CHAPTER IV

METAPHYSICAL FOUNDATIONS OF GANDHI'S WORLD-VIEW - II

GANDHI'S ONTOLOGICAL TRIUNE: GOD, WORLD AND MAN

As it was pointed out a world-view has its metaphysical presuppositions and Gandhi's world-view also is rooted in the fundamental metaphysical ideas. The metaphysical ideas are integral to it; they are not a mere delinkable adjunct. Unless viewed against their metaphysical background the components of Gandhi's world-view might appear only a confusing kaleidoscope. So it is essential to take a closer look at them and see how they serve as the integrating principles of the world-vision of Gandhi. Even a cursory survey of Gandhian thinking will reveal the fact that God (Truth), World and Man constitute his ontological triune and therefore, we will examine these concepts seriatim.

Article 1.

THE ULTIMATE REALITY: GOD - TRUTH

We have already seen that Gandhi considered himself to be a religious man and that it was his study of religions that led him from piety to ethics and from ethics to metaphysics. Gandhi imbibed a passion for truth and belief in God from the religious atmosphere of his family (1). At the early stages of his spiritual evolution his passion for truth was only an insistence on telling the truth and his belief in God was only theistic in nature, as is evident from his own testimony (2). From his theistic position where God is personal, Gandhi's attitude developed into a metaphysical position where God is 'The Eternal Principle', 'the One without a second', and 'the Universal Law'.

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IV. 1. 1. The bewildering mystery

The first major problem that confronts anyone who ventures to formulate a system of ideas about God is the bewildering complexity of this great mystery. "God is indescribable and impenetrable because He is in everybody and in everything. . . . So no description of Him is adequate". (3).

Gandhi was deeply conscious about this mysterious nature of God and the consequent helplessness of man in describing Him. Gandhi wrote on this miserable predicament of those who try to conceptualise God:

As a matter of fact, we are all thinking of the unthinkable, describing the indescribable, seeking to know the Unknown, and that is why our speech falters, is inadequate and even often contradictory. That is why the Vedas describe Brahman as "not this", "not this". But if He or It is not this, He or It is (4).

This being the plain fact, Gandhi did not set much store by how one defines God. "There are innumerable definitions of God because His manifestations are innumerable" (5).

This complexity gives rise to a multiplicity of concepts and definitions and the following description by Gandhi highlights most of the salient features of such definitions:

To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness; God is the source of light and life and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist. For in His boundless love God permits the atheist to live. He is the searcher of hearts. He transcends speech and reason. He knows us and our hearts better than we do ourselves. He is a personal God to those who need His personal presence. He is embodied to those who need his touch. He is the purest essence. He simply Is to those who have faith. He is all things to all men. He is in us and yet above and beyond us (6).

It is obvious from what Gandhi writes that he believed in the evolution of our knowledge of God, from a personal God to God as pure essence. Is. As Dr. S. Radhakrishnan says: "we have to vary continually our notion of God until we pass beyond all notions into the heart of the reality itself, which our ideas
endeavour to report" (7). As mankind seeks its goal of God at various levels and in various directions, Gandhi feels sympathy with every stage of the search. So what Dr. Radhakrishnan calls 'the bewildering polytheism of the masses and the uncompromising monotheism of the classes' (8), are for Gandhi the expressions of one and the same power, God, at different levels.

IV. 1. 2. Personal God

Gandhi knew only too well that as far as the common folk were concerned, the metaphysical concept of God as the Absolute Principle, as Essence, is far beyond their comprehension and therefore, what appeals to them is the religious approach to God, i.e., although God is nameless and formless, we give Him names and attributes and worship Him as a personal God. Gandhi reminisces:

In my own early youth I was taught to repeat what in Hindu scriptures is known as one thousand names of God. But these one thousand names of God were by no means exhaustive. We believe — and I think it is the truth — that God has as many names as there are creatures and therefore, we also say that God is nameless and since God has many forms we consider Him formless, and since He speaks to us many tongues, we consider Him to be speechless and so on. . . . (9).

Gandhi was prepared to accept all the names and forms attributed to God because he knew that they were all symbols connecting one and the same formless omniscient God (10). So Gandhi could sympathise with idol worship and wrote that he did not disbelieve in idol worship (11).

IV. 1. 3. From person to principle

Although Gandhi could understand and appreciate the need for a personal God of name and form, he insisted on working steadily upwards and improving our knowledge of God. Thus from the position of worshipping a personal God of name, form and attributes, Gandhi rose to the metaphysical level at which God is the 'Absolute Reality', 'the Eternal Principle', 'the One without a second' and 'the Universal Law'. Gandhi observed the world
around him and saw that everything was in a state of flux, ever changing and ever dying (12). But underlying all that change and flux, he could dimly perceive "a living power that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves and recreates. That informing power or spirit is God. And since nothing else I see merely through the senses can, or will persist, He alone is" (13).

The other significant thing he observed in the universe is that in spite of the amazing kaleidoscope, it is not a conglomerate of disparate elements but a well-ordered system of things. Gandhi saw that there is an unalterable law that governs everything in the Universe and that it is because of this law that the universe is a cosmos, an orderly whole and not a chaos. This unifying and sustaining principle, this indefinable, mysterious power that pervades everything Gandhi understood as God (14). Putting these two discoveries together Gandhi formulated his revolutionary conclusion that "the Law and the Law-giver are one" (15). Gandhi further adds: "He and His law are one. The Law is God. Anything attributed to Him is not a mere attribute. He is the attribute. He is Truth. Love and Law and a million other things that human ingenuity can name" (16). This perception that the law and the law-giver are one has great revolutionary potential about it. Because of this view Gandhi could extricate himself from all ritualism in his religious practice. There is neither ritualism nor church in Gandhi's religion. Also there is no scope for propitiating a personal God and frequently seeking his benevolent intervention in matters relating to human actions. So while putting his implicit faith in a benevolent God, Gandhi emphasised individual responsibility in every single act to make it conform to the law of God (17).
IV. 1. 4. Immanence and transcendence

Just as there is in Hinduism the two fold conception of God as Saguna Brahman endowed with all the glorious qualities we can imagine, and as Nirguna Brahman, the unqualified God-head which can be described only in the negatives "not this", "not this", there is the conception of the immanence and transcendence of God. It is a basic postulate in the Hindu theory of reality that the world is a manifestation of God. Although the Absolute manifests itself in the world (because it seems to be the nature or lila of the Absolute to do so),

... we cannot identify Him with the Universe in which He manifests Himself any more than we can identify a work of art with an artist. God is, no doubt, immanent in the world, but He is also transcendent. His immanence does not mean that He is to be totally identified with the world any more than His transcendence means that He is to be totally separated from the world (18).

It may be said that Gandhi is in complete agreement with this conception because, for him, God as the Law and all pervasive reality is immanent in the world while as the Absolute Principle, the Law-giver, He transcends the world. Gandhi's position in this regard is summarised thus:

the Absolute reality of God thus has two modes of existence - one coinciding with the world of Nature and Man and the other transcending it, that is the Absolute law does not exhaust its applicability to the phenomenal world and a good deal of its immeasurable power remain unknown to us (19).

IV. 1. 5. Truth is God

It is clear thus, that Gandhi's concept of God combines both theistic and metaphysical strains. In fact, there is no contradiction between the two positions. In the graduated scale of vision, each has its role and relevance. As Dr. Radhakrishnan says, "The suprapersonal and personal representations of the real are the absolute and the relative ways of expressing the one reality" (20). Though Gandhi could support and justify the theistic conception of God, he says that
his uniform experience convinced him that there is no other God than Truth (21). "If it is possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description of God, I have come to the conclusion that for myself, God is Truth" (22). Gandhi was not fully satisfied with this dictum for the limitations inherent in it became clearer to him gradually. So, after some years of relentless search and experiments he modified his definition and said that "Truth is God".

What are the difficulties in understanding the dictum "God is Truth"? The main difficulty, according to Surendra Verma, is the tendency to regard truth as merely a quality of thought and speech—as nothing but a quality of propositions. Such an interpretation of 'truth' naturally makes it exclude concrete reality and experience, and hence unacceptable as God who is regarded all inclusive. Truth as merely intellectual is obviously unequal to the wholeness of reality; and it is this distinction of Truth from Reality which bars our way to understand Gandhi's dictum (23).

Another difficulty is that as the connotation of the word 'truth' is mainly epistemological, it cannot suggest the ontological dimension which is vital to any concept of God.

Gandhi enumerates his reasons for changing the dictum to Truth is God as follows:

But two years ago I went a step further and said that Truth is God. You will see the fine distinction between the two statements, viz., that God is Truth and Truth is God. And I came to that conclusion after a continuous and relentless search after Truth which began nearly fifty years ago. I then found that the nearest approach to Truth was through love. But I also found that love has many meanings in the English language at least and that human love in the sense of passion could become a degrading thing also. I found too that love in the sense of Ahimsa had only a limited number of votaries in the world. But I never found a double meaning in connection with truth and even atheists had not demurred to the necessity or power of truth. But in their passion for discovering truth, the atheists have not hesitated to deny the very existence of God— from their own point of view rightly. And it was because of this reasoning that I saw that rather than say that God is Truth, I should say that Truth is God. I recall the name of Charles Bradlaugh who delighted to call himself an atheist, but knowing as I do something of him. I would never regard him as an atheist. I would call him a God-fearing man, though I
know that he would reject the claim. His face would redden if I would say, "Mr. Bradlaugh, you are a truth-fearing man, and so a God-fearing man". I would automatically disarm his criticism by saying that Truth is God, as I have disarmed criticisms of many a young man. Add to this the great difficulty that millions have taken the name of God and in His name committed nameless atrocities. ... There are thus a number of difficulties in the way, no matter how you describe God.

And then we have another thing in Hindu philosophy, viz., God alone is and nothing else exists. ... In fact, the Sanskrit word for Truth is a word which literally means that which exists — Sat. For this and several other reasons that I can give you, I have come to the conclusion that the definition "Truth is God" gives me that the greatest satisfaction. (24).

From this long explanatory note two points stand out claiming our particular attention. One is that God, for Gandhi, is chiefly a Principle, an Idea or Ultimate Law and not a person. Thus Truth is not a definition of God, but the ontological reality itself. And the other point is that God understood as Truth has universal appeal and excludes no one from its fold, not even the atheists. This is, indeed, one of the unique contributions of Gandhi to Indian philosophy.

IV. 1.6. Gandhi's concept of Truth:

This revolutionary equation inspires one to delve deeper into Gandhi's concept of Truth. Truth, of course, is the first and foremost of all the ideas of Gandhi. That is precisely why he named his autobiography The Story of My Experiments with Truth. Some writers have even identified his total philosophy with his conception of Truth. There is no gainsaying the key role of Truth in Gandhi's life and thinking (25). His concept of Truth is very comprehensive, for he says: "Truth is the sovereign principle which includes numerous other principles. This truth is not only the truthfulness in word, but truthfulness in thought also, and not only relative truth of our conception, but Absolute Truth, the Eternal Principle, that is God" (26). In one of his letters to the Satyagraha Ashram from Yeravda Central
Prison (Mandir) of Gandhi’s description), Gandhi gives a very telling and terse description of his conception of Truth:

The word Satya (Truth) is derived from Sat, which means ‘being’. Nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why Sat or Truth is perhaps the most important name of God. In fact, it is more correct to say that Truth is God, than to say that God is Truth. But as we cannot do without a ruler or a general, such names of God as ‘King of Kings’ or ‘The Almighty’ are and will remain generally correct. On deeper thinking, however, it will be realised that Sat or Satya is the only correct and fully significant name of God.

And where there is Truth, there is also knowledge which is true. Where there is no Truth there can be no true knowledge. That is why the word Chit or knowledge is associated with the name of God. And where is true knowledge, there is always Bliss (Ananda). There sorrow has no place. And even as Truth is eternal, so is the Bliss derived from it. Hence we know God as Sat-Chit-Ananda, one who combines in Himself Truth, Knowledge and Bliss (27).

Gandhi knew very well that this Absolute Truth portrayed by him in glowing terms was beyond the reach of ordinary human beings. So what is to be done? Gandhi answers that "as long as I have not realised this Absolute Truth, so long must I hold by the relative truth as I have conceived it. That relative truth must, meanwhile, be my beacon, my shield and buckler" (28). Absolute Truth, according to Gandhi, is the only Reality, the foundation of all relative truths and therefore, they reflect reality partially. And as human minds cannot comprehend Absolute Truth but can have only fleeting glimpse of Truth, "there is nothing wrong in every man following Truth according to his light. Indeed it is his duty to do so" (29).

Besides the ontological implication Gandhi’s concept of Truth has an ethical significance also. In the above letter to the Ashramites Gandhi points out:

Devotion to this Truth is the sole justification for our existence. All our activities should be centred in Truth. Truth should be the very breath of our life. When once this stage in the pilgrim’s progress is reached, all other rules of correct living will come without effort and obedience to them will be instinctive. . . . Generally speaking, observation of the law of Truth is understood merely to mean that we
must speak the truth. But we... should understand the word Satya or Truth in a much wider sense. There should be Truth in thought, Truth in speech, and Truth in action. To the man who has realised this Truth in its fulness, nothing else remains to be known, because all knowledge is necessarily included in it (30).

It is not hard to see that this ethical implication is much more significant for Gandhi than anything else because that is how it relates itself to life and thus becomes an integral aspect of his world-view.

IV. 1. 7. The Ultimate Reality—benevolent or malevolent?

Any serious discussion on Ultimate Reality must deal with the problem of the nature of God, whether the informing power or spirit in and behind the world that causes and regulates all its movements, creating orderliness and manifesting as its unalterable laws, is benevolent or malevolent? Gandhi too had addressed himself to the question in all seriousness. When asked: "is the power benevolent or malevolent"? Gandhi answered even without a modicum of doubt: "I see it purely benevolent. For I can see that in the midst of death life persists, in the midst of untruth truth persists, in the midst of darkness light persists" (31). Gandhi did not abandon the question after giving this answer. He was conscious of the very complex nature of the problem. There exists evil in the world, a lot of it at that. And if "God alone is" and nothing else is, then evil, along with the good, must be a part of the power. Thinkers over the centuries have grappled with this conundrum and tried to answer it in their own ways. The answers are not yet exhaustive and therefore, there are fresh explorations.

Gandhi knew the limitations of the human mind to grasp and unravel such mysteries and therefore, admitted that attempting to provide a final and conclusive answer to such questions is to try to be co-equal with God. Yet, he gives his interpretation which enlightens us while at the same time makes us humble, too.
I cannot account for the existence of evil by any rational method. To want to do so is to be co-equal with God. I am, therefore, humble enough to recognise evil as such. And I call God long suffering and patient precisely because he permits evil in the world. I know that He has no evil. He is the author of it and yet untouched by it (32).

Gandhi defines evil thus: "Evil is good or truth misplaced. It has no separate existence at all, but it is only truth or good misplaced" (33). This is like saying that 'dirt is matter misplaced'. It brings out the relative nature of both good and evil, which are often found to exchange places. What is good in given times and places may be 'evil' in relation to some other climes and circumstances. This does not, however, obliterate the distinction between 'good' and 'evil'. What is good at a particular time and place is good, and its reverse is evil. The ethical values are constant. The variation is only in their application with reference to particular contexts (34).

This frank admission of the existence of evil in the world around us or its definition in rational terms does not make it incumbent upon Gandhi to accept evil as such. In reply to a question 'Is evil also made by God'? Gandhi said:

Nothing can possibly exist without His allowing it. He makes many things inverted which must be put right. We must invert the process. . . . God has given us conscience. He has given us power to do right. . . . I know too well that I shall never know God if I do not wrestle with and against evil even at the cost of life itself (35).

He feels it his duty to resist evil, to fight it, because he understands it to be God's will to do so. He does not rest content with emphasising only the ethical aspect of the problem. He delves deeper into other aspects of the question. "God's hand is behind good but in God's hand it is not mere good. His hand is behind evil also, but there it is no longer evil. "Good" and "Evil" is our own imperfect language. God is above both good and evil" (36).
Thus it is clear that Gandhi views the question of the nature of God and the problem of good and evil from the ethical and metaphysical angles. At the ethical level he understands it as being due to the acts of man who has the freedom of will (37). As a corollary Gandhi underscores human responsibility in resisting evil and removing it from the world. At the metaphysical level he considers God as being above all attributes and qualities—nirguna. Thus, Gandhi follows the traditional ways of reconciling the existence of evil with his belief in God as the only omnipotent and benevolent Reality" (38).

IV. 1. 8. Proofs of the existence of God

Now we will briefly examine what Gandhi has to say about the evidence of the existence of God. Gandhi is against blind faith as it degenerates into dogmatism and superstition. "Unreasonable belief is blind faith and is open to superstition. To ask anybody to believe without proof would be unreasonable as, for instance, asking an intelligent person to believe without proof that the sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles"(39). So it is clear that to ask anyone to blindly believe in God is unacceptable to Gandhi. Then is the existence of God capable of proof?

In metaphysics several arguments like ontological, cosmological, teleological, moral, pragmatic and authoritarian are adduced to prove the existence of God. Gandhi had never wanted to argue out the existence of God after the manner of metaphysics. But he had put forward quite a few points which may be classified under the above mentioned categories of arguments (40). But the main thrust of Gandhi's arguments is that it is possible to reason out the existence of God only to a limited extent (41). Gandhi says:
There is an indefinable mysterious power that pervades everything. I feel it, though I do not see it. It is this unseen power which makes itself felt and yet defies all proof, because it is so unlike all that I perceive through my senses. It transcends the senses (42).

Gandhi admits that he has no arguments to convince through reason. "This belief in God has to be based on faith which transcends reason" (43). But he adds that he is surer of God's existence than the fact that you and I am sitting in this room. Then I can also testify that I may live without air and water but not without Him. You may pluck out my eyes, but cannot kill me. You may chop off my nose, but that will not kill me. But blast my belief in God, and I am dead. .. (44).

This emphatic testimony proclaims to the whole world that God is essentially a matter of faith. To try to prove God's existence through reason is to raise reason above Him. "God will not be God if He allows Himself to be object of proof" (45). God is proved not by extraneous evidence but in the transformed conduct and character of those who have felt the presence of God within. And it must be acceptable to all that Gandhi, by his living faith and transformed character and conduct, witnessed and proved the existence of God more thoroughly and indisputably than any arguments could have done.

IV. 1. 9. A resume

Thus it is clear that from the simple piety and theism of the early days Gandhi's attitude developed into a metaphysical position where God is the Ultimate Reality, the Eternal Principle, the Universal Law. Gandhi accepted the metaphysical position of the Upanishads and the Gita which holds that Reality in one and indivisible. It is sat - chit - ananda. This in fact, constitutes the corner stone of Gandhi's world-view.
IV. 2.1. How real is the world of reality?

The problem of how real is the world of reality and what is the basic 'stuff' of which it is made has puzzled poets, philosophers, and scientists all through the ages. In the recorded history of human thought we find diverse and polar views ranging from the Absolute Idealism of Plato, which holds that abstract entities or 'Universals' really exist outside space and time, in an autonomous world of timeless ESSENCES (Plato indeed held that such ideas or forms are the only things that really or wholly exist on the ground that it is only of them that we have absolutely certain knowledge, namely in mathematics) (46), to materialism, the theory which states that everything that really exists is material in nature and that minds and mental states unless identified with states of the brain and the nervous system do not exist (47). In Indian thought the two extreme positions are Sankara's advaita (monistic or non-dualist) interpretation of Vedanta metaphysics and Carvaka or Lokayata materialism, the former allegedly denying any intrinsic reality to the phenomenal world and the latter denying the reality of the Self or the Spirit.

Leaving philosophy aside, as we come to physical science, we find that 'flushed with its newly won triumphs', and 'drunk with the wine of power wrested from Nature' (48), Science trespassed upon the domain of philosophy and rejecting the evidence of a long line of seers and sages who had through a faculty higher than the senses and reason seen the spirit face to face, denied existence to anything supernatural and declared the universe to be a gigantic machine having no purpose or value but working according to certain fixed mechanical laws. But science, in
recent times, had controverted itself. The latest discoveries in physics, as noted in the INTRODUCTION, have shattered the base of materialism. The results of the researches in physics show that "at any rate, materialism has passed away. It has no longer any interest either to the physicist or the philosopher" (49). Fritjof Capra has concluded that physics which started with studying 'solid matter' has now found that matter does not really exist at the sub-atomic level and what exists is only diabolical energy dancing like a Nataraja and that the whole universe is 'an organic whole' — a large network of interconnections — which has been the perception and experience of the mystics of the East and the West (50). It is against this back ground that Gandhi's ideas of the world is to be examined.

IV. 2. 2. Vision, Upanishadic

That Gandhi's theory of reality of the world is a natural extension of his metaphysical position is not hard to see. As we already saw Gandhi could perceive that while everything around him was ever changing and dying, underlying all that change there is a power that is changeless, that holds all together and that informing power or spirit is God. Gandhi could see that the universe moved according to certain inexorable laws which are not blind or mechanical but moral in nature. "All things in the Universe including the sun and the moon and the stars obey certain laws. Without the restraining influence of these laws the world would not go on for a single moment", wrote Gandhi (51). God's law and God are not different things for Gandhi; the law and the Law-giver are one.

Gandhi based his perception of the reality of the world on the first mantra of Isavasyopanishad:

Isavasyamidam sarvam yetkimca jagatyam jagat
ten tyaktena bhunjidha ma grudha kasya svid dhanam

Gandhi dwelt at length on the meaning and implications of this
mantra during his 'Pilgrimage to Travancore' in 1937. "Now this mantra divides itself in four parts. The first part reads: All this that we see in this great universe is pervaded by God. . . ." (52). Thus the entire universe is, for Gandhi, a manifestation of the Divine spirit (53). It testifies to the immanence of God and therefore, is real, not only in a material sense but also in a metaphysical sense. This naturally takes us to a series of difficult questions like, how this finite, ever changing world of ours came into existence? How is it related to the changeless Absolute Reality that is God? If Absolute Reality is changeless how does it manifest itself in the world into shapes and forms? Gandhi, as he is not a metaphysician, does not go deep into such questions full of great scope for wild speculations. He, on the other hand, seems to share the view of a wise man who once said that the way of ascent from the world to God is revealed to us, and that is enough for our purpose. We need not bother ourselves with the way of descent from God to the world which is not revealed to us (54). Yet, the question remains, how real is the phenomenal world of here and now?

IV. 2. 3. Synthesis of advaitism and dvaitism

This question comes up particularly against the background of Gandhi's open admission that he is an advaitin. "I am an Advaitist" said Gandhi and this gave rise to a controversy that has generated more heat than light. The controversy is centred chiefly around two questions: (1) Is Gandhi really advaitic? For he has also said that he can support dualism, (2) Does advaita grant reality to the phenomenal world? The first question is, in fact, redundant as Gandhi himself had answered it when he said that "I am Advaitist and yet I can support dvaitism (dualism)" (55). Viewed from an ethical or religious point of view there is no incompatibility between advaitism and dvaitism as the source of both are the same metaphysical presuppositions. And we know
that Gandhi's approach was essentially moral, that is religious in a basic sense. But as it is a very vibrant issue among the learned metaphysicians whose chief occupation and delight is to engage themselves in hair-splitting arguments and protracted disputations on non-issues, i.e., issues that do not have a direct bearing on life, it is quite revealing to listen to what Gandhi has to say on this.

I am an Advaitist and yet I can support Dvaitism (dualism). The world is changing every moment, and is therefore unreal, it has no permanent existence. But though it is constantly changing, it has something about it which persists and it is therefore, to that extent real. I have therefore, no objection to calling it real and unreal, and thus being called an Anekantavadi or Syadvadi. But my Syadvada is not the Syadvada of the learned, it is peculiarly my own. I cannot engage in a debate with them. It has been my experience that I am always true from my point of view, and am often wrong from the point of view of my honest critics. I know that we are both right from our respective points of view (56).

Thus, on this controversial issue also we find Gandhi in his great historic role of a grand synthesiser, here amalgamating two seemingly contradictory metaphysical viewpoints. In his worldview he reconciles Advaitism with Dvaitism (57).

The second question, does Advaita grant reality to the physical world, had been answered quite forcefully and in detail by many learned scholars (58), and therefore, a detailed examination of the various points relating to this is not attempted here. The arguments of these men of learning and erudition boil down to this cardinal point that Sankara does not deny reality to this material world. What is ultimately real is God or Brahman in Sankara's language. The world of matter, being a manifestation of the Ultimate Reality, too is real, but its reality compared to what is Ultimately Real is only relative. This argument is acceptable to Gandhi also for he believed that the reality of the world is derived from that of the Ultimate and therefore, has to be taken very seriously. He did not consider
the world to be an aimless, purposeless jumble of sorts but believed it to be a divinely ordained scenario for humankind to work out its destiny. So Gandhi's attitude to the world, and everything in it, both sentient and non-sentient, is informed by this perception. While, for philosophers, Advaita as a theory of reality is only a magnificent idea, for Gandhi, it is not a mere metaphysical concept but a vibrant belief full of very real consequences. Most significantly Advaita implies not a mere unity but an essential oneness of all creations. As phenomenal nature is a manifestation of the Ultimate Reality – God – everyone and everything in it partakes of the divinity of God and hence essentially integrated.

When the awareness of the fact of Oneness of all existence becomes an experience in one's own consciousness, we call it spirituality. As R.R. Diwakar says:

> Spirituality in its essence is the direct experience in one's own consciousness and one's whole being, of Oneness of all existence, without any the least doubt or wavering. Awareness of such oneness in one's own consciousness without any feeling of separateness with anything in the universe is the hallmark of the experience of spirituality (59).

It is precisely in this sense that Gandhi is called a spiritual person. At the same time, it is important to note that Gandhi did not rest in the bower of this spiritual experience enjoying the ecstasy (60). On the contrary, he set out on his heroic mission of a fight to finish against all evil, injustice and exploitation and thus earned the well-deserved title of a Karmayogi, the activist yogi of action. It was in this dedication to the selfless, egoless service of the people and sentient beings, with unshakable faith in the immanence of the Supreme Spirit in everything that exists, lives, moves and has its being, that we find the characteristics of Gandhi's spirituality in action (61). Conventionally spirituality and Advaita are associated with asceticism but not action. But in Gandhi every concept is
The implications of *advaita* are far-reaching. For one, it disallows all discrimination between man and man and even between human beings and all other living things. Now, when all living beings are to be looked upon and treated as equals, a whole gamut of consequences flow from it, like social and economic equality, self-determination and democracy, civil liberties and freedom of the conscience, equality between men and women and so on. Its implications encompass the contents of the Declaration of Independence of the American Revolution, the Declaration of the Rights of Man of the French and even the goals of the socialist revolution in Russia (62).

IV. 2. 4. Vision corroborated by new physics

Modern science, especially New Physics, has brought forth enough evidence to show that all living and non-living things in the Universe are interconnected and interdependent as they are the same energy manifesting at different physical levels. The exploration of the atomic and subatomic world has made revolutionary revelation and we are forced to revise many of our basic ideas about reality. Quantum theory, the theoretical foundation of atomic physics, for example, reveals a basic oneness of the Universe. It shows that we cannot divide the world into independently existing small units. As we penetrate into matter, nature does not show us any isolated basic building blocks, but rather appears as a complicated web of relations between the various parts of a unified whole (63).

Not only quantum theory, but relativity theory of Einstein also has further exemplified this perception from a different angle. It tells us, among other things, that "atoms consist of particles and these particles are not made of any material stuff. When we observe them, we never see any substances; what we observe are dynamic patterns continually changing into one another - a continuous dance of energy" (64). So the basic point in the discoveries by New Physics is that we are seeing the universe as a unified cosmic process, and all objects, people and events as patterns in the process. Thus we see that modern science is corroborating the intuitive perception of the poets, mystics.
sages, and seers of yore and underlining the need for developing new attitudes and values as Gandhi has rightly emphasised. It must be mentioned in passing that in this consciousness of the Oneness of all existence is rooted the entire world-view of Gandhi, especially his practical programme for shaping a new life.

IV. 2. 5. Reverence for Nature

One important outcome of this awareness of the immanence of God in Nature and the consequent consciousness of the Oneness of the entire existence is the attitude of reverence for Nature that Gandhi advocated. "God manifests Himself in innumerable forms in this universe and every such manifestation commands my spontaneous reverence", wrote Gandhi (65). Gandhi was so sensitive to the charms of Nature (66) that some of his responses to the effulgence of Nature's beauty are so mellifluous as to compare with the best in nature poetry.

Have I not gazed at the marvellous mystery of the starry vault, hardly ever tiring of that great panorama? . . . . Could one conceive of any painting comparable in inspiration to that of star-studded sky, the majestic sea, the noble mountains? . . . . I need no inspiration other than Nature's. She has never failed me yet. She mystifies me, bewilders me, sends me into ecstacies. . . . Beside God's handiwork does not man's fade into insignificance (67)?

Nature's charm always prompts Gandhi to bow in reverence to the Creator and to acknowledge with humility human indebtedness to Him. He sees truth in a sunset and a crescent moon that shines amid the stars at night.

These beauties are truthful, in as much as they make one think of the Creator at the back of them. . . . When I admire the wonders of a sunset or the beauty of the moon my soul expands in worship of the creator. I try to see Him and His mercies in all these creations (68).

In fact, our ancestors had developed a reverential, almost religious, attitude to the objects of nature and this is evident from their practice of tree-worship, cow-worship etc. While, possessed with the spirit of science, modernists condemn such
practices as outright superstitions. Gandhi, far-sighted as he was, recognised their human as well as ecological significance. That is why he said:

I find in the practice of tree-worship a thing instinct with a deep pathos and poetic beauty. It symbolises true reverence for the entire vegetable kingdom which with its endless panorama of beautiful shapes and forms, declare to us as it were with a million tongues the greatness and glory of God (69).

IV 2. 6. In tune with Nature's laws

Gandhi's reverence for Nature did not rest content with a few statements of poetic exuberance. As it is a dynamic vision a whole gamut of consequences issue from it. First of all it lays great stress on individual responsibility to explore and understand the laws of Nature. Once we grasp how the laws of Nature operate, it becomes incumbent upon us to shape a creative life-style in tune with these laws. This also implies constant endeavour on our part. This, in fact, is a balancing process, an attempt to keep the pace of life in consonance with the dynamism inherent in Nature, and thus achieve harmony with her.

Gandhi's ideas of simplicity, vegetarianism, nature-cure etc., are all consequences flowing from his deep understanding of the laws of Nature. The most revolutionary of these ideas, of course, is simplicity. Gandhi emphasised the need for the limitation of wants for he knew that there is only enough in Nature to satisfy everyone's needs but not anyone's greed. This emphasis has immense practical relevance in the contemporary world-situation, where, while on the one side humanity is being sucked into the tyrating whirlpool of consumerism, on the other side the survival of Mother Earth is threatened by resource-depletion, drying up of non-renewable sources of energy, eco-degradation etc. It appears a nemesis of history that the very idea (simplicity) which was the causa causans for rejecting Gandhi as conservative and impracticable
should become the causa sine qua non for accepting him as a post-
modernist revolutionary.

IV. 2. 7. Nature - an unmixed blessing?

A problem similar to that whether God is benevolent or
malevolent is raised in the context of our understanding of and
attitude to Nature. Is Nature an unmixed blessing? Is 'all well
with the world' as the poet testifies? What about the
destructive or the so-called terrible aspects of Nature, what
Gandhi described as 'nature red in tooth and claw'?

Generally speaking, there are three predominant views on the
nature of Nature. One holds that Nature, as it is the
manifestation of God and governed by His Laws, is as perfect as
God has intended it to be and therefore, does not require any
modification or improvement by human interference. What human
beings ought to do is to understand the Laws and live accordingly
so that the harmony in Nature is not disturbed. This view
comprises a whole set of slightly differing attitudes ranging
from pagan nature-worship to the modern perception that Nature is
the most profound of moral text books (70).

At the other extreme is the understanding that Nature is
full of hostile and anti-human forces and phenomena, that the
state of nature is one of extreme disorder, 'nasty, brutish and
short' (71). This understanding includes, among other views, the
"humanisation of nature" theory of Karl Marx (which holds that
human beings in order to realise their humanity must transform
nature through their technology and productive activity), and the
humanity versus Nature approach of modern science and technology.
To conquer nature rather than to be subject to it, was seen to be
our historical calling. Any form of reverence for nature, such
as that displayed by primitive cultures, was considered to be
childish and backward for it hampered humanity's development.

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For the first time, nature becomes purely an object of humankind, purely a matter of utility, ceases to be recognised as a power for itself, and the theoretical discovery of its autonomous laws appears merely as a ruse so as to subjugate it under human needs whether as an object of consumption or as a means of production (72).

The third view (not a compromise between these two antithetical views which is well-nigh impossible) is that Nature is in a process of evolution and there is a teleological purpose in creation, i.e., a tendency to get back to its source. Sri. Aurobindo, for example, portrays evolution as starting from inconscient matter to form, from form to consciousness, from consciousness to self-consciousness and finally to Divine consciousness. When this is finally achieved, matter itself will become divine, according to Aurobindo (73). It is not difficult to see that Gandhi belongs to this stream of thought which considers phenomenal nature to be a movement of God and holds that the so-called contradictions and complex relation of opposites are conceptual in origin and that in the light of spiritual intuition we can grasp the harmony and integral character of the various phenomena in Nature, benign and belligerent. It was in the light of his intuitive belief that Gandhi gave his comment on the 1934 Bihar earthquake as God's punishment for the sin of untouchability committed by caste Hindus. Gurudev Tagore took strong objection to Gandhi's comment and cautioned him against spreading unreason and superstition (74). Gandhi gave a long reply justifying his stand and the following excerpt from this well-known reply is quite illuminating and relevant to the point under consideration:

I have long believed that physical phenomena produce results physical and spiritual. The converse I hold to be equally true.

To me the earth-quake was no caprice of God nor a result of a meeting of blind forces. We do not know all the Laws of God nor their working. Knowledge of the tallest scientists is like a particle of dust. . . . I believe literally that not a leaf moves but by His
will... He and His Law are one. Law is God...

Visitations like drought, floods, earthquakes, and the like, though they may seem to have only physical origins, are, for me, somehow connected with man's morals (75).

It may be said with confidence that this settles the dispute eminently, as nothing quite conclusive can be said on this. Any way, God's ways are beyond human arithmetic (76).

IV. 2. 8. Space and time

Any theory of reality is incomplete without a concept of Space and Time. Gandhi's concept of Space and Time is based on Indian philosophy (77). The infinite vastness of space, of the universe is awe-inspiring. Compared to the immensity of the Universe, the world is just a tiny speck and man but a minnow. This should teach one the lesson of humility and Gandhi's humility was the result of this deep understanding of the vastness of the Universe also. Time, according to Indian tradition is without beginning and end. This view of time gives a long range point of view to the Indian mind (78). Unlike the Western man, an average Indian is patient, ready to wait. He seems to believe that 'they also serve who only stand and wait' (79). Gandhi imbied this long-term perspective and was never impatient. He did not allow himself to be carried away by what he calls 'undue haste', and did not consider it wrong or improper to wait for long for the fruition of his ideas. A few thousand years is only a few drops in the vast ocean of time and he believed that Truth and Non-violence will finally win the race in spite of the temporary set backs and the mounting sceptical criticism about it. This concept of time together with his faith in God constitute the source of Gandhi's well-known 'incorrigible optimism'.

IV. 2. 9. A resume

Thus we see that Gandhi sees God in Nature and Nature in God. The entire Universe is a manifestation of God. So there is
not only unity, but true Oneness in Nature. The sentient and non-sentient things are bound together in an integral relationship. As the laws operating in Nature are God-given, it is the duty of humans to fashion their lives in consonance with those moral laws and live in tune with Nature. As God is immanent in every object in Nature, living and non-living, Gandhi developed an attitude of reverence for Nature and shaped a lifestyle accordingly. A whole gamut of consequences like simplicity, vegetarianism, nature-cure, conservation of natural resources etc. flows from this view. Gandhi was not blind to the so-called terrible aspects of Nature. But he saw them as part of a larger plan which is understandable only in the light of spiritual intuition. The infinity of space and time had a salutary impact on Gandhi. He developed patience and humility and a healthy and optimistic attitude towards change and human progress. Thus Gandhi's theory of temporal reality which is a basic component of his world-view is a logical extension of his vision of the Ultimate Reality and the nature of God's Being.

Article 3

MAN AS SELF

In the last two articles Gandhi's views on the Ultimate Reality, i.e. God and the phenomenal world were examined and in this article an attempt is made to work out Gandhi's idea of Man which is the third constituent of the ontological triune.

IV. 3. 1. Man, a wonderful piece of work!

Obvious it is that Gandhi was fully aware that man is a complex being having various dimensions like physical, psychological, intellectual and spiritual. Man has been the riddle of the world and the puzzle of poets, prophets and philosophers over the ages. That is why there are astonishingly
wide-ranging and astoundingly polar views on man, varying from 'Aham Brahmasmi' - I am God - of the Upanishads and 'God created man in his own image' of the Bible (80), to 'there is no animal in the world so treacherous as man' (81) and 'man is simply the most formidable of all the beasts of prey, and, indeed the only one that preys systematically on its own species' (82). In fact, Pascal was giving expression to this enigmatically contradictory nature of man when he exclaimed: "what a Chimera, then, is man? what a novelty! what a monster, what a chaos, what a contradiction, what a prodigy!! Judge of all things, feeble worm of the earth, depository of truth, a sink of uncertainty and error, the glory and shame of the Universe" (83).

IV 3.2. Concept of self implicit in world-view

This 'wonderful piece of work, noble in reason and infinite in faculty', man, engaged the attention of Gandhi too. In fact, implicit in any world-view is the concept of self and human nature and Gandhi paid considerable attention to it (84). And it is easy to see that he formed his idea of man in the light of his religious beliefs and metaphysical presuppositions. But it has been pointed out that Gandhi did not write as elaborately on man as he did on God. But from what he said and wrote about man, however scant it may appear to be, as they are fully impregnated with meaning and significance, it is possible to formulate Gandhi's concept of man. In fact, his long experience as satyagrahi in South Africa and India, his intimate personal contacts and correspondence with an incredibly large number of people from all walks of life and for quite a long period of time helped Gandhi to develop deep psychological insights into human nature. And he developed a very clear concept of self and of human nature which forms an integral part of his world-view.

Commenting on the significance of self (in world-view) Ramshray Roy says:
ether one judges an existing society or tries to articulate the vision of an alternative society, one proceeds from or implies a concept of human nature. . . . It is the conception of the self that provides the basic building block for man's relations with another man and with nature. As such it is necessary to focus on conceptions of self and their differential implications for sociability as they touch upon man-to-man relation . . . and on man's relationship with nature (85).

IV. 3. 3. Man: a manifestation of God

Gandhi did not go into the metaphysical intricacies of the questions relating to self (86). In keeping with his religious beliefs he modestly accepted the Hindu view which states that "man is a complex, multi-dimensional being including within him different elements of matter, life, consciousness, intelligence and the divine spark" (87). But Gandhi did not rest content with accepting blindly the Hindu concept of man. He gave it a revolutionary thrust by uncovering the dynamism inherent in it.

Basic to Gandhi's concept of the human self is the belief that man is essentially a manifestation of God. Gandhi understood and acknowledged the physical, psychological, intellectual and moral dimensions of the human self. But underlying all these, as the informing principle, is the spirit or the soul which is 'original and co-eternal with God' though part of God and as such dependent on God (88). "The soul is God-head within man, it is self-acting, it persists even after death, its existence does not depend upon physical body, it is matter rarefied to the utmost limit. Hence whatever happens to one body must affect the whole of matter and the whole of spirit" (89). It is clear that this view is logically connected to his view of the world also. As everything in the universe is a manifestation of God man cannot be otherwise. "If the world is but a reflection of Brahman, the individual self is but a spark of the Universal effulgence. Indeed both are one, but for the limiting conditions (90).

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For quite some time this Upanishadic vision that atman the individual self, and Paramatman, the Imperishable, Unmanifist, Exhaustless and Supreme Brahman, are not two but one baffled Gandhi (91). So, in order to describe his concept of the self, especially the relationship between God and the individual soul, Gandhi used to quote an Urdu couplet which means "Adam is not God, but he is a spark of the divine" (92). But later the Upanishadic vision became clearer to him and he whole-heartedly subscribed to that view of non-dualism between the Universal Self and the individual self. In a letter to Mira Behn Gandhi confessed that the meaning of the last two lines of the first verse of the morning prayer in the Ashram, which means: "I am that immaculate Brahman which ever notes the states of dream, wakefulness, and deep sleep, not this body, the compound made of elements", upset him (93). Gandhi explains:

Formerly I used to shudder to utter this verse, thinking the claim made therein was arrogant. But when I saw the meaning more clearly, I perceived at once that it was the very best thought with which to commence the day. It is a solemn declaration that we are not the changeful bodies which require sleep etc. but deep down we are the Being, the witness pervading the countless bodies. . . . The description of Being, the Brahman, is also quite apposite (94).

IV. 3. 4. The lower and higher selves

Thus, although this view incorporates within its spectrum the different aspects of the self namely the physical, the psychological and the spiritual it makes an important distinction between the Real Self and the not-so-real self or in other words the Higher Self and the lower selves. Gandhi does not consider either the body or the ego (psychological self) to be the real self because the spirit or soul that Gandhi identifies as the Real Self does not depend either on the body or the ego for its existence (95). But the fact that the Higher Self does not owe its existence to the lower selves does not in any way abate their significance. On the contrary, their value and
relevance increase as they house the Higher Self and serve as its vehicle. Though the lower selves, because of their inherent limitations, can cause to limit the operation of the Higher Self at least temporarily, they can elevate themselves by ridding themselves of their impurities if they willingly serve the Higher Law. Thus Gandhi does not find any inherent dichotomy between the two apparently contradictory selves. As pointed out in the article on Absolute Reality, the law and the Law-giver are one and along with the Law-giver the law also is manifest in all creations. Thus Gandhi does not find any fundamental contradiction between matter and spirit and the lower self and the Higher Self in man.

IV. 3. 5. Need for a metaparadigm

This view of Gandhi that the self is a spark of the Divine, a manifestation of God, and that the different dimensions of the self are not contradictory but complementary has far reaching implications about it. Its relevance becomes all the more clear if we examine it in terms of “self-models” of experimental psychology. In experimental psychology self-model is the way in which we see ourselves and the relationship between this self and everything else (96). This fundamental model conditions all thought perception and action.

It is a mind set or paradigm for all mental activity. Furthermore, since a self-model is often implicit in any educational, social, economic and political paradigms, it can even condition the development of paradigms themselves. If a physicist, for instance, experiences his consciousness and the physical world to be completely separate entities, he is likely to evolve different paradigms than he would if he experienced the two as part of a greater whole. In this respect our self-model is far more than a set of paradigms. It should strictly be termed a metaset (from the Greek meta ‘beyond’) or metaparadigm – that which lies beyond all sets and paradigms (97).

Many a modern thinker has pointed out that the most common self model by which most of us operate “is that of the individual self quite separate and distinct from the rest of the world. It works
on the assumption that I am in here while the rest of the world is out there" (98). This is what the philosopher and theologian Alan Watts dubbed the 'skin encapsulated ego'. What is inside the skin is 'me' what is outside is not me (99). In the modern world this view of the self is so pervasive that it has served as the model in all human interactions and activities and has created most of the problems confronting humanity today. "... it is this very model which lies at the root of much of humanity's problems today" (100). Peter Russell echoes the voice of a host of thinkers when he says that today we need a new self-model which is not bounded by the skin, whose essential quality is oneness with the rest of creation rather than separation from it (101). It is not difficult to understand that this felt need can most suitably be met by the self-model that Gandhi has evolved and applied in his life and activities.

IV. 3. 6. Human nature

Another important implication of Gandhi's concept of the self is that it enables one to see human beings as essentially divine. The practical consequence of this awareness of the divinity of the individual is that it compels one to look upon other individuals as ends in themselves and not as means to serve the purpose of others. This ensures the dignity of the individual. In fact, human dignity is grounded in human divinity. As the human individual partakes of the divinity of God, Gandhi believed that man is inherently and basically good. This provides the master key to Gandhi's concept of human nature.

The concept of human nature is of vital significance in any system of thought. "In fact, it is the different views of human nature which are to a great extent responsible for different ethical and metaphysical systems" (102). So quite natural it is that there are various theories of the self, of human nature in Eastern and Western thought.

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a) Three western theories

All these theories and formulations are based on three general views on the basic nature of humans, viz., human beings are (1) basically good, (2) basically bad, (3) basically unorganised or neutral. We will examine these views briefly in order to prepare the ground for a study of Gandhi's concept of human nature.

In Western thought the view that man is basically good is based on various reasons. The classical exponent of this view, Rousseau, for example, contends that nature is good and man being a part of nature he too is good. It was civilisation that brought corruption and vice. Let man return to nature and all will be well. Herbert Spencer who supported the view that human nature is basically good interpreted evolution as inevitable progress and cautioned man to stand aside, to keep hands off the cosmic process and to trust to evolution to bring changes in the human organism. Ashley Montague, the well-known anthropologist, strongly supporting this view says: "The organism is born with an innate need for love, with a need to respond to love, to be good, co-operative" (103). Ashley Montague rejects as completely false the widely popular notion in the West that life is a struggle and that competition is the law of life and declares that the principle of co-operation is the most important factor in the survival of man. None of these formulations, it is interesting to note, argues that human nature is essentially good because man has a soul or spirit which is nothing but God. Thus, the Western formulations of the self as inherently good do not fix it at a transcendental centre, as Gandhi did.

The second view states that man is essentially evil. This view has the support of one school of Christian theology as reflected in the doctrine of sin set forth by St. Augustine. The
sin of Adam, known in Christian theology as 'the original sin', has so corrupted human nature that every individual is born in a state of sin and hence evil and is unable to do any good through his own effort. During the Reformation, Calvin and Luther reaffirmed the Augustinian doctrine of sin. "This view received its most thorough going statement in the doctrine of total human depravity set forth by the followers of Calvin" (104). The second support to this view came from the empiricists who installed self-interest as the active and dominant ingredient of man's nature. This idea was hijacked and popularised by classical economists. Adam Smith being the most prominent among them, who identified the augmentation of fortune and the desire for bettering our material condition as the overriding motive of man. In this formulation the self is nothing but pure egoism, acquisitive and possessive egoism, and its relationship with the outer world and other human beings is totally instrumental (105). A third element in the disparagement of human nature came from nineteenth-century biological science which holds that man is an animal and like other animals he inherits a great array of fixed instincts acquired in the struggle for existence. So he is essentially brutish. Civilization is largely a veneer covering a bestial nature (106).

The third view takes the position that man is neither good nor evil. He possesses immense potentialities for both. This view draws its sustenance from some studies in psychology and biology that have shown that man differs from the lower animals in, among other ways, the flexible nature of his inherited tendencies. "Learning capacity rather than a rigid nature is characteristic of man" (107). So he is good or bad depending upon the nature of the total situation in which he grows up. Among the Western thinkers who support this view Reinhold Nieburh is the most prominent. He sees man as a curious blend of evil
and good, of 'nature' and spirit. Man is a child of nature driven by its thrusts and impulses; yet man is a spirit who stands outside nature. According to Nieburh the essential nature of man belongs on the one hand to all his natural endowments and determinations and on the other to that element of self-transcendence in him (108).

b) Gandhi's views on human nature

Gandhi's belief in the essential goodness of man is derived from his metaphysical presuppositions. The conviction that man is inherently good is so fundamental in Gandhian thinking that one may even say that Gandhi's entire attitude and approach to the questions related to life was based on this belief in the innate goodness of the human individual. The unique weapon of satyagraha and his revolutionary agenda for social transformation were all based on this belief.

Although Gandhi put his implicit faith in the goodness of the individuals he was not unaware of the element of error and evil in him. With his deep insight into human nature Gandhi knew that just as there is the divine spark in man there is also the brute in him. Gandhi makes a distinction between the 'higher self' and the 'lower self' and at the nadir of the lower self he identifies the 'brute'. The very fact that man has a body brings in with it certain natural limitations which cannot be ignored or underestimated as insignificant. But one shall not identify man with his lower nature, nor shall the ideal of life be identified with the attainment of the needs of the body. Man, Gandhi contends, is a mixture of good and evil, and the upward and downward tendencies are inherent in him. He says: "Every one of us is a mixture of good and evil. Is there not plenty of evil in us? There is enough of it in me . . . and I always pray to God to purge me of it. The difference that there is between human beings is the difference of degree" (109).
But as man is essentially good, goodness being his basic nature, Gandhi argues that man is also perfectible. "Godliness implies that it is more natural for man to be good than to be evil, though apparently descent may seem easier than ascent" (110). This is the ground for Gandhi's optimism. Of course, to err is human but to try to overcome error is divine. "There is no one without faults, not even men of God", wrote Gandhi. "They are men of God not because they are faultless but because they know their own faults... and are ever ready to correct themselves" (111). One hears in these words of Gandhi an echo of the famous saying that every saint has a past and every sinner a future. "Man must choose either of the two courses, 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 grab" (112). Although the downward course is easier than the upward as we are born with brute strength, "we are born inorder to realise God who dwells in us. That is the privilege of man, it distinguishes him from the brute creation" (113).

As Gandhi was not a metaphysician his chief concern was not an indepth analysis of the individual self as it is. So he does not go deep into the metaphysical intricacies of the question of the relation of man to God as Sankara does (114). On the other hand, being an unsystematic philosopher of the weltanschauung category, his emphasis is on praxis and therefore, he is more concerned with how to bring out the divinity that is already there in human nature. For this, Gandhi believed, human individuals have to be trained to extricate themselves from the pulls and pressures of the lower nature. He propounded a set of rules and vows for facilitating this upward impulse to perfect himself and to realise his ultimate end. As we will discuss these and other related points at some length subsequently, it is
IV. 3. 7. Oneness of man and of all life

Another implication of the conviction that man is the manifestation of the Supreme is the belief that all life is one. And like an advaitin, Gandhi did believe in the essential oneness of everything, sentient and non-sentient.

I believe in the absolute oneness of God and therefore also of humanity. What though we have different bodies? We have but one soul. The rays of the sun are many through refraction. But they have the same source. I cannot, therefore, detach myself from the wickedest soul, nor may I be denied identity with the most virtuous (115).

This belief further implies that the universe is a harmonious whole whose parts should naturally and spontaneously function together. So Gandhi says: "I subscribe to the belief or the philosophy that all life in its essence is one, and that the humans are working consciously or unconsciously towards the realisation of that identity" (116). So everything and everyone has its role or duty, value and significance. Thus equality comes up as a natural corollary to this belief. It follows that inequality, segregation, discrimination, violence or exploitation of any sort is unnatural and against the law of God, world and man. Gandhi's proclaimed stand against exploitation and injustice of any kind, whether it be untouchability, racialism, or suppression of women, is in keeping with this belief that all life is one. In short, a whole set of new attitudes and values are born out of this vision and they serve as the foundation on which a new order in tune with the perception of oneness is to be evolved.

The sense of oneness of the entire humanity and non-human nature has another insight to offer regarding the impact of human action on society and the natural environment. Since all life is one and man is gregarious every single act of the individual whether intentional or otherwise, exerts its impact on society.
"I believe in the essential unity of man and for that matter of all that lives. Therefore, I believe that if one gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him and, if one man falls, the whole world falls to that extent" (117). So Gandhi considers it the bounden duty of every one to exercise his reason and will carefully and cautiously and modulate his behaviour in such a way that the whole community, nay, the whole world gains out of it. This brings us to a consideration of another important question in Gandhi's concept of man, viz. the exercise of free will.

IV. 3. 8. Free will and determinism

The activities of the individual are bound to exert an ineluctable impact on society, over and above the impact on the doer himself. So Gandhi insisted that everyone must act in a way that will not harm or endanger the community or the natural environment. Man should exercise his will rather than follow his impulses or act merely on the force of habit. It naturally raises the question of free will or moral freedom. How free is man? Is the freedom of the will controlled or determined by any laws? It goes without saying that to any given situation more than one response is possible. But how do we choose between alternative courses of action? Are our choices fixed or conditioned by deterministic factors totally outside our control? Determinism holds that

the world or nature is everywhere subject to causal laws that every event that actually happens has to happen, since it logically follows from a description of the conditions of it occurrence, together with the relevant laws of nature, that it occurs. Likewise any event that does not happen could not have happened. If human actions are included in the deterministic system it follows that no one could ever have acted otherwise than he did and therefore, . . . that no one is morally responsible for his actions (118).

In Western ethical thought there are three widely held positions regarding the questions of free will versus
determinism, (1) indeterminism or lebertarianism (2) mechanical or total determinism (3) universal causation (119). Indeterminism says that freedom is a moral postulate and a necessary basis for human action (William James) and, therefore, freedom must mean freedom from the operation of causal laws. Mechanical determinism, also known as necessitarianism, states that everything in nature has a cause and operates according to certain given laws which are unalterable and so whatever a person does, he could not have done otherwise as everything is predetermined in a chain of cause and effects. The third position, universal causation, links determinism and freedom and stresses the role of man as an active (or passive) causal factor.

Man makes a selection among several alternatives, and the fact that the alternatives have antecedent causal connections does not destroy the element of freedom of selection. ... freedom is not freedom from causes, it is reflection and choice that makes the fundamental difference in the part that man plays in the world (120).

The significance of Gandhi's views on free will and determinism will be all the more clear when examined against the background of the Western ideas mentioned above. Gandhi believed that as God is manifest in man, he is endowed with free will, reason and conscience. And therefore, "we are the makers of our destiny. We can mend or mar the present and on that will depend the future" (121). Man is free does not at the same time mean that he has unlimited or unfettered freedom. Nor does it mean the arbitrariness of will. Freedom is essentially moral and hence "Freedom of will is the sine qua non of any system of ethics which aims at explaining the phenomena of moral obligation. If a man is determined by natural forces, the question of any moral responsibility ... should not arise" (122). In this context in order to decide how free man is and what law determines the freedom of will, Gandhi accepted the
position of the Hindu theory of Karma. Gandhi declared that he believes in the doctrine of Karma and rebirth (123).

a) The theory of karma — a glance

Explaining the theory of karma Dr. Radhakrishnan writes:

*Karma* literally means action, deed. All acts produce their effects which are recorded both in the organism and the environment. Their physical effects may be short-lived but their moral effects (*Samskara*) are worked into the character of the self. Every single thought, word and deed enters into the living chain of causes which makes us what we are. Our life is not at the mercy of blind chances or capricious fate . . . (124).

The theory of Karma, according to Dr. Radhakrishnan, emphasises the importance of right action.

All things in the world are at once causes and effects. They embody the energy of the past and exert energy on the future. *Karma* or connection with the past is not inconsistent with creative freedom. On the other hand, it is implied by it. The law that links us with the past also asserts that it can be subjugated by our free action . . . The law of *Karma* says that each individual will get the return according to the energy he puts forth (125).

Thus freedom acquires a new meaning and significance when placed against the background of the theory of *Karma*. And that is also why Sri Aurobindo emphasised its importance while answering Mr. Archer’s wild charges. Writes Sri. Aurobindo:

The doctrine of renunciation and *Karma* tells us that the soul has a past which shaped its present birth and existence; it has a future which our present action is shaping; our past has taken and our future will take the form of recurring terrestrial births and *Karma*, our own action, is the power which by its continuity and development as a subjective and objective force determines the whole nature and eventuality of these repeated existences. There is nothing here to depreciate the importance of the present life. On the contrary the doctrine gives it immense vistas and enormously enhances the value of effort and action. The nature of the present act is of an incalculable importance because it determines not only our immediate but our subsequent future (126).

Gandhi also understood the law of *Karma* as the law of moral continuity and felt the logic of its argument impeccable. That is why he said, "The law of *Karma* is inexorable and impossible of evasion" (127). Though inexorable it is not completely
deterministic and is not to be confused with either a hedonistic or a juridical theory of rewards and punishments (128). As Dr. Radhakrishnan points out, karma or connection with the past is consistent with creative freedom (129). Karma is not mere mechanical action performed under the influence of blind impulse or custom. According to Gandhi, "No action which is not voluntary can be called moral. So long as we act like machines, there can be no question of morality. If we want to call an action moral it should have been done consciously as a matter of duty" (130). Thus Gandhi does not see any basic contradiction between the law of Karma and free will or moral freedom. On the other hand, the possible arbitrariness of will is put to continual check by the creative urges that spring from within. That is why Gandhi said that "the free will which we enjoy is less than that of a passenger on a crowded deck" (131).

Gandhi's 'incorrigible optimism', his readiness to wait long for the fruition of human endeavours and his insistence on 'renunciation' can be better understood in the light of his belief in the law of Karma. Gandhi believed that good produces good and love increases our power of love and wins over hatred. So no moral action goes fruitless. It will certainly bear fruit in the long run.

b) Rebirth

As a corollary to the law of Karma Gandhi believed in rebirth also. "I believe in rebirth as much as I believe in the existence of my body", said Gandhi (132). The human soul, as Dr. Radhakrishnan says," has the two features of continuity with the past (Karma) and creative advance into the future (freedom). It is as incomplete as any other organism and so perpetually moves on . . ." (133), towards perfection through endless improvement. "The capacity of the self for endless improvement, and the pervasive facts of continuance point to a future where
the self's 'withheld completeness' obtains a chance" (134). This is what is called rebirth in Hindu thought. The belief in rebirth ensures that even a little moral effort is not wasted (135). As a finale we may also add Gandhi's memorable words: "Transmigration and rebirth are not mere theories with me, but facts as potent as the daily rise of the sun" (136).

IV. 3. 9. A resume

It is clear, thus, that implicit in Gandhi's world-view is his concept of man as self. Gandhi formed his notion of the human self in the light of his religious beliefs and metaphysical presuppositions. He accepted the Hindu view that man is a manifestation of God and a complex multi-dimensional being including within him different elements of matter, life, consciousness, intelligence and the divine spark which is the Godhead within him. Gandhi believed that as man is a manifestation of God human nature is basically good. This implicit faith of his in the innate goodness of the human individual did not make him blind to the element of error and evil in him. With his deep insight into human nature he knew that side by side with the divine there is also the brute in man. That is why Gandhi makes a distinction between "the higher self" and "the lower self" in man. But as man is essentially and basically good, Gandhi argues that he is also perfectible. It is possible for man to extricate himself from the downward pulls of the lower self and realise the higher self in him. In fact, the chief emphasis in the Gandhian praxis is on how to bring out the divinity inherent in human nature. And as a consequence of his belief in the essential divinity of human nature and the oneness of life Gandhi contends that if one man gains spiritually the whole world gains with him. So it is his duty to regulate his behaviour and actions in a way that would benefit the whole community. Gandhi also believed in the Hindu theory of Karma and
rebirth. He understood the law of karma as the law of moral continuity and rebirth, its natural corollary, as a chance obtained by the self for attaining its withheld completeness. Thus, Gandhi's concept of man, of self, is comprehensive and fits into the metaphysical framework of his world-view.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Autobiography. Part I, Chapter X.
2. Ibid., pp. 13-27.
6. Young India, March 5, 1925.
8. Ibid.
9. Young India, March 5, 1931.
11. Young India, October 6, 1921.
12. Ibid., October 11, 1928.
13. Ibid.
14. see Young India, March 5, 1925.
15. Young India, October 11, 1928.
17. G. Ravindra Varma in a personal discussion with the researcher at Sevagram Ashram, Winter 1990 (appended with permission).
22. Young India, December 31, 1931, p. 428.
214. Young India, December 31, 1931.
30. Ibid., p. 2.
31. Young India, October 11, 1928.
32. Ibid.
35. Young India, October 11, 1928.
38. Ibid.
41. Young India, October 11, 1928.
42. Ibid.
44. Ibid. p. 31.
47. Ibid. pp. 374 - 375.
51. Young India, January 23, 1930.

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53. There is no contradiction between "the Universe is pervaded by God" and "the universe is a manifestation of God" as "pervade" means "to extend through the whole of". It is useful to cite the interpretation that Sri. Aurobindo gives to this verse which is also in the direction as Gandhi has interpreted it. "All this is for habitation by the Lord, whatsoever is individual universe of movement in the universal motion. By that renounced thou shouldst enjoy; lust not after any man's possession". Aurobindo rejects the meaning that Sankara gives to the word *vasyam* 'to be clothed' and substitutes it with 'to be inhabited' which is of the same meaning as pervaded given by Gandhi which means 'to extend through the whole of'. Infact, only this meaning can do justice to the thought corpus of the *Upanishad* which teaches "reconciliation, by the perception of essential unity of the apparently incompatible opposites, God and the World, Renunciation and Enjoyment. Action and internal Freedom, the One and the Many. Being and its Becoming. . ." Aurobindo like Gandhi explains the *mantra* or verse in four successive, movements of thought. Aurobindo says, "In the first i.e. *isavayam idam sarvam*, a basis is laid down by the ideal of the one and stable spirit inhabiting and governing a universe of movements and of the forms of movements". Commenting on the basis of cosmic existence Aurobindo says: "God and the World. Spirit and formative Nature are confronted and their relations fixed". Aurobindo continues: "All world is a movement of the Spirit in itself and is mutable and transient in all its formations and appearances; its only eternity is an eternity of recurrence; its only stability a semblance caused by certain apparent fixities of relation and grouping. Every separate object in the universe is, in truth, itself the whole universe presenting a certain front or outward appearance of its movement. The microcosm is one with the macrocosm . . . . Since He is one and indivisible, the spirit of all is one and their multiplicity is a play of His cosmic consciousness . . . ." Sri Aurobindo, *The Upanishads*. Birth Centenary Library. Pondicherry, 1972. Vol. XII pp. 73 - 74.


55. Young India, January 21, 1926.

56. Ibid.


60. It is relevant to note here that Gandhi avoids not only material luxuries but luxuries of the spirit as well. See Margaret Chatterjee, Op. cit., p. 175.


64. Ibid. pp. 133-34.

65. Young India. September 26. 1929.


68. Young India, November 13, 1924.

69. Ibid., September 26, 1929, p. 320.

70. The view that Nature is the greatest of books was passionately held by John Muir, the father of the US environmental movement. For Muir Christians impeded a proper appreciation of the natural world for they had dispensed with nature-gods in favour of a single deity in whose image we were made. See Stephen Fox, John Muir and His Legacy, Boston, Little Brown, 1981 and also the article, "The Road to Ecotopia? Socialism Versus Environmentalism", by Robyn Eckersley in The Ecologist, Vol. 18, Nos. 4/5, 1988, p.p. 142-147.


74. Harijan, February 16, 1934.
75. Ibid.
78. Ibid., p. 60.
80. The Bible, the Book of Genesis, 1: 27.
81. Montaigne, Essays II, XII.
82. William James, Remarks at the Peace Banquet October 7, 1904.
83. Pascal, Pensees, VIII.
87. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, The Bhagavadgita, Introductory Essay, p. 46.
89. Harijan, November 12, 1938.
91. "This whole world has that being for itself. That is reality. That is self. That art thou O Svetaketu", Chandogya Upanishad, VI. 10.
93. yat swapna jagara sushuptamavaiti nityam tad bhrahma nishkalamaham na cha bhoota sangham.
95. Mahatma, Vol. IV, p. 353
97. Ibid., pp. 101-102.
98. Ibid., p. 102.
99. Ibid.
100. Ibid.
101. Ibid.
104. Ibid., pp. 70-71.
107. Ibid., p. 72.
110. Ibid., March 25, 1939.
111. Ibid., January 23, 1939.
112. Ibid., February 1, 1935.
113. Ibid., April 2, 1938.
117. Young India, December 4, 1924, p. 398.
120. Ibid., p. 93.
123. Young India, June 5, 1924.
125. Ibid., p. 219.
129. Ibid.
132. *Young India*, June 5, 1924.
134. Ibid., p. 229.
135. *Young India*, June 5, 1924.

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