

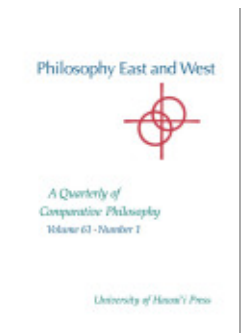


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*The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi for the Twenty-First
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The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi for the Twenty-First Century. Edited by Douglas Allen. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008. Pp. xviii + 263. Paper \$29.95.

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For decades, Gandhi's revolutionary ideas and techniques have drawn wide attention from scholars and activists. Gandhi is one of modern history's most analyzed thinkers: a sustained flow of scholarship on his life, thought, and methods presents a testimony to a vital interest in his philosophy. While there is a sense of continuity in Gandhian thought, literature about Gandhi has gone through various phases, in an evolution from romanticization or criticism of his ideas to a serious examination of his philosophy for addressing conflicts.

Among the challenges that contemporary Gandhian scholars face is discovering the relevance of Gandhi's philosophy for the twenty-first century. The overarching questions in recent years have been directed at Gandhi's nonviolent strategy and its relevance to solving personal, social, and political conflicts. *The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Douglas Allen, a professor of philosophy and a peace and justice scholar and activist, is a collection of essays by prominent scholars in the field of Gandhian studies exploring the urgent questions: "to what extent [sic] can we even speak of Gandhi's 'philosophy'?" and "to what extent are Gandhi's thought and action relevant for the twenty-first century?" (p. vii).

Setting the stage for this multidimensional volume in his comprehensive introduction, Allen reminds us that in spite of the broad reception of Gandhi's thought, "the question of Gandhi's relevance remains controversial. There have always been critics who have viewed and continue to view Gandhi's approach as naïve, utopian, escapist, negative, and completely irrelevant" (p. viii). Even some of his admirers submit that Gandhi "has limited or no relevance for a twenty-first century of shrinking decentralized villages and new, interconnected, global structures of corporate economic, military, and media power relations" (p. viii).

However, in contrast to these views, Allen argues that "the authors in this volume, while not romanticizing Gandhi or the past and while cognizant of changing contemporary contexts, submit that Gandhi's thought and action are significant, relevant, and urgently needed for addressing problems of the twenty-first century" (p. viii). In this era of religious, economic, environmental, social, and moral challenges,

a volume exploring the relevance of Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence, *satyagraha*, interreligious dialogue, religious ethics, communal unity, et cetera is not only significant but necessary. This collection creates a constructive philosophical framework for confronting the contemporary issues of terrorism, exploitation, violence, oppression, and injustice.

The substance and structure of this volume make it different from other recent books on the subject in three important ways. First, it includes prominent Gandhi scholars and authors of influential writings on Gandhian thought. Second, the range of topics with intersecting themes—in spite of the authors' distinctive approaches, critical analyses, and conclusions—provides a coherent narrative for the relevance of Gandhi's philosophy without compromising its complexity. Lastly, this volume is academic in stature but pragmatic in approach, and it invites the reader to consider alternative modes of thinking and action in a classic Gandhian way.

Each of the chapters is unique in approach and substance and contains multiple layers of thought. In this limited space a brief synopsis of the major issues addressed within each chapter will give a glimpse of its depth and breadth. I focus only on the central themes presented by the authors relating to the relevance of Gandhi in the twenty-first century, ordered by theme rather than the sequence found in the book.

The conflict among religions is one of the fundamental challenges of the twenty-first century. The two chapters "Gandhi and Interreligious Dialogue" by Bhikhu Parekh and "Gandhi and Islam: A Heart-and-Mind Unity?" by Fred Dallmayr address this issue from two different but related angles. Parekh focuses on the value of interreligious dialogue, which was Gandhi's central concern as he developed his nonviolent program in a multireligious community. Parekh argues that in the current era he sees religion as "one of the primary or contributory sources of conflict," noting that "there is a growing global consensus that a dialogue between religions is needed to resolve or at least minimize these conflicts" (p. 1). In this vein, he identifies three main issues: first, the importance of both intrareligious and interreligious forms of dialogue; second, "the deep mutual fears and antipathies between the proponents of the religious and secular views of the world" (p. 1); and third, "religious differences and hostility" as well as "the deeper conflicts of economic and political interests . . . played out at the religious level" (p. 2). He argues that interreligious dialogue could address various problems, and concentrates on Gandhi's approach because "few have embodied the spirit of interreligious dialogue in their lives as deeply as he has" (pp. 2–3). Parekh outlines and interprets various elements of Gandhi's approach to religion: "In Gandhi's view every religion can and should learn from others in areas where they have an advantage over it. Such a dialogue conducted at the deepest level and in a spirit of genuine humility is not just a moral and political necessity but also a religious requirement" (p. 11). While addressing the limitations in Gandhi's arguments, Parekh points to Gandhi's valuable insights into religion and interreligious dialogue.

Dallmayr engages the complex issue of religious intercommunal violence and analyzes Gandhi's approach to communal harmony. One of the most important issues that occupied his mind was the goal of "heart-unity" between Hindus and Muslims in India. Dallmayr tells the story of Gandhi's interfaith experience during his

upbringing in the diverse culture of the Indian subcontinent, which proved beneficial for the envisaging of a secular, democratic India. After providing a historical overview of some of the factors that put a strain on Hindu-Muslim relations, including disputes with leading Muslim leaders, Dallmayr posits that although “India’s struggle for independence is today only a distant memory . . . the issue of inter-communal and inter-faith harmony remains as timely and urgent as ever. In this respect, Gandhi’s involvement with the ‘Muslim question’ offers numerous lessons for our contemporary era” (p. 155), both in India and in the ever more globalizing world. These instructive lessons include involvement in the spirit of affection and sympathy, and creation of good will, “not only a ‘heart unity’ but a ‘heart-and-mind’ unity” (p. 157).

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, in spite of our modern secular societies, the question of the relationship between the sacred and secular and the role of religion in the public space is debated all around the world. Anthony Parel’s “Bridging the Secular and the Spiritual” and Joseph Prabhu’s “Gandhi’s Religious Ethics” contain Gandhi’s philosophical analyses, combining the categories of the secular and sacred, which offer insights into this issue. Drawing on his seminal work, *Gandhi’s Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony*, which explores Gandhi’s integration of the spiritual and secular within the framework of the Hindu theory of *Purusharthas* (the four aims of life), Parel addresses the challenge of maintaining the relationship between the sacred and the secular, a source of contemporary contentiousness. He underscores Gandhi’s uniqueness in bridging the gap between the secular and the religious, which he terms *artha* and *moksha*. Gandhi presents a unique view “that the secular and the spiritual should neither be collapsed into one nor radically separated from each other” (p. 19). One of Gandhi’s most valuable contributions, according to Parel, was “the articulation of what the right relationship between the secular and the spiritual should be” (p. 21), offering a world-affirming ethics based on nonviolence and human rights.

Prabhu clarifies the “non-dual relationship that Gandhi sees between religion on the one hand and ethics and politics on the other,” suggesting that this “gives his conceptions of all three domains a dialectical and fluid character, which allows for their progressive and mutual enrichment” (p. 164). After providing a thorough analysis of three important Gandhian ethical concepts—*satya*, *satyagraha*, and *ahimsa*—Prabhu reflects on Gandhi’s notion of *moksha* and its relation to *dharma*, showing important features of Gandhi’s ethical religion and its “activist” nature. The author concludes with a caveat that a “dialectical balance between morality, politics, and religion carries both great promise and significant risks” (p. 174), analyzing the challenges of the modern context where religion is often perceived as the source of conflict and violence. Contrasting positive aspects of Gandhi’s religion with the “chauvinistic expressions of religion in our time,” Prabhu suggests that “Gandhi’s example seems to provide a way where religion can be transformed from being a problem to being a potential solution” (pp. 176–177).

As a staunch proponent of nonviolence, Gandhi considered not only overt forms of violence but also subtle forms of exploitation that must be recognized to disrupt the tide of violence. Douglas Allen’s “Mahatma Gandhi’s Philosophy of Violence, Nonviolence, and Education” underscores that Gandhi is a valuable “catalyst chal-

lenging us to rethink our views of violence and nonviolence" (p. 41). In Allen's view, "Gandhi's approach to education emphasizes both the multidimensional nature of violence and structural violence of the status quo" (p. 42). Gandhi often used exploitation and violence synonymously—exploitation, for example, can be present in apparently peaceful classrooms. Allen sees Gandhi's education as peace education, as a "long-term preventive approach": "The much greater strength of Gandhi's educational approach to violence is in terms of preventative socialization, relations, and interventions so that we do not reach the unavoidable stage of explosive overt violence and war" (p. 46). After outlining the key to Gandhi's education, Allen concludes with challenges to such an educational approach, while emphasizing its value in the twenty-first century for the sustainability of humanity and the earth.

The destruction of war invites us to consider alternative methods for addressing conflict. M. V. Naidu's "The Anatomy of Nonviolent Revolution: A Comparative Analysis" and Richard L. Johnson's "Three 9/11s: *Satyagraha* or Terrorism" present various dimensions of Gandhi's nonviolent method that may be relevant in addressing modern-day conflicts. Naidu's comparative essay presents a novel analysis of the positive effects, including "creating and sustaining a democracy in the most multiracial, most multireligious and multilingual country," of Gandhi's nonviolent revolution in India (p. 223). Naidu formulates his claim by analyzing four major revolutions: the American (1775), the French (1789), the Russian (1917), and the Chinese (1949). After cataloging the violence and negative events that made up the legacy of these movements, Naidu analyzes the positive features of the Indian Nonviolent Gandhian Revolution (1915–1947) and outlines its unique features. In the Gandhian nonviolence section, he uses an epic style to communicate the power of nonviolence in our contemporary world.

Johnson presents Gandhi's *satyagraha* approach as an alternative for confronting terrorism. He catalogs three historical events that shared the date September 11: (1) September 11, 1906, when Gandhi launched his first nonviolent campaign in South Africa, where he became aware that the British used terror as a weapon; (2) September 11, 1973, the climax of the violent campaign coordinated for years by U.S. and Chilean imperialist forces that resulted in General Augusto Pinochet's attack against President Salvador Allende, leading to the deaths of thousands of people; and (3) September 11, 2001, the date of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on U.S. soil, followed by the "terrorism of the Bush administration in Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11" (p. 100). These events set the stage for Johnson's analysis of terrorism, "a highly charged and controversial term" that has been utilized by governments to "discredit their opponents." He argues that "the actions of their operatives can be essentially the same as those charged with 'terrorism'" (p. 100). Johnson recapitulates Gandhi's thought that "counter-terrorism stimulates terrorism . . . each side justifying their violence as a necessary response to the terrorism of the other side" (p. 109). He emphasizes the need to explore alternative approaches to confront violence and insecurity in the twenty-first century.

The need to reformulate Gandhi's philosophy and vision for a contemporary context, which is different from his Indian context, is addressed by Margaret Chat-

terjee's "Gandhi's Conception of a New Society" and Vinit Haksar's "*Satyagraha* and the Right to Civil Disobedience." After considering Gandhi's own societal context, Chatterjee looks to two major sources for ascertaining Gandhi's conception of a new society: his actual conduct and his writings and speeches. According to Chatterjee, the seeds of Gandhi's conceptions for a new society can be detected in the network of institutions with which Gandhi was associated. His educational, moral, religious, economic, and social experiments at his communities could be seen as the new works of the old institution of *ashram*, founded on pragmatic, not Utopian, considerations. Chatterjee details Gandhi's challenging ideas, including his critique of the homogeneity, market economy, and uniform school curriculum under industrialization, as well as his unconventional vision of a "non-hierarchical" society where "otherness would be genuinely welcomed." She emphasizes that Gandhi's conception of a healthy society focusing on "the condition of the most disadvantaged" and where "it would be possible for the people to set right nonviolently any abuse of power by those elected" (p. 222) remains challenging and relevant to our times.

Haksar provides an extensive analysis of Gandhi's philosophy of the right to civil disobedience. He compares and contrasts "the way Gandhi understands the right to civil disobedience" with "the way this right is understood by some contemporary liberals such as John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin and Joseph Raz" (p. 63). Haksar examines "the basis of Gandhian civil disobedience (and noncooperation)," analyzing essential questions relevant for the twenty-first century (p. 80). For example, he asks whether Gandhian civil disobedience is "rights based or is it duty based or is it justified in terms of consequences" (p. 80), and what forms the basis for the duty of civil disobedience? After underscoring Gandhi's valuable insights, Haksar suggests a moderate approach to *Satyagraha* and some modifications to Gandhi's views.

The project of Gandhi's relevance for the twenty-first century requires new theoretical frameworks for Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence and truth. Nicholas F. Gier's "Nonviolence as a Civic Virtue: Gandhi and Reformed Liberalism," Naresh Dadhich's "The Postmodern Discourse on Gandhi: Modernity and Truth," and Makarand Paranjape's "The 'Sanatani' Mahatma: Re-reading Gandhi Post-Hindutva" each present Gandhi in a fresh light relevant to our philosophical discourse and modern-day issues. Gier draws attention to his book *The Virtue of Nonviolence: From Gautama to Gandhi*, which reformulates "Gandhi's ethics of nonviolence from a virtue perspective" (p. 121), an approach relevant to the twenty-first century. He defines Gandhi's political philosophy in a novel way for our times, arguing that Gandhi combined the elements of modernist and postmodernist thinking in the same way that "constructive postmodernists do today." He also proposes that "Gandhi's political philosophy can be conceived as a 'reformed liberalism' (p. 122). The four sections of this chapter systematically deal with the framework and elements relevant to Gandhi's nonviolence as a civic virtue. After discussing Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence in detail, Gier concludes: "That which is most clear in Gandhi's moral and political message is that nonviolence cannot just be a personal virtue; rather, it must be a civic virtue, 'an attribute of society,' as Gandhi somewhat exaggerates" (p. 138).

Dadhich provides an extensive historical account of various interpretations of Gandhi's philosophy, from the first scholarly study (1944) to a popular Indian film on Gandhigiri (2006), using Gandhian ideas for resolving nonpolitical conflicts. He considers "whether Gandhi should be considered a postmodern thinker or not" (p. 186). After defining postmodernity both historically and contextually, he argues that Gandhi is a "complex thinker and to dub him as a postmodern thinker is to oversimplify his arguments, and his evaluation as a postmodernist requires close scrutiny" (p. 188). Dadhich analyzes two important aspects of Gandhi's thought—his critique of modernity and his theory of truth—to evaluate the question, concluding that a historical and discursive analysis of Gandhi's ideas "does not give a clear verdict whether we call him modernist or postmodernist" (p. 195). His critique of modernity and theory of truth make a strong case for calling Gandhi postmodernist; however, his theory of the individual and preference for autonomy make him modern. He concludes that "Gandhi's philosophy is open-ended and heuristic in nature and that makes it difficult to treat him as a representative of any known form of philosophical stream" (p. 196).

Paranjape provides an original, lucid, and challenging rereading of what he calls "*Sanatani* [perpetual, enduring] Gandhi." In the first section, he paints a bleak picture that portrays Gandhi as irrelevant, due to declining Gandhian institutions, dying old-school Gandhians, the rejection of his visions of Hindu-Muslim unity, and the dissociation from him by both political parties. After emphasizing that India and the West have "different narrative trajectories," Paranjape calls for a *Sanatani* reading and reclamation of Gandhi. Gandhi called himself a *Sanatani* Hindu and redefined "what it meant to be a *Sanatani* Hindu" (pp. 206–207): "It is a faith based on the broadest possible toleration. I refuse to abuse a man for his fanatical deeds because I try to see them from his point of view. It is that broad faith that sustains me" (p. 201). Paranjape's overview of the features of *Sanatani Parampara* for the purpose of resituating Gandhi in his tradition also provides the foundation for Gandhi's philosophy, vital for a deeper understanding of his thought and action. In the cultural history of India, *Sanatani* Gandhi interacts with alternative perspectives. Paranjape argues that this *Sanatani* reconsideration of Gandhi is embedded in Gandhi's writings and practice, and poses challenges to Hindutva. Gandhi's *ahimsa*, moral disciplines, and *Svaraj* (self-rule/home rule) present alternatives to rule from the outside world.

This thought-provoking book, full of nuanced understanding of Gandhi's thoughts, makes an excellent contribution to the relevance of Gandhi's philosophy for the twenty-first century. Prestigious Gandhi scholars on varied issues using various approaches join in harmony to address difficult and urgent problems by analyzing various facets of Gandhi's philosophy. However, the subject of Gandhi's philosophy of renunciation, which was an integral part of his life and methods, and its significance for our current situation, has been left out. Specifically, it would be interesting to explore the relevance of renunciation, not merely as moral restraint but as a pragmatic strategy to the present-day economic and environmental crisis. Overall, this outstanding collection will be valuable to Gandhian scholars, students, and activists. It will also make an excellent resource for classroom learning.