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GANDHI — THE MORALIST AND POLITICIAN

Gandhi was considered a man who offered the world something quite new in the field of ethics. Is this opinion right? In what does Gandhi's originality as a moralist consist? I think that one should look for it not in the contents of particular rules constituting his moral programme but, rather, in the context of the actual situation in which he was promulgating and realizing them, as well as in the postulated range of their validity.

Gandhi was the first to promulgate and realize the idea of *ahimsa* while acting in the capacity of a leader of a nation fighting for freedom. The idea of *ahimsa*, or the idea of love, sympathy, fellow-feeling, had been advocated as a universal moral aspiration in various cultures long before Gandhi's appearance; however, they were represented by people who remained outside the sphere of politics. For it was firmly believed that the defence of one's national interests was unavoidably connected with the necessity of departure from these principles. Whoever wanted to put them in practice should restrict his activity to the fields in which he would be acting only in his own name and on his own behalf. No one before Gandhi had dared to act on the same principles as a politician guarding the interests of his country, and especially as a leader of a country fighting for freedom.

Gandhi was the first to oppose the duplicity of moral attitudes not only within the sphere of principles but also in the field of his own political practice. He transferred, without any alterations or limitations, the moral rules appreciated in individual relations to the sphere of group-relations. This seems to constitute the most distinctive quality of Gandhi's attitude as a moralist and politician.

Gandhi's comprehensive principle of *ahimsa* includes three more concrete principles: 1) the principle of defence against injury, 2) the principle of benevolence towards one's adversary, 3) the principle of fighting without violence. The opinion that Gandhi was a man who apparently assumed non-resistance to evil is wrong. The essence of his idea was resistance to evil, but a non-violent resistance. He was actually a fighter who would not tolerate any injuries to himself or still less to others. He demanded an active attitude and, although he desired people to forget such means of fighting as manslaughter or bodily injury, he was sometimes inclined to consider a passive tolerance of wrongs a still greater evil than dealing with them by violence. He required fighting but he commanded people to desist from any hateful feelings against the opponent. He wished to treat the enemy as a potential ally. He would not allow slander of the adversary at the

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time of fighting or humiliating him in case of victory. Neither would he permit any retaliation [1].

Gandhi owes his world-wide celebrity to the idea which came to be termed "passive resistance" and which he himself preferred to call "non-violence". The term "violence", one of the most important in his ethics, was not either clearly defined or used consistently by him enough to enable us to decide in every concrete case of behaviour if Gandhi would count it as violence or not. By prohibition of violence in methods of struggle he usually meant the proscription of manslaughter and bodily injury. Among the recommended "non-violent" methods he includes, in mass action: strikes, demonstration marches, noncompliance with orders, etc. However, he also used the term "violence" in a wider sense, not only assigning it to actions which he considered morally objectionable, such as deceit, slander, lies and terror, but also occasionally counting as violence an unfriendly attitude, dislike and hatred. Thus the range of this idea becomes wider and certainly also more vague. It should, however, be conceded that the term "violence" in this wider sense has its equivalent in the idea of 'cold war", whose meaning seems to include those elements which served to enlarge Gandhi's conception of violence. Violence is, according to Gandhi, born mainly of hatred, and hence the only way of resolving human conflicts is through a conquest of hatred.

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The specific character of Gandhi's behaviour as a politician cannot be regarded as only a new technique of struggling. It was not simply political tactics, but was closely related to the choice of a definite way of life. It would be wrong to maintain that Gandhi decided to act as he did because in the existing conditions he considered it — rightly or wrongly — to be the most effective means of freeing India from the British yoke. As was rightly stated by C. Rajagopalachari, the very notion that what Gandhi taught was a "technique" has led to error and, of course, disappointment. "Non-violence is not a gadget to get what we used to try to get through violence" [2].

Some of Gandhi's co-workers accepted his postulates, treating them as tactically the best solutions in the given situation. Had they found that the methods rejected by him were more effective, i.e. more effective in the sense that they might lead to a quicker way of getting rid of the British, they would have consider it their duty to put them into practice. Gandhi's precepts had instrumental value for them, while he treated them as a matter of principle.

Gandhi was well aware of these differences of attitude and he often expressed his regret. In 1947, when the differences were particularly clearly revealed, he said: "If you analyse (the differences) you would find only one fundamental difference to which all others could be traced. Non-violence is my creed. It never was of the Congress. With the Congress it has always been a policy. A policy takes the shape of a creed whilst it lasts, no longer" [3].

[1] I have analyzed Gandhi's idea of non-violence in detail in my book *Etyka Gandhiego* (The Ethics of Gandhi), Warszawa, 1965.

[2] C. Rajagopalachari, "Violence in the Heart," in: *Mahatma Gandhi — 100 Years*, ed. S. Radhakrishnan, New Delhi, 1968, p. 310.

[3] Gandhi's weekly *Harijan*, 27.7.1947.

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The main aim which Gandhi as a political leader wanted to attain was to win independence for India. Closer analysis would prove the aim to contain such contents, that even in different conditions methods rejected by him could not serve the purpose: they would simply be ineffective. Gandhi treated independence as a whole complex of various factors — not only those from the area of foreign and home policy, but also those referring to the relations between groups, to civil rights, moral consciousness and so on, with a special emphasis put on the moral consciousness of individuals.

The word *Swaraj*, which he used and which was normally translated as political independence or autonomy, was associated by him with quite a number of values. That a foreign power should resign its claim to rule his country was treated by him as an indispensable but not sufficient condition of "the real *Swaraj*". "The word Swaraj is a sacred word" [4] he used to say. When he wanted to express his own conception of independence the word *Swaraj* was sometimes replaced by the word *Rama-Raj* — "the establishment of the Kingdom of Righteousness on earth", and Gandhi associated with it everything he considered valuable.

Here are some of his characteristic statements concerning independence "Let there be no mistake about my conception of *Swaraj*. It is complete independence of alien control and complete economic independence" [5]. "If *Swaraj* was not meant to civilize us, and to purify and stabilize our civilization, it would be worth nothing. The very essence of our civilization is that we give a paramount place to morality in all our affairs, public or private." [6]. — "The *Swaraj* of my conception will come only when all of us are firmly persuaded that our *Swaraj* has got to be won, worked and maintained through Truth and *Ahimsa* alone" [7]. — "Under *Swaraj* based on nonviolence nobody is anybody's enemy, everybody contributes his or her due *quota* to the common goal, all can read and write. (...). Sickness and disease are reduced to the minimum. No one is a pauper and labor can always find employment" [8]. — "The *Swaraj* of my dream is the poor man's *Swaraj*" [9]. —Sometimes Gandhi identified the ideal of *Swaraj* with the ideal of socialism, of which he had his own conception: "Only truthful, non-violent and purehearted Socialists will be able establish a socialistic society in India and the world" [10]. — At other times he refused to define *Swaraj* at all, saying that the concept of *Swaraj* would grow and change with advancing times.

On January 26, 1948, four days before his assassination, on the day which for nineteen years had been celebrated in India as Independence Day, and on which people took the vows not to give up the struggle as long as any traces of slavery remained, Gandhi addressed his followers in a way which proves that although the British had left India he did not enjoy the feeling of success: "This observance was

[4] Gandhi's weekly *Young India*, 19.3.1931.

[5] *Harijan*, 2 1.1937.

[6] *Young India*, 21.3.1930.

[7] *Harijan*, 27 5.1939.

[8] *Harijan*, 25.3 1939.

[9] *Young India*, 26.3.1931.

[10] *Harijan*, 13.7.1947.

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quite appropriate when we were fighting for the Independence we had not seen or handled. Now We have handled it. and we seem to be disillusioned. At least I am, even if you are not — What are we celebrating today? Surely not our disillusionment. We are entitled to celebrate the hope that the worst is over and that we are on the road to showing the lowliest of the villagers that it means his freedom from serfdom and that he is (...) the salt of the Indian earth, that it means also equality of all classes and creeds, never the domination and superiority of the major community over a minor, however insignificant it may be in number and influence. Let us not defer the hope and make the heart sick" [11].

In the light of the preliminary exposition it is clear that Gandhi strongly emphasized the unity between ends and means when the end in question was of a complex character. According to him ends and means cannot be separately evaluated. The end determines the choice of means and the means determine the attainment of this or that particular end. "There is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree." [12] — "They say, 'means are after all means.' I would say, 'means are after all everything.' As the means so the end Realization of the goal is in exact proportion to that of the means. Violent means will give violent *Swaraj*" [13]. — "I feel that our progress towards the goal will be in exact proportion to the purity of our means" [14].

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Considering Gandhi's ideal of *Swaraj*, considering the whole complex of values accepted by him, the methods he recommended can be treated as instrumental. E.g. Gandhi highly appreciated the nation's consolidation, but it could not be achieved by means of instilling hatred or the desire for revenge on a certain group of people, because a society which turned hatred into virtue or a vengeful society did not suit his ideals.

When Gandhi was striving for India's independence, he was concerned with the elimination of the wrongs done to his own nation which suffered from exploitation, humiliation and the harmful influence of slavery on the people's minds. However, he did not want the people who would win independence to deteriorate morally during the struggle, but he wished the struggle to become an opportunity for their moral improvement. In addition it must be stated that not only the final realization of the goal but also the very process of approaching the end by means of *satyagraha* had itself, in Gandhi's opinion, autonomous value. Hence his statement: "It seems that the attempt made to win *Swaraj* is *Swaraj* itself" [15]. Although the aims he was striving for were distant, he maintained that the way we live our lives every single day was essential. He considered participation in the nation's great efforts, the *satyagraha-struggles*, to be a better way of life for the Indian people than the passive, degrading endurance of evil — a better way even if there were no victory to be won at

[11] *Harijan*, 1.2.1948.
[12] N. K. Bose, *Selections from Gandhi*, Ahmedabad, 1948, p. 38.
[13] *Young India*, 17.7.1924.
[14] N. K. Bose, op. cit, p. 38.
[15] N. K. Bose, op. cit., p. 38.

the end of the struggle. The several *satyagraha-struggles* constituted not only an investment for the future but they also organized the nation's current life and contributed new values to it.

J. Nehru writing about the period preceding Gandhi's political leadership, stated that the Indian nation was divided and left to its fate. "And then Gandhi came. He was like a powerful current of fresh air that made us stretch ourselves and take deep breaths. — The dominant impulse in India under British rule was that of fear, pervasive, oppressing, strangling fear. (...) It was against this all prevading fear that Gandhi's quiet and determined voice was raised: Be not afraid" [16]. Gandhi was advocating a policy which demanded exceptional courage. With his own example of courage he showed the Indian people how to face up to arrest, beatings-up and imprisonment with the calm courage of men who know that their cause is just [17].

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The most essential ethical assumption which determined Gandhi's style of public activity was his conception of *ahimsa*, and particularly that element of it which, according to some contemporary moralists, may be called ethical universalism. I should like to define this principle in the following way: every human being as such has an intrinsic value which, in dealings with him, may never be ignored or discounted. Gandhi widened the moral community, at least in the sense of treating all people, however different or alien, as human individuals who count. He respected the dignity and worth of every man.

M. L King, whose attitude in his fight against racial discrimination closely resembled that of Gandhi's ~~*thisma*~~, spoke of the love which is expressed in the Greek word *agape*. "*Agape* means (...) redeeming good will for all men. (...). *Agape* does not begin by discriminating between worthy and unworthy people, or any qualities people possess. It begins by loving others for their sake. It is an entirely 'neighbour--regarding concern for others', which discovers the neighbour in every man it meets. There, *agape* makes no distinction between friend and enemy; it is directed toward both" [18]. M. L. King made it clear that, speaking of love at that point, he was not referring to some sentimental or affectionate emotion ("It would be nonsense to urge men to love their oppressors in an affectional sense"), but only to the precept that the intrinsic value of every person be recognized.

"Every man as such is our brother," [19] declared Albert Schweitzer. This principle was Gandhi's guiding idea in his political activity. He rejected all kinds of particularism. He desired the good as something to be enjoyed by all men. His loyalty to the human race superseded all other subordinate loyalties — national, racial, credal. "My patriotism is not exclusive; it is calculated not only not to hurt another nation but to benefit all in the true sense of the word." — "We want freedom

[16] J. Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, London, 1946, p. 427.
[17] Scil. R. C. Zachner, *Hinduism*, London, 1966, p. 182.
[18] M. L. King, *Stride toward Freedom*, New York, 1958, p. 86.
[19] A. Schweitzer, *Die Lehre von der Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben*, Munchen, 1966, p. 100.

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for our country but not at the expense or exploitation of others, not so as to degrade other countries." — "The conception of my patriotism is nothing if it is not always, in every case without exception, consistent with the broadest good of humanity at large." — "My goal is friendship with the whole world..." — "I have equal love for all mankind..." — These words expressed Gandhi's most authentic feelings, nevertheless it is not easy to quote them: all beautiful-sounding words have became commonplace; they mean so little today. Gandhi himself kept saying that we have had enough of noble slogans — what the word really needed was honest practice.

The above-mentioned assumption, the principle of ethical universalism — accepted by Gandhi not in words only but penetrating all his life and imposing duties on him not in the future kingdom of *Rama-Raj* but at every moment of the present life — gave a particular character to his political activity. Gandhi really took into consideration the welfare of his adversaries too and tried as hard as he could to minimize the wrongs which were being done to them during the struggle. He did so irrespective of the good or bad qualities the opposing party possessed.

The French author Vercors wrote about the necessity of persisting in a definite moral attitude even towards the worst enemy, even towards the enemy who had broken "the natural interhuman relationship" — and it is not difficult to see the analogy between Vercors' attitude and that of Gandhi: "We owe the enemy the general respect due to every man and consisting in the fact that he cannot be used as a simple tool or thing. It is always due to him even when he denies it to us. To treat him in the way he would have done it, had he been in our position, would mean admitting his victory and would deprive our struggle of any sense" [20].

The word "enemy", so emotionally loaded, was not used by Gandhi; it was the result of his concern that nobody should be degraded to the position of beings to whom no moral principles were applied. As was stated by the Polish philosopher H. Elzenberg, Gandhi did not want the effects of victory to prove that it was only a change of roles played in the long and rather mean drama which has been monotonously revealed in the history of mankind since its very beginning [21].

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Gandhi, like every man of action, was faced with the conflicts of the values he believed in, and had to make a choice among them. To save one value he had to give up another value. He had to agree to compromises — decisions which he felt to be the choice of a lesser evil.

J. Nehru, with all his realism, once stated that a politician always has to make compromises. Nevertheless he clearly saw the differences among people who are engaged in public activity and have to choose

[20] J. Maudale, "Dwa oblicza współczesnego humanizmu francuskiego· Emanuel Mounier i Vercors" (Two Faces of the French Humanism: Emanuel Mounier and Vercors), *Twórczość*, 4/1957.

[21] H. Elzenberg, "Gandhi w perspektywie dziejowej" (Gandhi in Historical Perspective), in: *Próby kontaktu* (Attempts at Contact) Kraków, 1966.

the lesser evil in their practice. He held in high esteem those in whom every decision and every act was preceded by a moral struggle. He maintained that in this respect Gandhi to some extent influenced even his adversaries.

I think that in his attitude towards the conflict of values and in taking decisions based on compromises, Gandhi's specific features as a politician were shown particularly clearly.

Gandhi tried to reach his positive aims without heavy losses — he believed in the duty of the minimization of evil. This statement appears to be not only very vague but also commonplace. But Gandhi's peculiar moral quality consists in the fact that he really applied this principle, that in every case he was looking sincerely and with all his might for a way of restricting any harm done to anybody. Surely the slogan, "Not one blow unless absolutely necessary" formulated by T. Kotarbiński and treated by him as obligatory in every situation, was one of Gandhi's most fundamental principles of action [22].

Agreeing to compromise, Gandhi preserved the sensitivity of his conscience. Necessary evil, the lesser evil, was nevertheless an evil for him. He did not try to make himself believe or to convince others that the gain achieved at the cost of an evil averts the evil. For instance, he frankly admitted that the effects of the boycott of British cloth which was organized by him, were bad for the Lancashire weavers who were unemployed and were living in poverty; he justified it by the fact that he was trying to save millions of people in his own country not only from poverty but from complete starvation.

Vercors asked a question concerning compromises which has been worrying many people besides himself: "Where is the limit which cannot be transgressed? This is a very important problem. I am sure that this is the essential problem of our era. If it is not solved, our civilization will be faced with destruction" [23]. Another kind of Gandhi's specific qualities was his setting limits to compromise. As we all know, it is not a common practice. Many people think, according to circumstances, every kind of deed may be accepted provided it is a means of preventing a sufficiently great evil. Those who think so express a sort of relativism in its radical form: they assume that all principles are only relatively valid in the sense that they admit exceptions. In discussions dealing with this problem usually striking instances of dramatic situations are cited, e.g.: The torturing of a war prisoner is infamous. But thousands of people in our camp are threatened with complete extermination. The only chance of escaping death is to torture the prisoner until he makes a confession. Can one give up this way of saving people? — Gandhi's answer would be that this kind of method should never be accepted. "Both reason and heart refuse to reconcile themselves to torture for any crime no matter how vile the crime may be" [24].

Although Gandhi was an advocate of non-violence, he admitted exceptions from the norm of non-killing. When asked what was the duty of a son whose father had been assaulted by a madman with

[22] Scil. I. Lazari-Pawłowska, "The Ethical Teaching of Tadeusz Kotarbiński" (to be published in *Dialectics and Humanism*).

[23] J. Maudale, op. cit.

[24] *Young India*, 26.2 1925.

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a hatchet, Gandhi replied that the son should defend his father even if he were to kill the assailant. He admitted of a similar behaviour only in extreme emergency, but nevertheless, he did admit it in some concrete situations, not only in the case of individual behaviour but also sometimes — though even less willingly — in collective behaviour, — hence his wavering attitude to a war for defence. A war for defence was a particularly severe dilemma for him, and he was sometimes more faithful to his principle of fighting against injury than to his principle of non-violence For instance, in his telegram to J. Paderewski he declared in September 1939: "Of course my whole heart is with the Poles in the unequal struggle in which they are engaged for the sake of saving their freedom. I am painfully conscious of the fact that my word carries no power with it. (...) All that I can, therefore, send to the brave Poles is my heart-felt prayer for the early termination of their fearful trial and for the grant of the required strength to bear the suffering whose very contemplation makes one shudder. Their cause is just and their victory certain" [25]. In a letter (of 18.9.1939) to his Polish friend Wanda Dynowska he even made the following statement: "If Poland has that measure of utter bravery and an equal measure of selflessness, history will forget that she defended herself with violence" [26].

Gandhi admitted exceptions from many norms. His decisions in conflicting situations could not be foreseen even by his closest fellow-workers. In some circumstances he was determined to preserve one value, in other circumstances another value. He responded to new challenges and new ways It is, therefore, impossible to work out a general scale of preferences in Gandhi's axiological beliefs.

Several norms, however, were treated by Gandhi as always obligatory in public activity, irrespective of circumstances.

Here are a few examples of such norms. Nobody should ever be slandered. The opponent's good qualities must never be denied. Hatred among people must never be fostered. Other people should never be held responsible for our own faults. People who oppose us should always be given the right to express their own views

Gandhi's application of these norms could be illustrated by numerous examples of his activities. I shall confine myself to one example only. When Gandhi attended the session of the Gandhi Seva Sang-organization in East Bengal a group of his opponents associated with S. Bose staged a hostile demonstration shouting "Don't want Gandhi," "Down with Gandhism." In his speech Gandhi criticized the participants of the session who found their behaviour outrageous: "There is always the fear of self-righteousness possessing us, the fear of arrogating to ourselves a superiority that we do not possess. (...) Whether the number of those who shout these slogans is fifty or five hundred, we may not ignore them. We must try to discover their grievance. We may not treat them with contempt, if we are believers in non-violence. No *argumentum ad hominem* will do. (..) We shall then try to meet and plead with them. (...) I do not say that you will immediately win them over but you will certainly check the spread

[25] M. K. Gandhi, *Non-violence in Peace and War*, Ahmedabad, 1962, p. 230.
[26] Ibid., p. 240.

of poison. Retaliation is counter-poison and poison breeds more poison. The nectar of love alone can destroy the poison of hate" [27]

The opinion that Gandhi's moral programme — including his political activity — contains some Utopian elements may be right. Nevertheless people who, in their striving for the moral good, try to break the limits of what is possible play an extremely positive role. among other things they make people feel ashamed, they shake people's conscience and they encourage at least some people not to act below real possibilities.

Erich Fromm, in his paper dedicated to Bertrand Russell. praises the role of prophets. According to him, prophets are persons who not only announce ideas, not necessarily new ones, but who also live their lives according to those ideas. We owe it to prophets that moral ideas from time to time "appear in the flesh" (There have been many priests.) The priests give an institutional character to ethical ideas, transform them into rigid doctrines and carefully guard the 'correct" formulation of each idea. Most frequently they destroy the bond between ideas and real life, while prophets become the source of moral inspiration.[28]

Ija Lazari-Pawlowska

There are very few prophets in the history of mankind, while there are many priests.

[27] D. G. Tendulhar, *Mahatma. Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, vol. V, New Delhi, 1952, p. 297.
[28] E. Fromm. "Prophets and Priests," in: *Bertrand Russell — Philosopher of the Century. Essays in His Honour*, Ed R Schoenman, London. 1967.

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