

Gandhi and Saintliness

SAMIKSHA GOYAL, NIRMALANGSHU MUKHERJI

An integrated reading of Gandhi's ideas, images, personal life, and political activities, at times inflicts considerable damage to the understanding of his thoughts. George Orwell's (1949–2000) view of Gandhi as a moral saint and his ideas as "anti-humanistic" is a striking example. Adopting Orwell's image, the philosopher Susan Wolf (1982), in an influential paper, questioned the very idea of moral saints. His saintly image is an important reason why there is little mention of Gandhi in academic moral philosophy. By showing that the image does not apply to his thoughts, we rescue Gandhi's moral concepts from the perceived image of a saint.

The complex phenomenon of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948) comprised a variety of elements: Gandhi's personal image that led to ascriptions of Mahatma, Bapu, father of the nation, half-naked fakir, and the like; his political life and leadership that played a major role in India's independence from British rule; his original moral and political ideas and the striking methods through which he articulated them. In the existing literature on Gandhi, there is a prevalent sense that most of these elements are necessary for understanding Gandhi. It is no wonder, then, that much of the prominent contemporary literature on the phenomenon of Gandhi continues to be largely anecdotal, historical, and biographical in character.¹

Beginning with the early expository work of Raghavan Iyer (1997), Bhikhu Parekh (2000), Anthony Parel (2000), and a few others, there is growing scholarly interest in recent years to give a theoretical shape to Gandhi's social, political, religious, and moral ideas; the goal being to form an abstract understanding of his thoughts. The emerging literature attempts to interpret Gandhi's moral and political thought as an alternative to classical liberalism and political realism (Devji 2005/2012; Mantena 2012; Kapila 2015; Mehta 2010). The underlying idea is to see how Gandhian ideas contribute to the ongoing theoretical debates in political and moral domains.

Since the focus is on Gandhi's thoughts, this enterprise requires an examination of the conceptual underpinnings of his ideas, largely independent of his personal life and political activities. Akeel Bilgrami (2003: 4159) views the project as follows:

Gandhi's thought and his ideas about specific political strategies in specific contexts flowed from ideas that were very remote from politics; instead they flowed from and were integrated to the most abstract epistemological and methodological commitments. The quality of his thought has sometimes been lost because of the other images Gandhi evolves—a shrewd politician and a deeply spiritual figure.

There is a strong case, thus, for viewing Gandhi as a philosopher rather than just a pragmatic politician (Goyal 2019; Taylor and Perry 2010).

Studying Gandhi

On the face of it, it seems reasonable that a theoretical examination of Gandhi's moral and political ideas will be largely independent of his title of Mahatma or his leadership of the Congress party. After all, we need not inquire into the personal attributes and political distinctions of Karl Marx or Mao Zedong to evaluate the quality of their thoughts, not to mention more abstract thinkers such as Immanuel Kant or John Rawls.

Samiksha Goyal (*samiksha.goyal@monash.edu*) is a research scholar at the Department of Philosophy, Monash University, Melbourne. Nirmalangshu Mukherji (*nirmalangshu.mukherji@gmail.com*) formerly taught philosophy at University of Delhi, New Delhi.

In each case, a study of their seminal work is enough. The point we are trying to make here is that although there is much knowledge about the personal and political lives of Marx and Mao, such information is usually reserved for their biographical and historical sketches. They are seldom used for Marxist and Maoist studies; a discussion of Marx's theory of alienation and Mao's theory of contradiction does not require a study of their lives. Why, then, should it be otherwise for seminal Gandhian ideas, such as ahimsa, satyagraha and swaraj?

Yet, it is hard to locate such a separation between biographical and theoretical issues in Gandhian studies. This is because, beyond the methodological plausibility of Bilgrami's project, the separation between Gandhi, the person, and his "theory" may not be as sharp in practice. There are two related reasons for this.

First, each of the three elements—image, activities, ideas—of the Gandhi phenomenon has had a powerful influence on our understanding of the same. For example, both Gandhi's popular image of Mahatma and his celebrated political interventions, such as in Chauri Chaura, have been viewed as central to understanding the Gandhi phenomenon (Amin 1984, 1995). Thus, it is not surprising that scholars often contend that Gandhi's moral and political ideas are inseparably integrated with his personal and political lives. For instance, the well-known historian and Gandhian scholar Vinay Lal (2019) remarks that we may understand Gandhi properly only when we pay attention to every moment of his life, including his morning ablutions, diet, walks, and prayers. Indeed, some authors hold that, contra Bilgrami, Gandhi's ideas were "derived" from his personal and political experience, rather than the other way round (Kolge 2017, 2020).

Second, Gandhi's own writings are often in the form of comments and wise dictums, with occasional oblique references to classical religious traditions. Despite an enormous oeuvre of 100 volumes, Gandhi never engaged in rigorous argumentation to develop his original ideas. With regards to his central notion of satyagraha (desire for truth), Gandhi relates that this idea arose from "prayerful search" rather than sustained analytical reflection: "I claim to be a votary of truth from my childhood. It was the most natural thing to me. My prayerful search gave me the revealing maxim Truth is God, instead of the usual one God is Truth" (M K Gandhi 1942/1999: 163). At no place, during this remark, does Gandhi explain the terms of the maxim.

Even the new theoretical approaches on Gandhi, noted above, continue to be mainly political–historical in character. No doubt, there is less emphasis on Gandhi's life and personality, and more attention on the meaning of his words, actions, and their connectedness; yet, the shift in emphasis comes in degrees rather than principle. In that sense, the extant literature continues to have a marked biographical dimension.² Perhaps, in the absence of standard textual material from Gandhi, relevant segments of his life itself are viewed as "text" to be supplemented on occasion with his intriguing "prayerful" remarks. The hope is that, with sufficient scholarly care, something like an abstract picture will duly emerge so that

attention may then be directed at the picture itself.³ It remains unclear though as to how one may address Bilgrami's worry that some crucial aspects of Gandhi's thought might have been lost in the process. Unless care is taken to disentangle the disparate elements in the Gandhi phenomenon, it may happen that an ascribed image of Gandhi infects the evaluation of his thoughts.

In this paper, as a case study, we examine ascriptions of sainthood to Gandhi to see what effect they have on some proposed interpretations of his thoughts. No doubt, the ascription of sainthood is an extreme case of the issue of ascribing images to Gandhi; yet, in our view, similar approaches permeate much of the literature in Gandhian studies. A detailed study of the case, thus, is meant to highlight some of the dimensions of the largely unexplored general problem with "integrated" studies on Gandhi.

As we will see, a range of authors have ascribed sainthood to Gandhi, either as tribute or as invective. The first and minor problem with these ascriptions is that they do not have any basis either in popular usage or in the personality of Gandhi; the problem is minor insofar as it is restricted to the personal image of Gandhi for the few who take the ascription of sainthood seriously. In any case, we are not really concerned with the folklore of Gandhi's personal images, such as Mahatma and Bapu, even if they have some anthropological basis; as emphasised, the truth or falsity of such images is not our primary concern. Our central concern is with the second and major problem, which arises when some authors use characteristics of the ascribed image to evaluate the quality of Gandhi's thoughts along with his personality.

Ascription of Saintliness

George Orwell's (1949–2000) famous essay on Gandhi carried precisely this (second) detrimental effect in the discipline of moral philosophy. Orwell (1949–2000: 462–63) characterised Gandhi as a "moral saint" and then criticised this notion as "anti-humanistic" among other things; that is, in ascribing an image to Gandhi, Orwell not only targeted him as a person on the basis of the ascribed image, but also questioned his moral beliefs from the same ground.

It is instructive to distinguish Orwell's characterisation of Gandhi as a saint from other ascriptions of saintliness. For example, Arundhati Roy (2014) has used the notion of a saint polemically to question the moral validity of Gandhi's popular image. That is, Roy subscribes to the moral value of ascribing saintliness to someone, but she denies the ascription to Gandhi by citing selective incidents and remarks from his life.⁴ Roy has almost nothing to say on the more scholarly task of analysing the abstract structure of Gandhi's thinking.⁵

Orwell's analysis, in contrast, is more subtle and theoretically challenging. He holds that Gandhi properly exemplifies the characteristics of moral saintliness in his life and thoughts. However, according to Orwell, the very idea of saintliness is morally and politically problematic; so is Gandhi as a person and thinker. In effect, Orwell suggests that the dubious idea of moral saints shows why Gandhi's personal character and his

thoughts need not be viewed as carrying intellectual and moral weight. For its striking critical angle, Orwell's paper continues to be widely discussed.⁶

In our view, the literature initiated by Orwell's paper has played a largely detrimental role in preventing a serious philosophical evaluation of Gandhi's thoughts, as Bilgrami cautioned. Since Orwell is more concerned with the concept of saintliness, with Gandhi as his prime example, his literary piece has given rise to much discussion in moral philosophy. The distinguished philosopher Susan Wolf (1982) extends Orwell's objections against Gandhi to argue that moral saints are irrelevant to common people; her paper led to a substantial literature in moral philosophy, some of which we will see.⁷ Academic philosophers almost immediately mention this literature whenever some interest is shown in Gandhi's moral philosophy. This is the contemporary challenge we have in mind for the present paper.

Our concern in this paper is not so much to engage with the literature on moral saints per se, but to see what effect the ascription of moral saintliness has on the "quality" of representations of Gandhi's thought, as Bilgrami put it. In particular, we will investigate whether the alleged features of moral saints—anti-humanistic, reactionary, and devoid of personal well-being—indeed apply to Gandhi's moral thought. We must note that although there is substantial literature on moral saints, we do not know of any significant literature that examines the ascription to Gandhi. It could be that the ascription of sainthood has been taken for granted in the West because of Gandhi's popular image as an ascetic, fragile, simple, simply-dressed, skinny, and non-violent person (Finkelstein 2012).

Since we are not primarily concerned with the concept of a saint, but rather with the ascription of saintliness to Gandhi, it is instructive to briefly investigate where that ascription came from. It appears that Gandhi was occasionally viewed as a saint primarily by authors writing in English.⁸ The vernacular equivalent of "saint"—namely *sant*, as it is typically used for reformist religious figures like Surdas, Tulsidas, Kabir, Ramdas, and many others—is not commonly used for Gandhi. In the common vernacular, Gandhi is known as Mahatma. So, perhaps, the problem with the ascription of saintliness lies in translating "Mahatma" as saint. A brief history of the title Mahatma might be helpful at this point.

There is no known ceremony or authority that conferred Gandhi with the title Mahatma. Until recently, most authors believed that Rabindranath Tagore called Gandhi a Mahatma for the first time (Lelyveld 2011: 20). In 1996, a document from Sabarmati Ashram revealed that Gandhi was first called Mahatma in a meeting in 1915 (Dave 2013); this was later mentioned by Gandhi's biographer Ramchandra Guha (2013). It seems that Gandhi came to be called Mahatma because he was broadly viewed as a messiah of the poor, a great soul who devoted his life for the people to secure freedom from poverty, untouchability, and foreign rule.

The title ascribed to Gandhi is part of the common practice of conferring titles on prominent leaders: Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Babasaheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar, Netaji Subhas Chandra

Bose, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, and the like. In fact, the title Mahatma was also conferred on the social activist Jotirao Phule; Gandhi himself conferred the title to Munshiram Viji of Gurukul. In any case, the title of Mahatma was routinely used for earlier scholars and social reformers, such as Basaveshwara (1105–67), Laloo Shah (1772–1890), and Ayyankali (1863–1941); some leading Jain scholars and thinkers are also viewed as Mahatma.⁹ The title thus applies to a mixed bag of tall community leaders, prominent scholars and thinkers, respected social reformers, noble spirits, and the like; it is just a mark of respect in a community. Nothing very specific about personal qualities and thoughts of the titled persons follow from such titles. In particular, the title Mahatma does not necessarily carry religious significance. To emphasise, the title Mahatma is essentially a mark of how people view a respectable figure; it is a tribute to a person, not really a comment on the quality of his thoughts.

It appears, therefore, that Orwell's remark that the "claims of saintliness" had been "made on [Gandhi's] behalf" has little factual basis.¹⁰ As we saw, while only a few authors writing in English use saint to portray Gandhi, the more widespread ascription views him as a Mahatma, and there is no significant overlap between the two images. So, either Orwell is ascribing saintliness to Gandhi on his own or he is misconstruing the popular image of Mahatma as a saint. To repeat, Orwell and others cannot claim to have found some historical basis of ascribing saintliness to Gandhi from the fact that Gandhi was fondly viewed as Mahatma by the people of India.

In contrast to Mahatma, sainthood in the Western context is primarily a religious concept. The title of saint is formally conferred posthumously to people who exemplify exceptional holy characters in their life. Although Orwell gives no clue as to where his idea of saintliness comes from, Wolf gives a clear signal by citing Mother Teresa as her prime example of a saint. It goes without saying that there is no real analogy between the Christian nun Mother Teresa who devoted her life to charity and the mass leader Gandhi who devoted his life to political freedom of people. In fact, as Mark Shepard (1990–2004: 5) informs, "Gandhi objected when people called him a *saint* trying to be politician."¹¹ Thus, we may conclude that there is no basis from common usage for calling Gandhi a saint. Is there, then, a conceptual basis of doing so?

Two Aspects of Saintliness

There are two possible ways to speak of saintliness in the context of Gandhi: that he was himself a saint, and that he advocated moral saintliness. The former refers to the person of Gandhi, ascribing a saintly image to him; the latter refers to the concepts and ideas that Gandhi held and advocated. Even though there is hardly any popular basis for ascribing a saintly image to Gandhi, it is clear that Orwell thinks otherwise. The issue now is: even if Gandhi, the person, is viewed as a saint,¹² does this saintliness necessarily attach to Gandhi's moral and political views as well? As noted earlier, regarding the methodological plausibility of distinguishing between an author's personal predilections and his (abstract) thoughts, it is obvious

that these ways of speaking are largely independent of each other. A saintly person need not advocate saintliness, and the advocacy of saintliness does not require that the advocate be a saint. In this paper, we are primarily concerned with the latter.

Before we do so, it is instructive to note that Orwell does not make this crucial distinction. Commenting on Gandhi's saintliness, Orwell (1949–2000: 459) says, “his whole life was a sort of pilgrimage in which every act was significant.” Following this familiar portrayal, Orwell uses several anecdotal references to Gandhi's personal life, such as his vegetarianism, as reasons for claiming that Gandhi affirmed saintliness as a moral principle. We will shortly examine the theoretical problems with affirming saintliness to Gandhi's moral principles. For now, we are pointing out the methodological problem with Orwell's strategy of understanding Gandhi's ideas on the basis of the saintly image ascribed to his personal life.

The problem is analogous to understanding and evaluating Aristotle's theory of justice from his sexist comments. There is textual evidence that Aristotle was guilty of making misogynistic observations of women. However, Aristotle's conceptual claim of “justice means equity” does not lose its theoretical value because of his alleged misogyny; it will be fallacious to regard his definition of justice as unjust. When we examine Aristotle's moral philosophy, we judge his conceptual propositions and not his personal ability to obey his own moral ideas.

Similarly, we know Gandhi regarded non-violence as a central moral ideal, yet, in his personal life, Gandhi is said to have, sometimes, violated the principle of non-violence: for example, once, he allegedly coerced his wife to clean toilets. One can possibly find other instances of personal violence in Gandhi's life such as compelling members of his family to follow vegetarianism. But in light of the Aristotle example, it is clear that, even if Gandhi may have himself failed to follow his principle of non-violence, it does not delegitimise the principle itself and its connection with the concepts of moral truth and moral agent in Gandhi's thought.

Orwell, therefore, is patently wrong in inferring, from the cited acts of coercion, that Gandhi was a moral perfectionist, and therefore, he advocated saintliness as a principle; we will soon see how this move to moral perfectionism influenced Orwell's evaluation of Gandhi's views on friendship, welfare, non-violence, etc. The cited personal references may be used to legitimately judge whether Gandhi was a saint in some given sense, but not whether Gandhi's moral views promoted saintliness (or not). For the latter step, we need to examine the proposed concept of saintliness to see whether it applies to Gandhi's thoughts. For this reason, we are trying to avoid discussing whether Gandhi himself may be viewed as a saint, a theoretically irrelevant issue in our view.

In this context, we note that Orwell's essay “Reflections on Gandhi” (1949/2000) is a response to Gandhi's autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927). This autobiography is an assembly of anecdotes, personal reflections, and pithy remarks on a wide variety of human issues; it is questionable whether it can be used to portray stable, abstract views of the author, especially when it is used as the only source for

doing so.¹³ Orwell's study thus suffers from yet another serious scholarly limitation. However, as noted, the lack of theoretically oriented texts is a global challenge to a conceptual study of Gandhi's ideas. Even if Gandhi used several moral concepts like truth, non-violence, liberation, non-cooperation, moral agency, and the like, which seem to form a coherent moral framework, Gandhi did not explain the location of these concepts in the framework, as noted. The present point is that the absence of scholarly literature cannot be filled up by selective references to Gandhi's practices as narrated in his autobiography and similar material.

Friendship

Regarding Gandhi's thoughts, Orwell's (1949–2000: 466) basic complaint is that his saintly moral ideals have an “anti-humanistic tendency;” that is to say Gandhi's thought is irrelevant, perhaps even detrimental, to humans. According to Orwell, moral saints like Gandhi advocate and live by some notion of moral perfection which excludes ideas of friendship and personal love. This is because both friendship and personal love are restricted to local, context-bound relationships, while moral saints advocate the notion of universal love, “love for all.” Orwell (1949–2000: 462) states that this dictum is in conflict with the general human need for love for someone in particular and for personal friendship.

Orwell arrives at this conclusion by first ascribing the image of a saint to Gandhi without any basis. Second, by deducing that moral saints are moral perfectionists without giving any reason and then, he relies on anecdotal evidence from Gandhi's autography to confirm that Gandhi practised moral perfection. Next, following the assertion, his argument goes like this: humans seek friendship and love, love means loving someone more than others; also, good friendship sometimes requires moral failure, such as telling lies, which is a violation of moral perfection; therefore, Gandhi's saintliness—which necessarily involves ideas of “love for all” and “moral perfection,” according to Orwell—precludes good friendship and loving relationships. Hence, Orwell (1949–2000: 463) warns that Gandhi's ideas are “anti-humanistic” and “human beings must avoid such saintliness.”

As an aside, we note that Orwell makes a similar complaint about Gandhi's notion of non-violence. Since, according to Orwell, Gandhi is a moral perfectionist due to his saintliness, Gandhi cannot allow any exception to moral ideals such as non-violence. As a consequence, non-violence results in unconditional pacifism which may be used as a tool only against benign enemies such as the British empire in India; it will fail against, say, Nazi violence. As against Orwell, David Hardiman (2003: 61) shows that Gandhian non-violence was in fact pursued as an option against Nazi violence. Moreover, following a careful study of Gandhian non-violence, many authors suggest that Gandhi did allow for principled, context-bound exceptions (Goyal forthcoming; Finkelstein 2012). Hence, Orwell's understanding fails from several directions. However, once we have shown Orwell's dependence on moral perfectionism, we set the topic of non-violence aside because it

has not played a significant role in the philosophical discussion on moral saints.

Turning to the concept of friendship, Faisal Devji's (2005–12) analysis of Gandhi's moral and political beliefs possibly refutes Orwell's understanding of Gandhi's alleged views on friendship.¹⁴ Devji (2005–12: 80–81) suggests that Gandhi insisted on developing friendship between different social groups to resolve differences arising out of prejudice, such as communal prejudice between Hindus and Muslims. Devji argues that Gandhi regarded friendship as a non-contractual disinterested relationship, meaning that friendship is a selfless and voluntary relationship. This is a fairly standard conception of friendship, distinct from natural brotherly relationships as well as contractual spousal or collegial relations. Thus, according to Devji, the concept of friendship plays a significant role in Gandhi's thoughts on social relations.

However, Orwell may be placing his emphasis on aspects of friendship that are somewhat different from what Devji ascribes to Gandhi. According to Orwell, "moral corruptibility" and "reacting on each other" are important characteristics of the notion of friendship. Orwell claims that, in view of Gandhi's moral perfectionism, these characteristics are absent in the latter's conception of friendship. Hence, Orwell argues that since Gandhi's moral good does not cover the good of friendship, it is irrelevant to humans. Following Orwell, Cocking and Kennett (2000: 296) also argue that "the nature of our commitment to our ... friends is inherently likely to lead us into moral danger." Thus, Cocking and Kennett partly agree with Orwell that the good of friendship is not the same as moral good; in other words, they claim that good friendship often requires moral exceptions for the sake of the friend.

We note that, unlike Orwell, Cocking and Kennett do not comment on the consequences of their view on friendship for moral thought itself; they simply suggest a "less moralised" version of friendship. They agree with Orwell only insofar as they argue that friendship is based on what they call "mutual drawing account," which sometimes requires one to make moral exceptions for the sake of a friend (Cocking and Kennett 2000: 296).¹⁵ The interest here is that while Cocking and Kennett agree with Orwell that friendship might require making moral exceptions, they do not further require, rightly, that the standard of moral good be lowered to make it "relevant" for humans. An obvious option is not to treat friendship as a moral concept at all, as we will soon see.

The detour to Cocking and Kennett's ideas is meant to highlight the insufficiency of Orwell's argument that a moral thought is "inhuman" if it does not make space for moral corruptibility involved in friendship, which he thinks is the case with Gandhi. Orwell's claim on Gandhi's thought raises the query: Is it the burden of moral theory to make space for lack of morality in human practices? Prima facie, it seems that such a demand on moral theory runs counter to its very idea which aims to explain the distinction between moral and immoral by setting criteria for distinguishing between blameworthy and praiseworthy actions. That is, if some action is acknowledged as blameworthy, then accommodating it

within the concept of morality violates the very foundation of a moral theory.

Needless to say, this is not the place to fully discuss the nature of moral theory. All we wish to point out here is that Orwell's claim—that there is a direct conflict between friendship and moral perfectionism—affects Gandhi's moral concerns only when some unproblematic notion of moral perfection legitimately applies to Gandhi, and that notion covers the concept of friendship. In our view, Orwell failed to establish the suggested connections. Apart from conceptual confusions regarding the idea of a morality and the subtle concept of friendship, our main objection to Orwell's analysis is that, except for leaning on the dubious image of a saint, Orwell provides no empirical and textual support at all to establish that the picture obtains for Gandhi. We conclude that there is nothing in Orwell's arguments so far to prevent Gandhi from holding a strong notion of moral good along with the standard view of friendship as a detached and voluntary relationship.

However, the preceding objection does not immediately apply to the maxim love for all, which Orwell takes to be another closely related feature of moral saintliness. This is because, unlike Orwell's claims on Gandhi's idea of friendship that are merely based on unsupported conjectures, the maxim does not suffer from lack of textual and conceptual support. Gandhi himself suggests something similar to love for all in his advocacy of service to the other; he holds that the concept of service to the other (*sev*) applies for the "upliftment of all" (*sarvodaya*). We, thus, turn to the idea of love for all to see if it comprises of anti-humanistic elements.

Welfare

Susan Wolf (1982) agrees with Orwell's basic contention that there is a necessary conflict between the advocacy of universal love and some forms of personal love. Wolf's ideas are philosophically interesting because she extends Orwell's criticism of moral saints to attack received theories in moral philosophy, such as utilitarianism and deontology. It is interesting for us because, as noted, Gandhi certainly advocates some version of universal love, which, according to Wolf, is philosophically problematic. Wolf is unlike Cocking and Kennett (2000), in that she is not arguing for a less moralised version of personal relationships such as friendship, rather she is more like Orwell in insisting on a less demanding conception of morality.

Wolf's basic idea is that any system of morality, which advocates the view that humans shall promote the "welfare of the other as much as possible," precludes adequate recognition of non-moral interests.¹⁶ She says that the presence of heightened moral virtues in an individual is bound to "crowd out non-moral virtues" and "personal interests" (Wolf 1982: 421). That is, people devoted to moral virtues like welfare of the other either do not have interest in non-moral values like playing the violin, or they allow limited value to non-moral interests which do not uphold welfare interests (Wolf 1982: 420). As such, even though Wolf agrees that welfare of the other is a moral good, she argues that maximising welfare of the other cannot be the demand of "common-sense morality." She

suggests that there is a conflict between pursuing non-moral interests and promoting the welfare of all, such that they restrict the space for each other; hence, to allow space for non-moral interests, the scope of welfare ought to be restricted. Several points can be raised in connection with this proposal.

Just as Wolf wants to limit the scope of welfare in view of the alleged conflict with non-moral interests, the opposite response suggesting limiting non-moral interests for the sake of welfare can also be made on exactly the same ground. In fact, the latter seems to be the case in reality. We restrict our non-moral interests and values to cater to others, especially those who are vulnerable and need help. We find it morally repugnant when, instead of attending to an injured person on the road, someone drives past her to get to a tennis match. It is morally repugnant because we expect the agent to prefer the moral interest to serve the other over non-moral interests, however significant the non-moral interests may be. In that sense, prioritising welfare over, say, watching a tennis match may be viewed as an aspect of common-sense morality. However, in her argument against crowding out of non-moral interests by moral interests, Wolf does not adequately consider the consequences of such crowding out of moral interests by non-moral ones. In fact, she expresses concern over regarding moral interests at the highest priority in the taxonomy of human interests.

Orwell's and Wolf's criticism of the maxim "welfare of the other as much as possible" is that enacting such a demand results in a person not having any non-moral interests which do not directly or indirectly promote welfare of the other. Orwell and Wolf (1982: 438) are opposed to the idea that the welfare interest becomes an ever-present filter for evaluating every other interest in human life. That is, they interpret this saintly view of morality as dictating that any human interest which does not uphold the welfare interest, fails the test of morality and is, thus, not worthy of human interest. The strength of their argument comes from the fact that individuals in fact have several interests apart from welfare of the other; if welfare is the highest and the only justifiable interest, then every other interest can at best be of secondary value. As Wolf (1982: 436) famously says, "one can be perfectly wonderful without being perfectly moral."

Although there is no clear textual elaboration, it is not difficult to see where Orwell's and Wolf's rather austere notion of welfare is coming from. There is a common view of saints, upheld in religions such as Christianity, where saints appear as lean, frugal, ascetic, firmly moralistic, and who sacrifice the normal pleasures of life in single-minded service of the poor.¹⁷ Wolf's mention of Mother Teresa as a paradigmatic example of a moral saint shows what Wolf is looking at. Personally, we may disagree with Wolf's rather negative portrayal of Mother Teresa, but that is beside the point here. All that Wolf has to say about the non-negotiable character of the idea of welfare mooted by moral saints seems to follow from the austere conception of moral saints.¹⁸

Assigning such a Christian view of moral saints to Gandhi is unjustified. This is so because, as noted in connection with

Devji's treatment of friendship, there is a significant presence of the notion of detachment in Gandhi's thought, which neither Wolf nor Orwell seem to notice. Gandhi's nascent notion of detachment can be culled from his concept of *anāsakti yoga* (the practice of non-attachment) which he introduces in his translation of the *Bhagvad Gītā* (M K Gandhi 1927–2011). Gandhi's notion of detachment is such that in the cases of conflict between various kinds of interests—immoral, non-moral, and moral—detachment plays a regulatory function in the "choice" of interests (Goyal manuscript in preparation). The notion of detachment takes welfare of the other as a desirable moral good and advocates detachment from one's biases (class, caste, religion, political interests, and personal compulsions) in order to make an unbiased—alternatively, truthful—choice when the moral good of welfare of humans is at stake. Let us see how this brief picture of Gandhi's notion of detachment interacts with Wolf's idea of moral saints.

The firm presence of detachment in Gandhi's framework shows that Gandhi is aware that welfare of the other is not the only interest one should, or in fact, entertain. The moral suggestion is that one ought to set aside other interests when in conflict with the welfare of the other. In this sense, detachment regulates the input of interests in an individual's life. As we saw, giving priority to the welfare of the other in situations of conflict is pretty much in tune with common sense morality as well. The notion of detachment grounds common intuition in the moral sense of the agent. The very presence of an arbitrating principle like detachment shows that Gandhi is not endorsing a complete crowding out of non-moral interests. Thus, it seems that even if the notion of promoting the "welfare of the others as much as possible" appears in Gandhi's thought, it does not amount to a complete crowding out of non-moral interests, as Wolf argues to be the case for moral saints.

To conclude, we have repeatedly mentioned the glaring lack of scholarly investigation on the part of Orwell in his portrayal of Gandhi; a similar complaint applies to Wolf since she uncritically adopts Orwell's perspective on Gandhi when, in fact, she had Mother Teresa in her mind. Orwell and Wolf's over-reliance on a false perceived image of Gandhi as a moral saint, amplified by their scholarly limitations, leads them to miss aspects of Gandhi's thinking that are crucial for understanding Gandhi's conception of moral good. As a result, the prevalence of an image drowned the attractive quality of Gandhi's moral thinking.

Permission for Reproduction of Articles Published in *EPW*

No article published in *EPW* or part thereof should be reproduced in any form without prior permission of the author(s).

A soft/hard copy of the author(s)'s approval should be sent to *EPW*.

In cases where the email address of the author has not been published along with the articles, *EPW* can be contacted for help.

NOTES

- 1 We have in mind literature, such as that of Brown (1972, 2008), Sarkar (1989), Amin (1995), Finkelstein (2012), Guha (2013, 2018), and Rajmohan Gandhi (2017), among others.
- 2 This perspective on Gandhian scholarship applies to the literature, cited above, that pays a tribute to Gandhi's thoughts, as well as that which basically aims for a negative portrayal of Gandhi, such as Roy (2014), Anderson (2012), and others.
- 3 The methodological problems of studying Gandhi and how to work around them are discussed in Goyal (forthcoming). In Goyal (manuscript in preparation), it is discussed how to extract some abstract view of Gandhi's thoughts from the stated "biographical" literature.
- 4 Several scholars have questioned the evidential basis of Roy's criticism (R Gandhi 2015; Kolge 2017).
- 5 Mohan and Dwivedi (2017: 9) expand on Roy's polemical strategy to declare first that "M K Gandhi was guilty of most of the crimes ... anti-Semitism, apartheid, caste discrimination, misogyny, exploitation of the poor." The authors then complain that people have covered up these "mistakes" "in his corpus to present a suitably saintly Gandhi" (Mohan and Dwivedi 2017: 228).
- 6 Even the popular news portal, *Scroll.in* (2017), reprinted Orwell's entire article on Gandhi's 150th birthday.
- 7 The philosophical literature that followed Wolf's work includes seminal papers such as Adams (1984), Cocking and Kennett (2000), Haybron (2002), Barry (2009), etc.
- 8 This includes the British judge who described Gandhi as "saintly" in his judicial order that sent Gandhi to prison (Kher 1962).
- 9 More recently, the title Mahatma was conferred on Anna Hazare by the residents of Ralegan Siddhi, the village in which Hazare lives (*Hindustan Times* 2011).
- 10 Orwell acknowledged that Gandhi himself never made such claims. So, for Orwell, such claims have been made by others.
- 11 Shepard warns that regarding Gandhi as a saint amounts to either making Gandhi immune to criticism or irrelevant to the world.
- 12 Amiya Chakravarty (1950) suggests that Gandhi's life does not fit the traditional idea of a reclusive saint at all. Nicholas Gier (2004: 168–73) evaluates several aspects of Gandhi's life to argue that Gandhi is a "flawed saint."
- 13 To our knowledge, even the autobiographies of famous philosophers such as Bertrand Russell (1969–2006) and Willard Quine (1985) are seldom used to discuss their philosophical views.
- 14 In his memoirs concerning Gandhi, the poet-writer Chakravarty (1950) recounts how Gandhi cherished and nurtured a large circle of friends in both his personal and public life. However, Gandhi's personal attributes are not really relevant for the discussion here.
- 15 There can be a philosophical debate between Devji's disinterested notion of friendship, and Cocking and Kennett's "less moralised" notion of friendship, but that is not the concern of the present paper. We are neither concerned with the concept of friendship itself, nor with the concept of friendship that would have appealed to Gandhi. Both require very different forms of inquiry. Our only concern is to examine whether Orwell's complaint of Gandhi via the ascription of saintliness is sustainable.
- 16 There is much conceptual uncertainty in this formulation. Recall what Orwell called "love for other," Wolf calls "welfare for the other," while Gandhi recommends "service of the other" (*sevā*). For now, we are setting aside the issue of whether these are equivalent ideas because we are yet to clarify what Gandhi means and requires in terms of *sevā*.
- 17 It is instructive that, except for the religious factor, exactly the same picture obtains for revolutionaries fighting for the masses. In fact, even the religious factor may apply to activists of liberation theology, Islamic jihadists, Jewish revolutionaries, and the like. The perspective on Gandhi changes radically if Gandhi is viewed not as advocating saintliness, but as recommending a revolutionary spirit.
- 18 In view of the preceding note and similar examples of resistance linked to mass welfare, it is legitimate to query if the suggested picture of moral saints is morally reprehensible at all. As noted, an evaluation of the idea of moral saint is beyond the scope of this essay.

REFERENCES

- Adams, Robert Merrihew (1984): "Saints," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol 81, No 7, pp 392–401.
- Amin, Shahid (1984): "Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921–22," *Subaltern Studies*, Vol 3, Ranajit Guha (ed), Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp 1–61.
- (1995): *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922–1992*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Anderson, Perry (2012): "Gandhi Centre Stage," *London Review of Books*, Vol 34, No 13, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v34/n13/perry-anderson/gandhi-centre-stage>.
- Barry, Peter Brian (2009): "Moral Saints, Moral Monsters, and the Mirror Thesis," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol 46, No 2, pp 163–76.
- Bilgrami, Akeel (2003): "Gandhi, the Philosopher," *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 38, No 39, pp 4159–65.
- Brown, Judith M (1972): *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics 1915–1922*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (2008): *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience: The Mahatma in Indian Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chakravarty, Amiya (1950): "A Saint at Work: A View of Gandhi's Work and Message," *William Penn Lecture*, Philadelphia: The Book Committee, <https://quaker.org/legacy/pamphlets/wpl1950b.pdf>.
- Cocking, Dean and Jeanette Kennett (2000): "Friendship and Moral Danger," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol 97, No 5, pp 278–96.
- Dave, Nayan (2013): "Gondal's Royal Doc Was First to Call Gandhi 'Mahatma,'" *Pioneer*, 2 October, <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2013/india/gondals-royal-doc-was-first-to-call-gandhi-mahatma.html>.
- Devji, Faisal (2005–12): *The Impossible Indian: Gandhi and the Temptation of Violence*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Finkelstein, Norman (2012): *What Gandhi Says: On Nonviolence, Resistance and Courage*, New York: OR Books.
- Gandhi, M K (1927/2017): *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, translated by Tridip Suhrud, New Delhi: Penguin.
- (1927–2011): *The Bhagvad Gītā*, New Delhi: Diamond Books.
- (1942–99): *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol 83, New Delhi: Publications Divisions, Government of India.
- Gandhi, Rajmohan (2015): "Response to Arundhati Roy," *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 50, No 30, pp 83–85.
- (2017): *Why Gandhi Still Matters*, Delhi: Aleph Book Company.
- Gier, Nicholas F (2004): *The Virtue of Non-violence*, New York: State University of New York Press.
- Goyal, Samiksha (2019): "Gandhi: Philosopher or Pragmatic Politician?" *Journal of Dharma Studies*, Vol 3, pp 197–206.
- (forthcoming): "Approaching Gandhian Metaethics: Methodological Issues," *Indian Ethics*, Purushottama Bilimoria and Amy Rayner (eds), Springer Nature.
- Guha, Ramchandra (2013): *Gandhi Before India*, New Delhi: Penguin.
- (2018): *Gandhi 1914–48: The Years That Changed the World*, New Delhi: Penguin.
- Hindustan Times* (2011): "Ralegaon Passes Resolution to Call Anna Hazare Mahatma, Anna Rejects," 2 October, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi/ralegaon-passes-resolution-to-call-anna-hazare-mahatma-anna-rejects/story-4jPHZCqld6R8kDt5IshU6J.html>.
- Haybron, Daniel M (2002): "Moral Monsters and Saints," *Monist*, Vol 85, No 2, pp 260–84.
- Hardiman, David (2003): *Gandhi in His Time and Ours*, New Delhi: Permanent Black.
- Iyer, Raghavan (1997): *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, India: Oxford University Press.
- Kapila, Shruti (2015): "Gandhi before Mahatma: The Foundations of Political Truth," *Public Culture*, pp 431–48.
- Kher, S B (ed) (1962): *The Law and the Lawyers*, Ahmedabad: Navjivan Trust, https://www.mk-gandhi.org/law_lawyers/25great_trial.htm.
- Kolge, Nishikant (2017): *Gandhi Against Caste*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- (2020): "Gandhi: A Mixture," *Journal of Dharma Studies*, Vol 3, pp 207–14.
- Lal, Vinay (2019): "Mahatma Gandhi: An Environmentalist by Nature," *Hindu*, 1 October, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/mahatma-gandhi-an-environmentalist-by-nature/article2956196.ece>.
- Lelyveld, Joseph (2011): *Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India*, New York: Alfred Knopf.
- Mantena, Karuna (2012): "Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Non-violence," *American Political Science Review*, Vol 106, No 2, pp 455–70.
- Mehta, Uday (2010): "Gandhi on Democracy, Politics and the Ethics of Everyday Life," *Modern Intellectual History*, Vol 7, No 2, pp 335–71.
- Mohan, Shaj and Divya Dwivedi (2018): *Gandhi and Philosophy: On Theological Anti-politics*, London: Bloomsbury.
- Orwell, George (1949–2000): "Reflections on Gandhi," *George Orwell: Essays*, compiled by George Packer, England: Penguin Books, pp 459–66.
- Parekh, Bhikhu (2000): *Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Parel, Anthony J (ed) (2000): "Introduction: Gandhi, Freedom and Self-rule," *Gandhi, Freedoms, and Self-rule*, Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, pp 1–23.
- Quine, Willard V (1985): *The Time of My Life: An Autobiography*, London: Bradford Books, MIT Press.
- Roy, Arundhati (2014): *The Doctor and The Saint*, New Delhi: Navayana Publishing.
- Russell, Bertrand (1969/2006): *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, London: Routledge.
- Sarkar, Sumit (1989): *Modern India*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Scroll.in* (2017): "Reflections on Gandhi: George Orwell's Assessment of Mahatma Gandhi after His Assassination," 2 October, <https://scroll.in/article/852522/reflections-on-gandhi-george-orwells-famous-review-of-gandhis-my-experiments-with-truth>.
- Shepard, Mark (1990/2004): *Mahatma Gandhi and His Myths*, Olympia, Washington: Shepard Publications.
- Taylor, Kenneth and John Perry (2010): "Gandhi as Philosopher," *Philosophy Talk*, 25 September, <https://www.philosophytalk.org/blog/gandhi-philosopher>.
- Wolf, Susan (1982): "Moral Saints," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol 79, No 8, pp 419–39.