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The Self and the Agency and Resistance

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The aim of my talk is to present three cardinal virtues for the building of a good political society. The three virtues are resistance, discipline and compassion. I have divided the talk correspondingly into three sections to talk about these three virtues. In the first section, I will talk about resistance and why we need to understand resistance as disobedience. In the second, I will present a case for why disobedience has to be disciplined and in the third, you will find a discussion of compassion and how compassion is a necessary feature of a good society. Throughout my talk, I will use some of Gandhi's ideas as he remains an inspiration that has helped me think through the need for compassion and non-violence. As Virgil was the guide for Dante as he entered Inferno and Purgatorio, I will use Gandhi as my guide as I build this structure. You will find I will be presenting some of Gandhi's ideas throughout at different points and interpellating many of what I say through the mouth of Gandhi. In fact, if I am right, there is a lot in Gandhi's writings which can help us give argumentative flesh to the outline I am presenting.

Part I

Resistance and Our Subjective Location

Let me first start with resistance. What is resistance? Resistance forms a family of interconnected actions which can be understood in many ways. It can be thought of as an embodied reaction to oppose oppressive power relations, as Michel Foucault would have it. Resistance, as Axel Honneth understands it, can be undertaken to gain *recognition* of social and personal dignity. Or, it can be a form of *withdrawing of consent* to unjust structures according to Gene Sharp. The performance of resistance can be undertaken on by one individual or a group of people. It can be within a limited social setting or it can be within a larger political context. It can be national or transnational. Historically, acts of resistance have been both violent and non-violent.

The concept of resistance has been multivalent. Whether it is a mark of irony or not, I am not sure. But the concept of resistance has been resistant to easy theorizing. In such cases, sometimes it is a good idea to start with finding the roots of the word. Nicole Loraux (2002) has tried, in her book, *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens*, to unpack the meaning of resistance through an etymological understanding of the word 'resistance'. It comes from the word 'stance', which as a word relates to the ancient Greek term of *stasis*. In Latin, stasis is cognate to *stare* which means to come to a *stand* or cause to *stand*. Resis-stance means 'standing *against'*. This idea of stasis also can be found in philosophically-loaded words like *ekstasis*, which means *standing outside oneself*. The word ekstasis and its etymological roots, we know, Heidegger made much use of in his book *Being and Time*.

We know that standing against something or someone requires courage. That is because resistance opens up a space of vulnerability in all of us. When people engage in collective resistance, there is

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a form of solidarity which is built out of a recognition of each person's perilous existence. In fact, as Judith Butler has shown in her article/chapter "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance," when you resist, "you are confronted with your vulnerability either in relation to police power or to those who show up to oppose your political stance" (Butler, 2016, p. 12). But that is only the surface level of vulnerability. At another level, which according to Butler precedes this political act, there exists a deeper form of vulnerability, which she calls *precarity*.

At the level of precarity, one is faced with the danger of being dispossessed of even security to one's life. At the deeper level of vulnerability, there is a real danger of losing one's material conditions, which would lead to poverty and push us to living on meagre means. Political history especially in the 20th century tells us that we have had large-scale denuding of one's own rights as human beings. The Holocaust and the history of Jews for example is a primary cautionary tale in this regard. Within a political society, the dispossession of one's political rights would expose you to what Giorgio Agamben would call a 'bare life' in his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Agamben, 1998). This condition of *bare life* (*nuda vita*), for Agamben remains a latent possibility in all of us as we live our lives in modern forms of life. Bare life becomes manifest when individuals are removed from the sphere of the political, as stateless or as people without any political identity. When that happens, we are exposed to the sovereign's authority without legal protection. We find a similar idea echoed in Judith Butler's other work. In her book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), Butler argues that precarity is a condition of life itself, from the moment one is born. It is "a condition of being laid bare from the start and with which we cannot argue." (Butler, 2004, p. 31). Butler, drawing on Agamben, argues that it is the recognition of the precarity of life itself which in the first place motivates us to come out in the streets to protest and resist forms of injustice.

Resistance may be triggered from a space of recognition of precarity and vulnerability but the aims of resistance, in its history, have been more substantial than merely wanting to live and continue to exist as mere biological form. In other words, we resist so that we can enter the sphere of *bios* which scaffolds a set of socio-political conditions which can in turn enable us to attain happiness (or *eudomonia*), to use an Aristotelian concept. We don't want to remain in the sphere of *zôè* since that would be indistinguishable from bare life and it won't give us the possibility of attaining higher forms of happiness. That is, by performing resistance, we become as the sociologists of non-violence and resistance, Lilja and Vinthagen, call it, 'resistance subjects' (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018). A resistance subject is someone who exposes themselves in all their body and spirit, as it were, to be able to transform normative orders and thereby generate newer and fairer conditions of political belonging. In resisting, a subject thereby can be said to project their *agency* to be able to achieve certain political (or moral) aims.

The above set of remarks reminds us of the need to place the act of resistance within the larger matrix of how political subjectivity is constituted. On the one hand, the history of legal and political discourses, largely within the liberal tradition, has tried to create a framework for the political subject as the bearer of rights based on certain universal normative principles. However, acts of resistance bring forth another facet of human existence whose genealogy can be traced back to the multiple forms of exclusion that humans have been subjected to in the past. As Anupama Rao, the historian of caste puts it in her article "Violence and Humanity: Or, Vulnerability and Political Subjectivity", "The other [history] is a genealogy of the "human" that is inseparable from a global history of dehumanization, predicated on a paradoxical permeability between "violence" and "the human." (Rao, 2011, p. 626). The 'resistance subject' therefore is not to be understood merely as

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a subject who is aiming to have certain political goals achieved. Politically, to resist is to wish to create a space ensuring that the full scope of one's subjectivity is displayed.

What is the full scope of one's subjectivity that people who are resisting aiming for? When we look back at the history of protest movements, we find there are a family of goals that connect all these protests. There are some excellent works that have already covered in fine historical detail the motivations and trajectory of resistance movements within the political field. For example, there is the excellent edited volume, *Civil Resistance and Power Politics* (2011)by Timothy Garton Ash and Adam Roberts which looks at the history of civil resistance in the 20th century. There is also David West's *Social Movements in Global Politics* (2013). Erica Chenoweth's own influential book *Civil Resistance: What Everyone needs to know* (2021) looks at the effective power of civil resistance across many recent movements.

Given the fact of precarity, I will take it that resistance is a process of *recovering* one's subjectivity. In different ways, our political existence threatens our subjectivity, through ideological, technological and larger global forces. Resistance must then be placed within this attempt at recovering that subjectivity.

How do we further unpack the act of resistance?

The Virtue of Resistance as Disobedience

One of the most famous acts of disobedience against the state is Antigone's protest against Creon. In Sophocles' play, *Antigone*, Creon, as the king of Thebes, enters the stage as a champion of political order. He says that he is here to uphold public law and the common good. He is aware, he says, that a life can prosper only within a political state, in his case, the city-state Thebes. Creon who acts as the supreme guide of the city-state, says he will bury Eteocles, who died fighting for Thebes, in full honour. Eteocles is to be entombed and is to be crowned "with every rite that follows the noblest dead to their rest." However, he proclaims that Polynices ought not to be buried and no sepulchre built for him. Creon wants to be the exemplar of impartiality. He is ready to undergo the greatest personal sacrifice so he is not considered to be a king who puts private interests above public rule. Creon does everything to ensure that whomever takes up arms against the city will be dealt with in the same way, including his own nephew Polynices. There will be no special treatment.

In this play, we have a king who upholds the *polis*. However, Antigone, who upholds the law of the *oikos*, (which means home) thinks familial duty and fidelity is more important than political duties. She says that there are certain rules, which fall outside the purview of the political. These rules according to her are unwritten and divinely ordained by the gods. As much as Creon is willing to subject himself to personal sacrifice, by allowing his nephew to remain unburied, Antigone is also willing to endure any kind of hardship for personal law. She says she is happy to die before her time, childless and that she will welcome death as a gain. Her ultimate aim is to give her brother Polynices a burial according to the unwritten laws of the *oikos*. Antigone defies the public order and disobeys Creon, the king of Thebes, by completing the burial rituals for her brother. She can thus be seen as an exemplary protestor who thinks that the rights of the private sphere cannot be encroached upon.

Antigone enacted disobedience. The play showcases the dichotomy between the universal laws of *polis* versus the immutable laws of the *oikos*. In modern terms, we can say her performance of disobedience was grounded in her belief in the dictates of her conscience, unwritten but natural. These private rules overruled the norms of the state. We can find a similar view in one of the

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earliest modern thinkers of disobedience and resistance. Henry David Thoreau in his famous essay, "Resistance to Civil Government" (which later came to be referred to with the title "Civil Disobedience") argued that the individual's conscience ought to be the final arbiter of what is right and wrong. In fact, Thoreau didn't believe that governments and political sovereign power is a given. He argued that it is the duty of governments to give a justification for why it ought to exist as a framework for ordering people's lives.

Thoreau built his moral theory out of a certain metaphysical outlook. For Thoreau, everything in the world are fragments of the divine and each one is a microcosm of the whole. Each entity has a role to play in the world ordered by laws. Human subjects for Thoreau are uniquely positioned to be aware of all the laws that connect the large "chain of being," to use A.O. Lovejoy's phrase. Once we know these laws, then our own existence will be in harmony with the rest of the world and therefore the actions that flow out of that awareness cannot infringe on the rights of another. As he says "when an acorn and a chestnut fall side by side, one does not remain inert to make way for the other, but both obey their own laws ... till one, perchance, overshadows the other. If a plant cannot live according to its nature, it dies; and so a man." (Thoreau, 1996, p. 14).

Once we know what the ordered laws are, then one doesn't need a government since we will realize how everything that exists harmonizes with everything else. These universal cosmic laws can be revealed through the instrument of one's conscience. Because one's conscience is the final knower of how harmony is played out in the world, moral authority rests ultimately with the individual. This means that for Thoreau there is no tradition, social or political, which can override the moral conscience of an individual. For Thoreau, resistance is a form of asserting the supremacy of one's moral conscience.

In both *Antigone* and Thoreau, we find an opposition between obeying one's own *nomos* and the normative rules of the *polis*. Resistance in this case is directed outward against the *polis* as it tries to encroach on the inherent or natural laws of personal morality. In this case, recovery of subjectivity is gained through disobeying the rules of the *polis*. We find true freedom only when we resist obeying rules imposed from the outside. This dialectic of the inside and the outside is developed by Hegel in his discussion of Antigone. Hegel understands Antigone, in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as a clash between a law that stems from the family or the personal and the law that comes from the *polis* or the state. Hegel argues that Creon's understanding of the reach of law to be one-sided. Creon's argument is a product of a partial awareness of Self-Consciousness – self-consciousness with a capital S – as this historically-informed dialectical movement across different civilizations. Through Creon, the Hegelian Spirit is only aware of its rationalist grounding. The tragic aspect of the play *Antigone* for Hegel comes from Creon's insistence on Moralität as the universal impartial set of principles that ought to guide our lives and its irresolvability with morals grounded in the private sphere of Antigone, which Hegel calls *Sittlichkeit*.

For Hegel though this dialectic is supposed to resolve itself in a higher-order of Self-Consciousness where individual morals – the Sittlickheit – is not supposed to stand in opposition to the polis or the universal law. The sublation or *Aufhebung* that Hegel projects onto global history is through the manifestation of a form of sovereign power where the individual is included as a constitutive part of the political. In such a case, the personal comes to be 'reconciled' in a polis where the collective rules of the whole instantiates a form of social recognition (*Anerkennung*) where the private comes within the fold of the public.

Despite a revival of Hegel's idea that such a sublation can be achievement in modern political theory through the work of Axel Honneth, Charles Taylor among others, there has been a lot of

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doubt raised from post-colonial thinkers who argue the process of incorporation of cultural rights of individuals have perpetuated a form of colonial appropriation. For example, Glen Coulthard, in his work *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* has argued how "when delegated exchanges of recognition occur in real world contexts of domination the terms of accommodation usually end up being determined by and in the interests of the hegemonic partner in the relationship." (Coulthard, 2014, p. 17). In other words, what post-colonial thinkers like Glen Coulthard argue is that a politics of recognition has gone hand in hand with expropriation of land. For an interesting take on how land was expropriated, do read Robert Nichols' *Theft is Property! Dispossession and Critical Theory* (2020).

Given this critique, then we are left with the need for resistance as a form of disobedience against structures of the polis. It seems that Thoreau's idea that there is an inalienable call of the conscience which we need to take heed of as the ground of disobedience. Only the call of a conscience can help us recover our subjectivity, it would seem. However, there is a danger that if we posit a conscience as the internally and morally transparent guide, we may end up with a purely subjective sense of norms. As Michael Walzer argued in his book, *Obligations: Essays on Disobedience, War and Citizenship* (1970), the idea of a private conscience may not be able to create a robust sense of public responsibility.

Gandhi and Resistance

Thus we are back to the view that in today's world, we still need to resist if we want to avoid being dominated. But where do we place the act of disobedience within the matrix of subjectivity? We find an interesting answer to this question from Gandhi. Gandhi had a special word for the person who is a political activist and resistor of domination. He called such a person satyāgrahī (**सत्याग्रही**).

Satya is the Sanskrit word for truth. The root of the word *grahi* is *grah* (ग्रह) which can mean a bunch of things. If you go to the Monier-Williams dictionary which is the authoritative dictionary for Sanskrit, you will find that it has around twenty-eight meanings. Gandhi understood *grah* as persistence or effort. Thus, satyagrahi is someone who persists in truth. The normal derivation of the word satyagrahi to mean as the person who persists in truth is the following.

ग्रह् (*grah*) is the root of *grahi*. *Grah* or *agraha* means to hold forth or persist. From this we have the agent-stem *grahin* as someone who persists. The nominative singular of *grahin* is *grahi*. We have satyāgrahī as a compound in the nominative singular – someone who holds forth or persists in truth. This is the standard translation of satyagrahi. This is what Gandhi also interpreted it to be. However, I wish to give a different interpretation which I will show is valid here. This interpretation opens up a new way of looking at subjectivity and disobedience in Gandhi, especially in light of the observations made above.

Grah is also the root verb for *graha* which means house or home. In that case, *grahin* means a householder. Satyagrahi which is the nominative singular form of *satyagrahin* then means the householder of truth. Satyagrahi then can be understood as, what in Sanskrit is called a bahuvrihi compound/samasa. Satyagrahi then is parsed as satyaṁ gṛhaṁ yasya saḥ (सत्यं गृहं यस्य सः) which translates into "He, whose house is truth." When we do this semantic derivation, we get the meaning that a satyagrahi is a person whose house contains the truth. In this translation, the home is the abode of truth for Gandhi. When we place this within the context of *Antigone* and Thoreau, *satyagraha* as the act or state of resistance, for Gandhi, emerges from the *space* of the home. In this case, the truth of the home has clear affinities with the truth of *oikos*, in Antigone or the truth of

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the conscience of Thoreau. A *satyagrahi* then is someone who guards the inviolable boundaries of the home. He is the upholder of the rule of conscience.

However, a conscience as merely a moral instrument that is embedded in each of us is anathema to Gandhi. For Gandhi, conscience is not something that ought to be obeyed without question, like Thoreau would have it. To explain how Gandhi understood the duty of conscience we need to go to one of the verses that Gandhi quotes often comes from the Bhagavad Gita. Gita is a philosophical discussion that the God Krishna has with his protégé and warrior prince Arjuna as Arjuna readies for battle. The battle is a fraternal one where Arjuna and his 4 brothers are setting out to kill all his cousins and uncles in the battlefield. The history of their rivalry is chronicled in the Indian epic, the Mahabharata. It is a story of how one set of cousins, the Kauravas, cheat their cousins, who are called the Pandavas of their rightful patrimony and share of royal rule. Arjuna, a member of the Pandava clan (the good side) before he gets into battle develops qualms. He is saddened by his fate of having to go into battle with his own family members, people he grew up with. Krishna then gives Arjuna a lecture on the battle-field on what the duty of a warrior is and emotionally prepares him to undertake this war.

In that discussion between Krishna and Arjuna in the Gita, there is a verse from Chapter 3, Verse 35, which Gandhi quotes very often. The verse goes like this

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात्।
स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः॥ ३५ ॥

śreyān svadharmo viguṇaḥ para-dharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt
svadharme nidhanaṃ śreyaḥ para-dharmo bhayāvahaḥ

I translate this as

It is better to do one's own duty (svadharma) however imperfect, than to do another person's duty well.

It is better to die doing one's duty; Obeying another person's command is full of danger.

What is svardharma for Gandhi? Svadharma is not merely whatever your conscience tells you. The rules of the home that Gandhi was advocating for involves a *struggle*. It is a *struggle* towards resistance. To understand how svadharma is tied to resistance, we need to go back to its etymological roots. The standard translation of svadharma is the following. dhṛ is the root word of dharma which means to uphold. Thus dharma is translated as upholding something, like tradition or rules. Svadharma is then taken to be the upholding or the following of the rules of the self. Given this interpretation, svadharma lends comes close to the idea of autonomy as the rule by and of oneself. However, there is another translation possible which reveals the novelty and importance of the word svadharma for Gandhi. In Sanskrit, dhṛ also means *resisting*. If we take dhr as resisting, we can svadharma as the act of resistance. Svadharma is not an act of obeying one's conscience but actually comes as the ultimate act of resistance. The supreme goal here is the act of resistance to oneself even.

Gandhi, through his commentaries on the Gita, espouses a view of conscience which involves a form of resisting the other person's command. In the political case, Gandhi's ideas would fit well with both Thoreau's and Antigone's duty to obey one's personal morals. But Gandhi differs from the traditional idea of the conscience as a form of resistance to the *polis* because for Gandhi, resistance is not only against outside political forces but also against oneself. We can find that the

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word that Gandhi used a lot to denote the highest of (personal duty) svadharma – what he called *paramo dharma* is yajna. Yajna is a ritual act of sacrifice which was performed during vedic times. However, yajna has come to denote in Sanskrit any kind of sacrifice. Later commentors and philosophers within the South Asian pre-modern tradition understand yajna to mean any kind of self-sacrifice.

However, Gandhi, in his commentary on the Gita translates yajna sometimes as self-sacrifice but also as 'non-cooperation' or a kind of disobedience. After translating yajna as non-cooperation (or disobedience, which are cognate words), Gandhi says "There is no harm in our enlarging the meaning of the word *yajna*, even if the new meaning we attach to the term was never in Vyasa's mind."

For Gandhi the greatest yajna is to be non-cooperative to one's inner self, as it were. Yajna is about resisting the urge to follow one's desires and intentions even. For Gandhi, we as sentient beings are bound by actions which are both unintentional and intentional. According to the traditional reading of autonomy, to be free is to disobey the orders that come from outside oneself. As Kant's famous clarion-call *sapere aude* in his *Essay on the Enlightenment* testifies, the proper interpretation on autonomy is where we are authors of our own rules. That is, we become free in so far as the intentions that drive our actions come from inside ourselves. We obey the rules that are purely internal and not external. This is consistent with what even Antigone and Thoreau would want. However, Gandhi believed the opposite, who believed that one's greatest sacrifice is to give up or surrender even one's own 'internal' rules. Gandhi starts with the idea that a *satyagrahi* is the keeper of an inviolable internal rule of conscience. But unlike for the Enligtenment thinkers, Gandhi understood conscience to be an act of resisting everything including one's own inner desires.

That is why Gandhi in his commentary on the Gita held onto the idea of a *niṣkāmakarma*. *Niṣkāmakarma* means desireless action. The greatest sacrifice one can undertake is to disobey one's own desires. That didn't mean that we adopt quietism and become inactive. We engage in action without submitting ourselves to the motivations that regulate our actions. If we do that, we would be in a position to even deny the intentional structure that holds the self together. That is the highest form of sacrifice. If we can disobey the dictates of motivations even from within oneself, then we are onto succeeding in surrendering ourselves. In fact, when we ultimately disobey and resist ourselves, we deny even the sense of mine-ness (*mamatva*). It was because Gandhi was so particular about resisting the inner self, which included even the attachment one may feel to one's own self that Gandhi advocated for what he called *aparigraha*, which translates as giving up of everything including denying how one's intentions and desires can constitute one's self. All of this shows that for Gandhi, *disobedience* and resistance has to be total. Disobedience ought to be the constant stance of the individual. Conscience is grounded in disobedience for Gandhi.

Part II

Disobedience and Discipline

The idea of disobedience is central to Gandhi. Given this framework of understanding autonomy as grounded in an act of disobedience, then we are in a better position to re-interpret another concept, which is important for Gandhi and that is svarāj. Svarāj is usually translated as self-rule. But if disobedience is one's svadharma and svadharma is what constitutes one's svarāj, then clearly svarāj is to be enacted through disobedience and resistance.

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Disobedience for Gandhi, it must be remembered is not a random act like a tantrum that a kid throws when they don't get what they want. Nor is it merely a strategy deployed for pragmatic ends. Disobedience calls for *sādhanā*. Sādhanā translates loosely as *discipline*. Another word that Gandhi uses is *tapas*. Tapas comes from the root word *tapa* which means to cause heat or pain. Tapas is therefore the practice of austerities. Gandhi borrows the idea of *sādhanā* and *tapas* from Yoga philosophy. As Yogasutra says in the second sutra of chapter 1, Yoga is "Chittavrittinirodhah". That means Yoga aims to still or control the fluctuations of thoughts. Control is only possible by disobeying the rules that are prevalent and this disobedience has to be inculcated within oneself at all times.

Given the central role that tapas, as austerity, has played for Gandhi, it will be relevant here to dwell a bit more on what *tapas* entails for Gandhi. Tapas is generally translated as suffering or pain. It would be an inappropriate reading of Gandhi to say that Gandhi meant that people should merely inflict suffering or pain on themselves to attain a kind of political or spiritual salvation. It must be remembered that Gandhi used *tapas* in different ways. He meant by tapas a focus of energy, penance, austerity, self-purification and importantly as *discipline*. The idea of discipline comes close to what the Skeptics and Stoics understood by the practice of *askesis*. Askesis, from which the word ascetic can be etymologically derived, entailed for Stoics like Epictetus a training of the mind to master emotions. Pierre Hadot translates the word askesis as *discipline* as well in his works, *The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (1998), *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (1997), and *Qu'est que la philosophie antique* (1995). Through Hadot's work we understand that askesis, as a form of spiritual exercise can be found from Plato/Socrates onwards.

Gandhi's own ideas, though not very philosophically informed, did overlap with some of what has come to be understood as underlying the function of such spiritual exercises. There are many directions in which, within western philosophical history and moral practice, the idea of askesis has been taken further. To name another recent influential understanding of askesis and somatic practices we can point to Richard Shusterman's work. Shusterman, in his work *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics: A philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (2008) understand askesis as as a form of enhancing one's aesethetic appreciation. He draws from Foucault's later works to make his case.

Gandhi, on the other hand, who was influenced by Yoga philosophy, tried to have his own spin on how discipline should be directed. The overlap between Gandhi and the idea of askesis as we find it in Roman philosophy or even in the later Foucault is that the body is the site of meliorative self-fashioning. It is through the body that one can initiate any kind of moral transformation. However, Gandhi understood tapas as a form of austerity in so far as one cultivated the virtue of *ahiṃsā* or non-violence. Gandhi differed even from the Yogic tradition that he was influenced by and took tapasya to somatic self-fashioning not for greater aesthetic appreciation as Shusterman or Foucault would have it. Nor was it for being indifferent to material things as skeptics would have it. Gandhi said tapasya ought to be undertaken so as to inculcate the virtue of non-violence.

Gandhi says "non-violent training must be of a different kind…. I am of opinion that it used to be given in the past and is even now being given in a haphazard way. The various exercises of Hatha Yoga are in this direction. The physical training given by means of these imparts among other things physical health, strength, agility, and the capacity to bear heat and cold. …My reference to Hatha Yoga is meant only with a view to showing that this ancient type of nonviolent training still exists, though I know that there is room in it for improvement. I do not know either that the author of this science had any idea of mass non-violence…. The object of the various

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exercises was to strengthen and purify the body in order to secure control of the mind… as we are thinking of a non-violent army, that is to say of bringing into being a Satyagraha Sangh, we can but build anew accepting the old as our foundation." (1947, vol. 79, p. 272).

For Gandhi, it was important that austerity was undertaken to cultivate *ahiṃsā* which is the virtue of non-harming others. Ahiṃsā within the Indian tradition has a long history as well. Ahiṃsā , for example, for the Jains is a personal virtue. For Jainism, the normative force of ahiṃsā comes from their metaphysical principle that everything that exists has a life (*jiva*). Within Jainism we find the principle that one should not harm anything in the world since all are imbued with life. This definitely had an influence on Gandhi's philosophy. However, unlike Jains, Gandhi's ahiṃsā , was ultimately a political virtue. For Gandhi, one became disciplined so as to cultivate ahiṃsā not merely for self-fashioning as an end in itself but so as to open up a space for social and political cohabitation.

To understand how ahiṃsā is a socio-political virtue, it will be useful to briefly undertake the metaphysical underpinnings of Yoga philosophy, which influenced Gandhi a lot. Central to Yoga's conceptual edifice are two foundational concepts – Puruṣa and Prakṛti. Puruṣa is pure consciousness and Prakṛti is everything else in the world, include material things, our psychological selves, our memories, experiences etc. The world is built out of both Puruṣa and Prakṛti, according to the Yoga darśana or philosophy. Prakṛti has three different qualities (gunas), called sattva, rajas and tamas. Sattva is the principle of goodness. Rajas is the principle of movement and tamas is what is responsible for everything that is static and dark. Everything in the world, that is prakriti, is a mixture of these three qualities. There is movement and there is goodness and there is also stasis. According to Yoga philosophy, we are born into the world conditioned by the forces of prakriti to see the created world as we do. We ascribe to even to ourselves the qualities that Prakṛti has. But the ultimate goal is to disassociate our natural tendency to think that pure consciousness (Puruṣa) is also conditioned by prakriti. For Yoga philosophy, true freedom or *kaivalya* as they call it is possible only when we realize that as subjects we are not part of Prakṛti but a part or attribute of pure consciousness (Puruṣa).

Now it is my conjecture that Gandhi took on this dual aspect of reality on board. But Gandhi understood Puruṣa not as pure consciousness but a kind of socio-political consciousness. For Gandhi, freedom was not about transcendence, as it would be the case for Yoga philosophy. Freedom for Gandhi was very much in the *hic et nunc*, within the socio-political sphere. Given Gandhi's deep political engagement, it would be more apt to interpret Gandhi as taking on the Yogic principle (which is derived from Samkhya philosophy) of Puruṣa to mean freedom within the political sphere. If we take this line of interpretation, then we can see that discipline or sādhanā for Gandhi acquires a new aim and meaning. The purpose of discipline for Gandhi, though embodied through one's acts of self-sacrifice, is to enable each individual to be aligned as it were, or to ready themselves, to become a more integrated part of the *polis*.

Though Gandhi never put it in these terms, we find there is evidence of this through his discussion of the political problem of the need to resolve moral and cultural plurality. Gandhi deployed the concept of *satyagraha* as the attainment of truth within the moral sphere. Gandhi was careful to gloss the idea of violence as not only physical violence but also moral violence. Violence generally can be seen in the political sphere when people take up morally antagonistic positions grounded from a position of assumed epistemic privilege. People, especially in the modern world can undertake to criticize others assuming that their own personal moral outlook is the right one. It is

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here that law is supposed to adjudicate. The authority of law within a society emerges in its function to enable collective action despite pluralism. In other words, we can think of the *raison d'etre* of law as providing a framework for coordinated action within a pluralistic moral reality. Within legal theory, it is argued that one can create such a normative framework whereby each subject enjoins the right to be free.

However, Gandhi thought that law by itself can't resolve disputes. To avoid violence that comes through moral disagreement, one should cultivate *ahiṃsā* in oneself. Ultimately, even if law is able to resolve moral disputes, there may still be rancour. Law can, Gandhi thought, only ensure harmony, as the absence of violence, in the public sphere. Gandhi's aim was to institute interpersonal harmony where people are able to live with differences without rancour. Importantly, Gandhi thought of the political space as a lab or an *agora,* if you will, where people worked together to become morally better. For Gandhi, political existence was not possible without a kind of solidarity aimed towards moral transformation. In societies governed by law, people 'tolerate' differences without necessarily understanding or forming a bond with the other. Thus it was possible as Gandhi criticized the West, that there could be all the trappings of civilization, like material progress and technological advancement while at the same time greed and avarice.

That is why Gandhi talked about ahiṃsā and satya together. Satya within the polis for Gandhi was inextricably linked with ahiṃsā . Here, I will take up an interesting interpretation by Akeel Bilgrami in his book *Secularism: Identity and Enchantment* (2014) where he discusses Gandhi's idea of non-violence and truth. Bilgrami shows for Gandhi, non-violence is not only a personal virtue but a political one. "The "satyagrahi" or non-violent activist has to show a certain kind of selfrestraint, in which it was not enough simply not to commit violence. It is equally important not to bear hostility to others or even to criticize them; it is only required that one not follow these others, if conscience doesn't permit it. To show hostility and contempt, to speak or even to think negatively and critically, would be to give in to the spiritual flaws that underlie violence, to have the wrong conception of moral judgment." (Bilgrami, 2014, p. 107).

The kind of humility that Gandhi, Bilgrami argues, advocated for involved non-violent restraint in the political space. For Gandhi, moral engagement was about decoupling the inferential connection we make between moral judgments and moral criticism. When we judge something to be morally incorrect, say "X is bad or is morally incorrect" we tend to make a universal rule, which is that "no-one ought to do X." Based on this universal rule, we criticize others for having deviated from this rule. We can think of this as the Kantian inheritance of modern moral stances. But what Gandhi said that moral judgments about what is right and wrong doesn't entail that we need to be critical of others through making judgments. For Gandhi, we all of us are inherently moral subjects and therefore we are bound to morally judge actions and people. But there are different ways of resisting immorality other than adopting cognitive attitudes which involve categorical statements.

It is important that the socio-political space that we all occupy we resist immorality. But Gandhi said that we don't criticize the other by adopting merely a cognitive moral stance or attitude. This would only create a divide between yourself and the person you are criticizing. It is this divide or *diremption* as Habermas would call it between oneself and the other which can lead to misunderstanding and a form of atomistic social living. The *satyagrahi* takes on the moral burden of the other person who is committing the moral wrong. By taking on the burden of the other person, the *satyagrahi* is now linked inextricably with the other who is now forced to take cognizance of someone else's suffering for their own wrong-doing. In such a scenario, the satyagrahi has succeeded in making the other person reflect on their action and its consequences

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for the larger community. When the satyagrahi adopts a disciplined form of resistance, through self-sacrifice, he or she becomes a moral exemplar.

There is humility in the satyagrahi's action because she is not saying "you did this wrong". She is not even directing any explicit criticism at the other person. She is showcasing humility by resisting immorality by expressing her disagreement not outwards but inwards, as it were. The satyagrahi in some sense resists and criticizes another person's moral wrong-doing through inflicting on themselves the burden of the blame and guilt as well as standing forth as an example of morally upright behaviour. The aim of sādhanā and *tapas* for Gandhi was to be a moral example for other within a socio-political setting. Such kinds of disciplined action creates a moral bond between the master and the slave because the evil master now has to take cognizance of the moral superiority of the satyagrahi who may be politically or socially a slave.

Part III

Compassion

In the earlier section, I had presented how for Gandhi discipline was aimed towards moral education of the other. Moral education was undertaken through humility and discipline. A satyagrahi understood discipline so as to engage in a form of moral criticism or resistance, if you like, so as to be able to create a stronger solidaristic bond with the other within the political sphere. Now, I am going to touch upon the third virtue which crowns the work of Gandhi which is *compassion*.

The word that Gandhi uses to talk about compassion is *daya*. Daya comes from the root word *day* which means to pity. We can find the word daya as a significant moral marker of Rama, the hero of the Ramayana who is portrayed as the avatar or incarnation of Visnu. For Gandhi, as it has been documented well, the Ramayana and the worship of Rama was an important aspect of his personal and moral life. Ramayana has had many versions. The word *daya* as an attribute of Rama is used mainly in Tulsi's Ramacaritmanas which is a book published in 1576 by Tulsidas. It is this Ramayana or retelling of that story that was most influential in Gandhi's intellectual and political development. As Gandhi has mentioned in his autobiography that Ramacaritmanas is the greatest book in all devotional literature.

We can mention briefly the context for the appearance of Ramacaritamanas. Though as the literary critic AK Ramanujan has said that there are innumerable Ramayanas (he mentioned a number 300) some have had more influence in Indian intellectual and religious history than others. It is also important that the time in which Ramacaritmanas came to the public domain was a moment of cultural and political ferment in India. As Sheldon Pollock has shown in his influential book *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, Power in Premodern India* (2006), there was a vernacular boom in India in the beginning of the second millennium. This increase in the usage and study of local languages can partly be attributed to how political patronage became decentralized and there were more independent smaller kingdoms. A parallel can be drawn to Europe and the vernacular traditions that flourished from the 12th century CE onwards. We know that in Europe there was suddenly, after the 12th century, a growth of universities, a kind of subsidence of centralized imperial power. Though Pollock invites such a parallel between medieval Europe and pre-modern India, we should be careful to ensure that we don't take the comparison to unhealthy lengths.

It is in this climate of linguistic diversity that we can play Tulsi's Ramacaritmanas as a 'translation' if you will in Awadh, a language cognate to Hindi and is part of the larger Indo-European family

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of languages. Tulsi who reimagines Ramayana re-inscribes Rama as a king who is compassionate or *dayalu* in Awadhi which means full of compassion or pity. It is this virtue of Rama, as interpreted by Tulsi, that Gandhi thinks is the one most worthy of emulation. In the Hind Swaraj, Gandhi translates daya as pity or love. But compassion is also an equally legitimate translation. How does compassion work for Gandhi?

To answer this question, we have to go back to how Gandhi understood *satya* or truth. As we saw a satyagrahi who is an upholder or searcher of truth looks for truth not as a constative product of epistemological or moral reasoning. Truth for Gandhi was always moral truth. Gandhi was very much aware of the existence of moral pluralism. There are different kinds of truths and some are right from one perspective and some are right from another perspective. Gandhi understood that moral theory can never resolve the problem of finding a universal perspective from which we can adjudicate the right moral stance. It is impossible to know *the* moral truth, even if such a truth existed since we don't have God's perspective. That is why the truth-seeker, the satyagrahi, is someone who ought to look for moral truth in a social context *with* the other. Gandhi believed that one can't seek truth merely from a theoretical perspective or from a solipsistic standpoint. Truth was always interpersonal and emerged out of interactions with the other. Truth was not a judgment one made but was something that one enacted and embodied through being with the other. For Gandhi one was always trying to be a moral exemplar by being open to taking on the blame of others.

We have seen how a satyagrahi is always enmeshed in the sociopolitical arena trying to be a moral exemplar to others. Exemplarity is not born out of trying to merely achieve some kind of excellence. This would go against Gandhi's principle of humility. One tried to achieve exemplarity so as to elevate oneself and the other to a greater moral plane. In such a situation, exemplarity is born out of compassion and not an urge to be morally excellent. Compassion in Gandhi's case is not merely an affective attitude. Gandhi was aware that compassion as an emotion can be limited given situational constraints. There are limitations to how much compassion can be emotionally instantiated. To overcome these limitations, Gandhi advocated that we take compassion to be born out of a love for the other. The love in this case is not romantic love. We can think of the love here as the love towards moral betterment. Again, we shouldn't think of moral betterment as merely an ideal that we should strive for. We have compassion towards the other in so far as we want a better society in which we take on the personal responsibility of moral education of everyone we meet.

Compassion is a process of cultivating togetherness and solidarity, for Gandhi. Compassion for Gandhi is the ultimate aim of truth. Once we attain truth in the moral sphere, then all of us are directly synchronized, as it were, with each other and act as the barometer of moral excellence. Solidaristic feelings that may emerge out of such a union is what grounds compassion for Gandhi. Compassion is a form of creating a space for the other by taking on the burden of their wrong-doing. We don't punish the other but open up a space for moral reckoning from the other. Once that happens, then compassion is born.

Conclusion

As part of my concluding remarks, let me present how for Gandhi the three virtues are tied together. We started with disobedience. Though Gandhi practiced disobedience against the British, Gandhi argued that disobedience or resistance is not merely outward looking. It is not to be engaged in merely in the public arena. Each of us should observe resistance within ourselves. Resistance to be successful in the political sphere outside has to have a correlated in each person's

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heart. The second virtue was discipline. Discipline was not only a modality of undertaking resistance for Gandhi. Being disciplined in the sense of sadhana for Gandhi led to a truly solidaristic sphere. Only by being disciplined or undertaking tapas, could one be a true exemplar for others. Ultimately, we saw that a community of exemplars would ground compassion. Compassion for Gandhi which was synonymous with self-less love cannot be greater in a community where the other person is even willing to give their life for you.

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