

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."²⁸ 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

1. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Foreword to *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, compiled and edited by R. K. Prabhu and U. R. Rao (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1967), xi–xii.
2. Vinit Haksar, *Gandhi and Liberalism: Satyagraha and the Conquest of Evil* (New York: Routledge, 2018).
3. Haksar, *Gandhi and Liberalism*, chapter 3.
4. Haksar, *Gandhi and Liberalism*, chapter 2.
5. M. K. Gandhi, *The Law of Love*, ed. Anand T. Hingorani (Mumbai: Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, 1998), 43.
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.
7. M. K. Gandhi, *Nonviolence in Peace and War* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1962), Vol. 1, 362.
8. Gandhi, *Nonviolence*, Vol. 1, 154–55.
9. Gandhi, *Nonviolence*, Vol. 1, 146.
10. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 98 vols. (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1958–1994), 89:116, fn. 1.
11. Gandhi, *Nonviolence*, Vol. 1, 416.
12. Gandhi, *Nonviolence*, Vol. 1, 146.
13. Gandhi, *Nonviolence*, Vol. 1, 79.
14. Gandhi, *Nonviolence*, Vol. 1, 154–55.
15. *Harijan*, July 21, 1940, reprinted in M. K. Gandhi, *My Nonviolence* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1960), chapter 47.
16. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 75:224.
17. Leela Gandhi, "Concerning Violence: The Limits and Circulations of Gandhian 'Ahimsa' or Passive Resistance," *Cultural Critique* 35 (1996): 105–147. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1354573>.
18. Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (London: The Bodley Head, 1936), 73, emphasis added.
19. M. K. Gandhi, *Young India*, August 25, 1920, reprinted in Gandhi, *The Law of Love*, 52.
20. Prabhu and Rao, eds., *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, 174.
21. Nicholas Gier, "Was Gandhi a Tantric?," <https://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/ngier/gantan5000.htm>, accessed September 14, 2022.
22. *Harijan*, March 14, 1936, reprinted in Gandhi, *Nonviolence*, Vol. 1, 121–24.
23. *Harijan*, July 21, 1940, reprinted in Gandhi, *My Nonviolence*, 127.

24. Thomas Weber, *Gandhi's Peace Army: The Shanti Sena and Unarmed Peacekeeping* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996).
25. *Harijan*, June 9, 1946, reprinted Gandhi, *The Law of Love*, 95.
26. See Haksar, *Gandhi and Liberalism*, chapter 2.
27. Vinit Haksar, *Indivisible Selves and Moral Practice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 86–95.
28. "Nonviolence of the Brave," *Harijan*, June 29, 1947, reprinted in M. K. Gandhi, *Nonviolence in Peace and War* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1962), Vol. 2, 258–59.

Gandhi and Moral Agency: A Study of Political Literature

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ABSTRACT

Despite decades of writings on Gandhi's moral and political thought, some of Gandhi's philosophical moral concepts are still not theoretically articulated. One such concept is Gandhi's idea of moral agency. I critically engage with some recent political-historical literature on Gandhi to extract philosophical discussions in the vicinity of moral agency. For this, I take two related steps. First, I argue that even though this literature presents considerable theoretical discussion of Gandhi's ideas, when considered individually, this literature produces only an incomplete picture of Gandhi's philosophical concepts. Second, I show that a comprehensive view of Gandhi's concepts emerges when grounded in the concept of moral agency. To this second end, I tie together various individual discussions on *satya* (truth), *ahimsā* (nonviolence), and disinterest to reveal the subliminal presence of detached moral agency in Gandhi's thought.

I. INTRODUCTION

Despite decades of writings on Gandhi's moral and political thought, some of Gandhi's philosophical moral concepts are still not theoretically articulated. One such concept is Gandhi's idea of moral agency. A significant reason for such a lack of theoretical articulation is that the literature on Gandhi's thought, with a few exceptions, typically takes an integrated view of Gandhi's life and his ideas. Often, the integrated reading of Gandhi's ideas, like nonviolence, truth, and self-rule, conceals the theoretical basis of his thoughts.¹ In fact, in some cases, such integrated reading leads to a wrong understanding of Gandhi's ideas; for example, the image of Gandhi as a saint has led to distorted understanding of Gandhi's views on friendship and welfare.² So, in the following, I discuss some of the recent historical-political literature on Gandhi's ideas that avoids such a reading of Gandhi. Contrary to an integrated reading of Gandhi's ideas, the selected historical-political literature provides theoretical analyses of Gandhi's concepts.

Given that historical-political literature is not directly concerned with moral philosophical concepts in Gandhi's

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 ideals 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.³ 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.⁴ 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.⁵ Thus, Mantena regards nonviolence as the central conception in Gandhi's moral and political thought to offer a strong contrast to classical political idealism.⁶ She argues that Gandhi's insistence on nonviolent *means*, instead of certain idealized *ends*, induces sensitivity towards the context in the actions undertaken.⁷

With a similar emphasis on Gandhi's insistence on means, Uday Mehta argues that Gandhi's nonviolence articulates "a contempt towards instrumentality of actions."⁸ 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.⁹

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."¹⁰ 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."¹¹

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.¹² 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 more conspicuous. 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 interest) is a positive idea as a source of nonviolence because detachment takes the form of “selfless action that aim[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.²⁵ 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. In that sense, Devji's notion of disinterest is a special case of the more general notion of detachment invoked by Mantena.

Devji views disinterest as a means of mutual arbitration on existing prejudice between parties. The idea is to give up the expectation of gain in one's relation with the other.²⁶ Devji contrasts disinterested friendship with state-

mediated contracts, as well as with mere brotherhood. According to Devji, the conception of brotherhood is limited and interested in that it is naturally given; brotherhood is laced with betrayal, violence, and sexual rivalry. Similarly, contractual relations which are mediated by the state are based on shared selfish interests; the registration of tenancy between the tenant and the landlord is executed to preserve the interests of both. As against the relations based on brotherhood and contracts, disinterested friendship is completely voluntary; in other words, social relations based on disinterest are purely for the sake of friendship. According to the disinterested notion of friendship, the relationship of friendship between individuals assumes the nature of a moral imperative instead of a relationship formed out of convenience of interest.

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.²⁷ 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.²⁸ 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.²⁹ 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, *satyāgraha* is intrinsically connected to *sarvodaya*.

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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).
2. See Samiksha Goyal and Nirmalangshu Mukherji, "Gandhi and Saintliness," *Economic and Political Weekly* 55, no. 36 (2020): 49–55.
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.
4. Karuna Mantena, "Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Non-Violence," *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 2 (2012): 455–70.
5. Mantena, "Another Realism," 457.
6. Many interpreters of Gandhi's thought regard nonviolence as his central principle. See Dennis Dalton, *Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973); and Joan Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964).
7. Mantena, "Another Realism," 464.
8. Uday S. Mehta, "Gandhi on Democracy, Politics and the Ethics of Everyday Life," *Modern Intellectual History* 7, no. 2 (2010): 359.
9. For more, see Faisal Devji, "Morality in the Shadow of Politics," in *Political Thought in Action*, ed. Shruti Kapila and Faisal Devji (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 108.
10. Mohandas Gandhi, "Anāsaktī Yoga: The Message of the Gita," in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* [hereafter CWMG], Vol. 46 (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1929/1999): 172, <https://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-literature/collected-works-of-mahatma-gandhi-volume-1-to-98.php>.
11. Mohandas Gandhi, "Discourses on the Gita," in CWMG, Vol. 37 (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1926/1999): 158, <https://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-literature/collected-works-of-mahatma-gandhi-volume-1-to-98.php>.
12. See John Waide, "Virtues and Principles," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 48, no. 3 (1988): 455–72. For a starting of this debate, see G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 1–19.
13. Anthony J. Parel, "Introduction: Gandhian Freedoms and Self-Rule," in *Gandhi, Freedoms, and Self-Rule*, ed. Anthony J. Parel (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000): 1–23.
14. Mantena, "Another Realism," 462.
15. The necessity of nonviolence also accommodates the compliance concerns of realists while maintaining the ideal aspects in Gandhi's conception of *swarāj*. On the issue of compliance, see Amartya Sen, "What Do We Want from a Theory of Justice," *Journal of Philosophy* 103, no. 5 (2006): 215–38.
16. For more on the debate between the ideal and the real in political philosophy, see Zofia Stemplowska and Adam Swift, "Ideal and Non-Ideal Theory," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy*, ed. David Estlund (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 373–92.
17. Mantena, "Another Realism," 463. This mistranslation is a regular problem with the literature; see Shaj Mohan and Divya Dwivedi, *Gandhi and Philosophy: On Theological Anti-Politics* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018); and Bindu Puri, "Faith and Reason: An Alternative Gandhian Understanding," *Journal of Dharma Studies* 2 (2020): 199–219, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42240-019-00048-9>. Others view *satyāgraha* as movement of passive resistance. See, for instance, Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, 7.

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."
19. Mohandas Gandhi, "From Yeravda Mandir: Ashram Observance," trans. V. G. Desai (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1933), 8–9, <https://www.mk Gandhi.org/ebks/yeravda.pdf>, accessed September 14, 2022.
20. Shruti Kapila, "Gandhi before Mahatma: The Foundations of Political Truth," *Public Culture* 23, no. 2 (2011): 448.
21. Mantena, "Another Realism," 448.
22. Mantena, "Another Realism," 461.
23. Mantena, "Another Realism," 461.
24. Mantena, "Another Realism," 459.
25. Faisal Devji, "The Praise of Prejudice," in *The Impossible Indian: Gandhi and the Temptation of Violence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 67–92.
26. Devji, "The Praise of Prejudice," 81.
27. Devji associates the idea of disinterest with Gandhi in terms of a close study of the *Khilafat* movement.
28. Devji, "The Praise of Prejudice," 72.
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).

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."² 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.³ Thus, the *logic of war* prevails.⁴ 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*,⁵ 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

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 inviolable 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.¹ It had also put the United States on a trajectory in which it sanctioned torture, kidnapping, and targeted assassinations with the