Torrence Gardner

[tagardn@ilstu.edu](mailto:tagardn@ilstu.edu)

Illinois State University

The Tradition

One may assume when living in this world that violence is the only tool that is wielded for power to be created and/or sustained. History has seemed to only recognize the violent eruptions and not the phases of tranquility. Images frequently reappear on the tube here in America that consists of violent sports and reality show brawls. Pundits screaming at each other on news cable such as Fox and MSNBC are on constant replay. As a citizen seeing this I realize more how power is thriving off such violence, but has there not been times where another form has come into play that has preserved or stripped away power? I believe this other form is shown through the action of nonviolence. It is more like a tradition that has its own views and tensions that are rooted in four major pillars. The pillars being power, human nature, means & ends, and practice over doctrine.

The nonviolent tradition importantly fosters an alternate understanding of power. The opinion that violence is the tool to acquire power is combatted by this view that power is reliant on the populace and is very fragile. Violence essentially is a quick way to destroy legitimacy. Political Scientist Gene Sharp labels the use of violence for control as Monolithic (power being firmly in the hands of one) in his book *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*. He sees violence as limited and reckless since all states have systems that help derive obedience from the subjects even in cases of dictators. Sharp explains that “many students of politics” isolate or ignore the social context where actions are made. Rulers could not use violence for ends if there was not a hidden structure in place that justified such actions. Obedience occurs when there is a social context that fosters it to happen.

Sharp alludes to six sources of how society grants power to individuals. The sources used: authority, human resource, skills, intangibles, material resources, and fear of sanctions. However, Sharp points out although these sources may have some influence it still remains that these will always depend on the consent of the citizens. This leads to the pluralist-dependency theory that is posed by him in which he sees the nature of power as only sustained or furthered if cooperation is garnered. Cooperation has come about in the past due to fear created by the ruler. It takes citizens to overcome the fear that has seemed to enslave them and take back or regulate the power of that centralized figure. However is it that easy to overcome fear and reclaim power? Fear can be overwhelming, specifically in cases where a gun is pointed in someone’s face. Nonetheless, nonviolence is not just about protecting lives but a responsibility to duty to uphold morality even if that results in death. One can simply not consent to another’s power but there will be a cost.

German political theorists, Hannah Arendt would pose similar inquiries but take a different spin on it. Instead of just seeing consent being a tool of power used by a populace she considers people working together in the first place for a common purpose as the true representative of power. She explains, “Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert” (44). Power is not this possession that can be just reclaimed back through force or consent, but rather it’s that collective effort that will always overturn force. Violence just simply destroys this innate sense of working together as a people. Although, she does see violence as instrumental in a sense that it is a means to an immediate (like self-defense) end and can instill fear. However, she furthers this concept that violence can be a useful tool by adding that it leads to unpredictable long-term ends and that power is actually the antithesis of violence. Arendt is similar to Sharp in that they see violence breeding obedience, but it diminishes power since it leads to mistrust and hatred. What she furthers in this shared concept with Sharp is the unpredictability of humans. Since we are unpredictable how is one to assert that the use of violence would lead to the ideal ends? Believers in the instrumentality of violence have seemingly rarely questioned the unpredictability of their goals. They simply add other ways violence can be used if a particular mode of force does not work. Violence, I think is even more unpredictable since now states do not dominate the use of violence as they once did. In present day there are terrorist groups and rebel groups that can get their hands on weapons of mass destruction on the black market. The means and ends have simply been further separated and blurred by new parties who want to use violence. Nonviolent theorists such as Mahatma Gandhi would see these groups as simply focusing way too much on the ends in an unpredictable world, that they simply replicate the pervasive state violence they abhor.

Mahatma Gandhi is in agreement with Sharp’s view in that power derives from subjects of the state. Gandhi focused on the system and the inner self rather than the British rulers that occupied the land. He eloquently states in his book *Hind Swaraj*, “The English have not taken India; we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength, but because we keep them” (38). Gandhi explains how Indians bought their goods and welcomed their officers, which gave them the opportunity to take over. Indians had an intense desire to buy such British goods. The British essentially created legitimacy in India through Sharp’s 6 sources of power. However, the fourth source, material resources, is what gave them the ability to create institutions that would consist of an Authority figure (Viceroy) and sanctions that created obedience of the Indians. There are powerful social forces Sharp discovers in his research that help breed obedience. It is easy to fall in the trap of idolizing rulers, upholding moral stability or being indifferent and just giving up power out of habit. Gandhi as well understood the effect manipulated social forces employed by the government had on his fellow citizens which is why he wanted more than just to expel the English rulers. He wanted Swaraj or self-rule to be attained and not just self-governance. One who has self-rule in Gandhi’s view would not obey such policies that would hurt them and the society just for the purposes of progress. One should only perform their duty and live without excess. In both these men’s opinions a transformation had to occur in the citizenry in which they would effectively become aware of their circumstance. Once they become aware they would not give up their power by simply not taking part in such a system. Sharp explains that withdrawal of consent can disrupt or anesthetize the system. One cannot be a ruler without having subjects. Policies and tasks cannot be accomplished without people following orders. That is why “Control over the mind is alone necessary, and, when it is attained, man is free like the king of the forest, and his very glance withers the enemy” (Gandhi 92). Fear must be overcome even if it results in death. Gandhi wanted his fellow Indians to come to the realization that true power lays within self-sacrifice for a deeply held principle.

This alternate understanding of power by Gandhi and Sharp may be due to the view of human nature that is held by believers of this tradition. Social philosopher Richard Gregg sees nonviolent resistance as having a psychological effect on humans. In Gregg’s book, *The Power of Nonviolence*, he expresses the belief that violent opponents only know how to react to someone who retaliates violently or shows fear. When a person does not retaliate and is not afraid a tension occurs inside the aggressor. He becomes confused and curious at what is going on. This bewilderment essentially disarms the aggressor and causes a moral imbalance. Gregg states, “He feels insecure because of the novelty of the situation and his ignorance of how to handle it” (44). This opens up the aggressor to new values and insight that before he/she was blind to. Gregg is in the belief that a person is not simply inherently good or evil, but has rather the capacity for both depending on what type experiences they have had. Such actions can be altered due to the example of the psychological change that occurs that is fostered by a nonviolent actor. Gregg states, “The disadvantage of the attacker increases by reason of a further loss of assurance. He becomes increasingly aware that the victim’s scale of value is different from his own” (46). This view breaks away from the belief of Thomas Hobbes who saw state of nature “as nasty, brutish and short” and could only be tempered through people giving up their power to a strong government. Instead of just containing the particular circumstantial violence of people, Gregg saw a way to alter such actions into a more harmonious manner. Humans instinctually suffer; to Gregg it combats the acquired element of violence since he claims our ancestors have been well tuned to deprivation and pain. Sympathetic response lies within each one’s subconscious. Attacker and victim are thus able to integrate their views with one another. This connection is accomplished by love. Gregg states, “Love involves the very principle and essence of continuity of life itself” (50).

Gandhi held a similar view since he believed that Swaraj was not just for the Indian, but for the English as well. The English were not this horrible group that would never be able to be a peaceful people. The removal or altered view of the social context (for Gandhi it was modern civilization) is the route to go if change in the individual is to occur. Gandhi held that love or soul force was stronger than any arms the way that Gregg argues love is more potent than violence. Gandhi explains, “The fact that there are so many men still alive in this world shows that it is based not on the force of arms but on the force of truth or love” (87). The world has still gone on even after disastrous wars throughout human history. Soul-force is seen to be natural to Gandhi that is why it is not recognized by human beings. This perception of soul-force being natural harkens back to Gregg’s view on the powerful effect gentile stimuli have on humans and the environment. “In nature, the most important forces are silent. Examples are gravitation, sunlight, electro-magnetic forces. . .” (113). Just as they are silent they are easily disregarded. The many forces of life essential for growth are slow and silent. It takes repeated actions of nonviolent resistance and loving-kindness to fully change someone who has only been exposed to violent stimuli throughout their life. However, this gentile stimulus is natural since as the biological observations in Gregg’s book shows it causes slow growth instead of a virulent reaction.

The reaction or growth that is caused by such stimuli is similar to Gandhi’s view that it goes against one’s manhood to follow an unjust law. Any law that breeds inequality or immorality shall or will be met with opposition since it not leading to any growth of that society but rather division. The government knows this Gandhi further explains, “They do not say: ‘You must do such and such a thing’ but they say: ‘If you do not do it we will punish you’” (90). They are essentially trying to combat a natural virulent reaction that may come about due to one of their laws. In Gandhi’s view, it is the citizen’s job to not just go along with any law, but rather analyze the law and seek to make sure that is does not harm the body or the soul of others. As Dr. Martin Luther king Jr. would later eloquently explain in a letter from a Birmingham jail, “Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust (4).” King delves deeper in to such a stance by explaining how, “oppressed people could not remain oppressed forever (7).” He believed that sooner or later the need for equality would expose itself and if it is not allowed to do it a nonviolent manner than it would be carried out through violent means. This need for freedom by majority of the African- American population that was occurring in the 60s is the visceral reaction that Gregg described when an entity is exposed to too much harsh stimuli. Gregg, as previously explained, sees humans by nature as sympathetic and the nonviolent movements particularly in the 60s tried to emanate such emotion within the viewers. This belief of human nature is a major concept that breaks such nonviolent believers away from the violent devotees.

A very distinctive, but conflicted concept that lies within the tradition is the means-ends relationship. Gandhi devoted much time to such a concept in his book *Hind Swaraj* to make clear how important this relationship is to the act of accomplishing a task non-violently. Gandhi felt that the means was just as important as the ends that would come about as a result. He explains by using the comparison of the robber that the homeowner would more than likely use a different means if the robber was his father, acquaintance, or a stranger (80). Each type of robber would arouse different emotions in us (pity, confusion, anger), thus leading to the use of a certain action. Essentially, the particular means applied would equal different ends. This comes in stark contrast to men such as Machiavelli who believed that the means mattered very little when compared to the outcome. He uses example after example on how drastic means had to be taken in order to attain the prescribed result. One particular example that he uses is explained in Chapter Seventeen of his book, *The Prince*, “Cesare Borgia was thought of as cruel; but this supposed cruelty of his restored order to the Romagna, united it, and rendered it law-abiding” (35). If the Prince did not use certain means then he would not attain the end goal he sought. However, Gandhi firmly believed that taking account of the means would lessen the chance of the situation escalating in a way that could be harmful for both parties. He explains that for example if one was to act in a brutal manner to the robber then it may lead to him threatening or causing more harm to the homeowner as well as the fellow neighbors. If the homeowner acted in an instructive manner then maybe he could help foster, but not force a change in the robber, thus leading to the growth of his character. Gandhi wanted not only an effective and peaceful end to such a problem, but also a type of growth to occur out of that.

The belief that effectiveness of the action should not be the main focus exposes a tension within the nonviolent movement. According to Horsburgh’s, *The Distinctiveness of Satyagraha*, other nonviolent believers in the west like King only focus on the effectiveness of the method and not the growth of both the parties that is essential to Gandhi’s Satyagraha. The western style of nonviolence was only being used as tool to allow integration in the current establishment, and not to help alter to a different way of life. In order to contribute the idea of a different way of life then each nonviolent movement had to consists of constructive work. Constructive work consists of self-reliant reforms such as manual labor, irrigation, and schooling that were all performed in distinct communities (Gandhi’s Ashram). Horsburgh cites such reforms as “morale-raising physical activity” since they fostered the change in the individuals and not just the desire for inclusion. He explains, “. . . that the Montgomery bus boycott was an effective exercise in the use of nonviolence. But it was a very limited campaign . . . it had highly specific and narrow objectives” (175). Although king sought negotiation and not violence, in Horsburgh’s view he did not seek moral growth that was to come out of the mass movements. King could almost be seen as having similar beliefs in means and ends as the violent devotees he opposed. Horsburgh desired for King to understand Gandhi’s emphasis on the means and not so much the ends when pertaining to the nonviolent movement. Gandhi emphasized not only equality, but also a new way of life. Horsburg sees Gandhi’s work in the Indian struggle as more universal than just a particular community’s struggle. Satyagraha (commitment to truth) did occur after every demonstration during the 60s movement but not while there were lapses. King, though, had to apply the struggle he was in to the specific context of the situation. King admired Gandhi, but I believe he felt it would be dangerous and detrimental to apply every principle of Hind Swaraj in the American context. African-Americans were not the majority as the Indian’s were when they had to go against the British. There were simply different factors that King had to take into consideration when he was leading the movement.

However, was Gandhi himself vulnerable to this very action that seems to irritate people like Horsburgh profoundly? Mehta in his work, *Patience, Inwardness, and Self-Knowledge in Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj*, claims that Gandhi did not fall prey to such acts. Gandhi challenges the goal oriented mindset throughout *Hind Swaraj* in his opinion. He explains that Gandhi did not even want to publish *Hind Swaraj* at the time he did due to the feeling of it being rushed and not yet being the ripest time. He explains, “The very structure of the work as a dialogue . . . accentuated that hesitance by postponing declarative conclusions” (420). Mehta uses the example of Gandhi’s opinion on the way Home Rule should come about. “Only men with mature thoughts are capable of ruling themselves and not the hasty-tempered” (16). He in Mehta’s eyes is focused on the moral action and not just the effectiveness of attaining the end goal. Mantena is a different author who does see Gandhi as a political figure that pushed goal-oriented initiatives. In her work, *Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Nonviolence*, she explains that Gandhi saw the world as inherently violent and acrimonious. That is the purpose of him creating strategic guidelines for people in the conclusion of *Hind Swaraj* to Mantena. Gandhi did not want simply to get rid of the British in a brutish and self-serving way. He believed as Mehta explains it’s easy to just focus on getting rid of the colonizer by any means than to resort to a more humane option. The means is where the Indian would be able to distinguish themselves from their brutal colonizer and thus showing the Indian as well as the colonizer that civility can occur in a society. Gandhi desired to convince the Indian that if they did not use such means then they would just be exemplifying how ambitious they are to become just like their previous colonizer. Gandhi, thus, according to Mantena, instilled strategic responses (means) to combat the political notion (easy to fall prey to violence). Many may see Gandhi as having an eloquent point (one should not want to quickly rule), however, just because on wants to overtake a ruler does not inevitably mean they will be the same as their predecessor. I feel Gandhi used the means over ends doctrine to push his belief on what a healthy life is. He was political since he analyzed a reality in his social context and then devised plans to alter that reality that would fit his idealistic world.

The relation between the means and ends is definitely a point of contention for theorist and nonviolent activists alike. However, there is another concept that lies within the nonviolent tradition that expresses a particular tension as well and that is practice/being over doctrine. Gandhi saw the sacrifice of self as very important to the nonviolent movement. He in fact states in *Hind Swaraj*, “Wherein is courage required – in blowing others to pieces from behind a cannon or with a smiling face to approach a cannon and to be blown to pieces?” (91). Sacrificing for the cause showed responsibility to duty in Gandhi’s opinion and not to a “lofty” ideal. The example of the cannon shows how he did not cherish the justification of war that pursued an ideal such as instilling democracy to the entire world. Self-sacrificing actions shows more commitment to truth than sacrificing someone else is the point Gandhi wants to make clear. War of such sort just simply continues tradition of masculinity and does not lead to a positive change in the individual. Real courage in his eyes was seeing a mother sacrificing her life to uphold morality even though she may have a dependent child at home. However, this is not an easy concept for many to accept. It is important to note that Gandhi at base level desired to overthrow a system (colonialism) that entails more effort than simply reforming it which is why he may have focused his efforts more on practice.

A responsibility to duty takes a lot of training as Gandhi and Richard Gregg understood. Gregg devotes even a whole chapter for training just to express the importance of this. Gregg explains that nonviolent resistance goes against our “primitive reactions.” He believes we are creatures of habit and it takes constant repetition to instill such a mindset. Since rarely do we have time to think before we act due to the nature of our fast pace world, he exclaims, instincts tend to be our moral guidance. Discipline needs to be instilled to combat such instincts. Gregg states, “There can be no human freedom without strict and habitual adherence to moral and intellectual principles” (144). The Civil Rights movement actually trained for certain situations to occur. In the PBS documentary, *Eyes on the Prize*, there is a clip in part 3 “Ain’t scared of Your jails” that shows civil rights protestors training on how to be disciplined at a lunch counter when an angry mob tries to provoke violence (2:00). However, this clip is in contrast to Horsburgh’s belief since he felt King and the movement focused solely on training for the purposes of pursuing a doctrine rather than for sacrificing for a moral calling. Gregg would be guilty of this in Horsburgh’s opinions since he is instilling the idea of training for the purposes of making a movement as effective as possible and not for the main purposes of changing the individual. King may have been more preoccupied with doctrine due to his particular context and his differing belief in the idea of “time.” He explains in his Birmingham letter how historically patience or statements of “wait until it’s the right time” has often become synonymous with “never” (3). He felt being patient is no longer a viable option since it been over three hundred years and not a whole lot has changed. Gandhi felt that patience was essential since if one rushed then they would only be quickly entering the system and not changing it since they had yet to change themselves. Gandhi, again, wanted to overturn the system and king simply wanted to reform it. One should not have to wait to make reforms. I would not as Horsburgh does, look at King with judgmental eyes because it seems as if his focus on doctrine led to citizen’s lives being changed for the better with the passage of certain constitutional bills. It is important to fit a particular prescription to a particular illness. Gandhi believed the Indian struggle was a universal one, but context is a very important factor to consider. If King was trying to be Gandhi in a sense then I think its justifiable to hold him to the same standard, but King had a different goal.

I have so far expressed the views and tensions of this tradition, but what are the limits of nonviolence, if any. Would nonviolence work in cases when a government even fails to pay attention to the movement? Author and Political Activist Arundhati Roy questions the use of nonviolence specifically in the case of present day India since the government has yet to let up in its measures that consist of forced evacuations. The government has simply ignored nonviolent protests in the past. These movements are not taking seriously by the media anymore as well. Violent movements like terrorist acts get full coverage and attention by national governments with their actions. Roy in her piece *Ahimsa* even states, “Unfortunately if peaceful change is not given a chance then violent change becomes inevitable” (13-14). People are essentially dying with no audience. Nonviolence needs an audience for there to be an effect to occur. Gregg’s claim of psychological sympathy can’t occur within the outside public if these nonviolent acts are being ignored. I can remember after 9/11 all the focus by the media was on trying to catch terrorist groups and instill fear rather than sympathy for the victims. If all the media attention was on trying to catch groups like Al-Qaida than one can almost for certain believe that peaceful protests against the War in Iraq and Afghanistan were being ignored. Governments like the United States learned from videotaping things like the movement in the 60s that continuously hurt their legitimacy. Instilling fear in the public has been a useful tool in blocking any sympathy from being created. An audience is of utmost importance to the movement because otherwise no effect will occur. It would be essentially forgotten and/or hidden

How about Genocide or ethnic cleansing? I am in agreement with Arendt that in a case like Hitler’s Germany I do not think nonviolence would have stopped a mass slaughter from occurring. Gandhi claimed in his response to a critic on the topic of Jewish extermination is that it is necessary for them to be nonviolent because Hitler is an individual that can have a change of heart as well as there would be a public outcry from viewers and readers. However, Hitler and his army had no problem sending civilians off to death camps. I am sure his fellow Nazis saw peaceful silent protests at these camps by individuals, but they still put them in to those toxic chambers and furnaces. Essentially, Hitler was the rule of law (he controlled everything), the Jews didn’t even have the option to protest since such rights were taken away in his first weeks of office. Gandhi as well as King was in a system and not under a tyrannical government, which matters greatly to how effective their movements would be. Gandhi also stated in his response to such critics of his appeal to the Jews that, “Sufferings of the nonviolent movement have been known to melt the stoniest of hearts” (4). There is truth to such a statement; however, just as one can easily feel for such victims one can easily forget. There are a number of genocidal acts some that have never been reported until recently and a couple that I can recall happened post holocaust (Rwanda and Srebrenica). Past acts of mass murder has yet to stop future mass murders from occurring. Nonviolence is essentially limited in cases where there is a tyrannical government.

Violence has seemed to be a dominant feature or tool to conquer a goal or retain power in Western culture. However, the nonviolent tradition although it may have some limits offers different, but useful insights on matters of power and violence. It is limited to think of violence as strictly the means to accomplish a goal since as the nonviolent tradition has shown one can have an effect by simply resisting or cooperating. Although I do not agree with all the tenets of nonviolence I do see it being just as powerful or even more powerful than violence. The ability to change the course of one’s action or group without the use of force is compelling, but also mystical to me. The nonviolent tradition shows that power does not have to be forced. When we are able to collectively come together and pursue a goal that is greater then the group than that to me truly represents power.