CHAPTER – III

THE STRUCTURE OF GANDHIAN ORDER

Man's fascination with nature is as old as his own appearance on this earth. Nature is man's habitat. It is also the source of his sustenance. Without the provisions supplied by nature, man's survival would be impossible. But above all, nature also constitutes perhaps the only source from which man derives his notion of order. But the meanings we give to nature, of the attributes we discover in it have not remained fixed through the ages. Even a cursory reading of R.C. Collingwood's book, The Idea of Nature, would argue against the fixed "nature", so to say, of nature. Even if nature itself has remained unchanged in its essentials despite changes in its exterior, our own conception of nature has periodically changed rather radically. And so has our idea of order.

Our concern with order and nature as its source is not inexplicable. Given the diversity of the phenomenal world as well as the extreme heterogeneity of orientation, attitudes and purposes of human beings and given the self-aggrandizing nature of man, interaction among men, between man and society and man and nature cannot be left to the wayward movement of individual desires. The consequence of giving a free rein to man in determining his purpose and deciding upon the ways and means of realizing it all by himself is disorder. This is reflected in what is known, in the West, as the state of nature (especially the Hobbesian concept of it) and, our own tradition, as Matsyanyaya. And since self-aggrandizement leads to anarchy

2 Matsyanyaya denotes big fish eating small fish.
and anarchy threatens to extinguish the light of culture and snap the thread of life, order emerges as a necessary condition for preserving life and sustaining constructive employment of human creativity.

It is in this context that nature constitutes the source which profoundly influences our thinking about order and ascertaining its content. The reason is that the model of order cannot be located either in the individual as a self-sufficient entity or in the mankind as an abstraction or as an aggregation of individuals. To ground the notion of order either in man or Man, whether in the organic or the atomistic sense, is to subject order to the whim and caprice of changes associated with time and space. And if order is as fragile and fickle as things of this phenomenal world or as man-made objects, it would fail in performing the role expected of it. The concept of order must, therefore, transcend the varieties and vagaries of time and space and must be grounded in something larger and more durable than man in his particular and universal aspects. This something is nothing else than nature.

Nature thus becomes the model of order in the human world. But nature itself has been viewed and defined in different ways. We need not concern ourselves here with the various ways in which nature has been viewed and defined over the ages. What is sufficient for our purposes is the polar conception of nature which has a great bearing on the notion of order both as an ideal to be attained or as a category of description of the real world. There is, first, the conception of nature which ascribes order in it not to nature itself but to something beyond it; something that transcends nature, to be sure, but nonetheless is the source of the multiplicity of names and forms in nature as a process of becoming. It is held that the process of becoming itself is inconceivable without a firm
ground of being as the ultimate source of order in nature.³

In contradistinction to this, nature is supposed to be self-sufficient and self-complete. It is supposed not to depend for its working on something distinct from and beyond itself and is completely explicable in terms of cause and effect. If nature is self-subsistent, it must be said to be governed by something within itself and therefore self-regulatory. The image of a machine comes readily to mind. Note for example, what Hume says about it through Cleanthes in Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion:

“Look around the world: Contemplate the whole and every part of it. You will find it to be nothing but one great machine. Subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions, to a degree beyond human senses and faculties can trace and explain. All these various machines, and even their most minute parts, are adjusted to each other with an accuracy, which ravishes into admiration all men, who have ever contemplated them. The curious adopting of means to ends, throughout all nature, resembles exactly, though it must exceed, the production of human intelligence.”⁴

In the Humane perspective, there is, at least, the recognition of a creator, even if he is nothing more than an engineer of the clockwork universe. Later on, however, the very idea of the creator is replaced by entities (particles, atoms, etc.), which obeying the law of energy, constitute the warp and woof of creation and, in their interaction, maintain equilibrium in nature.

These polar views of nature yield differential conceptions of order. If we consider nature not as a self-subsistent entity but governed by something beyond it, the significance and implication of the concept of order grounded in this understanding of nature is quite different from that derived from nature conceived as a self-subsistent entity. On the former view, man is supposed to be an integral part of a larger, cosmic order. To the extent that man participates in this order by attuning himself to the ground of being, he is endowed with humanity and, by ordering his own soul, contributes meaningfully to the order of society.\(^5\) If, on the other hand, if it is self-subsistent nature that provides the model of order, order has to be artificially created and maintained albeit with great difficulty.

Given a variety of conceptions of order, due not only to the difference in perspectives on nature but also to differences within a particular perspective, two questions assume importance? What precisely is Gandhi’s concept of order? In what way is his conception more meritorious than other conceptions? The point of departure for seeking answers to these questions, as a step towards understanding Gandhi’s concept of order, is the modern conception of order. This is by no means arbitrary. Gandhi himself selected to make the modern conception of order as his own point of departure. After discussing the modern conception of order, we will then focus on what Eric Voegelin calls “anthropological” paradigm of order, i.e. Platonic conception of order, for sharply etching out Gandhi’s conception of order.

In modern perspective, order in the natural universes is the model of order in the social universe. However, the social universe has yet to attain completeness that order in the natural universe seems to exhibit. In the words of Francis Edgeworth:

'Mecanique sociale' may one day take her place along with 'macanique celeste' throned each upon the double-sided height of one maximum principle, the supreme pinnacle of moral as of physical sciences. As the movements of each particle, constrained or loose, in a material cosmos are continually subordinated to one maximum sum-total of accumulated energy, so the movements of each soul, whether selfishly isolated or linked sympathetically, may continually be realizing the maximum energy of pleasure, the divine love of the universe.6

But what is meant by the movement of the soul? By the movement of the soul is not meant the yearning of the soul for God or some ultimate entity, the ultimate source of this phenomenal world. It is a movement that is directed towards realizing felicity. As Hobbes noted long ago, felicity does not consist in any repose of a satisfied mind. Since there is no ultimate aim or the greatest good, it only signifies satisfaction of one desire after another.7 The rejection of an ultimate aim are sumnum bonum signifies the rejection of the traditional two-tiered view of the good life. According to this view, the good life consists primarily in some higher activity distinct from the fulfilment of ordinary life needs involved with the production and reproduction of life.8 It does not mean that meeting these needs is considered avoidable or evil; their satisfaction far from being considered unavoidable is treated as infrastructural to a distinct activity that gives life its higher significance. A life lacking a higher purpose and absorbed in meeting ordinary life needs is considered

truncated and deprived.\textsuperscript{9} The rejection of a higher purpose has, however, brought the fulfillment of ordinary life needs to the centre of man's existence.

The rejection of higher life purpose signifies that the fulfillment of ordinary life needs has now become the focal point of man's existence. It also means that human beings emerge as self-defining subjects who discover their purposes in themselves. Nature becomes internalized in the modern period. As Taylor notes: "On this view, the free subject becomes someone who follows an internal purpose and who owes no \textit{a priori} allegiance to a pre-existing order but only to structures that one has created by one's consent.\textsuperscript{10}

Freedom is now no more defined as certain relation to a whole, but as the enjoyment of "natural liberty" in state of nature. The central significance of this perspective is the emergence of man as an "economic man"\textsuperscript{11} As an economic man, the individual must turn outward, exert himself fully in meeting his needs because on this depends his felicity and, more importantly, his own development. But placing the fulfilment of needs at the centre of man's existence makes needs, as Wolin points out, endless in two important senses: One, needs get detached from higher life purposes and become their one ends and, two, they proliferate endlessly.\textsuperscript{12} As a consequence of this, technologically induced and sustained economic growth becomes inevitable. Individuals become entrepreneurs; they serve the interest of all by serving their own ends. In this perspective,

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\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
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continued transformation manipulation of nature is *sine qua non* for satisfying ever proliferating needs.

The process of needs satisfaction is considered essential not only for ensuring felicity but also for man's self-development and civilizational progress. It is in the process of need satisfaction that the individual, it is claimed, acquires distinctive personality, involving the creative use of man's faculties in transforming mature and creating social institutions as well as the development of faculties themselves. Existing in potential, these faculties are actualized, refined, and expanded in the process of self-making of man.\(^\text{13}\) It is true that the search for felicity promotes jealousy and discord. However, as Kant asserts, discord itself must be valued because without it "all the excellent capacities implanted in mankind would slumber eternally undeveloped."\(^\text{14}\)

In the modern perspective, then, it is the movements of desire that constitute the most dynamic element of the social universe. A particular pattern of interaction among these movements producing an equilibrium is characterized as order. What is natural to man is his desires and their satisfaction. There is, it is claimed, no higher stratum of activity than this. The fulfillment of desires is not only natural, it is also rational since the happiness of the individual, his development and social progress — all depend on it. On this view, what is striking about persons is not their quest for self-realization in the traditional sense, but their "ability to conceive different possibilities, to calculate how to get them, to choose

\(^{13}\) This is what is reflected, in various ways, in the writings of Vico, Hegel and Marx.

between them, I thus to plan their lives".\footnote{Taylor, Charles. Social Theory as Practice (Delhi: Oxford University Press), 1983, p. 55.} Obviously, these ends are beyond the jurisdiction of reason; what rationality signifies, in this perspective, is the meeting of needs in a sober, disciplined, clairvoyant, and rational way. Rationality no more refers to a vision of true order of things; it does not signify "an active principle of the soul that allows us to rise above the particularities or contingencies of our experience and 'participate' in the structure of the cosmos."\footnote{Smith, S. B., “Hegelianism and Three Crises of Rationality”, Social Research, Vol. 56, 1989, p. 943.} Indeed, reason turns out, in this perspective, to be the hand-maiden of appetites signifying instrumental, prudential, calculative reasoning.

If man's ends are exempt from rational control, how does order in the social universe emerge and get maintained? As was pointed out earlier, the notion of order is derived from the natural science principle of equilibrium which provides both the mode of reality construction and a framework of action. It signifies "stability within a system composed of a number of autonomous forces. Whenever the equilibrium is disturbed either by an outside force or by change in one or the other elements, composing the system, the system shows a tendency to re-establish either the original or a new equilibrium.\footnote{Morgenthau Hans, Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace (New York: Alfred A Knopf), 1964, p. 168.} Three things are immediately noticeable. First, individual purposes are given and cannot be put before the bar of reason or of society. Second, pluralism is an essential characteristic of the social universe and its violation is tantamount to the extinction of the social universe itself. And, lastly, the maintenance of order is not the responsibility of the individual but the charge of an impersonal, "natural" mechanism which adjusts claims of individuals, disburses rewards...
and punishment and maintains order." On this view, instead of seeing nature as expressing a meaningful order, one which has to be accounted for in terms of ideas, we see it as a set of interlocking elements whose relations can be explained in terms of efficient causation. The order (as against disorder) in things does not consist in their embodying ideas, but rather in their meshing without conflict and distortion. Applied to human realm, this means that man comes to realise natural order when the company of desiring subjects comes to achieve full satisfaction (happiness), each compatibly with all others. The perfect harmony of desires is the goal which nature and reason prescribe to man.

This conception of order brings readily to mind Mandeville's dictum of private vices leading to public benefit. What is distinctive about this conception of order is the assumption that there is a natural harmony of interest. Even if the pursuit of self-interest by individuals and corporations tends to disturb social equilibrium, the Invisible Hand, referred to by Adam Smith, intervenes and sets things right. Needless to say that such a conception of order not only implies a very limited role for the state. It also visualizes a society where instrumental rationality and its correlate, private morality, would be sufficient unto themselves for maintaining order. Morality, either as motivation or control over action, is considered redundant in this perspective. However, in the lack of any substantive criterion for making a distinction between what is good for one and what is good for all, competition for scarce societal resources frequently leads to social conflict and disorder.

With interest replacing higher purpose in life, politics assumes a dual

role. It becomes the medium through which conflicts generated by the single-minded pursuit of self interest by individuals and groups are waged. In this role politics becomes a process of reciprocal resistance. But once conflict assumes threatening proportions and order is endangered, it becomes the instrument of resolving conflicts. This is so because power to retain what one has and gain what one wants constitute an important and strategic resource for ensuring felicity. When aggressive pursuit of self-interest disrupts social equilibrium, politics as a means of restoring or installing equilibrium initiates the process of bargaining to arrive at a compromise of limited and usually material prizes. Since compromises yield only partial satisfaction to the contestants and stimulate others to make demands on the political system, pacification and mediation of conflicts becomes a continuous task. Order, therefore, cannot be a set pattern, something that can be a priori determined; it is "something akin to a precarious equilibrium, a condition that demands a willingness to accept partial solutions."20 On this view, the conception of order gets divorced from the conception of right order and is reduced to the notion of equilibrium. But equilibrium tends to be frequently disturbed because of uncoordinated and uncoordinatable movements of desire. Hence, a new equilibrium must be installed which proves to be only tentative. The process goes on without any idea of the ultimate destination.

It is this concept of order and the resultant institutional arrangement that Gandhi condemns in *Hind Swaraj*. For him, modern civilization, based as it is on this world view, is like a *Upas* tree which provides shade against the sun, to be sure; however, no life survives within the reach of its poisonous emissions. Gandhi calls modern civilization satanic because it celebrates Mammon worship and lets loose life-

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corroding competition since the propelling force of this civilization is "the hunger for wealth and the greedy pursuit of worldly pleasures". When the pursuit of self-interest occupies the centre stage of man's life, "the vision of things above" loses its relevance rendering the search for spirituality and morality irrelevant too. Since the need to satisfy one desire after another does away with the criterion of contentment, the aggressive expression of possessiveness breeds exploitation, domination, inequality and oppression. As a result, violence becomes endemic and pervades almost all areas of human existence. That is why Gandhi describes modern civilization as based on the principles of "might is right" and "the survival of the fittest". Such a civilization, based as it is on violence, "does not respect all life and in its progress onward, it has not hesitated to resort to wholesale destruction of even human life."

Gandhi condemns modern civilization on the ground that it installs bodily comfort on the highest pedestal ignoring the claim of the soul. It does not mean that Gandhi totally rejects the claim of the body. He only rejects what he calls voluptuousness. As he says: A certain degree of physical harmony and comfort is necessary but above a certain level it becomes a hindrance instead of help. Therefore, the ideal of creating an unlimited number of wants and satisfying them seems to be a delusion and snare. The satisfaction of one's physical needs, even the intellectual needs of one's narrow self must meet at a certain point a dead stop, before it degenerates into physical and intellectual voluptuousness.

Gandhi is, however, convinced that, in the quest for material well-

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22 Ibid., XXIII, pp. 243-44.
23 Ibid., LXIII, p. 241.
being, modern civilization has definitely made voluptuosness the central tenet of human existence and a universal virtue. As a consequence, it "takes note neither of morality nor of religion."24 The ensuing disorder, both in the soul of the individual and in the social universe, can be controlled and eliminated only by "remaining passive about worldly pursuits and active about godly pursuits."25 But godly pursuit becomes possible only when the soul becomes attuned to the divine ground of being. It is this attunement with god that makes it possible to establish order in the soul which, in turn, becomes the ground of order in society.26

It is very easy to dismiss this truth as an obscurantist's dogma or a metaphysician's legerdemain. But the fact is that, when appetites and desires are given a free play and are allowed to take hold of the soul and direct the course of human action, disorder sets in the soul and from there it spreads on to the society. The disorder of society is a disease in the psyche of its members. And when society becomes diseased, it begins destroying man's soul.27 The resultant vicious circle can be broken only when the soul sets on a course of resisting society. But what would be the term of reference, so to say, of this resistance for overcoming and possibly eradicating disorder? Modern world view recognizes only one method, that is, to go on breaking through the habitual context of thinking and acting, the routinized collective institutions and preconceptions,28 for making society more compatible with man's purpose. But since man himself remains immune to control and

regulation either from within or without, no amount of change in the external environment succeeds in obliterating disorder or stemming it once it raises its ugly head.

Individual qua natural individual as the source of order only produces a hypertrophied state which, by acquiring evermore monopolies over different areas of social life, grows more demanding and oppressive day-by-day. Society, as a mechanical aggregation of self-defining subjects, has, again, proved to be a false source of order. It is, therefore, necessary to locate the source of order in something that fulfills three conditions. It must be (a) imperishable, that is, it exists even after the body has perished: (b) capable of forging a viable link between the phenomenal world and its substratum; and (c) able to rule over and discipline the unruly mob of appetites and desires. If the soul is as perishable as the body and does not survive beyond its carrier, then the philosophy of "eat, drink and be merry" becomes incontrovertible and social disorder becomes inevitable.

Similarly, if there is nothing beyond the phenomenal world or if there is something beyond the phenomenal world but cannot be related with it, then, again, mind becomes the battle-ground of contending appetites and desires creating disorder in the soul. And, then, Freud alone becomes a true philosopher and messiah. There is, then, no option but to reconcile ourselves with his contention that “our mind is not peacefully self contained unity. It is rather to be compared to a modern state in which a mob, eager for enjoyment and destruction, has to be held down forcibly by a prudent superior class”. But what is or can be this superior class which can rule over the unruly mob of desires? The superego in the

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29 This is what Charvak advocated as the true philosophy of life more than two thousand years ago.

Freudian schema is itself the source of oppression and the ego is, like the present day supervisor in a factory, harassed by both the superego and the id. And in the lack of a substantive concept of a person, the Freudian reality principle (that is, the need to adapt to the changing environment) proves to be a chimera. The superior class must, therefore, be the soul which, when attuned to the substratum of reality, develops the capacity to control and sublimate the mob of appetites and desires. Thus attunement of the soul to the divine ground of being as the source of order is not an argument that is an obscurantist's dogma. Nor it is an expression of a pragmatic necessity or a matter of expediency. The urge for self-realization through self-knowledge is as integrally human as the quenching of thirst. To ignore it is to encourage appetites and desires to claim rulership of the soul. In other words, the urge to look beyond one's own existence is as deep as any other urge.

But how does the soul get attuned to the divine ground of being and how does this attunement constitute the basis of order? When the soul's resistance to its destruction by society takes the form of a spiritual search, does it simply express itself in the form of conceptual understanding, as Plato claims, or something more is involved? For Plato, philosophy symbolizes the resistance of the soul to its destruction by society and constitutes the source of knowledge — a knowledge that yields the insight of seeing one in many and realizing the essential unity of the phenomenal world. But philosophy is no philodoxos (love of opinion). The realization of the oneness in many is grounded not in nomos (changing opinion or convention) but in physis (firm, invariant knowledge, the form or the idea). That is, knowledge as wisdom can be had only by transcending the

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multiplicity of changing forms and apprehending the idea behind them. Transition from becoming to being as the substratum of reality is the necessary condition of knowledge since the babble of the many induces the abortion of reason. True knowledge, however, cannot be gained either by accumulating discrete facts or splitting things into their components and dividing them into classes. Cognition of ideas, through Socratic techne logon, yields true knowledge of the Real which "belongs exclusively to the essence of things presented in the idea and to all else, in proportion only as it participates in the idea." In this process, that is, in the contest of relative, particular truths, thought emerges, "by continued analysis, from conditioned to unconditioned, from the phenomenon to the idea, from particular ideas to the highest and most universal."

For Plato, Intelligence or the Idea given definite form to erratic matter. Similarly, intelligence, the focus of the idea and the attribute of the soul, keeps in check the exuberance and aberrations of the spirit and appetites. To accept the rulership of wisdom over soul by attuning it to the idea is to establish order in the soul. The order of the soul then gets manifested in the order of society in as much as, for Plato, polis is nothing else than man writ large. There is a homology between the structure of man's soul and that of the polis. Like man's soul, the polis, too, exhibits a tripartite division of capacities and functions. Similar to man, again, these capacities and functions need to be brought under the rulership of intelligence personified by the philosopher king who, because he has a clear vision of the Idea and becomes holy and just and wise, can rule wisely. But to rule wisely

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33 Phaedrus, III, p. 430.
34 Plato, Republic, op. cit., p. XLVI.
35 Ibid., p. 11.
36 Ibid., p. 60.
37 Theaetetus, IV, p. 337.
does not so much mean an authoritarian rule by a person, as Karl R. Popper implies, as devising an institutional order in which appetites and spirit have their proper place and conduce to individual wellbeing and collective good when controlled and informed by reason.

It need not be pointed out that, for Plato as for Gandhi, man's highest ideal is self-knowledge. However, a true philosopher fixes, in Platonic perspective, his mind "upon true being" and is ever ready to "escape to the dwelling of the God". Also, not all can become philosophers because of the fixity of their nature. And yet in order to make society safe for the philosopher and to install justice as the ground of order, a philosopher-king must undertake the responsibility of moulding the polis in the cast of the idea. Convinced of the impossibility of everybody becoming a philosopher, Plato is forced to offer only a second best solution in which politics plays a central role. Plato treats matter and form as substantively different and separate. Form can only impose some order on matter; it cannot fully control its aberration. Thus matter turns out to be a limiting condition trying the patience of the philosopher-king and forcing him on occasions to transform knowledge as wisdom into knowledge as power. Since different constituents of the polis are unable by themselves to have a clear insight into the structure of the polis or to transcend their narrow self-interest, the resolution of the conflict between the idion (private) and the koinon (the public) must depend not on knowledge but on power pushing politics to the centre stage of human existence and endowing it with divine potency.

Plato rightly sees the need of turning around (periagoge) of the soul from its immersion in materiality, from the ignorance to the truth of God;

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from opinion about uncertainly wavering things to knowledge of being, and from multifarious activity to the justice of tending to one's proper sphere of action. It is this turning around that establishes the right order in the soul which, in turn, provides a firm basis for order in society. However, for various reasons, some of them alluded to earlier, Plato does not fully succeed in offering a firm basis of order.

Gandhi, like Plato, favours order to rest on harmony which must depend for its sustenance on morality rather than on external sanctions. But since the hold of morality varies from person to person, Gandhi recognizes the importance of regnum. But drawing heavily on traditional Indian thinking, he treats regnum as nothing more than an instrument of establishing and supporting the rule of Dharma. Treating society as a moral order, he puts emphasis on the necessity of preserving and upholding the network of interdependency through cooperation of individuals occupying various stations in life. Gandhi, however, looks with disfavour at the concentration of power in the hand of a person even if he is a philosopher-king. He believes in individual self-development that gets thwarted by the externalization of man caught in the maelstrom of his own passions. Development of true self constitutes, for Gandhi, the bed-rock of morality and the source of the awareness of treating society as Yajna.

Order, for Gandhi as for Plato, emanates from the soul's attunement to the divine ground of being. For Gandhi, it is the interior of man that is most important. In his words:

In the West, when they talk of the amelioration of the lot of the masses, they talk of raising the standard of life ... (But) how can an outsider raise the standard when the standard is within everyone of us? We can only strive to increase man's opportunities of realizing and fulfilling his
But "getting nearer to God" depends not on the acquisition of information but on the transformation of the self. And self-transformation is a continuous process of seeking perfection which is consequent upon the dawning of the realization that man is a part of the divine even though it is veiled by ignorance. The uncovering of the veil - of ignorance and allowing the divine in us to grow, shine forth and pervade our being signifies more than the use of reason; it requires faith which sanctifies reason itself and constitutes a kind of sixth sense which works in cases which are beyond the purview of Reason. The exploration of the divine in us thus requires both reason and faith. This divine, as the Shruts emphasise, dwells in all bodies, i.e. pura; he is therefore called Purusha. There is nothing that is not pervaded by Him. It is for this reason that Gandhi uses the mantra of Isavasyamidam Sarvam as the refrain of his spiritual exploration. This exploration signifies, for Gandhi, an uninterrupted quest for understanding that who is, according to Chhandogya Upanishad, within the Brahmapura of this body. And to know and understand this purush, the citizen of the pura, is to follow the commands of this purusha. By virtue of this a person becomes swarat.

This is precisely what Gandhi's idea of swaraj (self control) signifies. Swaraj, for Gandhi, signifies an inward change ... It is the transformation of heart ... And that absolute transformation can only come about by inward prayer and a definite and living recognition of the

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40 Young India, 8 July 1926, p. 245.
41 SWMG, Vol. VI, p. 106.
42 Ibid.
43 Brihadaranyakopanishada, II., V. 18.
44 Chhandogya Upanishad, 8, 1.1.
presence of the mighty spirit residing within." Once this internal transformation occurs, outward forms automatically change.

What is therefore necessary is ... a radical change more in inward spirit than in the outward form. If the first is changed, the second will take care of itself. If the first remains unchanged, the second, no matter how radically changed, will be like a whitened sepulchre ..."

This radical inner transformation, it need not be emphasized, is akin to Platonic periagoge. It is this swaraj (self-control) that, for Gandhi constitutes the true and firm foundation of swaraj (self rule in the political sense). The former is possible only when man actively seeks to come "face to face with God" or come nearer to one's own Maker. Political self-rule degenerates into anarchy without the sustenance to be derived only from the former. But God, for Gandhi, is Truth, that is, "not only truthfulness in word, but truthful in thought also, and not only the relative truth of our conception but the absolute Truth, the Eternal Principle, that is God." And this absolute Truth has to be rescued from its besiegement by relative truth. The search for truth is, for Gandhi, the vehicle of self-expression, but this is not world-negation as Schweitzer asserts. It is rather world-transforming. Gandhi does not deny the unreality of the phenomenal world; but while he recognizes this, he also emphasizes its permeation by the absolute. Gandhi declares that he is an advaidist but he is willing to accept dualism because this world, even though it is constantly changing, it has something about it which

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48 SWMG, Vol. VI, p. 95.
persists and ... is therefore to the extent real.\textsuperscript{50} The search for self-expression, Gandhi insists, must begin here and now, in the midst of everydayness which is not only the point of departure but also the point of eventual return of a spiritual journey for moulding it in the image of freedom it that the quest of self-realization yields.

The quest of self-realization which, through the attainment of ever higher levels of self-knowledge, brings to man the twofold realization that, on the one hand, the ultimate destiny of man as conditioned being is unconditioned and, on the other, that there is an essential relatedness between determined entities. Once this perspective suffuses one's being, an \textit{adhyatnm-adhidaivam} orientation, emphasizing the essential oneness of existence, influence one's outlook towards the external world.\textsuperscript{51} This does not mean that the universe is treated as an undifferentiated whole. It only means that what is recognized are distinctions, not differences, among entities. Given this orientation, the attitude of \textit{ahimsa} (non-injury or non-violence) forms an integral part of the exploration of truth. Absolute Truth is, as was indicated earlier, besieged by relative truths. But as long as one does not realize it, the relative truth becomes as Gandhi insists, one's beacon, one's shield and buckler.\textsuperscript{52} Since no one can be said to have a privileged access to truth, the attitude of exclusivism must be eschewed. One must consciously abstain from imposing one's own ways on others in order to preserve and respect

\textsuperscript{50} SWMG, Vol. VI, p. 107.
\textsuperscript{51} Adhyatman, refers to the supreme being manifesting as the self and adhidaivam refers to the supreme being operating in material objects. They refer to the correspondence between the subjective and the objective and represent the dual aspects of one sole imperishable entity.
\textsuperscript{52} SWMG, Vol. VI, p. 95.
their integrity. This is what *ahimsa* signifies.\(^{53}\)

*Ahimsa* as a necessary basis of social interaction means the development of true individuality not through a wilful conquest of others but through harmonizing oneself with an ever increasing network of relationships. Society, in this perspective, becomes a network of extended selves and humanity comes to be located in a highly complex web of harmonious interdependency. Commitment to truth, as the basis of self transformation, helps a person to rise above the pair of opposites and beings to him the realization that social order is *Yajna* (sacrifice). This, in turn, helps him overcome two errors of relativism and absolutism. The former implies distinction and differentiation, while the latter refers to the subjection of particulars to the whole. Both, when total, are perverse, because they are convenient. They oversimplify for the purpose of fruitful action; they cripple and mutilate truth. The former subjects the whole to a part and, therefore, does violence to truth and essence: the latter obliterates distinctions and, therefore, ignores the hierarchy of values.\(^{54}\) By insisting on realizing absolute Truth, Gandhi offers a way of resolving the dilemma of relativism-absolutism and thereby help gain a clear insight into the structure of being.

It is in this perspective that we can appreciate Gandhi's insistence on subjugating politics to *dharma*. Politics, in modern times, arises out of self-regarding actions of individuals and is apprehended through various definitions of truth each of which represents a position-specific understanding of the external world and its relationship with oneself. Charged with the responsibility of resolving conflicts that conflicting

\(^{53}\) It is interesting to note that Aristotle defines non-violence as abstaining from silencing others by force and considers as *sine qua non* of public life.

perspectives generate, politics has to rely on power; it, therefore, must necessarily deny justice. It can resolve these conflicts only when politics is shorn of its autotelic claims. This is so for the simple reason that autonomy of human action creates only confusion and chaos because of the paradoxes and unredeemed contradictions inherent in it. This means subordinating politics to some higher value which, for Gandhi, means dharma. Without the suzerainty of dharma, without the sustenance of its moral authority, even a constitutional, democratic polity has to rely on violence and coercion to uphold its authority. And as a necessary corollary, the increase in state violence is symptomatic of the erosion of dharmic order in the individual psyche and its reflection in society at large.

The erosion of what Jacques Maritain calls “interior ethics” and the hypertrophy of the state symbolize the retreat of the individual who, in his isolation, becomes more vulnerable to manipulation, exploitation and domination by others and the state. That is why Gandhi looks at the increase of the state power with the greatest fear since “it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality which lies at the root of all progress.”

Thus, for Gandhi, swaraj (self-rule) will not come through the installation of the present day market-mode democracy where only a few rule but through the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused.

Gandhi’s conception of swaraj is thus based on the internalization by all of true morality which finds expression in and is supported by appropriate social institutional arrangement. Complete harmonization of the moral and the institutional order is, Gandhi insists, necessary to sustain the

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rule of dharma through which alone propitious relationship between freedom and order can be maintained. The vitality of this relationship depends on the extent to which people make dharma an integral part of their being. This, in turn, is dependent on the attunement of the soul to the divine ground of being. But since the realization of the absolute Truth is a constant effort entailing suffering and deprivation, the overcoming of akrasia (weakness of the will) becomes necessary.

The ethical potency of Gandhian thought was grounded in moral clarity and metaphysical simplicity. Without succumbing to either the illusion of infallibility or the delusion of indispensability, Gandhi sought to achieve a balance of intellect and intuition, warning his followers against both rationalization of weakness and erratic emotionalism. Again and again he found that the powerful combination of faith and experience, pure reason and daily application, was both self-transforming and infectious, and he felt that his own life vindicated its strength. Spurning all Manichaean tendencies as snares, he deepened his conviction that God is formless and utterly beyond formulation. Individual integration and self-transcendence, he thought, can be achieved through considering and consolidating the close connection between truth and non-violence, satya and ahimsa. His unassailable belief that the conceptual foundation of his ethics was strong and sound—though he would refine his insights whenever his daily experience required him to do so—enabled him to find flexibility amid constancy.

Gandhi was a practical idealist. Untrammelled by the dead weight of convention, he was equally unconcerned with formal consistency. As a karma yogin, he had neither the time nor the aptitude for constructing a systematic philosophy. Instead, he discerned archetypal patterns and eternal possibilities for growth in the shifting conditions of human
interaction. 'Men are good,' he wrote, 'but they are poor victims making themselves miserable under the false belief that they are doing good.'

To overcome the false basis of thought and action, human beings must learn to question themselves and others, for, said Gandhi, 'we are all bound to do what we feel is right'. In translating his metaphysical assumptions into ethical principles, Gandhi always pointed to the basic impulses that underlie all action. Holding that there is a universal human nature which mirrors the Divine and may best be characterized as pure potential, he found it natural to use his own life as a crucible in which to test his principles and precepts. He that the extreme burden of expectation which the masses thrust upon him expressed the yearning of men and women for a freedom and self-reliance they could sense but seldom experienced. Conscious of his own limitations, he in turn drew strength from the latent goodness of the untutored peasants he sought to help.

Gandhi held that intelligent submission to the laws of cosmic interdependence and natural harmony would result in enduring fulfilment of one's true being. 'Has an ocean drop an individuality of its own as apart from the ocean? Then a liberated soul has an individuality of its own.' For Gandhi this hoary metaphor enshrined the key to the metaphysical problem of the individual and the whole, and to what Plato formulated as the problem of the One and the Many: 'I do believe that complete annihilation of one's self-individuality, sensuality, personality—whatever you call it, is an absolute condition of perfect joy and peace.'

However, bestial in origin, man is human because he is potentially and essentially divine. Any pattern of thought, direction of energy or line of action hostile to that primordial unity leads eventually to frustration and misery;

58 Ibid., Vol. XXIX, pp. 397-8.
those acts in tune with it will initiate a happy, if sometimes unanticipated, outcome. Thus the individual who would be truly human must reduce himself to a zero in the eyes of the world. Then he can mirror infinitude in his heart and in his life.

Any feasible conception of human nature, Gandhi felt, must allow for the heights as well as the depths of human attainment and longing. Satya and ahimsa, truth and non-violence, were the two ultimate and universal principles he used to clarify the chaos of sense impressions and conflicting desires. Human beings are, at heart, amenable to moral persuasion. Any compelling moral appeal must, therefore, be addressed to the human soul, not to the assemblage of habits and traits that make up the separative personality. A constant awareness - primacy and supremacy of Truth (sat) frees one from needless over-assertion or violent appropriation of any partial or particular truths. 'My anekantavada [belief in the manyness of reality] is the result of the twin doctrine of satya and ahimsa.'

Gandhi castigated much in modern civilization because it withers human dignity and impedes moral growth. It establishes a social structure based on the law of the jungle, a tense and competitive rat race relieved only by spasms of furtive self-indulgence. If the salty drop cannot exist without the ocean, the ocean itself has no existence independent of its myriad drops. Using another metaphor, Gandhi wrote that 'we are all sparks of the divine and, therefore, partake of its nature, and since there can be no such thing as self-indulgence with the divine it must if necessity be foreign to human nature.' The process of igniting the spark must, therefore, begin within individual consciousness, then spread

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59 Young India, 21 January 1926, p. 30.
60 CWMG, Vol. LXIX, p. 231.
among the masses, before ultimately transforming the entire social order. To effect such a change, the questions which the mentally lazy and morally cowardly set aside as irrelevant must be honestly confronted. Inverted notions must be corrected. And fundamental issues—the scope of self-consciousness, the purpose of life, the role of the individual—must be considered and reconsidered.

For Gandhi, one central truth becomes the starting-point for all such enquiries. 'The purpose of life is undoubtedly to know oneself. We cannot do it unless we learn to identify ourselves with all that lives. The sum total of that life is God.'61 Though individual perfection may be distant, human perfectibility is omnipresent. 'To say that perfection is not attainable on this earth is to deny God.... Life to me would lose all its interest if I felt that I could not attain perfect love on earth.'62 The permanent possibility of perfection can be translated into a continuous expansion of love and truth as embodied in selfless service. None the less, the gap between the elusive ideal and an existing reality will inevitably distort one's understanding of individual perfection. Each individual must constantly rethink and renew his sense of the relation between ideal and reality. He must contemplate these matters with a faith that is beyond knowledge, but not incompatible with reason. 'Faith is not a thing to grasp, it is a state to grow to', 63 and 'the fact is that perfection is attained through service'.64 Firm faith prompts selfless service, as selfless service preserves firm faith. Such is the time-honoured pathway to individual perfection and universal enlightenment.

Faith is not itself to blame if some who profess religious faith

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63 Ibid., Vol. LXI, p. 28.
64 Ibid., Vol. XXX, p. 180.
prove corrupt. In men of great intellect, mental agility can sometimes obscure the intuitions of the heart. Only when the intellect is in harmony with the heart can it be rescued from the tyranny of egotism and enlisted in the service of humanity. But the process of purification is arduous indeed. For even if self-centeredness and hostility are transcended, irrational fears and doubts, tensions and pressures, may remain.

The moral culture of man must begin, then, not with an external improvement of morals, but with a basic transformation of the mind, a systematic training of the will. Only sustained tapas—self-suffering—is permanently purifying. Prolonged suffering is therapeutic only when undertaken for the sake of all and for Truth. 'Progress is to be measured by the amount of suffering undergone by the sufferer.' Suffering for the truth facilitates self-knowledge; in addition, it may subtly heal the individual and those around him. Whilst Gandhi saw no reason to assume a linear historical process of collective ascent, his view of tapas as a foreshadowing of moksha or emancipation, and his conviction that the human spirit is one with the divine, fortified his optimism. 'Only an atheist can be a pessimist.' By optimism, he meant not that everything will invariably augment the happiness of every person, but that all moral strivings will ultimately find their fruition.

Since individuals can intuit ethical principles when the veil of forgetfulness and fear is lifted, and since the patient application of principles is strengthened by self-correction, no one needs to be taught what is right. Nor does anyone need to be shown the practice of self-examination. Instead, everyone must be encouraged to exemplify what he or she knows to be right. True religion is identified by moral vigour and

65. Young India, 16 June 1920, p. 3.
66 Navajivan, 23 October 1921.
contagious example, not by theological sophistry or hortatory skill. Gandhi constantly shattered the hypnotic spell cast by sanctimonious beliefs in collusion with hypocritical practices. He knew that mere moralism cannot redeem a materialistic social structure estranged from the rhythms of nature or an economic framework which fosters greed and exploitation. 'Is it not most tragic', Gandhi lamented, 'that things of the spirit, eternal verities, should be regarded as utopian by our youth, and transitory makeshifts alone appeal to them as practical'? The penetrating clarity of W. M. Salter's Ethical Religion spoke to Gandhi's heart, and he paraphrased eight of its chapters in Gujarati. He strongly endorsed Salter's reasoned conviction that an ethical idea is useless unless put into practice, even though right action may not always be recognized or repaid. Fidelity to conscience, however, needs no public approval; it is its own reward.

However strong the moral impulse in men and women, living in the world seems to demand intolerable yet inescapable compromises. In response, Gandhi advised all social reformers to assume responsibilities willingly, accept the limitations they involve, and trust in Truth, which is God. 'As the sea makes no distinction between good rivers and bad, but purifies all, so one person, whose heart is purified and enlarged with non-violence and truth, can contain everything in that heart and it will not overflow or lose its serenity.' Divine discontent and a natural longing for moksha or emancipation should not be distorted into selfish salvationism or crafty escapism. Liberation from the bonds of conditioned existence admits of no short-cut or escape-route, but comes unsought from assiduous perseverance in dharma the path of duty. For Gandhi, dharma has no more to do with ritual or convention than true religion has to do with church-going or temple-worship. Dharma is nothing less than

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67 Young India, 14 November 1929, p. 376.
progressive concern for lokasangraha, the welfare of the world. Just as self-realization depends upon self-conquest, so both must be cherished in terms of their contribution to the common good. *Dharma* is to be ceaselessly discovered. Its avenues are self-chosen.

Gandhi drew a firm distinction between ultimate values, which must be impervious to concessions or compromises, and concrete applications, which derive from patient efforts to discern meaning and truth within the flux of events. 'You may have faith in the principles which I lay down,' he wrote, 'but conclusions which I draw from certain facts cannot be a matter of faith.'

This elusive ideal is interpreted differently by each individual. But it is always true that dharma lies, not in securing uniformity of conception, but in striving for the ideal without allowing its remoteness to tempt one into shrinking or twisting it. Under all circumstances, 'the striving should be conscious, deliberate and hard.' Self-discipline is not a matter of technique; it must become a way of life. Moreover, the temptation to compromise grows stronger as it becomes subtler. 'Man's ideal grows from day to day and that is why it ever recedes from him.' Since true knowledge and free action consist in conformity with an order which is prior to human action, Gandhi felt that man's moral stature depended on a constant readiness to hold certain values as sacred and absolute. At first, one must relinquish everything that distracts one from the universally valid ethical order. One must free oneself from passion and prejudice, from whatever bears the stamp of the conditioned personality and the circumscribed environment. To think and live universally—the height of true individuation—necessitates a purificatory discipline. Such discipline, at any level, can best be

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69 Ibid., Vol. XXXVIII, pp. 216-17.
70 Harijan, 5 September 1936, pp. 233-240.
undertaken with the help of a binding oath.

Such a vow is not merely a promise to oneself to do the best one can, for any conditionality betrays a lack of self-confidence as well as a shallow conception of human potential. 'If we resolve to do a thing, and are ready to sacrifice our lives in the process,' wrote Gandhi, 'we are said to have taken a vow.' The assumption of unconditional vows acknowledges lapses, but provides criteria and incentives for growth. It is far better to fail and to learn, Gandhi thought, than to live with so much moral ambiguity that growth becomes impossible. 'A life without vows is like a ship without anchor or like an edifice that is built on slip-sand instead of a solid rock.' With the aid of vows, tapas becomes more catalytic than mere suffering. It is transformed into creative self-restraint and therapeutic self-sacrifice; it purifies consciousness and clarifies vision. Vows can help to induce self-knowledge and enhance self-transcendence. They can spur one to refine dharma, to discharge one's duties with skill and timeliness, and to hold true to a programme of progressive self-reform.

For Gandhi, the English term 'vow' carried with it all the meanings of the original Sanskrit terms vrata (a solemn resolve or a spiritual decision) and yama (a spiritual exercise or a self-imposed restraint). In its oldest meaning, vrata refers to a divine will or command, which establishes and preserves the order of the universe. Since this divine nature is inseparable from essential human nature, individuals can, through their vows, reflect cosmic order by deliberate and vigilant performance of dharma. Gandhi did not set limits to the degree of moral development and spiritual resolve of which any person is capable. Taking

72 Indian Opinion, 8 October 1913.
73 Young India, 22 August 1929, pp. 278-279.
vows beyond one's capacity betrays thoughtlessness and lack of balance; the essential value of a vow lies in a calm determination to hold to it regardless of all difficulties. By holding the vow intact within one's heart, the energies of the soul may be released, transforming one's nature.

Conscience remains a potential force in every human being, but in all too many it remains half asleep. 'Conscience has to be awakened' through the power of a vow. Emotions which are stimulated by unconscious social and environmental pressures cannot count its conscience. Indeed, a person who has not consciously sought to strengthen and sharpen conscience cannot be said to possess one. 'Youngsters as a rule must not pretend to have conscience. It is a quality or state acquired by laborious training. Willfulness is not conscience....Conscience resides only in a delicately tuned breast.'

Conscience is, moreover, the single strongest force against the degradation of human dignity: once man is stripped of conscience and reduced to a mechanical aggregate of perfunctory acts, he becomes an object rather than a subject, a passive instrument rather than an intrinsic end. By casting the cultivation of conscience in terms of vows, Gandhi sought to socialize the individual conscience rather than internalize the social conscience. At once compelling and self-validating, the awakened conscience is an inner voice, the voice of God or Truth. The veracity of such an inner voice can be confirmed only by direct experience resulting from training in tapas: indirect evidence, however, can be seen in the inner consistency and transparent integrity of a Socrates or Gandhi. A well-nurtured conscience results in heroism, humility, and high saintliness. Such virtues are the ripe fruit of tapascharya, a consecrated life of austere yet unanxious commitment.

75 Young India, 21 August 1924, p. 278.
Heroism is a quality of the heart, free of every trace of fear and anger, determined to exact instant atonement for every breach of honour. More than any rule-governed morality, heroism can enable a person to stand alone in times of trial and isolation. It can also establish a deep concord between like-minded men and women loyal to their conscience. But, for Gandhi the greatest obstacle to the incarnation of the heroic ideal in society is, paradoxically, the absence of humility. When human beings do not adequately recognize their fallibility, they will not make sufficient effort to arouse individual conscience. Foundering in a delusive sense of security, they are caught in a 'mobocratic' state of collective helplessness. Only after the heart is touched by the enormity of divine truth will the distance between the ideal and reality become painfully evident. And only then will genuine humility flow forth. Whilst heroism is cultivated skill in action (karma yoga), humility is the virtue of effortlessness (buddhiyoga).

Humility cannot be an observance by itself. For it does not lend itself to being deliberately practised. It is, however, an indispensable test of ahimsa. In one who has ahimsa in him it becomes a part of his very nature ... Truth can be cultivated as well as love. But to cultivate humility is tantamount to cultivating hypocrisy.76

Gandhi's conception of human nature, social solidarity, and historical promise compelled him to rethink constantly his ultimate principles. Throughout his life, he was convinced that God is Truth. But if sat or 'Truth is the essence of Deity, every relative truth is a reflection of God from some particular angle. Since every standpoint or perspective contains some kernel of truth, God is everywhere. In 1929 Gandhi subtly altered the emphasis by declaring not that 'God is Truth', but that 'Truth is God.' This simple juxtaposition of equivalencies radically changed the

76 CWMG, Vol. XLIV, p. 203.
questions Gandhi felt he had to ask and answer. One can always ask if a certain proposition is true, but one need not strain to prove the reality and pervasiveness of Truth. That one can ask the question, or even breathe, is proof enough. Further, Gandhi's formulation curbs the itch to anthropomorphize. It also clarifies the close relation between truth and love. If truth is corrupted, it ceases to be truth, even though corrupt love may still be love. When one obtains the assurance of truth, one's love is purged of consoling illusions. In metaphysical priority, one must say 'Truth is God', then add 'God is Love', and yet 'the nearest approach to Truth is through love'. Like Plato, Gandhi here distinguished between how one knows and how one learns. Fifteen years later he wrote: 'I do not believe in a personal deity, but I believe in the Eternal Law of Truth and Love which I have translated as non-violence. This Law is not a dead thing like the law of a king. It's a living thing— the Law and the Law-giver are one.'

Gandhi saw no sense in the claim that one must know all truths to adhere to Truth. One need merely follow the truth one knows, little or partial though it may be. The individual who would be faithful to what he knows and who aspires to greater wisdom will work to reduce himself to a cipher in his quest. For Gandhi, there can be no beauty and no art apart from truth. When one finds truth beautiful, one discovers true art. When one loves Truth, one expresses a true and unconditional love. The seeker must only be honest with himself and truthful to others. Where he cannot speak the truth without doing great harm, he may be silent, but Gandhi, like Kant, insisted he must never lie. The truth-seeker cannot be so concerned with his own safety or comfort that he abdicates from his larger duties. 'He alone is a lover of truth who follows it in all conditions

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77 Ibid., Vol. XLVIII, p. 404.
78 Ibid., Vol. LXXVII, p. 390.
of life. The virtues stressed by most religious and philosophical traditions cannot be dismissed by the genuine seeker of truth as alien or beyond his concern. He must, rather, synthesize these virtues in ahimsa or non-violence, the moving image and decisive test of truth. If all existence is a mirror of the Divine, violence in any form is a blasphemous repudiation of Deity itself, if all souls are sparks of the Divine, rooted in the transcendental Truth, all violence is a species of deicide.

Just as humility is the natural accompaniment of true heroism, ahimsa is the necessary correlate of fearlessness. In Gandhi’s vision, the maintenance of moral stature and spiritual dignity must be based upon the practice of ahimsa. He conceived of ahimsa as an integral part of yajna or sacrifice, a concept rooted in the Indian conception of a beneficent cosmic order and a humane discipline requiring self-purification and self-examination. The moral force generated by ahimsa or non-violence was therefore held by Gandhi to be infinitely greater than any force founded upon selfishness. The essential power of non-violence was viewed alternatively by Gandhi as being ‘soul-force’ and ‘truth-force’. The two terms are fundamentally equivalent, and differ only in their psychological or ontological emphasis. For Gandhi, ahimsa represented not a denial of power but a renunciation of all forms of coercion and compulsion. He held in fact that ahimsa had a strength which no earthly power could continue to resist. Although Gandhi was noted for his advocacy of ahimsa in social and political arenas, its most fundamental and intimate use lay for him in the moral persuasion of free souls.

Just as Gandhi sometimes inflated the word ahimsa to encompass all virtues, he equally broadened the notion of himsa or violence to

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79 Ibid., Vol. L, p 76.
include all forms of deceit and injustice. Himsa proceeds from fear, which is the shadow of ignorant egotism. Its expulsion from the heart requires an act of faith which transcends the scope of analysis. Gandhi held, however, that just as intellect plays a large part in the worldly use of violence, so it plays an even larger part in the field of non-violence. The mind, guided by the heart, must purge all elements of egotism before it can embody ahimsa. Gandhi postulated that the willingness to kill exists in human beings in inverse proportion to their willingness to die. This must be understood in terms of tanha, the will to live—which is present to some degree in every human being and reinforces the concept of the separative ego. As that ego is illusory and transitory in nature, it has a necessary tendency to fear for its own future, and with that an inevitable propensity towards violence. Gandhi held that ahimsa could be taught and inculcated only by example, and never by force. Coercion, indeed, would itself contradict ahimsa. The roots of violence and himsa lie in the mind and heart, and therefore mere external restraint or abstention from violence cannot be considered true ahimsa. Gandhi chose the term ahimsa because himsa or violence is never wholly avoidable; the word ahimsa stresses that which is to be overcome. Whilst acknowledging that some violence can be found in every being, Gandhi could never concede that such violence was irreparable or irreducible. He held that those who begin by justifying force become addicted to it, while those who seek the practical reduction of himsa in their lives should be engaged in constant self-purification.

Ahimsa, in the widest sense, means a willingness to treat all beings as oneself. Thus ahimsa is the basis of anasakti, selfless action. It is equivalent to the realization of absolute Truth, action and it is the goal towards which all true human beings move naturally, though
unconsciously. Ahimsa cannot be realized alone; it has meaning only in the context of universal human interaction and uplift. Like truth, ahimsa, when genuine, carries conviction in every sphere. Unlike many forms of love, however, ahimsa is embodied by a truth-seeker not out of longing or lack, but out of a sense of universal obligation. It is only when one takes the vow of ahimsa that one has the capacity to assess apparent failures in terms of one's own moral inadequacies. Ahimsa means, at the very least, a refusal to do harm. In its positive form, ahimsa means the largest love, the greatest charity.\textsuperscript{80} Gandhi's refusal to set different standards for saints and ordinary men, combined with his concern to give ahimsa a practical social function rather than a purely mystical use, led him to extend and employ the word in novel ways. The political strength which ahimsa can summon is greater and profounder than the impact of violence precisely because ahimsa is consubstantial with the immortal soul. Any programme of social or political reform, including civil disobedience, must, therefore, begin with the heroic individual, for only when such pioneers radiate the lustre of ahimsa will all humanity be uplifted.

Anyone may practise non-violence in the absence of support and even in the face of hostility. Indeed, ahimsa in the midst of adversity becomes the sovereign means of self-purification and the tritest road to self-knowledge. Ahimsa is the anti-entropic force in Nature and the indefeasible law of the human species. Just as unconditional commitment to Truth can lead to limited truth in action, so too the universal creed of ahimsa may yield an appropriate policy of non-violence. As a policy, non-violence is a mode of constructive political and social action, just as truth-seeking is the active aspect of Truth. Truth and Non-Violence are the integrated aspects of immutable soul-force. 'Non-violence and truth

\textsuperscript{80} Modern Review, October 1916.
together form, as it were, the right angle of all religions. 81

One must be sure, however, not to believe conveniently in ahimsa as a policy, whilst doubting the creed. 82 Whether or not any specific policy is demonstrably effective, it is imperative to hold true to the creed. Gandhi distinguished, moreover, between policy and mere tactics. Some successful tactics might at times be inappropriate, but the policy itself continues to be apt. Gandhi marvelled at those who, conceding that his non-violent programme worked in the case of the British, insisted that it must inevitably fail against a Hitler or Mussolini. Such a view romanticized the benevolence of the British and altogether denied that tyrants are a part of the human species. Gandhi’s own experience had shown him that the British could be utterly ruthless or devious, even though his firm faith forbade him from excluding anyone from the possibility of growth, change of heart, and recognition of necessity. Something more reasonable than subtle racism would be required to challenge the universal relevance of ahimsa.

It is in the application of ahimsa to the issues of war and peace, however, that Gandhi’s teachings can be seen to be uncompromising. Non-violence does not signify the unwillingness to fight against an enemy. But, he argued, the enemy is always ignorance and the evil which men do: it is not in human beings themselves. Even though he loathed war and violence in all its forms, Gandhi could not be classified as an orthodox pacifist. Indeed, he held that the courage and heroism often displayed by war-struck individuals reflected well upon their moral character, even if war itself was a dark moral blot on those who

81 Navajivan, 9 August 1925.
encouraged or allowed it to happen. For himself, he rejected indirect participation in war, and refused to let others fight his battles for him. 'If I have only a choice between paying for the army of soldiers to kill my neighbors or to be a soldier myself, I would, as I must, consistent with my creed, enlist as a soldier in the hope of controlling the forces of violence and even of converting my comrades.'

Training for war demoralized and brutalized people, Gandhi believed, and its after-effects brought nations down to abysmal levels of dissolution and discontent. He therefore strove to show how non-violence was the cleanest weapon against terrorism and torture. He asserted that the man who holds to a high sense of dignity and brotherhood, even to the point of death, confounds aggression and may even shame his attackers. Whilst insisting that non-violence was the only means for bringing to an end the familiar vicious cycles of revenge, he recognized that this required expert timing. Poor timing could lead through foolhardiness to a form of suicide or martyrdom, and Gandhi held that there was a higher truth in living for non-violence than in inadvertently dying in its name. Witnessing the course of warfare from the Boer War through the Second World War, he only strengthened his conviction in regard to the basic creed of non-violence. Indeed, when he heard of the bombing of Hiroshima, he declared, 'Unless now the world adopts non-violence, it will spell certain suicide for mankind.' In a non-violent state, it should finally be possible to raise a non-violent army, which could resist armed invasion without recourse to arms. However distant such a prospect, Gandhi refused to relinquish it, for he knew that violent triumphs guarantee nothing but the brutalization of human beings and the perpetuation of further violence.

83 Young India, 30 January 1930, p. 37.
84 Harijan, 29 September 1946, p. 333.
The individual who would strive to be fully human—to embody satya and ahimsa to the fullest possible extent—should not rely on others to display a moral courage which is the mature product of an inward transformation. Nonetheless, like-minded seekers and strivers can offer each other moral support and mutual encouragement. If the political life of any nation is to be spiritualized, the process must begin in intentional communities. Gandhi’s ashrams were such pioneering attempts—small communities committed to embodying the principles they upheld. Chief amongst these principles were the vows of satya and ahimsa. Self-restraint and purification involved mental, verbal, and physical continence, control of the palate, and the vows of non-possession and fearlessness. Also essential were non-thieving, in the broadest sense of the concept, and the vow of swadeshi, self-reliance. The strength of the ashram lay not so much in the establishment of detailed rules for living as in the conscious effort to exemplify a shared perspective and to conduct ‘experiments with truth’.

The ashram may be seen as a sphere of fellowship in which one can test oneself, taking truth one step beyond oneself. Anasakh could be nurtured, errors corrected, solutions tried, tapas magnified. The fortunate could discover that ‘the secret of happy life lies in renunciation’. For Gandhi, the ashram was a microcosm which might come to mirror the full potential of the macrocosm, a minute drop that reflects the shimmering sea. The progressive renunciation of puny selfhood could, he felt, open minds and hearts to the Self of all humanity. Embracing the globe, Gandhi’s hopes were addressed not only to his own generation but also to all posterity.

It remains for those, therefore, who like myself hold this view of

85 Ibid., 24 February 1946, p. 19.
renunciation to discover for themselves how far the principle of *ahimsa* is compatible with life in the body and how it can be applied to acts of everyday life. The very virtue of a *dharma* is that it is universal, that its practice is not the monopoly of the few, but must be the privilege of all. And it is my firm belief that the scope of truth and *ahimsa* is world-wide. That is why I find an ineffable joy in dedicating my life to researches in truth and *ahimsa* and I invite others to share it with me by doing likewise.86

By articulating this vision of order, proposes to reverse the course of history and revive the dead past. Needles to say that this is based on misunderstanding and confusion. The soul's resistance to its destruction by society serves basically two functions: (a) it provides a clue to the salvation for oneself and others; and (b) it provides an insight into right order. It stimulates reconstruction of order in one's own soul which then becomes a substantive centre of a new community. This community, by its existence, then relieves the pressure of the surrounding corrupt society. Such an insight does not yield a blue-print of right order but sheds a light of wisdom on the struggle to realize this order first in one's own soul and then in the society at large; it does not yield piece of information about truth, but initiates the process of arduous effort to locate the forces of evil and identify their nature.

The insight may, and usually does, get institutionalized and even fossilized. This does not make that insight a thing of the past, a dead tradition; only its institutional covering becomes the past, the tradition. To resurrect that insight is not to revive the past but to open new horizons of the future. This is precisely what Gandhi proposes to do.

Political and social philosophy involves a search for 'a definition of

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86 Young India, 25 October 1928, p. 357.
man' and the major political thinkers differ in the accounts they give of the powers essential to men. This means both description and prescription; the facts are verifiable but cannot be conclusively settled, the values and choices commended may be defended or disputed in terms of moral principles and human experiences but must in the end be left for each individual to test for himself. Man first of all sees his nature as if out of himself, before he finds it in himself. Man also denies to himself only what he attributes to God or Nature. Alternatively, what a man declares concerning God or Nature, he in truth declares concerning himself. Augustinianism puts God in the place of man; Pelagianism puts man in the place of God. The denial of the divinity of man is usually accompanied with the humanization of God in the image of what man would like to be but could never become. The denial of God tends to lead to the deification of man. In secular philosophies, the elevation of man is usually achieved through a mechanistic conception of nature and the belief that human reason is capable of comprehending and manipulating the world. Alternatively, it is possible to stress the impotence and the irrationality of man in relation to a determinist view of the world or a historicist view of society as an objective and independent reality in time. In any case, it is not easy to dispense with 'the parapolitical myth' regarding man, for it is deeply embedded in our language.

*Man and the Brute*

Where does Gandhi stand in relation to all this? Human nature, he repeatedly asserted, will only find itself when it fully realizes that to be human it has to be beastly or brutal. He claimed in 1921 to be 'a fairly

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88 Harijan, 22 October 1938, p. 298.
accurate student of human nature and vivisector of my own failings. I have discovered that man is superior to the system he propounds.\textsuperscript{89} In his Autobiography, he declared that the brute by nature knows no self-restraint, and man is man because he is capable of, and only in so far as he exercises, self-restraint.\textsuperscript{90} Elsewhere, he states that the duty of renunciation differentiates mankind from the beast.\textsuperscript{91} Man becomes great exactly to the extent that he works for the welfare of his fellowmen.\textsuperscript{92} The differences between men are merely those of degree, not of kind. 'We were, perhaps, all originally brutes. I am prepared to believe that we have become men by a slow process of evolution from the brute.'\textsuperscript{93} To the extent of this Darwinian element in his thought, Gandhi was more a Victorian than a Hindu. Again, man must choose either of the courses than the upward or the downward, but as he has the brute in him, he will more easily choose the downward course than the upward, especially when the downward course is presented to him in a beautiful garb.\textsuperscript{94} The 'downward instinct' is embodied in all men. Gandhi claimed that he was not a visionary but a practical idealist, and non-violence is the law of our species, as violence is the law of the brute. 'The spirit lies dormant in the brute, and he knows no law but that of physical might. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law - to the strength of the spirit.'\textsuperscript{95} The moment a man awakens' to the spirit

\textsuperscript{89} Young India, 13 July 1921, p. 218.
\textsuperscript{93} Harijan, 2 April 1938, p. 64.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 15 February 1935, pp. 6-7.
\textsuperscript{95} Young India, 11 August 1920, p. 3.
within he cannot remain violent. The essential difference between man and the brute is that the former can respond to the call of the spirit in him, can rise superior to the passions that he owns in common with the brute, and therefore, superior to selfishness and violence, which belong to brute nature and not to the immortal spirit of man. 'This is the fundamental conception of Hinduism, which has years of penance and austerity at the back of the discovery of this truth.'

Man and God

Fundamentally, Gandhi believed in what he called the ‘absolute oneness of God and therefore also of humanity. What though we have many bodies? We have but one soul. The rays of the sun are many through refraction. But they have the same source.’ He was fond of quoting the Mohammedan saying: 'Man is not God: but neither is he different from the light (or spark) of God—adam khuda nahin lekin kkuda ke nur se adam jado nahin. The essence of his position is contained in his statement that ‘we are born with brute strength but we are born to realize ‘God’ who dwells in us. That indeed is the privilege of man, and it distinguishes him from the brute creation.’

Man is bestial in origin, but he is human precisely because he is potentially and essentially divine. It is not that Gandhi offers a simple dualistic view of man, but, rather that man is neither brute nor God, but is human in so far as he uniquely possesses the power of choice that determines the increasing brutalization of his nature and a reliance on instinctual violence (reinforced by intellectual violence), or his increasing awareness and manifestation and consequent realization of

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96 Harijan, 11 August 1940, pp. 244-245.
97 Amrita Bazaar Patrika, August 1934.
98 Young India, 4 September 1924, p. 292.
99 Harijan, 2 April 1938, p. 65.
his ultimate divinity. To become divine is to come closer in thought, feeling and act to the whole of creation. More specifically, when human nature 'acts equally towards all and in all circumstances, it approaches the divine.'

Gandhi declared explicitly that he was a believer in advaita (the Indian doctrine of monism), 'the essential unity of God and man and for that matter of all that lives'. This is similar to the Stoic idea of the universe as a divine whole and of mankind as an essential unity in which the individual could realise, himself. Man alone is made in the image of God. 'That some of us do not recognize that status of ours makes no difference except that then we do not get the benefit of the status, even as a lion brought up in the company of sheep may not know his own status and, therefore, does not receive its benefits; but it belongs to him nevertheless, and the moment, he realizes it, he begins to exercise his dominion over the sheep. But no sheep masquerading as a lion can ever attain the leonine status.' He argued that to prove the proposition that man is made in the image of God, it is surely unnecessary to show that all men admittedly exhibit that image in their own persons. It is enough to show that one man at least has done so. 'And will it be denied that the great religious teachers of mankind have exhibited the image of God in their own persons?' At the same time the hubris of man needs to be corrected by a contemplation of nature. 'When we look at the sky, we have a conception of infinity, cleanliness, orderliness and grandeur which is purifying for us. . . . When once we are in tune with the sky, the nature

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100 Desai, Mahadev, Diary of Mahadev Desai (Ahmedabad: Navavjivan Publishing House), 1932, p. 247
101 Young India, 4 December 1924, p. 398.
102 Ibid., 15 July 1926, pp. 252-253.
103 Ibid.
of our environment on earth ceases to have any significance for us.'

Man must adopt a correct posture, neither too high nor too low, as was taught in the Gita.

**Oneness of Humanity**

The doctrine of man's oneness with God and humanity has several implications. First of all, this doctrine is incompatible; with the belief that an individual may gain spiritually and those that surround him suffer. Gandhi believed that if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him and, if one man falls, the whole world falls to that extent.

There is not a single virtue which aims at or is content with the welfare of the individual alone. Conversely, there is not a single moral offence which does not, directly or indirectly, affect many others besides the actual offender. Hence, whether an individual is good or bad is not merely his own concern, but really the concern of the whole community, nay, of the whole world. Secondly, the monistic doctrine implies that all human beings are working consciously or unconsciously towards the realization of that identity.

Thirdly, what one man is capable of achieving is possible for all to attain. The soul is one in all. Its possibilities are the same for everyone. Gandhi did not go so far as the Stoics did in regarding man as 'cosmo political', designed to

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104 Desai, Mahadev, *Diary of Mahadev Desai*, op. cit., p. 252.
105 Young India, 4 December 1924, p. 398.
107 Gandhi’s Correspondence with the Government, 1942-44, p. 69.
108 Young India, 23 November 1931, p. 454.
110 Harijan, 18 May 1940, pp. 131-132.
form by deliberate effort a single community with one common law, a 'City of Zeus' or universal communis deorum et hominum civitas. To Gandhi the moral-solidarity of mankind was an ever-present fact rather than merely a contrived political ideal that remains to be realized. 'I have been taught from my childhood, and I have tested the truth by experience, that the primary virtues of mankind are possible of cultivation by the meanest of the human species. It is this undoubted universal possibility that distinguishes the human from the rest of God's creations.'

Fourthly, it is quite 'proper to resist and attack a system, but to attack and resist the author is tantamount to resisting and attacking oneself. 'For we are all tarred with the same brush, and are children of one and the same Creator, and as such the divine powers within us are infinite. To slight a single human being is to slight those divine powers, and thus to harm not only that human being, but with him the whole world.'

Fifthly, man's ultimate aim is the realization of God, and all his activities, social, political, religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour, simply because the only way to find God is to see God in creation and be one with it. This can only be done by service of all. I am a part and parcel of the whole, and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity.' Again, 'true individuality consists in reducing oneself to zero. The secret of the life is selfless service. The highest ideal for us is to become vitaraga (free from attachment). Ethical rules were framed by rishis (seers) on the basis of personal experience. A rishi is one who has realized things for himself. Sannyasa in the Gita is renunciation of actions inspired by desire (kama). He is a man who is the ruler

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113 Harijan, 22 August 1936, p. 217.
Clearly, then the divinity of man manifests itself according to the extent to which he realizes his humanity, i.e. his oneness with his fellowmen. For Gandhi, as for Spinoza, men must unite themselves 'by bonds that make all of them as one man'. To Spinoza and Goethe, and to Gandhi, the unity between all men, though veiled from common sight, was in fact as 'real' as the idea of separateness is to a man still under the spell of his senses. Although at times Gandhi spoke of God as a person, and the ideal man as a servant (dasa) of God, he really regarded God, as the Stoics did, as an indefinable and universal Power that cannot be conceived apart from humanity or from the whole of nature: each man is a ray or a part (amsa) of that divine Power that underlies all change, that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves and re-creates all forms of life.

*Man and his Environment*

Every man is born in the world with certain natural tendencies that are variable and alterable, while at the same time he is born with certain definite limitations that he cannot overcome. While admitting that 'man actually lives by habits, I hold that it is better for him to live by the exercise of the will.' Men are capable of developing their will to an 'extent that will reduce exploitation by others to a minimum and make them capable of self-rule. Man's triumph consists in substituting the struggle for existence with a struggle for mutual service.' 'Man is a thinking no less than a feeling animal. To renounce the sovereignty

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115 Young India, 4 October 1928, p. 333.
117 Harijan, 6 June 1935, pp. 80-82.

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of reason over the blind instincts is, therefore, to renounce a man's estate. Man's estate is one of probation. During that period he is played upon by evil forces as well as good. He is ever a prey to temptations. He has to prove his manliness by resisting and fighting temptations. 'He is no warrior who fights outside foes of his imagination, and is powerless to lift a finger against the innumerable foes within, or what is worse, mistakes them as fiends.'

In man, reason quickens and guides the feeling; in the brute, the soul ever, lies dormant. To awaken the heart is to arouse the dormant soul, to awaken reason and to inculcate discrimination between good and evil.

Gandhi recognized that in spite of the greatest effort to be detached, no man can altogether undo the effect of his environment or his upbringing. But he believed that man is essentially capable of self-direction. It is 'man's privilege to overcome adverse circumstances'.

Again manliness consists in making circumstances subserve ourselves. Those who will not heed themselves perish. To understand this principle is not to be impatient, not to reproach fate, nor to blame others. He who understands the doctrine of self-help blames himself for his failure. He argued that while in the Kalinuga, the level of practice had deteriorated, the mind of man, in history had very much progressed. Practice has not been able to keep pace with the mind. Man has begun to say, 'This is wrong, that is wrong'. Whereas previously he justified his conduct, he now no longer justifies, his own or his neighbour's. He wants to set right the wrong, but he does not know that his own practice fails him. The

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118 Ibid, 25 April 1936, p. 81.
119 Ibid., 7 November 1936, p. 308.
120 Ibid., 7 March 1936, p. 25.
122 Harijan, 20 June 1936, pp. 149-150.
contradiction between his theory and his practice fetters him. His conduct is not, governed by logic.\textsuperscript{123} Self-direction, for Gandhi involves passing moral judgement on one's own behaviour, justifying or condemning it. But man mistakenly believes he has set right what was wrong; he tries, fails and does not always recognize that he has failed. Yet, he progresses at least in so far as he recognizes as wrong what he once regarded as right, and he tries to avoid it, even if he cannot always assess correctly his level of effort and the extent of his failure. What distinguishes man from the brute is his ceaseless striving to rise above the brute on the moral plane. "Mankind is at the cross-roads. It has to make its choice between the law of the jungle and the law of humanity."\textsuperscript{124}

Gandhi had thus a frankly optimistic view of human nature. "I am an irrepresible optimist. . . . My optimism rests on my belief in the infinite possibilities of the individual to develop non-violence."\textsuperscript{125} And yet in practice Gandhi was often more inclined to deny a pessimistic view than to uphold a positively optimistic view of human nature. "I refuse to believe that the tendency of human nature is always downward,"\textsuperscript{126} he declared in 1926 and stated the next year: "Men like me cling to their faith in human nature . . . all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding."\textsuperscript{127} In fact, it is in moments of trial that human nature shows itself at its best.\textsuperscript{128} He said in 1931 that he was more concerned with preventing the brutalization of human nature than with preventing the sufferings of his own people. . . ., I know that people who voluntarily undergo a course of

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 17 March, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 14 April 1946, pp. 86-87.
\textsuperscript{125} Tendulkar, D. G., Mahatma, Volume 5, op. cit., p. 17.
\textsuperscript{126} Young India, 9 December 1926, p. 432.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 24 February 1927, p. 60.
suffering raise themselves and the whole of humanity, but I also knew that people who become brutalized in their desperate efforts to get victory over their opponents or to exploit weaker nations or weaker men, not only drag down themselves but mankind also. And it cannot be a matter of pleasure to me or anyone else to see human nature dragged in the mire. If we are all sons of the same God, and partake of the same divine essence, we must partake of the sin of every person whether he belongs to us or to another race. You can understand how repugnant it must be to invoke the beast in any human being. Though we have the human form, without the attainment of the virtue of non-violence we still share the qualities of 'our remote reputed ancestor, the ourang outang'. In 1938 Gandhi again declared, Man's nature is not essentially evil. Brute nature has been known to yield to the influence of love. You must never despair of human nature.

Gandhi's greater concern for the rejection of a pessimistic view than the dogmatic assertion of an optimistic view of human nature can be better understood in the light of Kant's essay, 'On the Radical Evil in Human Nature'. Kant distinguishes between the frailty, the impurity and the depravity of human nature. To Gandhi as to Kant, frailty is an inevitable result of the weakness of the will which could in principle be remedied; impurity is the unfortunate consequence of the fact that ever, our purest motives are not wholly untainted by considerations other than the highest, while depravity points to the corruption rather than the inherent evil of the human heart. Kant contended that every bad action, when we inquire into its rational origin, must be viewed as if the man had fallen into it directly from a state of innocence through a free exercise of

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129 Young India, 29 October 1931, p. 325.
130 Harijan, 4 October 1938, p. 300.
131 Ibid., 19 November 1938, p. 336.
his elective will. Man may fall into evil by seduction, yet the original constitution is adapted to good and it could not be corrupted by any other than man himself, if he is to be held to be accountable for his corruption. We must presuppose that a germ of good has remain-đ in its complete purity, indestructible and incorruptible and in this way the propensity to evil is compatible with a high view of human nature and a belief in the original capacity for good. The moral culture of man must begin not with improvement of morals but with a transformation of the mind and the training of the will. This is why Gandhi insisted: 'Man and his deed are two distinct things. Whereas a good deed should call forth approbation and a wicked deed disapprobation, the doer of the deed, whether good or wicked, always deserves respect or pity as the case may be.'

When Mencius said that human nature is good he was in some degree speaking tautologically, because in the last analysis he seems to have meant by the 'good' that which is in harmony with human nature. Gandhi gets round this difficulty by bringing God into the picture, God taken as equivalent to the oneness of all life. Man is good because he is divine, i.e. capable of realizing his kinship with the whole of creation and especially the rest of humanity. For Gandhi, as for the Confucians, an evil man is one who does not change, not one who cannot be changed. To Mencius a man's nature is naturally good just as water flows naturally downward; this is attested by the fact that man is teachable. The consequence of this doctrine of original goodness is that humanity cannot be divided into good and bad; there are only evil acts, no wholly evil men. Gandhi, however, felt that it was more important at time to combat the doctrine of original sin than to argue for the doctrine of original goodness.

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At times Gandhi confined himself to pleading for an open rather than a closed and fixed view of human nature and of human possibilities. Human life is a series of compromises, but although it is not always easy to achieve in practice what one holds to be true in theory, it is both unwise and unjustifiable to lower the theoretical ideal of human development. ‘Let us be sure of our ideal. We shall ever fail to realize it, but shall never cease to strive for it.’ The ideal will cease to be one if it becomes possible to realize it. The pleasure lies in making the effort, not in its fulfilment. Yet, ‘ideals must work in practice, otherwise they are not potent’. When a man works for an ideal, he becomes irresistible. We must believe, if we are to be truly human, that it is more natural to be good than evil, ‘though apparently descent is easier than ascent’. ‘Who can predict the future?’ he asked. The virtue of an ideal lies in its boundlessness. But although religious ideals must thus from their very nature remain unattainable by imperfect human beings, although virtue of their boundlessness they may seem ever to recede further away from us, the nearer we go to them, still they are closer to us than our very hands and feet because we are more certain of their reality and truth than even our own physical being. ‘This faith in one’s ideals alone constitutes true life in fact it is man’s all in all.’

Man does not become divine when he personifies the innocence of faith in himself. Only then does he become truly man. In our present state, no doubt we are partly men and partly beasts, but in our ignorance and

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134 Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, op. cit., p. 363.
135 Harijan, 24 July 1937, pp. 188-189.
136 Young India, 5 January 1921, p. 5.
137 Ibid., 21 July 1920, pp. 3-4.
139 Tendulkar, D. G., Mahatma, Volume 7, op. cit., p. 475.
even arrogance we say that we truly fulfill the purpose of our species when we behave like beasts.\textsuperscript{141} It is not easy to efface the old samskaras or acquired tendencies of thought and character,\textsuperscript{142} but we must reject 'the theory of permanent inelasticity of human nature'.\textsuperscript{143} In the last analysis, Gandhi supported his view by his belief, so essential to the Buddha, that 'nothing in this world is static: everything is kinetic. If there is no progression, there is inevitable retrogression.'\textsuperscript{144} Man has the 'supreme knack of deceiving himself.'\textsuperscript{145} and of failing to see that human nature is such that man must either soar or sink.\textsuperscript{146} We are the makers of our own destiny. We can mend or mar the present and on that will depend the future.\textsuperscript{147}

Thus Gandhi challenged all lukewarm theories of human nature that stress the possibility and the necessity of achieving an equilibrium or a balance between good and evil tendencies, just as he challenged all lukewarm theories of social equilibrium based upon a balance between the fears and the dreams, the bestial instincts and the moral aspirations of men. To stress the good or the evil is to become inevitably involved in a cumulative process of increasing good or of increasing evil; there can be no stability or certainty or reliability in any intermediate position. If no man is irretrievably evil, it is because it is in principle never too late to reverse the gear or to alter one's course.

\textsuperscript{141} Young India, 9 March 1922, p. 141.
\textsuperscript{142} Harijan, 12 October 1934, p. 274.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 7 June 1942, pp. 180-181.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 4 August 1940, pp. 232-233.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., p. 202.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., p. 202.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
In support of Gandhi's view of human nature, it could be argued, as the philosophers of the Enlightenment were apt to do, that man's naturally good (or rational) urges are vitiated not so much by irrational urges, instincts and passions as by the false and even dangerous teaching on man's inherently evil nature; vested interests and tyrannical ambitions find in that theory a justification for their policies of oppression, exploitation and enslavement. To insist on the inherent evil of human nature only serves the evil purposes of cunning and greedy power seekers. Alternatively, it is possible to take a less dramatic view and to argue that a river cannot rise above its course, that it is better to believe in the original goodness than in the original evil of human nature if we wish to transform men and to change society, that an excessive emphasis on the weakness of the flesh could render inert and inoperative the inherent willingness of the spirit. A man's image of himself can, and in fact does, affect him, and therefore even if it is not based on a provable theory, it can, within limits hard to define, produce its own verification. However, in the end it must be admitted that it is difficult to believe in human reason or human goodness without also believing in the rationality and progressive tendency of the universe or of human society if not of the entire course of human history. This is why, although Gandhi appeared at times to be pleading for an open view of human nature, he was really unable to support his doctrine of original goodness or his castigation of original sin without advancing also a theory of human perfectibility, divine grace and the upward tendency of human evolution. Dharma or morality cannot be ultimately divorced from rita or cosmic order. It is not surprising that de Maistre, for instance, who at times refused to admit there being a human nature as such (although he was prepared to believe in the dubious category of national character), also repudiated the basic assumption of
the Enlightenment, the rationality of the universe.

**Human Perfectibility**

Man, according to Gandhi, will ever remain imperfect but 'it will always be his part to try to be perfect'.\(^{148}\) There is nothing at a standstill in nature: only God or the ultimate, transcendental reality could be motionless: perfect and beyond evolution. Man is characteristically a progressive being, and yet through mental inertia is unable to see that the universally valid rules of conduct are fundamentally simple and easy to carry out.\(^{149}\) Man believes and lives\(^{150}\) and no one dare be dogmatic about the capacity of human nature, in any particular instance, for degradation or exaltation.\(^{151}\) No human being is so bad as redemption, no human being is so perfect as to warrant his destroying him whom he wrongly considers to be wholly evil.\(^{152}\) 'We must believe that every man can think for himself.'\(^{153}\) The rationality of human nature is the precondition of its theoretical perfectibility. Every individual must be regarded as an end and none as a means. We must assume that every man can understand his own powers by the head and has the heart to realize his faith in himself in practice. Being necessarily limited by the bonds of the flesh, we can attain perfection only after the dissolution of the body.\(^{154}\) Besides, where would be room 'for that constant striving, that ceaseless quest after the ideal that is the basis of all spiritual progress, if

\(^{149}\) Desai, Mahadev, Diary of Mahadev Desai, op. cit., p. 124.
\(^{150}\) Tendulkar, D. G., Mahatma, Volume 4, op. cit., p. 296.
\(^{151}\) Harijan, 13 April 1940, pp. 80-83.
\(^{152}\) Young India, 2 March 1931, p. 67.
\(^{153}\) Harijan, 10 April 1937, pp. 65-66.
mortals could reach the perfect state while still in the body.”

By perfectibility on earth is, therefore, meant the possibility of growing towards total awareness of our true nature, which is fundamentally identical with that of every thing that lives.

Gandhi’s belief in perfectibility is, in the final analysis, dependent upon his belief in rebirth. Time is no consideration. If it takes time, then it is but a speck in the complete time cycle. ‘I believe in rebirth as much as I believe in the existence of my present body. I therefore know that even a little effort is not wasted.’ Further, ‘if for mastering the physical sciences you have to devote a whole lifetime, how many lifetimes may be needed for mastering the greatest spiritual force (non-violence) that mankind has known? But why worry even if it means several lifetimes? For if this is the only permanent thing in life, if this is the only thing that counts, then whatever effort you bestow on mastering it is well spent.’ Thus Gandhi’s faith in human perfectibility is not merely a moral conviction but is ultimately based upon metaphysical beliefs that all men are not ready to accept. But he was not so naive as to think that men could be transformed overnight. ‘All men are imperfect, and when imperfection is observed in someone in a larger measure than in others, people are apt to blame him. But this is not fair. Man can change his temperament, can control it, but cannot eradicate it. God has not given him so much liberty. If the leopard can change spots, then only can man modify the peculiarities of his spiritual constitution’.

In fact, we must not only recognize that man is born to make mistakes but we

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155 Young India, 27 October, 1922, p. 340.
156 Harijan, 8 June 1935, pp. 131-132.
157 Young India, 27 October, 1922, p. 341.
158 Harijan, 11 March 1936, p. 64.
should magnify our own errors so as to be deterred from falling into them again.\textsuperscript{160} We must be conscious of the fallibility of human nature. And this must make us humble, without destroying our confident conviction in the truth as we see it.\textsuperscript{161}

\textsuperscript{160} Tendulkar, D. G., Mahatma, Volume 7, op. cit., p. 103.
\textsuperscript{161} Harijan, 7 June 1935, p. 133.