

On the Significance of Gandhi Today

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Perspectives on Gandhi's Significance Workshop

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Department of Political Science of Reed College for so generously hosting this workshop on the significance of Gandhi. I cannot imagine a more attractive and appropriate setting for the workshop. In particular, I would like to thank my old friend and colleague, Darius Rejali, for agreeing to the idea and then for doing so much to make it happen. It would have been impossible without his active engagement in the organisation. My gratitude also goes to Jolie Griffin for all the work she has done to make this whole event run so smoothly. Thank you so much.

I would also like to thank these three great Gandhi scholars – Dennis Dalton, Akeel Bilgrami and Karuna Mantena – for enthusiastically agreeing to participate in the workshop. I am not a Gandhi scholar, but I have learned so much about Gandhi, and, indeed political philosophy more generally, from all three of them. It is an honour and a pleasure to be able to discuss the significance of Gandhi with these three participants; with Darius; and with the faculty and students of Reed College - and in this wonderful setting.

In many ways this workshop is the celebration and appreciation of the outstanding scholarship of Dennis Dalton over fifty years on the thought and life of Mahatma Gandhi. His classic text, Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action has influenced generations of Gandhi scholars and students, and the three of us sitting here with him.¹ The workshop also is meant to recognize the remarkable work on Gandhi's political thought by Karuna Mantena, and especially

¹ See also his edited volume of Mahatma Gandhi: Selected Political Writings (1996).

her many articles and forthcoming book on Gandhi's Realism. Last but not least, the workshop derives from Akeel Bilgrami's work Gandhi's ethics in the Cambridge Companion to Gandhi and his remarkable genealogy of the Gandhian tradition and a parallel tradition in the West from the late seventeenth century, through the young Marx, and down to the present.² I have learned from all three. My small presentation is deeply indebted to all three and follows the paths they have laid down.

1. Introduction and overview

In my presentation I would like to suggest that Gandhi's thought and practice are of great significance today. Gandhi put together three interconnected arguments that are of great significance in my opinion.

The first argument is his critique of the deep problems of Western industrial civilization or modernization. These are the problems of increasing global inequality; increasingly destructive vicious cycles of war and violence; and the relentless domination and exploitation of human beings, communities and the ecosystems that sustain life on earth. These three problems constitute the global crisis today and Gandhi's critical analysis of them is as relevant today as a century ago – perhaps even more urgently so.

The second argument is the alternative Gandhi developed to the deep problems of Western modernization. This is Gandhi's vision of an 'alternative modernity' or 'alternative civilization' grounded equality, nonviolence and mutual cooperation.

The third and most original argument Gandhi put forward and lived every day of his adult life is the nonviolent way (or ways) of life that has the capacity transform modern social systems of inequality, violence and domination into alternative social systems in which equality, nonviolence and self-organising democratic cooperation would become paramount.

² See Akeel Bilgrami, Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment, (2014)

For Gandhi, these three interconnected arguments are not arguments or theories in the first instance. Rather, they are three interconnected modes of conduct or ways-of-being-in the world-with-others; and, only secondarily, arguments reflectively abstracted from the lived experience and daily testing he called 'experiments in truth'.

As we can see, these three arguments - of a critique of a vicious way of life, an alternative virtuous way of life, and the nonviolent way of moving from one to the other - are strongly interconnected. The alternative nonviolent civilization is not left 'hanging in the air'; or located in the distant past or a pacifist counter-culture; or kicked down the road as some kind of 'democracy to come' by means of war, violent revolution, modernization, stages of development; or the unintended consequences of marketization; or the cunning of reason, history or providence, or the gravedigger's dialectic. Rather, it is brought into being – into actuality – step by step, day-by-day, by acting ethically and experimentally in accordance with the third, nonviolent way of transformation.

I would like to draw a very rough sketch of these three interconnected arguments. On my interpretation, at the heart of Gandhi's analysis is a contrast between two general modes of power that have many specific manifestations in different relationships and circumstances. These two modes of power are: first, 'himsa' - the power of violence, domination and exploitation, or 'power-over' and 'against' other living beings; and, second, 'ahimsa' - the power of nonviolence, non-domination and non-exploitation, or 'power-with' other living beings.

Ahimsa, the power of nonviolence, is literally the power that animates all forms of life and unites them in complex 'family' relationships of interdependency and mutual aid or mutual sustainability. It is the power or animacy of life itself.³

The power of ahimsa, of nonviolence or power-with, is manifest first and foremost in the nonviolent ethics or *ethos* that Gandhi calls Satyagraha. This nonviolent ethical mode of being is then manifest in various nonviolent ways of being-in-the-world-with-others (human and non-human). The three most important are: (1) swaraj: individual and collective self-organising and

³ Satyagraha: its significance, April 25, 1919, CWMG 17: 448-9.

self-governing participatory democracy; (2) swadeshi: community-based and democratically organised ecological economics; and (3) nonviolent direct interaction and contestation with violent and dominative others; and oriented towards showing violent contestants the superiority of nonviolent ways of conflict resolution, and so of transforming the contest into nonviolent contestation, negotiation, resolution and, eventually, cooperation together.

Let's call the creative and transformative power of nonviolent contestation with violent others 'nonviolent agonistics'. It is usually called 'nonviolent direct action' or 'nonviolent resistance' but these terms do not express the interactive, creative and transformative dynamics of Gandhi's complex mode of interacting with violent and dominative others and moving them around to resolve their differences by nonviolent means of negotiation. And the alternative term, 'Gandhi's dialectic', is also misleading, as this aligns his nonviolent contestation too closely with Western theories of violent dialectics. Whereas the Greek term 'agonistics' just refers to the arts and practice of contests in general.

Gandhi first used the term 'Satyagraha' in South Africa to refer to the specific form of nonviolent power in cases of nonviolent agonistics. When he returned to India he began to extend his use of the term 'Satyagraha' to refer to the general mode of power manifested in ethics, swaraj, swadeshi and nonviolent agonistics. And, he put these different forms of nonviolence into practice in his everyday conduct, ashrams, village work, economics of Khaddar, nonviolent campaigns, working with the Congress Party, and so on.

As we can see, these ways of being nonviolent are both ends and means: they comprise both the enactment of Gandhi's alternative modernity here and now, and the ways to transform and replace the violence and domination of the present.

This development in Gandhi's thought and practice of Satyagraha after his return to India came about as the result of working with and learning from: Indian agricultural peasants; handicraft and hand spinning workers; and Indian women engaged in household management, food preparation and looking after the health of extended family members in Indian villages and ashrams. Moreover, he learned from their time-tested, nonviolent practices of non-cooperation with unjust landlords as he travelled around India in support of their nonviolent agonistics. These

informal traditional Indian ways of life were Gandhi's teacher and guide, as he was the first to acknowledge.⁴

2. Mentors

Before I sketch this out in a little more detail I would like to mention that I came to see this possible interpretation of Gandhi from reading and lecturing on Gandhi's works. However, it would not have been possible for me to see the ways that the features I have just mention hang together without the aid of the great work of Dennis Dalton, Akeel Bilgrami and Karuna Mantena. I hope I have not completely mis-interpreted them. I stand to be corrected in the discussion with all of you. I would like to be corrected, for this is just a preliminary sketch that requires much more work.

I have also been deeply influenced by the work of Richard Bartlett Gregg, the author of the famous book entitled The Power of Nonviolence, which was published in 1935, and revised in 1944 and 1959. Gregg is a fascinating American. He lived with Gandhi for three years and then set out to explain Gandhi's thought and practice to Westerners in his books and articles. He died here in Oregon in 1974. This is what Martin Luther King Jr said of Gregg's book: 'I hope it gets a wide readership, particularly among those, in this country and throughout the world, who are seeking ways of achieving full social, personal and political freedom in a manner consistent with human dignity.'

I have also drawn inspiration from Bharatan Kumarappa, the editor of the 1950 edition of Gandhi's writings on nonviolence, entitled Satyagraha or Nonviolent Resistance. In the Introduction he sets out Gandhi's three interrelated arguments. Like Dennis Dalton in his classic text, he goes on to argue that we have to understand the power of nonviolence, Satyagraha, in both its general sense of the power animating all aspects of life and its manifestation in specific

⁴ Vijay Prashad, 'Black Gandhi', Social Scientist, 37, 1-2, 2009, 3-20; David Hardiman, Gandhi in His Time and Ours (2003), Thomas Weber, Gandhi as Disciple and Mentor (2004), Dalton, 'Gandhi's Originality'.

social systems of ethics, self-government, ecological economics, and nonviolent agonistics.⁵ Here is how he puts it:

“Satyagraha or nonviolent resistance, as conceived by Gandhiji, has an important lesson for pacifists and war-resisters of the West. Western pacifists have so far proved ineffective because they have thought that war can be resisted by mere propaganda, conscientious objection, and organisation for settling disputes. Gandhiji showed that nonviolent to be effective requires constructive effort in every sphere of life, individual, social, economic, and political. These spheres have to be organised and refashioned in such a way that the people will have learnt to be nonviolent in their daily lives, manage their affairs on a cooperative and nonviolent basis, and thus have acquired sufficient strength and resourcefulness to be able to offer nonviolent resistance against organised violence. The practice of nonviolence in the political sphere is not, therefore, a mere matter of preaching or even of establishing arbitration courts or Leagues of Nations, but involves building up brick by brick, with patience and industry, a new nonviolent social and economic order. It depends ultimately on banishing violence from the heart of the individual, and making of him a transformed disciplined person. Gandhiji’s contribution lay in evolving the necessary technique and showing by example how all this can be done.”

3. Two contrasting modes of power - nonviolence and violence – and their various forms

As I mentioned, at the heart of Gandhi’s analysis is a contrast between two general modes of power that have many specific manifestations in different relationships and circumstances. These are: (1) the power of violence, domination and exploitation (profiting at the expense or suffering of others), or, simply, ‘power-over’ and ‘against’ other living beings; and (2) the power of love or nonviolence, non-domination and non-exploitation, or, simply, ‘power-with’ other living beings. Of the two, the power of nonviolence is more basic. It is the power that animates and connects all

⁵ Compare Dalton, Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action

forms of life in infinitely complex relationships of interdependency, symbiosis, mutual aid and nonviolent dispute resolution.

In modern industrial societies, we are entangled in both modes of power in their various instantiations. However, relations of violence, domination and exploitation of humans and the living earth tend to be paramount.

The recourse to violence, or the threat of violence, to resolve disputes in the last instance, and the continuous preparation for the next and more destructive round of violence and counter-violence, world without end, is the specific manifestation of the general mode of power that runs throughout modern societies. Violence is not only used to impose coercive relationships of power-over others. It requires relationships and ever more extensive military-industrial-economic complexes of command-obedience and ruler-ruled in order to mobilise for the next cycle of violence and counter-violence. And these dominant relationships have blowback effects on all social relationships. Violent conflict becomes the prototype for nonviolent forms of competition and conflict resolution in the political, economic and social spheres. When people mobilise to resist the injustices in these societies, then tend to organise themselves in the mirror image of the dominant powers-that-be, and orient themselves to seizing their concentrated forms of power themselves in armed or unarmed friend-enemy struggles.⁶

Thus, when this mode of power becomes paramount, we tend to foreground it in our histories, political theories, social sciences and media, and so take it as the model of all forms of human power – as Gandhi argued in chapter 17 of Hind Swaraj, and Hannah Arendt argued in On Violence. In so doing, Gandhi argued, we tend to overlook another mode of power, the power of nonviolent cooperation – that exists in and sustains everyday life. It is the basis of sociality. It exists not only in families, but in informal relationships throughout the interstices of violent and dominative institutions (even in prisons and refugee camps). In our taken-for-granted informal relationships to ourselves and to others, we tend to exercise power-with-one-another, rather than over and against others, and to resolve our disputes nonviolently.

⁶ Gandhi referred to unarmed friend-enemy struggles as ‘duragraha’ (see Two After Thoughts below)

Contrary to the social Darwinians, it is not violent struggles for existence that are the major factor in the evolution of life on earth, but, rather, these symbiotic relationships of interdependency, mutual care, and nonviolent dispute resolution. If this were not the case, as Gandhi roundly concludes in Hind Swaraj, 'the human race would have ceased to exist long ago.'

4. Contrasting assumptions

Gandhi argues that violent and nonviolent social systems are based on contrasting assumptions. The power of nonviolence is based on the assumption of a spiritual or animating unity of life in relationships of interdependency and mutual aid that is more fundamental than our differences. Spontaneous nonviolent cooperation is seen as prior to competition; trust is prior to distrust; and love to hate. These qualities exist in greater or less strength in every person and can be developed by self-training and working together. These are all aspects of the power of nonviolence.

As Gandhi writes in 'the law of our being': 'If love or nonviolence be not the law of our being, the whole of my argument falls to pieces, and there is no escape from a periodical recrudescence of war, each succeeding one outdoing the preceding one in ferocity.'⁷

In contrast, the basic assumption of the power of violence is that humans are separate or independent beings (autonomous). As a result, distrust is prior to trust, ill-will is prior to goodwill, anti-social behaviour is prior to coercively imposed socialisation, and competition and aggression are prior to cooperation and peace. The coercive imposition of power-over relationships (domination) is necessary to establish order (civilization) and cooperation. Coercively constrained competition is seen as the motor of human development.⁸

In addition, these two ways of life have diametrically opposed assumptions about the relation between means and ends.

The power of nonviolence rests on the assumption that the means prefigure and give rise to the ends, as the seed to the flower. It follows that the only *way* to a nonviolent world is by

⁷ Harijan 26, 9, 1936

⁸ Satyagraha: Its Significance

nonviolent means in each step we take. Thus all effective change towards peace and justice begins with ethics *as* ethos – with being nonviolent in everything one says and does – whether in our everyday life and the technological means we use, and in confronting a violent adversary.

On this constitutive view of means and ends, violence and domination do not lead to justice and peace, but to counter-violence and counter-domination. Violent victory over an opponent suppresses the conflict but does not resolve it, feeding resentment, retaliation and further conflict.

The objective of nonviolent resistance, therefore, is not victory over an opponent, voluntary submission or even compromise. Rather the aim is to transform the violent adversary into a nonviolent partner in a nonviolent relationship of exercising power together.

The power of violence, in contrast, rests on the assumption that means are contingently related to ends. Vicious or immoral means can lead to virtuous or moral ends. War, war preparation, violence and domination are the means to peace, democracy and justice. This is the basic assumption of modern civilization according to Gandhi and Gregg - advanced by Hobbes, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Mill, Darwin, Freud, Fanon and the theory and practice of development, modernization and conflict resolution today. Gandhi was among the first to call it into question; followed by Gregg, Einstein, Huxley, King, Camus, Arendt, nonviolent social scientists, and millions of anti-war and nonviolent activists today. Yet, the assumption persists in theory and practice.⁹

5. Satyagraha 1: ethics or ethos

Now, I would like to briefly sketch Gandhi's view of how the enactment and coordination of nonviolent ethics, community-based participatory democracy (swaraj), cyclical economics (swadeshi), and nonviolent agonistics - locally and globally - can change and gradually transform our violent world into one in which nonviolence is paramount.

⁹ See Karuna Mantena, [Gandhi's Realism](#) (forthcoming), Joan Bondurant, [The Conquest of Violence](#), and Dustin Howes, [Freedom without Violence](#). The classic modern view that war and domination lead to world peace is Immanuel Kant, 'Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent' and 'On the Guarantee of Perpetual Peace' in 'Perpetual Peace'.

Satyagraha in the specific sense of individual ethics or ethos is the first step, as we have seen in the quotation from Bharatan Kumarappa, and as Dennis Dalton, Akeel Bilgrami and Karuna Mantena have argued more recently.

The phrase ‘the power of nonviolence’ or ‘soul-power’ is the English translation of Satyagraha. Satya means ‘truth’ and ‘Sat’ means ‘being’. ‘Graha’ means acting in accordance with, grasping and hanging on to, and being moved by.

So, Gandhian ethics consists, first, in always being truthful and open; of always seeking the truth and acting accordingly in everything we say and do. We need to realise that we are less than perfect in searching for the truth and acting on it; we may always be mistaken and we always see the truth partially or perspectively in our time and place. Thus, we need to see each attempt as an experiment; and always be open to criticism and self-criticism. Hence, we need to listen to and take into account the views of others, even and especially those with disagree with; and revise our views through reciprocal discussion and elucidation. This is the specific or experiential sense of truth for Gandhi.

But there is also a more general and primary sense of ‘truth’ involved here; namely ‘the truth of our being’ (the Sat in Satya). The truth of our being, as we have seen, is that the ground of our being is in relationships of love or nonviolence. We are all connected with and animated by the power of nonviolence. Nonviolence (ahimsa) refers here to nonviolence in both the negative sense of non-harm or minimum harm to all living beings; and the positive sense of active care or compassion for all living beings. ‘Truth is love, and love is truth’.¹⁰

This demanding ethical way of life thus requires a lifetime of meditation, training and practice, in the spiritual tradition of your own choice, to gradually acquire the ethos to act in this way in different and demanding circumstances. We never become perfect sages. Like all spiritual and ethical traditions, it consists in three main steps towards the ethical government of the self – ‘self-government’, or ‘self-mastery’ as Karuna Mantena calls it (individual swaraj).

The first step is to work to free ourselves from socialisation into the dispositions to act in accordance with power of violence, domination and exploitation. This involves freeing ourselves

¹⁰ Satyagraha: Its significance

from the disposition to act or react on the basis of anger, fear, ill-will, distrust, hatred, bigotry, enmity, selfishness, envy, the will to dominate, and so on. For it is this aggressive and antagonistic reaction that initiates the cycles of violence and counter-violence that escalate into wars. This self-restraint requires meditation, daily practice, patience, discipline, and the slow acquisition of self-mastery.

The second set of practices of the self is to begin to act in all your relationships to yourself, to others, to the living earth and to the spiritual realm in the way of non-harm and love with an open heart; even in relation to those who are portrayed as your 'enemies'. Given our aggressive socialisation in contemporary societies, this second, positive step is as difficult as the first. However, as you become accustomed to this nonviolent ethos it gradually becomes less difficult to uphold as you go along.

This leads eventually to the famous third step of spiritual ethics. Rather than struggling against the grain of your socialisation to try to grasp and hold on to the truth of your being in nonviolence, you begin to connect with the intersubjective power or animacy of nonviolence, and it begins to support your efforts. We are all familiar with this kind of self-transformation when, for example, we first began to walk, or swim, or paddle a canoe. Rather than struggling to stay afloat, we begin to realize that the water can support and sustain us and we can paddle in sync with it. In ethical practice, we begin to be in synchronicity with the power of nonviolence that animates all life and to be supported and moved by it. Ethical conduct becomes more regular, customary and graceful as the ethical agent becomes infused with the power of love that animates all life.

(This famous third step of the universal power of love supporting and moving the honest ethical apprentice for Gandhi and King is a common feature of many ethical traditions (as Gandhi noted). It is 'infused grace' for Christians, the 'human spirit' for humanists, biophilia for deep ecologists, the power of Gaia for earth systems theorists, anima mundi for Greek ethicists, the power of 'as if' for atheist existentialists, interbeing and compassion for Buddhists, the power of the gift-reciprocity relationship for Indigenous people, the way the sustained intersubjective ethical practice gradually sustains the practitioner for Aristotelians, and 'humanness' or *Mitfreude* (joy-with fellow humans) – the sun-like 'divine happiness of power and love' for Nietzsche.)

Finally, (as William James and Aldous Huxley pointed out), it is also that the world is disclosed to us in a new way in virtue of our new way of being.¹¹ The light dawns slowly over the basic interdependency and mutual support of all forms of life. We see that our life is co-sustained by all the forms of life around us on which we depend, and which depend on us in turn. We recognize this truth in every breath we take of clean air, every step we take on the living earth, every morsel of food we eat, every gift we have received from other living beings. We are moved to reciprocate. We see that if we wish to sustain ourselves accordingly we need to do so in a way that co-sustains all our interdependent relatives. That is, we see the truth of our being in Gandhi's sense throughout the universe. We identify not with our ego self but with our interdependent self.

It is this self-transformative power of Gandhian ethics that enables practitioners to withstand tremendous suffering in upholding nonviolence in nonviolent agonistics, for what is sacrificed here is just the ego-self. The spiritual or interdependent self is upheld.¹²

6. Satyagraha 2-3: Swaraj and swadeshi

According to Richard Gregg, Gandhi's great insight was to see that bringing this nonviolent ethos into being and sustaining it over time has to be grounded in apprenticeship in nonviolent communities of practice with like-minded others. These are communities of practice organised around participatory democracy, the shared exercise of power-with each other, and the settlement of disputes nonviolently: that is, collective self-government or swaraj. Moreover, they are also communities of self-reliant, cyclical economics, human-scale technology, voluntary simplicity, non-possession, renewable energy sources and solar power, and care for the ecosystems that sustain their pacific way of life: that is, swadeshi. Community members cultivate Gandhi's alternative modernity from the ground-up and they network outwards to other similar communities around the country and the world. These communities embody Gandhi's main

¹¹ This is now called the Santiago theory of cognition but this reciprocal relation between knowing and being is a commonplace of most spiritual traditions.

¹² See Karuna Mantena, 'The Power of Nonviolence' 2016.

norm of human association: the sustaining and well-being of each and all affected, human and non-human: that is, Sarvodaya.¹³

This relationship between ethics, participatory democracy and ecological-economics was summarised by Richard Gregg in the book that Gandhi commissioned him to write on the economics of Khaddar in 1928. Here is how he summarised it:

“If the use of machinery and power ought to be controlled or restricted, it is very difficult to see what principles to follow. To me the surest basis would seem to be on the assumption of some sort of symbiosis or mutual support and aid between man and nature, and the recognition of a far closer symbiosis between man and man than is implied in capitalism. This may of course be stated in purely moral or spiritual terms also. Machinery and power must be subordinated to the true welfare of humanity. Such a concept would involve dropping the idea of “man’s conflict with nature”, of his “conquest of nature”, and developing instead an active belief in the actual unity and harmony with nature and matter, between men of all nations. Such an idea is quite acceptable to Indian thought, however strange or absurd it may seem to Western readers who have not followed closely the most recent developments of science.

It is because of this failure in symbiosis or of balancing energy accounts that machinery, with its unrestrained use of stored-up power, may be said, in terms understandable in the West, to “represent a great sin” [or error], as Mr. Gandhi has said.”

7. Satyagraha 4: Nonviolent agonistics

On Richard Gregg’s interpretation, this cultivation of nonviolent ethics in nonviolent communities of practice, including the nonviolent use of renewable resources, is the foundation of Gandhi’s alternative modernity, and of his *way* of spreading it nonviolently around the world. It is also the training ground of the final specific form of the power of nonviolence I wish to touch on: that is, nonviolent agonistics.

¹³ Gandhi’s texts on these communities of practice and their connections are collected together and introduced by Dalton in Gandhi: Selected Political Writings.

The practitioners of nonviolent agonistics first learn the alternative way of life they are contesting for through living in these communities of practice. They also learn the way that they should conduct themselves in contestation with violent and dominative opponents if they are to embody the power of nonviolence as Gandhi understands it. Moreover, they return to their communities of practice after their campaigns, or set up one in prison, in order to heal their wounds, rest and relax, rebuild strength and self-control, and prepare themselves for another campaign. Much more time is spent in these communities than in the nonviolent campaigns. They are more basic and more important than the agonistic campaigns. The campaigns are the 'manifestation' or 'dramatization' of the nonviolent way of life that is already actual and which the practitioners know and love.

Thus, we can see that there is a circular relationship of mutual support of the four components of Gandhi's alternative modernity. In order to be able to govern nonviolently with others in democratic communities of self-government, local economics and agonistic campaigns of non-cooperation, participants have to engage in ethical practices of individual self-government. Reciprocally, to develop individual ethical self-government they have to practice it in the complex cooperative and conflictual relationships of collective self-government in these communities of practice. They are all instances of 'self-government' (swaraj).¹⁴

The way that Gandhian practitioners conduct themselves in contestation with violent opponents is well-known and well-analyzed. I will just finish off my presentation by mentioning some of the central features of Gandhi's nonviolent agonistics that Richard Gregg discusses.

Ethical jiu-jitsu

As I mentioned earlier, it is misleading to call nonviolent action 'resistance'. It is the whole complex agonistic arts and game of reciprocal interaction between nonviolent and violent actors that goes through a number of stages to the creative transformation of the agonistic relationship between them into a nonviolent relationship of mutual respect and negotiation in which they

¹⁴ See Dalton, Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action, 12-29.

work to resolve their differences and find ways to cooperate together. Gregg called the contest a kind of 'moral or ethical jiu-jitsu'.¹⁵

The central point of Gandhian agonistics is that it is the manifestation and dramatization of the ethical power of the nonviolent way of life and of the way that disputes are resolved in and by it. It works by persuading the violent opponent and onlookers of its superiority; and by drawing the other into its nonviolent relationships of mutual trust; and thereby gradually transforming the violent other into a nonviolent democratic partner.

Here are a few of the main features.

First, violent actors act on the assumption that nonviolent actors will respond with fear or anger and thus respond with flight or fight. They expect this kind of interaction and know it well through training and experience. But, this is not what happens. Instead, nonviolent practitioners embody and manifest all the virtues of Gandhi's ethics. They are fearless, calm, and steady because of training, belief and experience. They exhibit self-control and do not retaliate with anger and counter-violence. They accept blows with a good temper, state their desire to find out the truth of the dispute and to examine both sides, and to abide by the outcome. They harbour no ill-will, treat the other as a friend, not an enemy, and assume good faith.

They prove their sincerity by accepting suffering rather than inflicting it on others, with no fear or resentment. They manifest an outstanding kind of courage that violent attackers have not seen before: the courage to die but never to kill. (The power of nonviolence is the weapon of the strong, not of the weak.)

Gandhian nonviolent contestants show their disagreement with the opponent's unjust activity, and give their reasons why, but they go out of their way to otherwise support the well-being of their opponent, minimize their suffering, and always remain open to learning from hearing their side of the story. They employ the tactics of marches, direct protests, boycotts, strikes, and especially campaigns of non-cooperation, but they do so in ways that does the least

¹⁵ The central feature of nonviolent 'physical' jiu-jitsu is that the nonviolent jiu-jitsu master neither flees nor fights the violent opponent directly, but, rather, maneuvers in such ways that the violent attacker's own actions work against him; constantly causing him to lose his poise, balance, self-confidence and energy. Moral jiu-jitsu works in a similar way but more importantly in the moral, emotional and psychological realms.

amount of harm to the opponent as a fellow human being. That is, they embody the constitutive traits of the ethos of nonviolence. Women are better at all this than men.

The cumulative effect of this kind of interaction on violent actors is a kind of ethical jiu-jitsu analogous to physical jiu-jitsu. The violent attackers lose their moral balance. 'They suddenly and unexpectedly lose the moral support which the usual violent or resentful resistance of most victims would render them. In Gregg's nice wording, they *plunges forward, as it were, into a new world of values.*' The attackers are surprised, feel insecure and unsure how to proceed, whereas the nonviolent actors retain poise and balance.

Second, as the interactions continue, violent actors begin to lose their assurance in the moral worth of their own mode of comportment in contrast with the nonviolent alternative dramatized in front of them; and relative to the gaze and reactions of onlookers. They begin to entertain the idea that they might be confronted with a way of life that is higher than mere physical force; that the power of nonviolence may be a higher realization of human nature – 'perhaps the manifestation of some ultimate powers in the background of life itself.' The refusal of nonviolent actors to use violence against opponents shows their trust and respect for the personality and moral integrity of the violent opponents; and these qualities of trust and respect have a powerful effect on the opponents.

These factors and more create in the very personality of the opponents and onlookers a 'strong new impulse that is incompatible with his previous tendency'. This new suggestion does not conflict with their previous tendency, but diverts and absorbs its energy so that it is even more powerful.

Persuasion and conversion are brought about nonviolently by creating this kind counter tendency within the thought, imagination and emotional make-up of the adversaries. 'This is 'the wisest psychological dynamic and moral strategy'. This internal counter-tendency is the intimation of the life-sustaining power of nonviolence, in dramatic contrast to the life-destroying power of violence.

Integration

Third, once violent opponents realise that the nonviolent actors do not wish to humiliate or conquer, but to work out their dispute in a relationship of mutual respect, the violent opponents see that there is a way to re-establish their equilibrium at a higher level of existence without losing face. This introduces the creative phase of nonviolent negotiations and conflict resolution Gregg calls 'integration'.

This is not the voluntary submission of one side, the victory of one side over another, or a compromise. It is a fourth way to solve conflict. It consists in trying to work out together a creative solution that takes into account the suffering and well-being of all affected and tries to find ways to satisfy them. This is not conceived as one negotiation, but as an open series of negotiations in which the partners learn from each other. There has been an enormous amount of work on nonviolent contestation, negotiation, resolution and cooperation since Gandhi and Gregg. However, I think that there are three features that remain significant.

The first is Gregg's view that the transformation of the contest between nonviolent and violent actors into nonviolent negotiation is what he calls the 'sublimation' and the 'inclusive syntheses' of the energy of both parties. In violent *versus* nonviolent struggles the partners use their energy in opposition to each other. Not as much energy is wasted as in violent struggles, but it is still immensely wasteful, enervating and exhausting, especially for the violent partners. In contrast, what happens in the transformation to nonviolent negotiations is the realisation that they can combine their energy by working and acting together: that is, the emergence of 'spontaneous cooperation'. Gregg calls it 'utilizing emotional energy':

Love [nonviolence] means using in the moral sphere the principle of the resolution of forces, known to every schoolboy who has studied physics, instead of the wasteful principle of direct opposition and consequent waste of energy, which produces unsatisfactory and only temporary results. Love does something better than conquer, for conquest implies destruction, submission and suppression. Love is more intelligent and tries not to allow any energy to go to waste.

Today, I imagine that we would call the transformation to negotiating-together in this way the 'emergent property' of self-organisation.

The second point Gandhi & Gregg make is that this kind of negotiation or integration requires 'love' in the sense of empathy and compassion of each participant in dialogue-with each other if they are to really understand the suffering of each and work out the appropriate ways to well-being in mutual response. It cannot be a pre-packaged model of transitional justice from dictatorship to representative democracy, for this is just the exercise of domination (power-over) of the more powerful partners in a new form.

Cycles of learning and persuasion

The final point is that this way of negotiation is itself the manifestation of a nonviolent way of life – of ongoing nonviolent contestation and cooperation. In engaging in it, the participants are beginning to bring into being a nonviolent way of life together and be animated by the symbiotic power that co-sustains all life.

The negotiations are not episodic and final, but, rather, ongoing and cumulative. The partners often call off the negotiations when they appear to be blocked or a compromise has been achieved. The nonviolent partners return to their communities of social, spiritual and ecological practices to reconnect with the restorative and animating power of nonviolence these provide (even in prison).

Here they reflect on the integrative negotiations, the contests that preceded the negotiation, and the complex effects and responses these had on participants, onlookers and the global audience *as* 'experiments in truth'. These trials often include setbacks, large (Himalayan) blunders, outbursts of violence among the nonviolent actors, and so. That is, they build up their ethical and practical strength and their practical knowledge of the complex field and science of nonviolent interaction and its effects. Then they begin the cycle again where they left off and carry it forward.

Gandhi's Salt March Satyagraha in 1930, the negotiations that followed, and Gandhi's decision to call off the negotiations at a certain point is often taken as the paradigm case of this virtuous, cyclical nature of nonviolent agonistics. Yes, but Gregg's point is that Gandhi's whole life exemplifies the ongoing, cyclical character of nonviolent campaigns grounded in the broader

nonviolent way of life in communities of practice, and in ongoing interaction with the violent and dominative way of life it seeks to transform.

As Gregg argues, and as he first learned in Gandhi's ashram, this is how the power and animacy of nonviolence cooperation and contestation grows in both the human and natural world – slowly but surely and step by step, generation by generation. That is, not by force, but by means of the transformative power of persuasion.

Thank you – I welcome discussion

Two after thoughts

There are two very significant features of Gandhian nonviolence that I have not discussed because I do not have the time to do so. I will just mention them briefly and we can discuss them in the discussion period if people wish to do so.

1. Joining hands

First, most of us most of the time are participants in the dominant institutions: representative government, the legal system, and capitalist relations of production and consumption. Moreover, most people would prefer to work within and try to reform and transform these institutions from within. That is to say, most of us do not live in ashrams and villages of participatory democracy and self-reliant local, cyclical, ecological economies. Nevertheless, many of us now participate in both types of social systems to varying degrees.

The question is: Can the Gandhian ethics of nonviolence be exercised in reformatory and transformative ways in the paramount institutions of violence, domination and exploitation?

The answer is yes. Gandhian himself participated in the Congress Party, the courts and capitalism in South Africa and India.

The reason why it is possible is that recent research on 'communities of practice' shows that, within all of these institutions, there exist informal communities of practice that are based in mutual trust and cooperation of the kind that Gandhi claimed exist everywhere.¹⁶ They exist within institutions of domination (command-obedience), exploitation, selfish bargaining, aggressive competition, and profit seeking. Both types of relationships – formal power-over and informal power-with - exist even in the most dominative and exploitive institutions (even prisons and concentration camps).

Relationships of power-over depend on and are parasitic on relationships of power-with (as Arendt also put it). This is the Achilles Heel of the power of violence. That is to say, communities of power-with within institutions of power-over are the ground of the (potentially

¹⁶ Kropotkin made the same claim in Mutual Aid in 1901, eight years before Gandhi in Hind Swaraj.

transformative) exercise and expansion of Gandhian ethics and nonviolent agonistics within these institutions.

This is precisely what Gandhi recommends in his most systematic analysis of the transformative potential of Satyagraha locally and globally.¹⁷ Gregg's book on the revolutionary potential of 'voluntary simplicity' within American capitalism is another example.

However, Gandhian nonviolent practices from within need to join hands with and coordinate their activities with community-based swaraj and swadeshi practices outside of these dominant institutions if they are to be effective. Again, this is what Gandhi tried to do.

In my opinion, if we are to address effectively the three global problems I mentioned at the beginning, then we need to work up ways of joining hands and coordinating the activities of those working within the dominant institutions and those working in communities outside of them. The significance of Gandhi for me is that he passed on to us his experiments in trying to do this so we can learn from them and carry them forward.

2. Gandhian nonviolence and non-moral or unarmed nonviolence

Second, I have contrasted Gandhian nonviolence with violence. However, we also need to clarify carefully the differences between Gandhian nonviolence and other forms of nonviolence that are common today. The most important contrast is between Gandhian nonviolence, which is often called 'principled or moral nonviolence', and 'pragmatic and strategic or non-moral nonviolence', which is commonly associated with Gene Sharp.

This terminology is a misnomer because Gandhi was an outstanding pragmatist and a strategist, but, unlike the non-moral strategists of nonviolence, his pragmatism and strategy were always under the horizon of his nonviolent ethics and so in confluence with the ethical and spiritual power of nonviolence. Both Richard Gregg and Karuna Mantena have shown the complex ways in which Gandhi combines ethics, pragmatics and strategy.¹⁸ Whereas, in contrast, the non-moral, strategic approach treats morality as an unnecessary feature of the struggles and is critical of the moral dimension of Gandhian nonviolence. It is thus more accurate to call this

¹⁷ Satyagraha: Its significance

¹⁸ Karuna Mantena, 'Competing Theories of Nonviolent Politics'.

non-moral approach 'unarmed resistance' and reserve 'nonviolence' for Gandhi's ethical approach, for he introduced the term 'nonviolence' in the first instance.

Unarmed resistance is not only not grounded in Satyagraha and the power of love. It is also not grounded in the alternative modernity of swaraj and swadeshi, or in moral jiu-jitsu (but rather 'political jiu-jitsu').

Moreover, it is oriented to replacing power-holders or rulers of various kinds with new power-holders and new rules. It is not oriented to transforming the structures of power-over between rulers and ruled into democratic power-with relationships and transforming the power-holders into nonviolent and equal democratic partners. It is, if I may put it this way, 'War without Violence', (as Shridharani called it in 1930). That is, it is modeled on the prototype of violent revolution with the exception that it is unarmed rather than armed, for the reason that unarmed struggle is said to be more effective.

As a result, it is subject to the same criticisms that Gandhi advanced against violent revolution and strategic bargaining over competing interests, as Joan Bondurant pointed out in her classic article on Satyagraha versus Duragraha. It treats the opponent as an enemy that the unarmed practitioners seek to defeat and establish power-over. If they can 'convert' the opponent by argument and tactics, that is okay, but this is rare on this view, and the usual ways of winning are compromise, defeat and dissolution of the powers-that-be. In so doing, it replicates the logic of aggression and counter-aggression and domination and counter-domination. The empirical studies seem to support this view.

For these and other reasons, I think it is of the utmost importance to clarify the difference in kind between these two contrasting approaches to nonviolence.¹⁹

¹⁹ Richard Gregg, Joan Bondurant, Thomas Weber, HJN Horsburgh, Brian Martin, Barbara Deming, Sean Scalmer, and Dustin Howes have all contributed to explicating the similarities and dissimilarities between various types or schools of nonviolence. As early as 1944 Theodore Paullin distinguished six different senses of nonviolence.