well as social cohesion.

Some of his colleagues saw socialist undertones in the program. However, in a conversation on Marxism with a close associate in 1942, Gandhi lauded Marxists’ care for the poor, but differentiated his comprehensive ethical and grassroots efforts to address social unrest and individual dissatisfaction from those that focused on economic reform and reliance on machinery as the answer to these problems. Although Gandhi’s Sarvodaya and Marwari socialism both strive for social equality and liberty, the former is built solely on the principles of nonviolence in all aspects of life. Gandhi also disagreed with the utilitarian view, encompassing the welfare of the greatest number, and instead emphasized the good of all: “A votary of ahimsa cannot subscribe to the utilitarian formula (of the greatest good of the greatest number). He will strive for the greatest good of all.” Hence, each unit in the society was cared for equally, despite their status, birth, caste, gender, color, etc.

Gandhi observed that the equal good of all remained a fantasy in most modern democratic societies despite various legislative measures. In a 1947 speech, he invoked the first verse of the ancient Indian philosophical text Īsāpaniṣād: “Enjoy thy wealth by renouncing it.” Gandhi interpreted this verse as a call to the wealthy to share their wealth, and he uniquely elucidated the meaning at a time when communal violence had erupted due to the partition of India at its independence: “The moral of it was that we should deprive no man of his wealth, whether it be in the shape of life, honour or religion.” He visited rural areas and learned about the ill-treatment of the poor workers by the wealthy and invoked Hindu philosophical teachings to inspire the sentiments of charity and goodwill in his fellow religiously inclined Indians. Gandhi has been criticized for such idealistic statements that often yield meager results.

On the one hand, Gandhi sought to persuade the wealthy to share their wealth; on the other, he asked the Congress workers to create volunteer corps to educate and serve the marginalized. Political philosopher Anthony Parel articulates Gandhi’s intent about the Constructive Program: “The focal point of Constructive Programme is Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) of civil society. However, the general thesis of the work is that the NGOs should work in tandem with the state.” Gandhi had witnessed the failure of the state in various developed countries, and he also expressed concern for the Indian leaders’ fascination for the similar British systems of governance. In the present context, I focus on the philosophical intent of decolonization in Gandhi’s program, which was oriented toward the reconstruction of just and equitable social and political systems for a free India as well as the decentralization of power. More importantly, I maintain that it was an integral part of his political decolonization of India from foreign rule and systems: political, economic, social, and linguistic. Gandhi expresses his view of English civilization by saying (to the English): “We hold the civilization that you support to be the reverse of civilization. We consider our civilization to be far superior to yours.” He wanted to restore Indians’ confidence in their own culture, but at the same time rid the inequalities and violence embedded in their own traditions.

In the thirty-two-page booklet, Gandhi addresses the needs of the most marginalized by both the colonial regime and India’s own caste and gender conventions. For developing a series of necessary elements for complete self-rule, he drew both from the social and spiritual wisdom of India’s traditions as well as from Western ideas from thinkers like John Ruskin. Ruskin’s Unto This Last inspired Gandhi in his concept of Sarvodaya in 1904, as he was preparing to launch his first satyagraha campaign. Gandhi denounced modern civilization as violent and its machinations as inhumane, and he rejected most of what the foreign rulers had to offer. Gandhi published a letter in Young India outlining his vision for home rule to All India Congress Committee members: “My swaraj is to keep intact the genius of our civilization. I want to write many new things but they must be all written on the Indian slate. I would gladly borrow from the West when I can return the amount with decent interest.” He affirmed his commitment to adhering to indigenous knowledge, spiritual, and social systems while embracing the significance of certain values presented by thinkers like Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin, and Henry David Thoreau.

In his 1908 manifesto Hind Swaraj, written in a dialogue form, Gandhi highlighted the inadequacies of modern advancements of science, technology, and legal and medical systems for the well-being of all citizens. He began to envision alternative modes of governance and social structures dedicated to the uplifting of all: “We have to learn, and to teach others, that we do not want the tyranny of English rule or Indian rule.” While Satyagraha campaigns were focused on ousting the English rule, the paradigm of Sarvodaya and the Constructive Program provided a path for organizing sustainable and nonviolent social and political systems for all citizens (complete independence).

In 1945, when Indian self-rule became imminent, Gandhi emphasized the value of the Constructive Program in “Draft for Congress Constitution.” He emphasized that social reform encompassed true freedom: “Constructive
programme is the chief plank for winning Swaraj by truthful and non-violent means. Its full execution means complete independence.”12 Gandhi was referring to the eighteen-fold plan that he had refined, addressing each aspect of life. Gene Sharp views this program as an attempt to oppose the “old inadequate social order” and build a “new social order.”13 Consistent with Gandhi’s 1945 speech, Sharp sees that “the constructive program has been described as the scaffolding upon which the structure of the new society will be built.”14 In Gandhi’s vision, Indian society must rid itself of both the colonizer’s oppressive educational, economic, social, and political systems, as well as internal unjust practices of untouchability and women’s customs relegating them to a lower status.

ELEMENTS OF THE CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAM AND COMPLETE DECOLONIZATION

A number of scholars note how colonialism contributed to dismantling India’s “civilizational infrastructures,” including social, economic, educational, and ecclesiastical, as well as disrupting the people’s worldviews rooted in indigenous systems.15 Amilcar Cabral, a prominent African anti-colonial leader, writes about the effects of disruption of native histories: “The colonialists usually say that it was they who brought us into history: today we show that is not so. They made us leave history, our history, to follow them.”16 Colonialism resulted in fractures in native cultures past and present, and a recovery of histories required ingenuity. In his Constructive Program, Gandhi considered ways to reassert India’s traditions and culture. Simultaneously, he adopted practices oriented toward the flourishing of citizens in the free Indian state. After 1940, as the promise of legislative freedom was becoming a reality, Gandhi turned his attention to developing systems for complete freedom. Fearing India’s adoption of British regulatory social and economic structures at the expense of millions of common citizens, he proposed to Congress a constructive program as “the truthful and non-violent way of winning Poorna Swaraj . . . (and) is designed to build up the nation from the very bottom upward.”17

As a public and international figure, Gandhi was aware that the powerful Western nations, including Britain and the United States, despite their democratic polity, had failed their citizens along the lines of skin color, gender, and social status. Gandhi was also cognizant of India’s traditional system of monarchy in which social well-being, economic pursuits, and individual flourishing were connected to the stratification of varṇa (generally translated as caste due to set occupations: education/parochial, rulership/military, trade/investing, and labor/service) as well as self- and socially-regulated puruṣārthas or goals of life: fulfilling social and religious duties (dharma), acquiring wealth (artha), pursuing sensual pleasure and desires (kāma), and aspiring toward religious/spiritual pursuits (mokṣa).18 Notably, while these systems informed rights and responsibilities for men, women’s duties were dictated through religious laws and social mandates.

Although these systems created a coherent social structure, they often proved detrimental to the upliftment of the common people. Gandhi experienced the strength and deficiencies of these systems, i.e., monarchy, religious-based laws, and modern democracies. Hence, he devised a plan that fulfills the true promise of people’s power in India’s complete (decolonized) self-rule (democracy). According to Anthony Parel, “[t]he innovator’s task was to increase the patrimony of the past and make it productive.” He quotes Gandhi, “I believe that it is our duty to augment the legacy of our ancestors and to change it into current coin and make it acceptable to the present age,” and suggests that “Gandhi’s notion of the state would be compatible with the ‘oceanic circle,’ a ‘parliamentary swaraj according to the wishes of the Indian people’—a mixture of the Indian idea of self-rule and the Western idea of representative government.”19 Because of his study of history and his experiences both in England and South Africa, Gandhi comprehended the imminent tyranny of all political systems when they go unchecked and when citizens lose control of the structures of governance.

In the first section of the booklet Constructive Programme, Gandhi writes:

> We have long been accustomed to think that power comes only through Legislative Assemblies. I have regarded this belief as a grave error brought about by inertia or hypnotism. A superficial study of British history has made us think that all power percolates to the people from parliaments. The truth is that power resides in the people and it is entrusted for the time being to those whom they may choose as their representatives.20

After an analysis of the eighteen-fold program, it becomes clear that it was oriented to lay out a list of actions to ensure autonomy and social harmony among citizens, which remains a mirage even today for developed democratic nations. The eighteen steps of the program, not systematic by any means, include the following:

1. Communal Unity
2. Removal of Untouchability
3. Prohibition
4. Khadi
5. Other Village Industries
6. Village Sanitation
7. New or Basic Education
8. Adult Education
9. Women
10. Education in Health and Hygiene
11. Provincial Languages
12. National Languages
13. Economic Equality
14. Kisans
15. Labor
16. Adivasis
17. Lepers
18. Students

Although this program was mostly overlooked by the ruling party as India gained political freedom, as well as by social philosophers, its elements provide insights into the issues we are confronting today.
ANALYSIS OF THE CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAM: TAXONOMY AND TRAIL TO DECOLONIZATION

In order to understand its depth and breadth, the elements of the program can be organized into four main areas, which demonstrate how Gandhi's plan was inclined to build a voluntary force to create the necessary conditions for ensuring freedom, justice, and dignity for all members of society:

A. The promise of human dignity (Communal Unity, Removal of Untouchability, Women, and Adivasis)

B. Capacity for building economic equality (Economic Equality, Khadi, Other Village Industries, Kisans, Labor)

C. Protecting native knowledge systems (Provincial Languages, New or Basic Education, Adult Education, National Languages, and Students)

D. Concern for education and health care (Prohibition, Education in Health and Hygiene, and Lepers)

Such classification of the eighteen components of the Constructive Program shows an effort for getting rid of both the foreign grip and domgatic clutches of Indian customs of untouchability and ill-treatment of women. Although Gandhi's program relies on voluntary organizations, its broad scope includes the taxonomy of social, economic, educational, and political plans that he believed would assure pūraṇa swaraj (complete freedom) in the following ways:

A. Promise of Human Dignity (Communal Unity, Removal of Untouchability, Women, and Adivasis)

A free society must have racial and gender equality as well as respect for different belief systems, all necessary conditions for securing human dignity. India's untouchability has been compared to the United States' system of slavery. Notwithstanding their particularities, Gandhi believed that complete freedom must include purging the internal racism that has chained a great number of people into subservience. In his earlier life, Gandhi himself demonstrated sexist and racist behavior, which he confronted as he realized that such tendencies are violent. He boldly claimed that he would not hesitate to reject Hinduism, his own faith, if it substantiated a discriminatory caste system. Swaraj was responsible and in the shaping of which she had no hand.22 He boldly deconstructs the Indian cultural views of women and simultaneously defends the equality of men and women in his notion of complete freedom.

Gandhi also considered respect for all religions and freedom to practice one's own religion as a hallmark of complete freedom. He saw religions as repositories of wisdom and worked for harmony among various religious groups: "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any."23 Gandhi struggled to convince India's warring people to adhere to his proposal of interreligious harmony. Nevertheless, Gandhi's position offers a theoretical and practical framework for living in pluralistic societies, which can be considered to build interreligious understanding.

B. Capacity Building for Economic Equality (Economic Equality, Khadi, Other Village Industries, Kisans, Adult Education, Labor)

Gandhi adopted voluntary poverty as he threw himself into the struggle for India's freedom. He envisioned politically independent India to be free from the ills of poverty that he had seen in the rich nations of the world, despite their parliamentary democracy. In 1947, Gandhi told a group of volunteers: "Real hard work will have to be done only after independence. Unless poverty and unemployment are wiped out from India, I would not agree that we have attained freedom. Real wealth does not consist in jewelry and money, but in providing for proper food, clothes, education, and creating healthy conditions of living for every one of us."24 Freedom for India, for Gandhi, meant dignity of life and labor of its citizens. Even though he believed in the moral persuasion of the individual, he eventually realized the importance of legislative measures to address socioeconomic disparities.

Gandhi argued for voluntary simplicity for the affluent and showed concern for poor economic conditions of the masses. He rejected the model of welfare economics and anthropocentric normative economics, instead providing a model that was sustainable while causing minimal violence to humans, non-human animals, and plants. For this, he emphasized reviving village industries (including spinning, soap-making, tanning, match-making, paper-making, etc.) and developing self-sufficient villages. Gandhi insisted volunteers visit rural areas to educate the illiterate citizens...
on current-day issues and their rights and responsibilities. The recent pandemic and other catastrophes have revealed the dangers of dependence on outside resources and misinformation. Gandhi’s prescient call for “every village to produce all its necessaries and a certain percentage in addition for the requirements of the cities” holds promise for rural self-sufficiency and progress.25

For Gandhi, decentralization of the economic structures formed an essential aspect for building a democratic and decolonized society. He feared the monopoly of large corporations and mechanized production enterprises. Physical labor and village industries represented the pride of family art and crafts and retention of native knowledge systems. Gandhi’s views were different from social philosophers who argued for dismantling the economics of physical labor through the mechanization of industries. Similar to some Western thinkers, he did not see equality as all citizens having equal wealth. The contemporary American philosopher Harry Frankfurt, for example, also argues that “morality is not that everyone should have the same, but that each should have enough.”26 Gandhi campaigned for the accessibility of sources for all to live a dignified life, not a luxurious one. He himself demonstrated through his own example of voluntary simplicity.

Gandhi argued for reverting back to the indigenous industries that provided enough and encompassed a variety of regional knowledge systems of arts, agriculture, and crafts. At the same time, he argued for the care of farmers’ needs and for organizing labor unions. In a 1944 written speech, Gandhi provided specifics for the labor unions that were dedicated to the well-being of the workers:

(a) Labor should have its own unions.

(b) Education, both general and scientific, of both men and women should be regularly undertaken through night-schools.

(c) Children of laborers should be educated after the Basic Education style.

(d) There should be a hospital, a creche, and a maternity home attached to every center.

(e) Labor strike.27

Such constructive guidance was meant to support the workers in emerging capitalist markets and preempt exploitation by the rich stakeholders.

C. Protecting Native Knowledge Systems (Provincial Languages, New or Basic Education, National Languages, Students)

Linguists and cognitive psychologists have explored the relationship between language and the construction of reality. Chad Bower argues that language “reproduces ways of thinking” and connects linguistic patterns and conceptual frameworks. In her research, cognitive psychologist Lera Boroditsky shows how language conditions our conceptions of time and space, and she bemoans the fact that we are losing languages by the day.28 Gandhi was probably not thinking in these scientific terms; however, he committed himself to learning many of the languages of India. Gandhi believed that, in order to understand other people, we must learn their language; and, in order to understand ourselves, we must retain our native languages.

In his Constructive Program, Gandhi insisted on (1) preserving native languages to build an inclusive nation and (2) speaking a national language to conduct our business. He wrote: “The languages of India have suffered impoverishment. We flounder when we make the vain attempt to express abstruse thought in the mother tongue. There are no equivalents for scientific terms. The result has been disastrous. The masses remain cut off from the modern mind.”29 Gandhi wanted to break “the spell” of the English language on the elite politicians and officers. While his fellow politicians took pride in speaking the colonizer’s language, Gandhi insisted that to decolonize Indian knowledge systems, we must embrace our native languages. Gandhi himself was a polyglot; he learned at least eleven languages and always preferred to speak in his national language. India is the region of many languages that are tied to regional cultures, art, poetry, literature. To preserve the native traditions and indigenous knowledge, Gandhi advocated preserving regional dialects.

D. Concern for Education and Health Care (Prohibition, Education in Health and Hygiene, Lepers)

The Constructive Program included steps to build a healthy and moral citizenry. Gandhi emphasized prohibition not just on moral grounds, but because of the physical and social ill effects of substance addiction. He explicitly named the negative impact of substance abuse on personal health and society and urged Congress workers to find practical ways to habilitate the addicted and take care of the exhausted workers. He did not look down on those with addiction but provided a solution: “Congress committees can open recreation booths where the tired laborer will rest his limbs, get healthy and cheap refreshments, find suitable games. All this work is fascinating and uplifting.”30 He addressed health education and care for those living in rural areas. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the effect of such health crises and lack of education on the well-being of rural people. Gandhi himself had experienced several plagues in which he took the responsibility of nursing the afflicted. Some of the lessons he had learned were of the values of sanitation, isolation, education, and nutrition. The Constructive Program pleads with those in power to create a voluntary corps for education to address health crises.

Notably, Gandhi includes “leprosy” in his Constructive Program. Our modern world has experienced the consequence of failing to understand AIDS and other contagious diseases. Gandhi knew that misinformation of the disease among the population, especially stricken with superstition, had relegated the afflicted to a status of pariah. In a 1947 speech, Gandhi announced: “Leprosy is ... contagious like cold, cholera, plague, etc. Why then should people suffering from that disease be looked upon with contempt? When a person gets really affected by leprosy, people start looking at him with contempt. They refer to
him as a lowly creature. But real lowly creatures are those who show contempt.” Gandhi made the same semantic choice to condemn segregation of the lepers as he did to denounce the practice of untouchability and racism toward Indians by the colonizers. Gandhi himself nursed lepers and pleaded with Congress workers to pay attention to the most neglected members of society: “The lot of the lepers who are much in need of attention is studied neglect. I am tempted to call it heartless, which it certainly is, in terms of non-violence.”

Gandhi not only summoned Congress volunteers but also held the state responsible in the case of public health emergencies. Historian Vinay Lal presents Gandhi as “a theorist of a biopolitics which placed the responsibility of well-being both upon each individual and the state. He knew enough about public health, and the importance of sanitation to discern that the advance of the plague in Johannesburg [the 1904 outbreak of the plague] was imminent, and he was sharply critical of the local authorities.” Gandhi offered a plan to preempt the outbreak of diseases and also sought to prepare volunteers and authorities to protect the most vulnerable.

CONCLUDING ANALYSIS

In 1945, when Gandhi completed his draft of the revised and enhanced Constructive Program, India was on the verge of gaining political independence. Although eager about the prospect of India’s political freedom, he became concerned about the future of millions of marginalized masses who had participated in the campaigns of nonviolent civil resistance. He devised a plan oriented toward the care and well-being of all and a vision of just and equitable social and political systems for a pluralistic society. Witnessing the plight of Indians under British rule, Gandhi had “argued that the degeneracy of India was in part due to the degree to which Indians had brought colonialism upon themselves and were complicit with its continued dominance of their lives in their everyday daily acts.” But as the dream of India’s freedom was becoming a reality, he made efforts to free Indian minds and governance structures from colonial tendencies as well as purify them from the clutches of Indian systems that were oppressive. Even though his trust in volunteer organizations may be considered utopian, he envisioned a path for complete autonomy, economic self-sufficiency, compassionate health care, education for all, indigenous knowledge systems, as well as the moral responsibility of citizens of India to build a society that fulfills the promise of flourishing.

In a 1937 speech, Gandhi admitted that the Constructive Program may need adjustments as situations may change: “[C]onstructive programme is not like Truth and non-violence valid for all time. Take the charkha. If you go to the North Pole or to the Himalayan peaks or to Tibet, the talk of cotton won’t do. Still, I say that the constructive programme is for the good of our millions. Legislatures are only for a few.” He was not dogmatic about the relevance of all of the components of the plan and trusted the local organizations to uplift their neighbors over laws and policies. Gandhi, as social philosopher and champion of the poor, examined not only the conditions of Indians but also the sway that Indian religious beliefs had on their lives. In addition, he critically analyzed Western social systems and offered solutions at a time when such alternative modes of governance and comprehensive social reforms were not being examined. He sought to empower the common citizen through non-governmental organizations that worked alongside legislations to fight for their freedom and justice. He crafted a detailed plan that, if applied selectively and contextually, can offer direction even in today’s world of economic and social inequality, traditional autocratic laws, and colonial, imperial governance. In the era of heightened sensibilities about prevalent inequities, Gandhi’s Constructive Program provides philosophical insights and a catalog of actionable items to address the colonial, capitalistic, industrial, and traditional religious systems that neglected the well-being of millions, Sarvodaya.

NOTES


3. Gandhi wrote the complete draft in 1941, which was revised later in 1945. CWMG, 81:354–74.

4. CWMG, 83:459.

5. CWMG, 37:381.

6. CWMG, 93:105.


8. CWMG, 10:307.

9. In 1904, John Ruskin’s Unto This Last inspired Gandhi to the life of simplicity, physical labor, and austerity. Gandhi published a paraphrased translation of the book as Sarvodaya.

10. CWMG, 28:201.


12. CWMG, 88:239.


14. Sharp, Gandhi as a Political Strategist, 81.


17. In 1944, Gandhi sent a lengthy speech to the Workers’ Conference, held in Bombay on October 28 and 29. CWMG, 85:77.

18. Anthony J. Parel provides a lucid account of India’s ancient political systems and Gandhi’s progressive interpretations of some and deletion of others in “Gandhi and the Emergence of the Modern Indian Political Canon,” The Review of Politics 70, no. 1 (2008): 40–63.


21. CWMG, 70:279
Gandhi: An Imperfect Philosopher

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ABSTRACT

Gandhi’s life is the ultimate challenge for a philosopher because, in it, he has united two seemingly contradictory dimensions—the political and the philosophical—in a way that is remarkable. This paper, therefore, argues that if we are investigating the life of Gandhi as a philosopher, then the question is not whether Gandhi’s thoughts and ideas were integrated to the most abstract epistemological and methodological commitments, as argued by Akeel Bilgrami, or whether Gandhi failed as a moral or spiritual or philosophical person because he sacrificed any moral principle to gain political or other advantages, as assumed by many historians and political scientists. The question is plain and simple: How could Gandhi integrate both the philosophical and the political aspects of life and at the same time remain true to both, as contended by Ernest Barker? This paper is an attempt to answer this question.

I

Gandhi is not a philosopher in the following two ways. First, he is not himself driven or motivated by the academic norms of philosophical discipline to be watchfully consistent in everything he says, nor does he see himself as bound to explain away his inconsistencies. Moreover, he often speaks and writes in aphoristic language that lacks precision, even if it is highly evocative and provocative. Second, his interest in philosophical problems goes beyond the interest of any simply academic philosopher. He attempts to address philosophical problems not just to get things cognitively right, but with a view to articulating ideals which his actions will seek to live up to. Thus, ideas for him are primarily a foundation of his “experiments” or “strategies” to make our humanity better in various ways—less unequal, less given to domination and authoritarianism, less violent in word and deed.

The flipside of these two points is precisely that Gandhi is a philosopher in the following two ways. First, he is a philosopher in a thin sense, as many traditional philosophers were, a person with an enduring love for wisdom, but also, as many non-traditional philosophers were, with an enduring interest in critical thinking. Second, he is also a philosopher in a broader (thick) sense with his wide-ranging concerns that seek to understand fundamental truths about himself, about the “other,” about the world he and the “other” inhabit, and about his relationships with the world and the “other.” This gives Gandhi much wider and deeper yardsticks to judge any philosophical position or concept, wider and deeper than just assessing them for consistency and precision and rationality in some narrow sense, but also assessing them for their practicability, their ethical consequences for different kinds of suffering present in the world.

These two points show that the essential thing to appreciate about Gandhi is that you cannot understand him as a philosopher without seeing that the philosophy is reflective of him as a person. This is what distinguishes him from most of the philosophers in the academic profession. Throughout his life, he was trying to achieve and/or maintain integrity among his philosophical ideals and between his ideals and his life. In brief, what he tries to live/act/choose is, on the one hand, based on philosophical ideals, which are in turn based on his desire to reduce or minimize different kinds of human suffering. If Gandhi is understood as a philosopher in this sense, he epitomizes more than (and also in quite a different way) what the eleventh and last thesis of Karl Marx’s Theses on Feuerbach demands of a philosopher—namely, “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.” Of course, it is well known that Gandhi’s concerns and methods of inquiry are different from Marx’s, but on this thesis about the nature of philosophy, he is one with Marx, and it is in this sense that I would like to explore and understand Gandhi’s philosophy.

Since Gandhi sees human life as a whole and not in isolable compartments, he, unlike most modern academic philosophers, does not maintain the division of different philosophical inquiries into metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, and logical questions. Therefore, one can develop a comprehensive understanding of Gandhi’s philosophy by studying any aspect of Gandhi’s philosophy (metaphysics, epistemology, or ethics). It also means that we can begin our inquiry into Gandhi’s philosophy by investigating any of these aspects of his philosophy, but we cannot do so by pretending that these are strictly separable. For a better understanding of Gandhi’s philosophy, one should always be cross-referencing among different aspects of his philosophy, seeing their relevance to one another, no matter where one starts.

II

Gandhi’s life is the ultimate challenge for a philosopher because, in it, he has united two seemingly contradictory
dimensions, the political and the philosophical, in a way that is remarkable. In the existing literature, some scholars have sought to understand and explain this dichotomy and the corresponding seemingly inner contradictions in Gandhi’s life. However, most of the scholars seem to have worked on one aspect of his life without seeking to understand how the other aspect has influenced and shaped it. The result is that, for a long period in the existing literature, we find two Gandhis who do not speak to each other. The first is the Gandhi of historians and social scientists, who is a political strategist completely unconcerned about philosophical issues. The second is the philosophical Gandhi, who has nothing to do with real political issues. Now, however, there is a growing realization that if we describe Gandhi in either/or terms, we miss the essence, something very intrinsic to the kind of person that he was. Recently, scholars have been consistently arguing that the process of understanding Gandhi’s life and philosophy with all its complexity will remain incomplete and perhaps inadequate if we cannot make sense of how he mixed “the spiritual with the temporal” (in the language of Ernest Barker), or how he had “an epistemic foundation that was both certain and flexible, determinate and yet adaptable, categorical as well as experimental” (in the language of Partha Chatterjee), or how he could have moral judgments that are both universalizable and modest, in that we are not encouraged to impose our moral judgments on others, without leading us to a moral relativism that rejects any possibility of a guiding principle to arrive at what is morally right or wrong (in the language of Akeel Bilgrami).

Though Barker acknowledges that Gandhi “could mix the spiritual with the temporal, and could be at the same time true to both,” he did not tell us how Gandhi does it. Chatterjee argues that Gandhi could do it only by accepting “a disjunction between morality and politics, between private conscience and public responsibility, indeed between Noble Folly and Realpolitik.” He explains that “it was a disjunction which the ‘experimental’ concept of ahimsa was meant to bridge.” A little later, he adds, “the experimental conception of politics could accommodate a potentially limitless range of imperfections, adjustments, compromises and failures.” Scholars like Samiksha Goyal and Nirmalangshu Mukherji go on to argue that unless care is taken to disentangle the two aspects of Gandhi’s life, an evaluation of his thoughts would be inadequate.

There are also some scholars who have tried to resolve the problem by introducing an idea of hierarchy between the two dimensions of human life, the political and the philosophical. Richard Sorabji writes, “Gandhi was first and foremost a spiritual and moral leader, and only after that a politician.” Does this idea of disjunction, disentangling, or hierarchy help to improve the matter to any length? The idea of disjunction did not resolve but overlooked the moral dilemma that Gandhi might have faced whenever he had to choose between remaining consistent, as philosopher, to his moral principles or making adjustments or compromises as a political strategist. It says that there was no such moral dilemma for Gandhi. At a personal level, he was consistent as a philosopher, but in politics, he allowed himself to be inconsistent because it was the only way he could solve the practical problems of an organized politics. This seeming disjointedness can be bridged by the “experimental” concept of ahimsa (nonviolence): a religious ideal but introduced to solve political problems. Like the idea of disjunction, the idea of hierarchy rejects any moral dilemma for Gandhi. According to those who propound a spiritual hierarchy, Gandhi always preferred to remain a philosopher over a politician. But we can accept this idea only by rejecting the idea that no Realpolitik can be developed by studying the life of Gandhi and he moved millions into political action not as a politician but as a Noble Folly. In brief, in all such cases, there remain two Gandhis. As long as it is not resolved how these two Gandhis can be understood in one single conceptual framework, there is work to be done in getting Gandhi right. One has to find a way of saying that Gandhi could be true to both of them or none of them.

I want to be clear that I am not arguing that Gandhi epitomized a perfect harmony between thought, word, and action and tried to make his actions live up to his ideals. Although I accept that Gandhi tried more than most of us to live an integrated life, I, like Ashis Nandy, agree with Arnold J. Toynbee, an English historian, when he said, “Gandhi was one prophet who was willing to live in the slum of politics. He could not afford to be a perfect Gandhian. It is a tribute to his memory when one calls him an imperfect Gandhian.” Therefore, the question is not whether Gandhi failed as a moral or spiritual person or whether he sacrificed any moral principle to gain a political advantage. The question is plain and simple: How did Gandhi integrate both the philosophical and the political aspects of life?

III

In his seminal work “Gandhi, the Philosopher,” Akeel Bilgrami partially attempts to understand or explain this question. Bilgrami explains how Gandhi’s moral judgment is to be tied to what he called “exemplary” acts, thereby generating a form of universalizability that is unlike the standard one since Kant, which by Gandhi’s lights is cognitively coercive. This more modest version of universalizability, at the same time, was not so modest as to imply any moral relativism. According to Bilgrami, the source of Gandhi’s modesty is not in Mill’s idea of human fallibility, where we seek the truth though we are never sure that we have attained it. Rather, the source of Gandhi’s modesty is his insistence that criticism (with those whom one morally disagrees) is not implied by the making of one’s moral judgements. He adds that, for Gandhi, “[c]riticism reflects an impurity of heart, and is easily corrupted to breed hostility and, eventually, violence. With an impure heart you could still indulge in non-violent political activism, but that activism would be strategic, merely a means to a political end. In the long run it would, just as surely as violence, land you in a midden.”

There are two problems with such an understanding. First, it assumes that Gandhi’s political actions were directed by philosophical principles alone, distant from the concrete, practical situations at hand. On the other hand, on many occasions, Gandhi himself accepted that his political acts were also determined according to the exigencies of the situation. Second, Gandhi seemed to be ambivalent about removing criticism from moral judgment. Indeed, he was
an excellent critic of political and civilizational tendencies. In Gandhi's own words, his book *Hind Swaraj* “is a severe condemnation of modern civilization.” He criticized everything that stands for modern civilization—speed/ railways, court/lawyers, hospital/doctors, and parliament/politicians. He also criticized political acts of individuals. If he criticized the Jallianwala Bagh massacre as ordered by General Dyer, he also criticized the assassination of Curzon Wyllie by Madan Lal Dhingra. He wrote, “His [Dhingra’s] defense is inadmissible.” In some rare cases he also criticized some acts of individuals. Many times, when some residents of Gandhi’s Ashram transgressed Ashram rules, especially the Brahmacharya (celibacy) rule, he not only criticized the acts but also undertook fasts as penance.

This opens up two possibilities. The first is that, though Gandhi could not completely remove criticism from his moral judgment in practice in his own life, nevertheless he held that removing criticism from moral judgment is an important and correct moral position. In other words, he could not live up to his own ideal. Second, Gandhi did not seem to argue for the entire removal of criticism from moral judgment. The problem with the first possibility is that though it solves the philosopher Gandhi’s problem of how his ideas were integrated to the most abstract epistemological and methodological commitments, it did not solve the problem of how the politician Gandhi practices a politics that could accommodate a potentially limitless range of imperfections, adjustments, compromises, and failures. In other words, this analysis helps us to understand how Gandhi as a philosopher was consistent within his ideas, but it is inadequate because it does not show us how to find consistency between his ideas and political actions. It, therefore, means that the idea of removing criticism from moral judgment does not integrate or merge two Gandhis. In other words, in Bilgrami’s analysis also there remain two Gandhis and, as it is said above, so long as it is not resolved how these two Gandhis can be understood in one single conceptual framework, there is work to be done in getting Gandhi right.

There remain two Gandhis in Bilgrami’s analysis because there is a problem in the way he explains Gandhi’s understanding of truth. Bilgrami writes, “the alternative source of the modesty in Gandhi has less to do with issues about truth, and more to do with the way we must hold our moral values.” He adds that, for Gandhi, truth is an exclusively moral notion. A little later, he writes, “truth has to be a more abstract value than a moral value because both (moral) truth-teller and the (immoral) liar share it.” But at the end of the paper, he himself raises the question “How can there be a value if no one can fail to value it?” and answers it in the following way:

The answer is: yes, someone does indeed fail to value truth in this more abstract sense. But it is not the liar. It is the equally common sort of person in our midst, what Harry Frankfurt has called, the “bullshitter.” This is the person who merely sounds off on public occasions or who gets published in some academic journals simply because, he is prepared to speak or write in the requisite jargon, without any goal of getting things right nor even (like the liar) concealing the right things which he thinks he knows.

But what my reading suggests is that in the Gandhian scheme of things, no human being can fail to value truth or the moral value of truth-telling, and for Gandhi, this understanding is based on his assumption of human nature. He believed that “[n]o human being is so bad as to be beyond redemption; no human being is so perfect as to warrant his destroying him whom he wrongly considers to be wholly evil.” At the end of his paper, Bilgrami does acknowledge that Gandhi was convinced of the inherent corruptibility of our moral psyches. But what Bilgrami misses is that for Gandhi, no human being is beyond redemption either. Therefore, Gandhi did make some exemptions to moral principles like nonviolence, but not for utilitarian reasons (for the greatest good of the greatest number) or because for someone who is inherently evil or criticism cannot be completely removed from moral judgment, but rather due to the limitations of human beings. There is no way to determine what the greatest good of the greatest number is or who is inherently evil.

Now it is my turn to answer Bilgrami’s question: How can there be a value if no one can fail to value it? Or I can also add another question: Why do we seek the highest moral value though we are sure that we cannot attain it? Both are indeed good questions and only by answering them can we come close to grasping the question of this article, namely, how could Gandhi integrate both the philosophical and the political aspects of life and remain true to both of them?

Gandhi’s answer is that we can talk about holding moral values only in terms of degree (which should not be confused with multiple aspects of reality or “Anekantavada”). Gandhi strongly believes that although there is no way to find out who is inherently good or evil, nonetheless we can talk in terms of degree. We can ask how one person and his conduct or acts in comparison to another person and his conduct or acts are closer to a realization of possible moral perfection for human beings on earth. Gandhi also insisted that since there is no way to determine what is morally wrong, one should listen to one’s own conscience or inner voice. But listening to one’s own conscience does not improve matters because it does not help to determine who is and whose acts are closer to a realization of possible moral perfection for a human being.

When Gandhi was asked, “Does the ‘inner voice’ mean the ‘message of God’?”, his reply was, “The ‘Inner Voice’ may mean a message from God or the Devil, for both are wrestling in the human breast.” And when he was posed the next question, “How can an ordinary man distinguish between God’s will and his own will?” his reply was, “Not every person can know God’s will. Proper training is necessary to attain the power to know God’s will.” Elsewhere, he explained it further:

Willfulness is not conscience. A child has no conscience. The correspondent’s cat does not go for the mouse in obedience to its conscience. It does so in obedience to its nature. Conscience is
the ripe fruit of strictest discipline. . . . Conscience can reside only in a delicately tuned breast.\textsuperscript{23}

He also claimed that “having made a ceaseless effort to attain self-purification, I have developed some little capacity to hear correctly and clearly the ‘still small voice within.’”\textsuperscript{24} It means that for Gandhi, one’s level of disciplined life that one acquires for preparing oneself for the service of mankind (to make our humanity less unequal, less dominating, and less authoritarian) can help one to determine whether or not any particular act is morally right in some degree with one’s opponent/fellow seeker at that particular situation. For Gandhi, disciplining one’s life for the service of humankind is a lifelong process. In this way, whenever Gandhi is faced with a difficult situation or moral dilemma, he listens to his small voice or conscience to reach a moral judgment. And, for him, such moral judgments are universalizable and have both firmness (because such moral judgments are based on listening to his conscience, which has made a ceaseless effort to discipline his life, and he is going to act upon them for the service of mankind) and modesty (because he was sure about his limitations in his effort to discipline his life) that allow for a politics that could accommodate a potentially limitless range of imperfections, adjustments, compromises, and failures. In this way, Gandhi remained both an imperfect philosopher as well as an imperfect politician and was true to both the central aspects of his life.

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NOTES

5. Barker, “Gandhi as Bridge and Reconciler,” 51.

Gandhi’s Cosmopolitanism: Glimpses of His Enlightenment Aspirations

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ABSTRACT

Is it possible to understand Gandhi’s ideas by refracting them through a Kantian lens? How does Gandhi imagine and deploy a public space for individuals to meet as citizens to reflect on and to debate matters of collective concern? How does he understand the collaborative nature of soul-making? While Gandhi explicitly grounds many of these practices in Indian philosophical and religious frameworks, we show that his views also reflect a capacious enlightenment sensibility and that he offers us a distinctly modern account of citizenship. Moreover, Gandhi is often viewed as an arch nationalist, as a parochial preserver of Hindu tradition, and as a romantic political philosopher who looked back with nostalgia to an idealized past. We reject the simplicity of this portrait and argue that Gandhi is a cosmopolitan thinker whose strategic calls to action in the public sphere were future-oriented and even more...
creative and radical than those that the cosmopolitan Kant advocated for his own idealized public sphere.

INTRODUCTION
We are interested in the role that the public sphere plays in Gandhi’s thought. In particular, we would like to ask whether it is possible to understand Gandhi’s ideas by refracting them through a broadly Kantian cosmopolitan lens. How does Gandhi imagine and deploy a public space for individuals to meet as citizens to reflect on and to debate matters of collective concern? How does he justify demonstrative protest in the context of the Indian independence movement? And how does Gandhi understand the collaborative nature of what we will call (borrowing from John Keats) soul-making? Gandhi explicitly grounds many of these practices in a distinctively Indian philosophical and religious framework. Nonetheless, his views—about our relation to nature, respect for law, and the significance of reason—emerge from a capacious enlightenment sensibility. Gandhi provides a modern account of citizenship and a model of how to think and to talk across differences.

Gandhi’s corpus is vast and complex, and his ideas evolved throughout his long life. To be sure, he was a harsh critic of modernity and a harsh critic of British colonial law and policy. He was also a profoundly religious Hindu. All of this is well-known and all of this frames his philosophical and political project. We wish, however, to call attention to important counter-currents in Gandhi’s thought that are not so often appreciated. Some of these may be strategic and can only be understood in the broader context of his thought, but some are themselves important ingredients in Gandhi’s philosophy.

In particular, we wish to call attention to the ways in which Gandhi’s thinking is grounded in the very modernity he criticizes and that frames his cosmopolitanism, albeit a cosmopolitanism that is grounded in the religious tradition and national sensibility for which he is so well-known. We do not pretend to conduct an exhaustive survey of Gandhi’s writings; in fact, we are intentionally selective, choosing those places where these intriguing counter-currents arise. Nor do we claim that these are the most important aspects of Gandhi’s thought, only that they deserve more attention than they have hitherto received, and that attention to them deepens our understanding of Gandhian philosophy.

GANDHI TODAY
Gandhi’s philosophical stance is contested. On the one hand, he is often viewed as an arch nationalist and ideologue, a parochial preserver of Hindu tradition, and, in many respects, a romantic political philosopher, rejecting modernity in favor of a return to a premodern agrarian civilization. This view emerges from a plausible reading of *Hind Swaraj* and is reinforced by certain remarks in his dialogue with Rabindranath Tagore. On the other hand, contemporary political debates in India reveal just how slippery a position Gandhi occupies in ideological space. No major political group today comfortably claims Gandhi as an ally. Religious traditionalists, Hindu nationalists, Muslims, Dalits, Marxists, and even secularists and liberals of different stripes are equally ambivalent about how closely they would be affiliated with Gandhi. This suggests, at the very least, that there is a complexity in Gandhi’s method and message that has hitherto escaped scrutiny.

We approach some of this complexity by addressing Gandhi from a new direction: Instead of seeing Gandhi simply as an anti-modern nationalist, opposed to Tagore and his cosmopolitanism, we will show that Gandhi is himself a cosmopolitan whose views resonate with those of the European enlightenment. We will argue that Gandhi shares some of the perspective of that archetype of European modernity, Immanuel Kant, even though their respective forms of cosmopolitanism differ in detail.

THE KANTIAN LEGACY: ENLIGHTENMENT AND COSMOPOLITAN PURPOSE
Kant might seem to be a strange touchstone for thought about the Gandhian project. After all, the whole point of the Kantian legacy is to stress the primacy of reason above all else, and an impartial, universalized form of reasoning that would ground many of these practices in a distinctively Indian philosophical and religious framework. Nonetheless, his views—about our relation to nature, respect for law, and the significance of reason—emerge from a capacious enlightenment sensibility. Gandhi provides a modern account of citizenship and a model of how to think and to talk across differences.

We will show, however, that these tensions are not as deep as they might appear to be. Kant’s cosmopolitanism is not as secular as it is often portrayed; Gandhi’s Hinduism is not as orthodox as it is often portrayed. Nor is the contrast between the discursive and the enactive as sharp as many take it to be. Moreover, the contrast between what is regarded as Gandhi’s parochialism and Kant’s cosmopolitanism is overstated. When we adopt more nuanced views of Kant’s and Gandhi’s respective enlightenment programs and versions of cosmopolitanism, they will turn out to be more akin than different. This is not to say that Kant and Gandhi agree in all matters; they do not. It is instead to point out resonances that merit our attention as we try to understand Gandhi’s own cosmopolitan thought.

We will begin with particular attention to the three essays that ground Kant’s modernist political project: “What Is Called Enlightenment?” “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,” and “Toward Perpetual Peace.” We will show that, taken together, these essays articulate a position strikingly similar to Gandhi’s account of citizenship and its relation to the public sphere: if Kant is a cosmopolitan, so is Gandhi.

In “What Is Called Enlightenment?” Kant argues for the importance of the public sphere: a locus in which citizenship is made possible through reason and dialogue. In the public sphere, all persons are free to express their opinions and to argue for them. That sphere (joka) thus constitutes a
shared discursive space that unites individuals as citizens in a common political project. The diversity of opinion is thereby brought to bear in a shared political purpose.

Kant argued that instead of constraining his subjects by force, an enlightened monarch ought to permit and to encourage citizens to debate and even to criticize laws and the state, constrained by—and only by—reason. Governance, he argued, should allow for moderate political change. Such deliberate political processes would then lead to greater stability than would revolutions. A robust public sphere, however intellectually unruly, he argued, would therefore be more conducive to peace.

This conception of the public sphere and of its role in enabling the free expression of all citizens informs Gandhi's thought. One important point for present purposes is that Gandhi accepts Kant's revolutionary idea that good governance requires not only the probity of public officials but also a citizenry that can provide checks on their government. Another—and this is often ignored when people contrast Gandhi with enlightenment thought—is Gandhi's agreement with Kant that the public sphere is discursive in character. We will return to these points below.

In order to explore more surprising connections between Kant and Gandhi, we turn to the less familiar, but equally important, theological dimensions of Kant's political thought as developed in "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose" and "Toward a Perpetual Peace." In these essays, Kant argues for an alignment of human action with natural law, which, in the long trajectory of human history, leads to a perpetual peace for all humanity. In these works, Kant commits to a naturalistic teleology, to a universalist conception of law, and to the idea of Providence. All of these ideas are deeply imbricated with Lutheran theology.

In the first of these two essays, for instance, Kant states:

> Nature has willed that man should produce entirely by his own initiative everything which goes beyond the mechanical ordering of his animal existence, and that he should not partake of any other happiness of perfection than that which he has procured for himself without instinct and by his own reason.\(^5\)

Kant continues: “Nature gave man reason, and freedom of will based upon reason, and this in itself was a clear indication of nature's intention as regards his endowments.”\(^7\) Note here the alignment of reason with nature's purpose. Despite the apparently secular or scientific language of “nature” in this essay, the teleological and intentional language that Kant uses suggests that nature is a proxy for the Christian God. This should inform our reading of Kant's cosmopolitanism: it is not a purely secular ideology, but rather an extension of a Protestant view of the relation between persons and the Divine to a broader account of the relations between persons and nature.

In "Towards Perpetual Peace," Kant appeals to Providence, making more explicit the theological underpinning of his account of the connection between the natural and human domains.

> Perpetual peace is guaranteed by no less an authority than the great artist Nature herself . . . if we consider its purposive function within the world’s development, where it appears as the underlying wisdom of a higher cause, showing the way towards the objective goal of the human race and predetermining the world’s evolution, we call it Providence . . . . Modesty forbids us to speak of providence as something we can recognize, for this would mean donning the wings of Icarus and presuming to approach the mystery of its inscrutable intentions.\(^5\)

This should give pause to anyone who would draw a sharp distinction between a modern, secular Kant and romantic theological Gandhi. Kant goes beyond mere talk of “nature,” assigning it not only a will but also “artistry,” and calling it “Providence,” a metonym for the divine. He even notes that nature in this sense exceeds the understanding of human minds, transferring the mystery of causes to the mystery of divine intention. This alignment of divine agency and human purpose is one way of articulating a cosmopolitan vision, and it is emphatically not secular. Indeed, we will see this very conception echoed in Gandhi’s notion that God’s handiwork in Nature is embodied in humanity, and that this alignment is what enables the possibility of peace.

We have demonstrated that Kant’s cosmopolitanism and his optimistic humanism are not grounded purely in pure reason, but rather in a sensibility according to which God speaks directly to persons and infuses them with the values and projects that He brings to creation. We say this neither to disparage Kant’s project nor to dismiss the centrality of rationality to Kant’s conception of the foundations of political order, but rather to point out that the context for that optimism and for that faith in reason is a broader religious faith. We will see when we attend to Gandhi’s thought that he shares both the religious framework that Kant articulates (mutatis mutandis) and the optimism grounded in human reason and its ability to animate the political sphere.

While we may not be able to know how Nature unfolds (Kant) or what God’s plan is (Gandhi), both underscore and prescribe the use of reason by humans as they act as trustees for Nature. This includes treating humanity as a whole with dignity, as ends in themselves, and never as means. Soul-making in the public sphere cannot be understood without taking seriously the relation between human beings and nature, and the alignment between human aspiration to perpetual peace and natural law. It is to that soul-making that we now turn.

**Gandhi: Soul-Making in the Public Sphere**

Gandhi unified political action and moral development under the heading swaraj. This term denotes both political and personal independence or self-rule. Gandhi argued that the first is meaningless without the second. Personal swaraj, he argued, is a precondition for any morally acceptable action on behalf of political independence, or...
Indeed for any public action at all. This is because legitimate participation in the public sphere requires rationality and non-egoistic moral motivation.

Like Kant, Gandhi moves from a religious frame to a secular ethical project. Gandhi’s focus on the practice of self-mastery is based on his reading of the Bhagavad Gītā. In that reading, he foregrounds the conception of individual duty (svadharma), duty grounded in one’s social role (varna-dharma), and the essential unity of humankind through identity with the divine (not the Christian God, but Krishna). This religious register is as foundational to Gandhi’s political project as Kant’s very different religious commitments are to his political project. And Gandhi’s project, while different from Kant’s in specific goals and in its conception of civil society, is nonetheless equally secular and cosmopolitan.

Gandhi’s theory of swaraj involves an account of the cultivation of the emotions, as well as of the mastery of the emotions by reason and conscience. That is, he is not interested in the abnegation of the affective, but in the harnessing of the affective life in moral discipline (yoga). Gandhi’s genius is to translate the cultivation of personal discipline into a project aimed at public, national discipline. Just as he understands persons as citizens of their families, villages, and nations, he understands the nation as a citizen of a community of nations, one that, like the family, is responsible for the moral upbringing of its members.

Two aspects of Gandhi’s cosmopolitanism are taken as evidence that he diverges from the ideals of the European enlightenment. The first is his use of embodied action in public affairs. The second is his emphasis on the role of the emotion of love in political action. We will show that each instead is a reflection of the Enlightenment sensibility refracted through a colonial Indian lens, and that each contributes to, and does not undermine, Gandhi’s status as a cosmopolitan thinker. We begin with Gandhi’s use of embodied action.

Gandhi crafts a set of methods for national soul-making. The space for this practice is the public sphere. Public action tests and adjusts the boundaries of law and morality that govern a social order and constitutes the dialectic between individual and social morality. In the context of a colonial struggle for independence, social action was primarily realized in the form of political protest. These protests were not only—or even primarily—understood as efforts to shape policy. But they were also means for shaping political emotions in the context of the movement for justice and freedom. Gandhi thought that such action could only be effective and acceptable when performed in public informed by this moral valence.

Gandhi took these actions to be relevant both to the intra-Indian and to the inter-national contexts. Gandhi thus aspired to a citizenship animated by cosmopolitan ideas he shared with Kant. We begin with the national context. During the Indian independence struggle, Gandhi proposed and enacted different forms of non-cooperation and civil disobedience, prominently including the salt march and fasts. Gandhi understood such public actions as representational or discursive: they are, he held, acts of communication and even of instruction. Gandhi’s term for these actions was satyagraha, indicating both grasping and insisting on the truth (or reality). This term is important because it reminds us that, however religious Gandhi’s foundations are, he took the edifice erected on those Foundations to be universal in virtue of being tied not to one’s particular viewpoint but to reality itself, or truth.

It is true that these kinds of actions in the public sphere exceed the scope of those actually envisaged by Kant, who emphasized discussion and debate and not demonstrations. Kant would have thought that Gandhi’s actions are different in kind from purely verbal expression in pamphlets or speeches, and so not expressions of reason. Nonetheless, we will show that these actions serve the very political and discursive function that Kant identified as central to citizens’ participation in good governance.

Gandhi’s requirement of ahimsa was essential to all forms of action in the public sphere, whether they were petitions to courts and legislative bodies, acts of non-cooperation, or even civil disobedience. This requirement, as well as the internal constraint Gandhi imposed on the motivation and attitude of the satyagrahi who had license to commit such actions, was critical to Gandhi’s conception of legitimate practice and free expression in the public sphere. Dhirendra Mohan Datta puts the required attitude of the satyagrahi as follows: “[The satyagrahi] explains his just grievances coolly and calmly to the public and the aggressor, appeals to his reason, gives him time to think, and if even then the latter does not agree to rectify the wrong, the satyagrahi gives him due notice of his intention to launch the non-violent movement and then actually does so.”

Reason—so central to Kantian thinking—is hence critical to Gandhi’s thought as well.

The Salt March is a well-known instance of non-violent political action in the public sphere. The march protested the salt tax and prohibition of private salt manufacture imposed by the British. Indians of different religious persuasions walked off their jobs, walked along with Gandhi to the sea, and made salt (an act of swadeshi or reliance on one’s own resources). In this way, they affirmed their freedom (swaraj)—both personal and collective—to assemble as citizens in a public space to make their case—through articulate action—against a government that they took to have acted unfairly. Here we have a clear example of public discourse in Kant’s sense of that term, albeit undertaken through what might at first appear to be nondiscursive means. That appearance of non-discursivity is, however, illusory. Because this public action is intended to communicate the fact that there is an inalienable right to self-determination, it makes a statement. Such action is simultaneously instrumental and rational; it is aimed at, as well as reflective of, individual and collective moral cultivation.

Nonetheless, however discursive they were, Gandhian non-cooperation and civil disobedience were supplemented by what Kant would have recognized as discourse. Gandhi also constructed and advanced explicitly legal arguments—oral and written—for the legitimate extension of British Law to its colonial subjects. British colonial ideology and
legal theory made these arguments particularly poignant: given India’s status as a part of the British Empire, Gandhi’s argument for the uniform application of British law could only be dismissed on pain of parochiality and partiality.

Gandhi hence did not reject British law tout court, despite his critique of the violence of its application in the colonies and despite his more general critique of the adversarial legal system in Hind Swaraj. Instead, he used British law and legal theory strategically, relying on his skills as a lawyer to argue that the colonial application of British law is inconsistent with its claim to be grounded in universal, rational justice. Once again, we see Gandhi’s rationalist cosmopolitanism in action: he approves of the commitment to universality and to fairness; he criticizes the institutions against which he protests because they betray those very values.

Gandhi saw satyagraha not as a purely Indian idea, but rather as a strategy of global significance. In particular, he recommended it to African Americans in a solidarity that historian Nico Slate has called a “colored cosmopolitanism.” Slate describes alignments across the US and the Indian subcontinent in response to “the color line.” It is well-known that Gandhi’s method of nonviolence resonated with Martin Luther King, Jr. But Gandhian ideas circulated well before King’s time in Indian and African American journals (Chand and The Aryan Path in India and The Crisis in the US). In these journals, we find debates about the promise (and the risks) of “cosmopolitan” alliances between otherwise distant lands/peoples/cultures based on their shared humanity. The aspiration represented by satyagraha transcended national, ethnic, and religious boundaries and connected peoples beyond biological notions of race, constituting a more inclusive and trans-national public sphere.

Despite these obviously cosmopolitan commitments, many still read Gandhi as a narrow nationalist. One reason for this is the position he seems to take in the famous debate with Tagore. Tagore is often represented in this debate as the champion of cosmopolitanism against Gandhi’s alleged nationalism. But this is a caricature. Here is a passage that might suggest that Gandhi is a parochial nationalist:

I know families in which English is being made the mother tongue. Hundreds of youths believe that without a knowledge of English, freedom for India is practically impossible... All these are for me signs of our slavery and degradation. It is unbearable to me that the vernaculars should be crushed and starved as they have been.

But let’s see what comes next. Gandhi writes:

I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any... I would have our young men and young women with literary tastes to learn as much of English and other world languages as they like, and then expect them to give the benefits of their learning to India and to the world.

So, what might have appeared to be a parochial devotion to local languages and a disparagement of a cosmopolitan vision—when seen in context—is, in fact, a rooted cosmopolitanism. Such a cosmopolitanism is born of the intuition that citizenship in the world requires a mature sense of who one is, that participants in a global public sphere have a right to demand respect as equals from their colleagues, and that their intellectual vision should be global. Gandhi makes this point in another letter in this exchange when he writes:

Nor need the Poet fear that Non-cooperation is intended to erect a Chinese Wall between India and the West. On the contrary, Non-Cooperation is intended to pave the way to real, honorable and voluntary cooperation based on mutual respect and trust.

The resonances with Kant’s understanding of the public sphere are compelling: mutual respect and trust are the point, realized in the treatment of persons as free, equal, and as ends in themselves. Finally, consider the following remark in this exchange, in which Gandhi responds to the charge that swadeshi is parochial:

Nor is the scheme of Non-Cooperation or swadeshi an exclusive doctrine... The message of Non-Cooperation, Nonviolence, and swadeshi is a message to the world. It must fall flat if it does not bear fruit in the soil in which it has been delivered.

These actions in the global sphere suggest that while Gandhi is indisputably engaged in a practice of national soul-making, this practice is infused with a cosmopolitan ethos. We have shown that Gandhi uses public action as a form of argument, as the public deployment of reason. But the public sphere is not only the domain of reason: persons bring their affective lives into their political interactions as well. And this takes us to another dimension of the conversation between Gandhi and Tagore.

Tagore, in Creative Unity, defends the universality of creative human affect, and so can be read as defending the importance of emotion in the public sphere against the emphasis on reason in political action we have been ascribing to Gandhi. Martha C. Nussbaum draws our attention to Tagore’s advocacy of love for one’s country, a love that she argues is a necessary public emotion grounded in an aesthetic sensibility. In Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice, she argues that reason and argument, narrowly understood, cannot serve as the vehicle for social and political change. She makes the case for the importance of the practice of appropriate political emotions in the public sphere.

While Tagore’s encouragement of patriotism is a fine example of the value of public emotion, this recognition of the role of emotional life in politics does not distinguish his position from that of Gandhi. Gandhi also argues for an essential role of emotion in political engagement. He assigns pride of place to what he calls “soul force” or “love force” (which is inseparable from the active practice of
ahimsa),\textsuperscript{19} This is an equally powerful way to represent the role of universal emotions in the public sphere. So, while many have seen Tagore’s patriotism to be an expression of his cosmopolitanism, and Gandhi’s advocacy of ahimsa to be nationalistic, the soul-force Gandhi advocates is, in fact, equally expressive of a cosmopolitan ethos.

There are two further senses in which Gandhi’s soul force or love force is cosmopolitan: first, understood as a political emotion, it neither presupposes a narrow view of a nation’s boundaries nor implies a dichotomy between insider and outsider; second, Gandhi’s soul-force is an embodied emotion that is always reason-governed in the service of justice and humanity as a whole. But how does Gandhi’s emphasis on the affective square with the Kantian valorization of reason?

Kant does not assign any role to emotion in the public sphere. This dismissal of the affective dimension of human relations rests on the alignment of his sharp distinctions between reason and emotion and between the public and the private. Gandhi does not share Kant’s prejudice against the rationality of the emotions, a prejudice that has come under sharp attack in recent literature on the emotions, including not only Nussbaum but also such theorists as de Sousa, Solomon, and Damasio.\textsuperscript{20} There is a growing consensus that the Platonic division of the soul into affective and rational parts is impossible to square with actual human psychology. Emotions involve judgments and appraisals. Reasoning often proceeds from affective premises. And the public sphere is a domain in which persons express pride, anger, disgust, and solidarity, as often as they offer cold, logical analysis. Gandhi’s introduction of love as a public emotion is hence a prescient corrective to the European prejudice against the emotions.

One of Gandhi’s devices for infusing public reason with affective force was his controversial use of the “fast unto death” as a political device. These fasts were often effective, but one might well think that they constituted an abandonment of public discourse in favor of rank blackmail, or at least an appeal to emotion unmixed with reason. While we do not condone these particular forms of embodied action, Gandhi took them to be actions that bring people to their senses.\textsuperscript{21} Conceived in this way, Gandhi’s fasts are public discursive acts, very much in the space of reason, although they make use of the body, an object often associated with the private sphere.

Gandhi’s use of his body in this way was not private: it was not an exercise in manipulation or simple emotional infection. In each fast, Gandhi used the body as a public expression—as a premise in an argument designed to open people’s eyes to injustice. The fast amounted to an assertion that Gandhi himself could not live with the injustice in question. Joined with the implicit premise that others are (or ought to be) like Gandhi in this respect, the fast entails that nobody should be able to live with that injustice. The inability to tolerate injustice is both rationally defensible and affectively immediate: an expression of justified disgust with a practice, a disgust that makes normal life impossible. This embodied discursivity is what enables Gandhi so effectively to fuse the rational and the affective in public discourse. This is another respect in which Gandhi enhances and extends Kant’s vision of the human rationality that infuses the public sphere.

**CONCLUSION**

Indian philosophers who wrote during the period of British rule creatively synthesized classical and modern ideas. Gandhi has been widely recognized for creatively adapting Hindu practice in the modern context and in the anti-colonial struggle. Nonetheless, many have accused him of adopting a reactionary “back to the past” anti-modern, anti-cosmopolitan sensibility. We have proposed an alternate interpretation of Gandhi’s thought. We have shown that his philosophical project embodies a cosmopolitan aspiration that resonates with Enlightenment ideals, albeit with a distinctively Indian inflection.

We have also suggested a re-evaluation of the often exaggerated difference between Tagore’s and Gandhi’s positions, arguing that they are each cosmopolitan, albeit in different ways. Like Kant, Gandhi is committed to a universal vision of the public sphere as a domain of rational discourse, and like Kant, he grounds that secular commitment in a religious framework. But, like Kant, that religious framework is consistent with a secular understanding of the public. And Gandhi’s own cosmopolitanism goes further than Kant’s: it unites rather than divides the affective and the rational.

Finally, Gandhi’s cosmopolitanism is not a qualified version of cosmopolitanism. It is not vernacular cosmopolitanism, colored cosmopolitanism (Slate), cosmopolitan traditionalism (Carey-Webb), immersive cosmopolitanism, extreme cosmopolitanism, moderate cosmopolitanism (Ganeri), or a version of James Mill’s paternalist cosmopolitanism.\textsuperscript{22} While these distinctions have some descriptive advantage, their normative effects can be pernicious. (“It isn’t really authentically cosmopolitan, just some qualified semblance of the real thing—the European thing.”) To be sure, all forms of cosmopolitanism are qualified in some respect; the specific qualification reflects the context in which that cosmopolitanism arises. Gandhi’s cosmopolitanism is distinctive. It is Indian; it is liberatory. But it is no more distinctive, and no less an expression of Enlightenment values, and no more nationalistic than any other cosmopolitanism.\textsuperscript{23}

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**NOTES**


9. A great deal more needs to be said here. In particular, the differences between the social orders envisioned by Kant and Gandhi are significant, as are the ways in which their respective religious commitments inform their understandings of duties, rights, and the structure of the public sphere. But there is not space here to follow this line of thought.


12. Gandhi’s own blind spot about the caste system—his view that it could survive if suitably understood as different forms of labor weighted equally and infused with equal dignity—was, as Slate (Colored Cosmopolitanism) argues, finally cleared up in part by cosmopolitan African American intellectuals. They, among others in India, convinced Gandhi that his aspiration to a shared humanity required that he give up his defense of caste.


19. There is a great deal more to be said about the many dimensions of Gandhi’s understanding of “soul force,” but that is beyond the scope of this essay.


BOOK REVIEWS

The Yogasūtra of Patañjali: A New Introduction to the Buddhist Roots of the Yoga System


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Patañjali’s Yogasūtra is a fascinating text. Besides a thorough reflection on meditation, this short treatise brims with philosophical acuity. Patañjali touches on the ever-pending question of self and identity, and on the ever-crucial question of freedom (or freedoms: are siddhi and kaivalya omnipotence-as-freedom and disenagement-as-freedom, respectively, two distinct ideals of freedom?). Moreover, Patañjali sketches a map of the content of the mind, the content that is to be emptied in the process of yoga. The mind consists—he writes in Yogasūtra (YS) 1.6—of valid knowledge (pramāṇa), erroneous knowledge (viparyaya), verbal construction (vikalpa), sleep (nidrā), and memory (smrīti). Imagination and emotion seem to be missing here—whether ignored, downplayed, or treated as subordinated to the noetic elements of the mind. The fact that Patañjali dedicates an independent rubric to vikalpa is worth noticing. It conveys his interest in language, in the possibilities and impossibilities of language. Still in the compartment of philosophy, Patañjali is interested in and provides his readers with an analysis of time (through the concepts of kṣana and krama, moment and sequence). Patañjali corresponds—and here I come to Pradeep Gokhale’s new book—with neighboring philosophical traditions, including Śāmkhya, Buddhism, and Jainism.

The Yogasūtra is usually identified primarily with the Śāmkhya tradition. It is rooted in the Śāmkhyan dualistic metaphysics that distinguishes between puruṣa and prakṛti, i.e., between the self above and beyond everything worldly and matter, which includes everything that is not the self, from the sun, the moon, and the stars to the human body and mind. Yes, even the mind belongs in this formulation to the category of matter, to prakṛti, not to puruṣa. Śāmkhya vocabulary in the Yogasūtra includes, besides puruṣa and prakṛti, the abovementioned concept and ideal of kaivalya. Kaivalya stands for the ultimate distinction between prakṛti and puruṣa, which amounts to ultimate freedom—freedom of the self from the world and the worldly, including freedom from the content of the mind. Mādhava Vidyāranya, in his famous fourteenth-century Sarvadarśanasamgraha: A Compendium of Every Philosophical School, refers to Patañjala-yoga, namely to the Yogasūtra and the philosophical school that emerged from it, as “śeṣvara [sa-īśvara] sāmkhya,” namely “Śāmkhya with Īśvara (god),” or “Theistic Śāmkhya,” emphasizing the Śāmkhyan trajectory of the text.
Every Yoga scholar knows that there are Buddhist threads in the Yogasūtra, including the Brahma-vihāras, “the sublime attitudes” (YS 1.33), the concept of prajñā, “wisdom” (YS 1.48-49), the therapeutic paradigm that the Buddhists refer to as the “four noble truths” (cātavāri āryasatyāni), a family resemblance between “the eight limbs of yoga” (aṣṭāṅga-yoga, YS 2.29 onwards) and the Buddhist “eightfold path” (aṣṭāṅga-mārga), and of course Patañjali’s debate with Yogācāra Buddhism (YS 4.19-21). But Gokhale’s claim is far more radical: according to him, Patañjali relies on Buddhist sources as much as, or even more than, on the Sāmkhya tradition. “In my survey,” he writes, “I found that more than 50 percent of the Yogasūtra’s aphorisms can be said to have a background in Buddhism, directly or indirectly. Less than 40 percent of the aphorisms can be said to have a background in Sāmkhya or other orthodox [āstika, i.e., non-Buddhist and non-Jaina] sources, directly or indirectly” (12). In other words, Gokhale opens a whole new Yogasūtra before us, revealing its deep Buddhist roots.

Gokhale’s book is a contemporary Yogasūtra commentary—a new Ṭīkā if you wish—on this old text. Gokhale follows Patañjali’s text, chapter after chapter and sūtra after sūtra, translating, explaining and highlighting in each verse its philosophical roots, revealing not only Buddhist but also Jaina influence. In the following lines, I will focus on the salient Buddhist trajectory revealed by him, but the Jaina roots also deserve to be looked into. Take, for instance, the phrase mahāvṛata, “the great vow,” with reference to the five yamas, Patañjali’s principal ethical principles in YS 2.31. Gokhale is a pandit, a Sanskrit classicist. Every claim he makes is textually grounded in Sanskrit and Pāli sources. Not very often is a pandit’s work open for English readers.

Gokhale’s book opens a unique window to working methods and tools that are usually hidden from the Western (or Westernized, I am thinking of mainstream Indian academia) eye. I recently read a book review article by a Western scholar who specializes in Indian philosophy suggesting that the pandits’ work is written “in a doxographical style, and along more or less clearly drawn scholastic lines.” In other words, he imagines a lack of creativity and a sense of religiosity in their work. He does not realize that often, the most radical critique of the tradition comes from within the tradition itself. Gokhale’s work is a rare opportunity for the writer to whom I am referring and for others to become acquainted with contemporary classicist thinking.

Gokhale’s book comprises four chapters, which are actually Patañjali’s own chapters with Gokhale’s new commentary. Gokhale also provides us with three effective appendixes. The first, “Buddhist Conceptions of Meditation, Yoga and the Bodhisattva’s Spiritual Journey vis-à-vis Patañjala-yoga,” is where he visits the Buddhist texts that, according to him, influenced Patañjali. The second is titled “Asanga on Forms of Supernormal Knowledge and Powers.” Chapter 3 of the Yogasūtra includes a long list of siddhis—powers, special capacities, or yogic attainments—to be acquired through various meditations (samyama). Many of these siddhis are, in fact, different types of knowledge (“jñāna” is the word used by Patañjali), from knowledge of the universe and knowledge of the arrangement and movement of the stars, through knowledge of the content of other minds and knowledge of previous births, to knowledge of the distinction between puruṣa and prakṛti, Self and Matter. Do not forget that the mind is “matter.” Hence, the sharp differentiation is between self and mind, between Descartes’s “I am” and his “I think.” For Patañjali, yoga is about cessation of the fluctuations of the mind (yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ, YS 1.2). Hence, according to Patañjali, only when the mind is totally still, i.e., empty of any content, including the psychological substratum (the samskāras) underlying the thoughts, only then one’s amness (svārūpa) can be revealed. Other siddhis, or yogic attainments, in chapter 3 of the Yogasūtra include powers such as the capacity of miniaturizing one’s body, of becoming invisible, and of determining the time of one’s death at will. Buddhist terminology differentiates between supra-ordinary types of knowledge and supra-normal powers or capacities, referring to them as abhiñāna and rddhi, respectively. In his appendix, Gokhale takes us to Asanga’s Śrāvakabuddhi, where like Patañjali (or, according to Gokhale, Patañjali after Asanga), he sketches a list of powers, each with the meditation technique that leads to it. In his commentary on chapter 3 of the Yogasūtra, Gokhale underscores Buddhist parallels in the relevant sūtras. In his appendix, he shows us—through translated paragraphs from Asanga—why he thinks that Patañjali borrows from Asanga. The latter, Gokhale suggests, draws on earlier Pāli sources. The philosophical question about the continuity or ambivalence between siddhi and kaivalya as complementing or alternately contradicting concepts of freedom is, in light of Gokhale, a question about agreement or conflict between Buddhist (siddhis) and Sāmkhya (kaivalya) influences on the Yogasūtra. Gokhale remarks that “Patañjali’s system of Yoga is not a coherent system because it is an attempt to synthesize two soteriological systems—Sāmkhya and Buddhism—which are mutually inconsistent in many ways” (13). Gokhale’s third appendix is titled “Discrepancies Between Patañjali’s Aphorisms and Vyāsa’s Interpretations.” This appendix supports one of Gokhale’s main arguments. Gokhale argues that Patañjali draws extensively on Buddhist sources, but Vyāsa, his Bhāṣyakāra, i.e., his foremost commentator, makes a political move (yes, politics in the realm of ideas) by distancing Patañjali from the Buddhists and situating him on the “right side” of the map, i.e., the āstika side (the Buddhists and the Jains are on the other side, the nāstika, namely the allegedly heretic side). According to Gokhale, Vyāsa is pro-Sāmkhya, whereas Patañjali is closer to the Buddhists. Gokhale asserts:

Vyāsa must have been aware of the Buddhist background [of the Yogasūtra], but he seems to have knowingly avoided acknowledging the Buddhist influence. He interprets the whole of the Yogasūtra as a Sāmkhya text. He acknowledges the Buddhist position only when it is to be criticized or when the Sāmkhya position is to be defended against it. (11)

And Gokhale adds:

Unfortunately, the Bhāṣyakāra’s narrow interpretation of Yogasūtra came to be treated as authentic at the hands of the later commentators, and the Buddhist background got completely side-tracked. (11)
Gokhale’s own attempt is to rectify the situation and to bring back to light the Buddhist roots of Patañjali’s text.

The implications of the picture revealed by Gokhale are far-reaching. First, Patañjali and Vyāsa cannot be one and the same person, against the belief of authoritative Yogasūtra scholars such as Philipp Maas, the compiler of a critical edition of the first chapter of what he refers to as Patañjala Yogäsāstra, namely of Patañjali’s Yogasūtra and Vyāsa-Bhāṣya together. “According to manuscript colophons and secondary evidence,” Maas suggests, “both texts [the Yogasūtra and Vyāsa’s commentary] taken collectively bear the common title Patañjala Yogäsāstra and probably have one single, common author named Patañjali. This author collected the sūtras from different sources and furnished them with explanations, which in later times came to be regarded as the Yogasūtra-bhāṣya.”

I had my doubts even before reading Gokhale, owing to the sidhi (powers) section of chapter 3 of the Yogasūtra, where I felt that Vyāsa’s commentary is too distant from the text. Al-Birūnī’s eleventh-century translation of the Yogasūtra into Arabic also raises questions regarding the equation between Patañjali and Vyāsa, which I cannot delve into at present. But if Gokhale is right about Patañjali’s Buddhist roots and Vyāsa’s striving to conceal them, then author and commentator are surely different from each other.

Another implication of Gokhale’s narrative has to do with the date of Patañjali and, subsequently, with the question about Patañjali of the Yogasūtra and his namesake, the author of the Vyākaraṇa-Mahābhāṣya, the Great Grammatical Commentary, who is usually dated to the second century BCE—are they two or one? If Gokhale is right about Yogācāra influence on Patañjali, then the two Patañjalis—the Yogasūtra-kāra and the grammarian—are definitely different from each other. The grammarian lived too early to have borrowed from these Buddhist thinkers. In light of Gokhale’s work, Patañjali of the Yogasūtra would have to be dated to the fourth or even fifth century CE.

Having introduced Gokhale’s book, I now wish to shortly discuss two verses of the Yogasūtra—1.33 and 2.5—that I have been thinking about for a long time. Apropos Gokhale, both are utterly Buddhist. It is their structural similarity which caught my eye.

YS 1.33: Through the practice of friendliness, compassion, joy, and equanimity toward the happy, the suffering, the virtuous, and the unvirtuous (respectively), the consciousness is clarified. (maitrī-karunā-muditā-upekṣānāṃ sukha-duhkhā-punya-apunya-visayānāṃ bhāvanātāśa citta-prasādanam, my translation).

YS 1.33 is the first verse in a series of seven sūtras (YS 1.33-39), which prescribe different techniques of preparing the mind for meditation by acquiring a state of citta-prasādanam, namely a sense of clarity or tranquility at the level of consciousness. The yogin can choose the technique that works best for him, as the particle vā, “or,” in each of the verses 34-39 implies. These techniques include, for example, prānāyāma (breath control, YS 1.34), or meditation of any desired object (1.39). There are two “twists” in sūtra 1.33: first, the fact that each of the four “sublime attitudes” is directed toward a different addressee. Friendliness is directed toward those who are happy, compassion toward the suffering, joy toward the virtuous, and equanimity (or indifference, or dispassion) toward the non-virtuous. Each type of addressee merits a different attitude. The second twist is that the ideal qualities listed here are not prescribed for the sake of creating a better society or world based on a more appropriate self-other relationship. They rather comprise a technique intended to facilitate meditative introspection and ultimately—in Patañjali—“aloneness” (nirīṣṭa-samādhi, kaivalya). The ethical and social dimensions of ideals such as maitrī and karunā (friendliness and compassion) are subordinated here to the yogin’s seeking for metaphysical transcendence. Barbara Stoler-Miller (1979), who worked on the brahma-vihāra formula in the Buddhist context, depicts a similar picture of a preparatory meditative work intended to facilitate the yogin’s inner-transformation, or “change of heart,” as she puts it. In the Buddhist framework, the yogin-monk is required to cultivate all four attitudes and apply them—in meditation—to every sentient being, rather than assigning each attitude to a different type of addressee as in Patañjali. Gokhale’s reading of YS 1.33 is altogether different from mine. Your reading, he would tell me, follows Vyāsa’s commentary, the same Vyāsa who aims to distance the text from its Buddhist roots. Gokhale translates this sūtra as follows:

The mind becomes tranquil by cultivation of friendliness, compassion, gladness and equanimity (or indifference), which have happiness, suffering, merit and demerit (respectively) as their objects. (46)

And he explains:

When Patañjali says that maitrī [friendliness] has happiness as its object, it means that developing maitrī implies desiring for happiness of the other. Similarly, when Patañjali claims that karunā [compassion] has pain as its object, it may simply mean that developing karunā about another person implies desiring that the pain of the other person may be removed. Similarly, to say that muditā [joy, gladness] has merit as its object implies that developing muditā towards another person implies appreciating the merit of the other person, and to say that upekṣā [equanimity] has demerit as its object implies that one should be detached from the demerit in the other person. . . . [Therefore] these attitudes may not be directed to specific types of persons, but they could be directed to all. Hence, maitrī will not be directed to happy persons only; maitrī as a wish for another person’s happiness would be directed towards all. Similarly, the other three attitudes can be addressed to all beings in the world. This gives us what can be called a universalist interpretation of the four attitudes. (47)

According to Gokhale, Patañjali adopts the Brahma-vihāra formulation from the Buddhists as it is, without any twists.
In his commentary of YS 1.33, Gokhale visits Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, as also the Carakasamhitā (the famous Āyurveda treatise) and the Jaina Tattvārthasūtra. Gokhale suggests that, in the present case, Patañjali is closer to Asaṅga than to the other sources examined by him, and that the four sublime attitudes are for Patañjali universal and directed to all, not to any specific sector. But what about upekkṣā—equanimity, even indifference—as a universal attitude? Gokhale interprets upekkṣā in Patañjali (as against Vyāsa) as resonating in the meditation “May all beings be dissociated from sin (apuṇya)” (49). Upekkṣā, for him, is a matter of dissociation. Interestingly, in the Carakasamhitā (the intersections between yoga and medicine are worth noting, and Gokhale duly highlights them), upekkṣā conveys the proper attitude of the physician toward patients who are nearing their death, namely equanimity, or poise.

YS 2.5: Avidyā (worldly gaze) is (a matter of) misidentification of the impermanent, the impure, the painful, and no-self with the permanent, pure, joyous, and self (respectively). (aniṭṭha-sūci-duḥkhā-anātmasu nītya-sūci-sukha-ātma-khyātir avidyā, my translation).

In YS 2.5, Patañjali offers a definition of avidyā, the worldly and, in fact, worldmaking gaze. This is Patañjali’s epistemological definition of avidyā. In YS 2.15, he adds a psychological definition of the same concept. In 2.15, Patañjali famously writes that “all is suffering for the discerning” (duḥkhama eva sarvam vivekaṁ, reminiscent of the Buddhist “sabbam dukkham”). It is implied that one who fails to see the suffering (duḥkhā) inherent in worldly existence, both on and under the surface, is “undiscerning.” It is the unseen workings of the samskāras (karmic residue) and the guṇas (the activators of prakṛti, of matter) under the surface that add the psychological dimension. The term “avidyā,” here undiscernment, does not occur in 2.15 explicitly, but is the heart of the commentators’ discussion. However, my current focus is on YS 2.5. Here Patañjali defines avidyā as misidentification of A, B, C, and D (the impermanent, the impure, the painful, and the non-self) as E, F, G, and H (permanent, pure, joyous, and self), respectively. The terminology is Buddhist through and through: anītya (impermanence), duḥkha (suffering), and anātman (no-self, minimal self)—what could be more Buddhist? Gokhale explains that Patañjali appropriates the Buddhist conception of vipāryāsa, contrary perception, or delusion or, according to Gokhale, even “perversion”). But interestingly, in the Buddhist context, to mistake A with E, B with F, C with G, and mostly D with H, namely the anātman with the ātman, is a delusion since the anātman, and correspondingly impermanence, are the most adequate descriptions of reality. In Patañjali, the mistake or delusion works the other way around. Since Patañjali is committed to Sāṃkhya metaphysics (or now, in light of Gokhale’s work, it is safer to say that he stitches together Sāṃkhya and Buddhist trajectories), it is the permanence (of both puruṣa and prakṛti when “she”—prakṛti—returns to “her” primordial mūla-prakṛti state), hiding between the lines of the impermanent worldly existence, behind the veil of avidyā/vipāryāsa, which awaits revealment. Patañjali, then, borrows the Buddhist definition of vipāryāsa (that, according to Asaṅga, is the root of avidyā), but in its “new home”—the Yogasūtra—it conveys a metaphysical position which is the very opposite of the Buddhist stance. “Patañjali’s explanation of unwisdom [avidyā],” Alex Wayman explains, “is precisely the four varieties of delusion, an ancient doctrine of Buddhism, Vipallāsā in Pāli.” Wayman refers his readers to the Anguttara Nikāya. Gokhale refers his readers in the present case to Vasubandhu’s Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya (AKB). The verse quoted by him (“catvāro viparyāṣāḥ, anītye nīyam iti, duḥkhe sukham iti, aṣucau śucitī, anātmany ātmeti,” AKB V.9) is identical to Patañjali in content (the other way around, as I explained), but not in structure. Here the question of structure arises—the structure that is mutual to YS 1.33 and YS 2.5. If you have a group of four elements related to another group of four elements, Gokhale elucidates, there are two ways of presenting this relation, namely through a “respectivity model” or a “pair model.” In both sūtras, Patañjali employs the respectivity model: A, B, C, and D applying to E, F, G, and H. Gokhale explains that the respectivity model is “a useful device for giving information in a concise way.” Therefore, Vasubandhu frequently uses this model in the Abhidharmakośa (and uses the word “yathākramam,” i.e., in the same order, or respectively). But in the Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya, his auto-commentary on the text, where conciseness is not a priority, he uses the pair model (as in the verse quoted by Gokhale). As a sūtra-kāra or a compiler of sūtras—like Vasubandhu of the Kośa, not the Bhāṣya—Patañjali is committed to conciseness, hence opts for the respectivity model.

Conclusion: After reading Gokhale’s book, the Yogasūtra looks different. Patañjali is revealed as a compiler who borrows a good number of verses from Yogācāra Buddhism. Gokhale is interested in the politics behind and between the lines of the text. Vyāsa, he argues and shows, emphasizes the Sāṃkhya influence on the Yogasūtra and undermines the contribution of Buddhist and Jaina sources to the Yogasūtra as a textual melting-pot. But there is another political cat waiting to be taken out of the bag, which has to do with the present-day status of the Yogasūtra in the West as “the bible” of yoga (that is, āsana) practitioners. The West is always keen to exoticize India. The Yogasūtra and Patañjali have been (and still are) heavily exoticized. Numerous publications endorse the imagined picture of Patañjali as an original author who translates into words insights that come directly from his own meditative practice. Gokhale’s work de-exoticizes and demystifies the Yogasūtra. He reminds us that the crux of thinking, of scholarship, and of creativity at large is dialogue. His book reveals Patañjali’s treatise as inherently dialogic, corresponding as it is with several sources, Buddhist as much as—or even more than—Sāṃkhya. Gokhale’s book is a must read for anyone interested in the Yogasūtra, in classical Indian philosophy, in comparative philosophy, and more broadly, in the intricate and intriguing relationship between text and commentary.

NOTES
Daya Krishna and Twentieth-Century Indian Philosophy: A New Way of Thinking about Art, Freedom, and Knowledge


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Daniel Raveh’s Daya Krishna and Twentieth-Century Indian Philosophy: A New Way of Thinking about Art, Freedom, and Knowledge is not an intellectual biography about Daya Krishna. Instead, it is an invitation to read Dayaji by offering extracts from his work in context with his contemporaries, leavened with Raveh’s analysis. Krishna’s work is now housed for free at Open Library (https://www.dayakrishna.org/).

Raveh adopts Krishna’s dialogic method when he argues for broadening the list of scholars that philosophers have traditionally been in dialog with, so as to do philosophy without borders. Instead of only examining the works of scholars like Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault, and Gayatri Spivak, he argues for engagement with the ideas of scholars like Krishna, Mukund Lath, and Ramchandra Gandhi.

Due to space constraints, this review will only attempt to get others interested in reading Krishna’s work. In addition, although Raveh introduces Krishna’s work within the context of his conversational partners in twentieth-century Indian philosophy, I will focus on Krishna. I begin with a short biography of Krishna and then pick out highlights from each of the four chapters of Raveh’s book. The hope is to provide a sampler of Krishna’s work that will serve as enticement to further explorations of twentieth-century Indian philosophy, using Raveh’s work as a guide. All citations are to Raveh’s work.

DAYA KRISHNA

Krishna was born in Meerut (near Delhi) in 1924. He completed his PhD at the University of Delhi in 1955. His dissertation, titled The Nature of Philosophy, is a dialogue and critique of European philosophy as it was read in India before the 1950s. He taught primarily at the University of Rajasthan in Jaipur. He wrote twenty books and two hundred articles. His most prolific period of writing was from the late 1990s to 2007. He died in 2007. His major works include the following: Political Development: A Critical Perspective (Oxford University Press, 1979); Indian Philosophy: A Counter Perspective (Oxford University Press, 1991); The Problematic and Conceptual Structure of Classical Indian Thought about Man, Society, and Polity (Oxford University Press, 1996); and The Nyāya Sūtras: A New Commentary on an Old Text (Sri Satguru Publications, 2004).

CHAPTER 1: TOWARD A NEW PICTURE OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

One of the enduring contributions of Krishna’s work is his (arguably provocative) critique of assumptions about “Indian philosophy.” I will focus here on his critique of three assumptions.

The first assumption critiqued by Krishna is that Indian philosophy can be neatly classified into nine schools. The main supposed division is between those schools that accepted the authority of the Vedas (orthodox schools) and those that didn’t (heterodox schools). Supposedly there are six orthodox schools of philosophy, such as Nyāya and Vedānta, and three heterodox schools, such as Buddhism and Cārvāka. Krishna critiqued this pedagogical assumption by pointing out that two foundational texts, Patañjali’s Yogasūtra and Īśvarakṛṣṇa’s Sāṃkhya-kārikā, both contain passages that reject the authority of the scriptures, such as at YS 1.6-7 and SK 2. As a consequence, the idea that the orthodox schools outnumber the heterodox schools and are thus the dominant schools of Indian philosophy is also challenged.

The second assumption that Krishna critiques is pervasive, partly due to the work of the politician and philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. The assumption holds that Western philosophy contributes rationality and pursues rational thinking, in particular through scientific thinking, while Indian philosophy contributes spirituality and pursues spiritual practices, such as through yoga. While it is true that Western philosophy has rationality in it and that Indian philosophy has spiritual practices in it, Krishna challenges the idea that there are no spiritual practices in Western philosophy and no rational thinkers in Indian philosophy. As Krishna points out, one need only look at the way in which Western philosophy is often taught, by excluding medieval thinkers that discussed spirituality, and at the way in which Indian philosophy is often taught, without much engagement with, for example, the philosophy of language. Given the wide belief that rationality is superior to spirituality, Indian philosophy is thus often ignored. Krishna worked to change what he held to be a false dichotomy.

The third assumption that Krishna sought to dispel was that doing comparative philosophy in India was primarily about comparing classical Indian to Western philosophy. Instead, he saw comparative philosophy as a means for various Indian traditions, including Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Kashmir
Shaivism, Bhakti, and Indian Muslim, to be in contemporary
dialog with each other. The Samvāda Project, inspired by
Krishna’s contemporary Krishnachandra Bhattacharya,
was one that Krishna pursued for two decades. The
topic of the first Samvāda, for example, was “what is the
status of propositions in the philosophy of language?”
Samvāda meetings were held all over India on a number of
philosophical topics. Raveh offers an interpretation of the
situation:

[T]he project is not about negotiating classical
Indian philosophy with modern Western
philosophy, but about establishing a dialogue
between two groups of contemporary Indian
philosophers, which he refers to as “Western” and
“Classical.” The Samvāda meetings enabled each
group to become acquainted with the intellectual
world and the philosophical toolbox of the
other. For [Krishna], as a member of the “Indian
Philosophy: Western” group, the Samvāda Project
is not about reaching out to classical sources in
Sanskrit instead of Kant and Russell. It is about
different methods of philosophizing. (43–44)

Using Bhattacharya, Raveh argues that Saṃvāda is about
breaking down “caste” in a new sense. Bhattacharya says:

We condemn the caste system of our country, but we ignore the fact that we, who have received
Western education, constitute a class more exclusive and intolerant than any of the traditional
castes. Let us resolutely break down the barriers of this new caste. (44)

Raveh says:

It is exactly in order to break the boundaries of this “caste,” that the Samvāda Project came into
being, as also to invite the pandits to examine their own boundaries and ways of seeing, and
understanding, through their “other,” namely their brothers and sisters trained in Western philosophy.
(44)

And later:

The Samvāda Project, then, is not an encounter
between “contemporaries” and “ancestors,” but
between two groups of contemporaries, with
different training and tools, but nevertheless with
a common denominator, a sense of “Indianness,”
and a mutual past preceding the “bifurcation.” For
the Western-trained participants, for Krishna after
Bhattacharya, the project was a matter of creating
a new language for philosophical discourse. (44)

Raveh’s interpretation helps one see that what on the surface
can look as if it is just another iteration of a common form
of philosophy is, in fact, striving toward self-understanding
of the complexities of “Indianness.” Quoting from the
work of Elise Coquereau-Saouma (whose dissertation is
on Krishna’s understanding of Samvāda), Raveh endorses
her claim that Samvāda is about “breaking the ice between
thinking-communities, overcoming prejudices, and letting
go of frozen pictures” (29).

Raveh also discusses a controversial statement made by
Krishna to the philosophers Jay Garfield and Nalini Bushan,
where Krishna states that a philosopher who writes in
English is not an “Indian philosopher,” including those
working in India in the late nineteenth century to the early
twentieth century. Garfield and Bushan, in their work Minds
Without Fear (Oxford University Press, 2017), use Krishna’s
statement to them as a convenient foil to argue against
the claim that if you write in English, you are not an Indian
philosopher, even though they were aware that Krishna
did not literally mean it. In an explanation of Krishna’s
statement, Raveh holds that Krishna was merely taking on
the role of the pūrva-paścīn, the opponent in a debate that
raises an objection. Krishna’s goal was to provoke Garfield
and Bushan, through a counter-perspective, to develop
their project in a way that shows how the opposite could
be true. Krishna was asking how to make sense of their
work, given the imposition of colonial ideas that broke the
continuity of the traditions that existed before colonialism.

CHAPTER 2: THINKING CREATIVELY ON THE
CREATIVE ACT: A DIALOGUE WITH KRISHNA

I once complained to my friend’s twelve-year-old daughter,
Simone, that I wished I was more artistically inclined.
Simone responded by saying, “Philosophy is art.” Raveh
points out that, for Krishna, this is absolutely true. He says:

If Bharata, author of the Nāṭya-śāstra, the root-text
of art and aesthetics in India, dated “somewhere”
in the first centuries CE, focuses on theatre, and his
great commentator, Abhinavagupta (10th century,
Kashmir), writes on art and thinks primarily of
poetry, then Krishna’s model of fascination, the
art-form closest to his heart, is the philosophical
text and the thinking-thread that binds it together,
what he refers to as “the art of the conceptual.”
(77)

According to Raveh, Krishna rejects the reduction of art to
emotion, asserting instead that art and aesthetics cannot
and should not be reduced to any single dimension. Raveh
further states that, for Krishna, “[art] ‘exists’ in a space and
time of its own, that unstick the ordinary, day-to-daily time
and space, and enable us to go beyond them” (85). Raveh
gives the example of film as one way in which one can be
transported out of their actual space and time and into,
for example, the court of the sixteenth-century ruler Akbar.
Raveh uses the example of film to illustrate his point about
Krishna’s conception of space and time in art. However,
because of Simone’s comment, it occurred to me to also
ask: do philosophical texts exist in a time and space all unto
themselves that take us beyond our own space and time?
In other words, in addition to trying to arrive at timeless
truths, can we also see philosophy as a means to transport
us in time and space?

Raveh repeatedly points out that one of Krishna’s core
drives was not only to move away from merely examining
the products of thought, but also to include the process.
For Krishna, the process of producing philosophical works is never finished. Krishna holds that when you see a philosophical text as finished, you will fail to understand it. For Krishna, unless one is intellectually dead, one repeatedly walks alongside various interlocutors. By always seeing philosophical works as essentially unfinished, philosophers are released from what could end up becoming a paralyzing quest for an ultimate truth and the finitude of a mathematical argument. However, Raveh also criticizes Krishna's view of the role of process: “While Krishna emphasizes process he also emphasizes the objective world and the material aspects of life that spiritually focused Indian philosophy is often seen to drive us away from” (87–88).

CHAPTER 3: FREEDOMS
In his "An Attempted Analysis of the Concept of Freedom" (1952), Krishna writes:

Man is the only Being who can choose not to BE. Therein lies his greatest freedom: the freedom from ends, from Life, from Conscious Being. He is the only animal who can commit suicide—a self-conscious annihilation of itself. Still, the self-conscious annihilation does not present itself as a “must.” It merely presents itself as a choice—a choice that is the ultimate foundation of freedom in man. . . . If death is merely seen as external or internal necessity, man can only submit to it—whether with a protest or not, it does not matter. It is only when Death is seen as choice, as the self-conscious annihilation of one’s own Dasein, that it appears as Foundational Freedom. (102)

Raveh refers to two kinds of suicide. There is one where "life fails to fulfil one’s expectations, and one drowns in suffering and frustration" (102–103). This kind of suicide is not a free choice. Rather, it is something that is compelled by circumstance. The second type of suicide, as expressed in the passage above, is one where “one chooses Death, if one really decides to choose it, not because life has failed him, but because, well one chooses it” (102). Krishna endorses a view under which death can be a matter of choice. As Raveh says, “if one chooses not to die, not to commit suicide, despite the possibility, not the hypothetical but the actual-existential possibility, one’s life is no longer ‘given’ but is a matter of choice” (103). Raveh also discusses Krishna’s disdain for “spiritualists” who talk of “not dying” or “release from death.” Krishna thinks this is a delusion.

Freedom as disengagement and freedom as omnipotence are notions of freedom that are extracted from Patañjali. Both notions are related to the notion of ultimate freedom, which is freedom from any constraint whatsoever. Raveh points out that Krishna argues against the notion of ultimate freedom. Instead, Krishna is interested in the notion of foundational freedom, which, according to Raveh, is the freedom of the human being to stand naked before himself with all his vulnerability. Raveh points out that, for Krishna, “empirical freedoms” in the social and political domains of the world, are not only as significant as [fundamental freedom], but even more significant, applying as they are to the collective sphere, to ‘us,’ not just ‘me.’ “

Using the frame of analytic philosophy, my reading is that Krishna is not interested in the problem of free will as it is discussed in contemporary analytic discussions, where free will is linked with the principle of alternative possibilities and is understood as bestowing “the ability to do otherwise.” While Krishna’s analysis of fundamental freedom relies on the principle of alternative possibilities, his main aim is to show that we must be freed from the illusion of a “given” freedom – ones we are born with as part of our nature. He urges us to embrace a contextual and situational freedom that is always changing along with the human situation.

Although the chapter is primarily about freedom, Raveh includes a discussion of a new model of knowledge championed by Krishna: knowledge without certainty. Raveh quotes from Krishna’s “Knowledge: Whose Is It? What Is It? And Why Has It to Be True?”:

Knowledge does not belong to anybody, even though one may say “I know” . . . knowledge is a collective, cumulative affair of mankind, and if it had to be regarded as “belonging” to anybody, it would be to mankind as such, and not to this or that “I.” But mankind includes not only those who lived in the past, but those who will live in the future also . . . knowledge is an ongoing human enterprise, a collective puruṣārtha. . . . A puruṣārtha is a matter of seeking, perennial seeking, as perennial as time itself, and hence not something that can be possessed, or meant to be possessed. (124)

Raveh explains that, for Krishna, no one should be excluded from knowledge because it does not belong to anyone. Krishna thinks of the idea of excluding someone or a group from knowledge as a case of epistemic injustice. Krishna’s account stands in opposition to Śaṅkara’s account of knowledge of Brahman as the only true form of it. Krishna’s account involves inherent uncertainty:

What is known is not only incomplete, but full of inaccuracies, inadequacies and errors, about which one knows nothing, except that they must be there, if the enterprise of knowledge has to go on, as it must. (126)

Krishna also says,

The attitude to knowledge is nowadays determined by governments, large companies, industrialists. They determine what will be done with it, and how it is to be produced. Knowledge is no longer independent of the purposes which we want to derive from it. And the purposes are only two: economic profit and military. Knowledge today is funded and controlled. It is controlled by big corporations, big business centers, or funded for military purpose. Power or profit! This is, to my mind, a very dangerous game. (128)
CHAPTER 4: CONCEPTS AND ACTIONS: DAYA KRISHNA AND SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

Raveh points out that if the narrative of Indian philosophy is all about renouncing worldly matters, then social and political philosophy will not appear to be central to the history of Indian philosophy. Indeed, works written on social and political philosophy, such as Kautiliya’s <i>Arthashastra</i>, don’t find a large following even amongst Indian philosophers. With respect to social and political philosophy in Indian thought, Krishna says:

[N]ot . . . much attention [has been paid] by those who have written on Indian philosophy. . . . It is in the social, political and legal thought of India, that one may find a counter-picture to the still prevalent one that has been developed around the centrality of the renouncer tradition. (136)

Krishna rejects the renouncer model based on the idea that the human condition is suffering. Raveh points out Krishna’s position on the issue:

Denial of the world, of matter, and of one’s responsibility towards the world (these lines are written as Brazil’s Amazon rainforest is in flames), is for Krishna a sign of ungratefulness on behalf of the yogin, the aspirant of beyondness. Withdrawal and return, with emphasis on the return, Krishna endorses wholeheartedly; denial and repudiation, he totally rejects. (137)

In his work <i>Socio-Political</i>, Krishna offers a narrative which is in contrast to the typical picture, according to which there is the omnipresence of the renouncer model with discussions of liberation and salvation through spiritual practice. Krishna argues that virtue, rather than birth, is how caste should be determined. In addition, he argues that Brahmins should not be thought of only as the priestly class. Instead, given Brahmins are immune from punishment, they should also be seen as having the duty to make sure rulers live up to the norms expected of them, as well as take on the duty to protect free speech. According to Raveh, Krishna also critically discusses an issue that bothered him a great deal: the emphasis in social and political philosophy on karma theory. Krishna holds that karma theory leads to moral monadism, the view that karma is only self-regarding and not other-regarding. Krishna spends a great deal of energy critically engaging moral monadism.

OVERVIEW

Raveh’s work is a helpful introduction to twentieth-century Indian philosophy and to Krishna in particular. While many scholars have focused on exploring the work of figures from prior stages of Indian philosophy, there is a dearth of scholarship engaging such works produced in the twentieth century. Scholars working in other traditions have risen to the challenge of doing so, and it is time for Indian philosophers to do the same.

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