AHIMSA AND HUMILITY IN/FOR PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION DISCOURSE

by

Karen Sihra

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Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
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Abstract

Peace education has made significant and meaningful contributions to the development and maintenance of social justice based education. This thesis presents the argument that peace education’s adoption of a scientific and logical definition of peace potentially limits the application and effectiveness of peace education’s objectives. More specifically, Johan Galtung has explored and provided a view of peace that insists upon a systematic and delimited definition commonly employed by peace education theorists. In so doing, peace education has adopted an approach to conflict and violence that depends on many of the understandings found in the Enlightenment tradition. Through adopting notions of subjectivity and objectivity found in this tradition, many theories of peace education inadvertently incorporate the very premises to which these theories object.

In response, this dissertation seeks to combine the work of Mohandas K. Gandhi and intersubjectivity as found in philosophy of education discourse to offer peace education a philosophical framework in which subjectivity and objectivity are determined through relationship and responsibility to the other, rather than scientific processes and assumptions. In order to demonstrate the benefits of adopting such a framework, this thesis carefully examines Gandhi’s theoretical framework to demonstrate its stark contrast to Enlightenment traditions. It then moves to a discussion
of Gandhi’s understanding of Truth, its relationship to ahimsa (literally translated as “to do no harm”), and the impact this relationship has upon one’s responsibility to the other. It then compares and aligns the responsibility to the other found in Gandhi’s work to that found in intersubjectivity discourse and insists upon a notion of humility through ahimsa. In so doing, this work demonstrates the benefits of a re-defined framework on peace education scholarship.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Gandhi.

The name elicits thoughts of admiration, respect, and love for some while eliciting resentment, pain, and struggle for others. For those of us living in the 21st Century, a post-Cold War and post 9/11 world, his non-violent methodologies may seem never more timely or never more utopian. In a world of increasing engagement of religious tensions, his appeals to God and faith may seem a welcome refresh or a dangerous antagonism.

Rationale for Study

Most of the popular reflections of Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948) find their basis in Gandhi as a man, as a historical figure, or as a political actor. Indeed, he is omnipresent in all of the above configurations. Today, we increasingly see references to Gandhi on popular television shows like Seinfeld (Cherones, 1993), in movies like Lage Raho Munnabhai (Hirani, 2006), and even in viral internet videos and spoofs like Celebrity Death Match (Fogel, 1999). All of these situations depict a small, soft-spoken man who lived a highly principled public life. Very few of these representations, however, delve deep into how this highly principled life came into being. In fact, most of these representations place Gandhi into an other-worldly, saint-like status permitting us to look up to, rather than at, the complex set of ideas that made Gandhi, well, Gandhi.

And we we have been carefully positioned to look up to Gandhi. The title Mahatma was bestowed upon him quite early in his political life. Mahatma is a Sanskrit
word meaning Great Soul. Its intention is similar to that of the word *saint* found in Christian traditions, *tzaddikim* in Judaism, *sant* in Sikhism, or *Hazrat* in Islam. In bestowing the title, there is a clear recognition of the contributions Gandhi has made to the world and his physical role in enacting the metaphysical. Yet this other-worldly status has the potential to limit our inquiry into his thought to an external and foreign phenomenon, to be viewed from the outside looking in, restricting us to simply draw from Gandhi, rather than drawing in and learning from.

As a result, the tendency is to draw upon Gandhi’s work as a popular political figure to determine how we can address temporal challenges and problems. The 2011 Occupy Wall Street Movement is a prime example of such a move. “Occupy Wall Street is about anxiety, and the courage of young people to fly into conflict on Gandhi’s wings. This is the noble legacy of civil disobedience on display... We are seeing that anxiety channeled by courage can transform a society” (R Johnson, 2011). The Occupy Movement is often criticized for lacking clarity in objectives, despite being broadly viewed as an anti-capitalist movement and a slow moving attempt to achieve participatory democracy (Walker, 2011). Despite much exploration and searching, however, I have been unable to identify how the young people of this newly transformed society *participate* and what their role would be in developing, and maintaining such a *democracy*. Through this quote, I may be able to assume they are anxious, courageous, and possibly noble; yet I am left puzzled by their capacity to balance on Gandhi’s wings. Perhaps the actions of the Occupy Movement have parallels to some of Gandhi’s political actions, such as civil disobedience or non-violent resistance; however, philosophically speaking, the relationship between individuals and
society remains underdeveloped and relatively unconcerned with, what I will argue in this dissertation, Gandhi’s proposition for a society that finds its basis in engagement and responsibility.

Partially, the lack of clarity surrounding the relationship of individuals to one another is a result of how Gandhi is predominantly explored and taken up in philosophical traditions. Popularly, he is examined through the lens of political philosophy or theology. In political philosophy discourse, there is often an examination of his possible interpretations of power, authority, war, and peace. Predominantly, questions about alternatives to violence to promote various forms of political change are explored in this stream of thought through an examination of his political initiatives (Coates, 2008; Godrej, 2006; Parel, 2008; Steger, 2006). In theological circles, Gandhi is often explored for his religious beliefs and interpretation of the Hindu faith. His legitimacy as a Hindu is often either championed or questioned, and his interpretation of sacred Hindu texts are often explored for their contributions to an overall understanding of the faith as a whole (Creel, 1972; Flood, 2009; Roy, 2002; Shideler, 1960). Political and theological explorations have contributed to a rich and colourful understanding of Gandhi’s activities as a political actor and as a religious thinker. In contrast to the dominant view of separating religion and politics, in this dissertation I seek to draw on both Gandhi’s political and religious positioning to explore how Gandhi can help us define our responsibility to ourselves and to one another from a philosophical perspective.

I focus on the work of Gandhi primarily because of his conceptualization of ahimsa, literally translated as “to do no harm”. For Gandhi, ahimsa provides an
alternate way of being in the world and a way to act against violence. Combined, these traits require a complex understanding of the concept of ahimsa as “to do no harm” from a philosophical perspective, rather than a tool to be used primarily to address violent phenomena. Responses to violence encompass the activities involved in addressing and achieving non-violence, where non-violence is understood as the absence of violence. Gandhi’s ahimsa, as this dissertation will demonstrate, requires individual engagement with and responsibility to others.

In the context of Indian philosophical traditions, ahimsa is not a foreign concept. In addition to its significance in India’s social and political realms, ahimsa finds its roots in Indian religious traditions. Ahimsa is a predominant notion found arguably in all Vedic traditions, and is an integral piece of the overall teachings of Hindus, Jains and Buddhists. As a result of its broad presence, ahimsa is interpreted in a number of ways. My dissertation focuses on the Gandhian interpretation of ahimsa. While this interpretation is not entirely exclusive to Gandhi, its specificities and focus provide particular insight to how ahimsa can contribute to (re)conceptualizing how individuals relate and respond to one another.

My efforts here are focused upon exploring ahimsa’s contribution to understanding individuals in society from a philosophical perspective, and how this exploration can contribute to a more engaged and responsible individual. Presently this is the focus and dialogue found amongst many who study peace education (Bajaj, 2004; Bekerman, 2007; Bickmore, 2005; Danesh, 2006; Duckworth, 2006; Galtung, 1973; Hirsch, 2006; Horenczyk & Tatar, 2004). Given peace education’s and Gandhi’s

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1 Some argue that Sikhs reject ahimsa (see “Sikhism & Jainism,” 2011), I strongly disagree; however this is far beyond the scope of this dissertation.
shared focus on the development and maintenance of more peaceful and nonviolent societies, an exploration of Gandhi’s understanding of ahimsa provides a relevant, meaningful, and complimentary lens through which to explore the possibilities of a nonviolent, engaged, responsible individual and society.

**Peace Studies and Peace Education**

Peace education scholarship is predominantly focused on creative and productive ways to counter violence found within educational contexts and practices (Danesh, 2006; Opotow, Gerson, & Woodside, 2005; Salomon, 2004a, 2004b; Synott, 2005). The literature uses rich definitions of peace and violence based primarily on the work of Johan Galtung. While useful to the overall study of peace education, there are potential philosophical questions and challenges embedded in Galtung’s approach. In part because peace education is a relatively new field embedded in the tradition of peace studies, it has depended upon the philosophical perspectives outlined by Galtung to develop further theory and inquiry.

Galtung demonstrates the complexity of peace research, its multifaceted nature, and its relationship to existing structures of violence. He begins his discussion with three basic principles of peace: (1) ‘peace’ refers to general agreed upon social goals; (2) these social goals, while complex and difficult, are not impossible to achieve; and (3) peace can also be understood as an absence of violence. To support his broad thesis while at the same time insisting that peace is “the absence of violence”, Galtung proposes a broad definition of violence that includes personal, structural and cultural manifestations (1969, 1973, 1990). In so doing, his definition of peace hinges upon these manifestations so as to well position him to examine the principles of peace. In
defining peace in this way, Galtung’s argument “hinges on making a definition of ‘violence’”, which begins with, despite its dangers, the premise that “violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations” (1969, p. 168). As a result, Galtung’s focus remains in the realm of violence and the potential for peace to respond.

Furthermore, Galtung places emphasis on generally accepted broad social justice issues. He accepts and unpacks the premise that violence is not simply a physical act but a phenomenon that occurs in social contexts that may not necessarily have a physical manifestation (1990). His interpretation of violence creates the space to achieve a broad set of social goals through peace. As a result, violence and peace are assumed to be empirical and verifiable phenomena.

In part, Galtung’s overall project of promoting and achieving peace requires an empirical definition of violence and peace. He sees the project of defining peace as a “major part of a scientific strategy… it should immediately steer one’s attention towards problems that are on the political, intellectual, and scientific agenda of today, and tomorrow” (1969, p. 168). By its nature, a scientific strategy requires a formula capable of expressing information; therefore peace and violence require practical and validated definitions to fit into this formula. To add depth to the pursuit this scientific strategy, Galtung offered a two-sided definition of peace that is rich, complex and useful for addressing both the personal and structural violence he describes: ‘absence of violence’ (negative peace) and ‘social justice’ (positive peace) respectively. “[T]he absence of personal violence does not lead to a positively defined condition, whereas
the absence of structural violence is what we have referred to as social justice, which is a positively defined condition (egalitarian distribution of power and resources)” (Galtung, 1969, p. 183). It is this formula that peace education predominantly engages to propose strategies and solutions in and for educational concerns and issues.

Peace education, as a scholarly field of research, is relatively new in academic contexts. The Journal of Peace Education’s first issue was published in 2004. The field recognizes the importance of laying a foundation for the scholarship found in the journal specifically and for peace education in general. Most notably, the first article of the first issue is Ian Harris’ article entitled “Peace Education Theory” (2004). In this article, Harris outlines five main postulates of peace education: (1) it explains the roots of violence; (2) it teaches alternatives to violence; (3) it adjusts to cover different forms of violence; (4) peace itself is a process that varies according to context; and (5) conflict is omnipresent. Harris' postulates are heavily reliant upon Galtung's definitions of peace and violence. They accept that peace is a response to violence and peace is necessarily an act of social justice. Indeed, the definition of violence employed by Harris is broad and has the capacity to address structural and cultural violence described by Galtung.

Galtung’s insistence upon finding a scientifically reliable definition for peace does indeed challenge existing political structures; and this formula has had meaningful and deep influence on the ideals of peace education. While invaluable, Galtung's insistence upon a scientific method to peace studies can also present some deep philosophical challenges. Thomas Kuhn's (1962/1996) discussion of scientific
paradigms is of particular relevance. Galtung pursued his project by “resembl[ing] and
by modeling to one or another part of the scientific corpus which the community in
question already recognizes as among its established achievements” which “are from
the start encountered in a historically and pedagogically prior unit that displays them
with and through their applications” (Kuhn, 1962/1996, pp. 45-46). While I will discuss
the tradition upon which Galtung bases his definitions of peace and violence upon in
greater detail in chapter two, briefly here I assert that Galtung’s definitions of peace
and violence depend on the existing and popular philosophical positioning of the
Enlightenment tradition. Indeed, within the scientific community, any new theory needs
to find its basis in previous theories and practices as “without them it would not be
even a candidate for acceptance” (Kuhn, 1962/1996, p. 46). Building upon the existing
key philosophical views of rationality, subjectivity, objectivity, freedom, liberty,
responsibility, and morality offered by the Enlightenment tradition, Galtung’s position
has been popularly accepted and drawn upon for over fifty years. As a result, it has,
arguably, failed to question key philosophical assumptions, has encouraged a
reactionary approach to peace, and has promoted a dichotomous view of social
phenomena.

Furthermore, positioned firmly in the Enlightenment tradition, Galtung’s scientific
Enlightenment project restricts a deep understanding of ahimsa. Ahimsa is
predominantly found in traditions that extend beyond the rationality insisted upon in the
Enlightenment tradition. Hence, in this dissertation I present Gandhi’s notion of ahimsa
as an overall way of confronting and offering an alternate philosophical paradigm to
provide an alternate understanding of how individuals relate to one another, specifically
for the benefit of peace education.

Ahimsa

Taken as an embracing and encompassing philosophical position, the notion of ahimsa has the capacity to add a creative and robust element to peace education discourse. When solely understood through its literal translation, “to do no harm”, there could be an inclination to limit ahimsa’s application to the physical world. That is to say, it could be interpreted to imply “do not do drugs”, “walk with caution on icy sidewalks”, “look both ways before crossing the street”, “do not cheat, lie or steal”, “do not exceed the speed limit while driving”, or even “do not litter”, as failure to comply with any of these directions could potentially do harm to oneself, others, or the environment. Although all of these statements could be seen as an expression and manifestation of ahimsa, it is only a partial engagement of the significance of the term. As a result of ahimsa’s relationship to Gandhi’s overarching view of Truth, the notion of ahimsa moves from a mere physical directive to a metaphysical directive of how one perceives him or herself in the world and, in turn, how one relates to the other.

Truth and Ahimsa

For most philosophical traditions concerned with ideas of it, Truth is a complex and value-laden term, and Gandhi’s is no exception. With a few exceptions (see Stoljar & Damnjanovic, 2007), schools of modern or postmodern philosophical discourse do not limit their discussion of Truth to elements of factual correctness or honesty. Historically, concerns of Truth have primarily been charged with the task of distinguishing between objective and subjective knowledge. That is to say, Truth is often associated with a generalized agreement of comprehension of objects and facts,
and how this cognition and understanding may contribute to one’s capacity to make judgements. Beyond these agreements, questions of Truth’s application and malleability encourage deep and rich philosophical dialogue. Generally speaking, ancient and modern philosophical traditions have argued that there is a Truth, applicable to everyone at all times, upon which (moral or amoral) judgements can be made (David, 2009). Alternatively, postmodern philosophical traditions, again generally speaking, hold that the development and understanding of Truth is a subjective exercise found through an assessment of phenomena in the world, not in abstraction of the world (Aylesworth, 2012).

Gandhi could be read as either an ancient, modern or postmodern philosopher. For him, Truth is indeed a comprehension of objects and fact, contributes to our capacity to make judgements, applies to everyone at all times, and is a subjective and relative exercise. As a result, labels such as modern or postmodern render themselves irrelevant for my discussion. Instead, I explore Gandhi’s Truth through its foundations in religion and culture and the ways Gandhi interpreted Truth through his own philosophical exploration.

Firmly rooted in Hindu religious traditions, Gandhi’s Truth is the Absolute. He sees the term as synonymous with God and Love characterized by ahimsa. The notion of God is understood as a Vedic interpretation as opposed to the Abrahamic views of God. Indeed, distinguishing between Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic faiths can be seen as over simplifying broad religious traditions (Dodds, 2009), however a key distinction is the varying beliefs of God as a person (Davis, 2010; Sihra, 2010). In contrast to Abrahamic faiths, who find their relationship to an embodied God through
the initial covenant made by Abraham, non-Abrahmic faiths such as Hinduism have made no such covenant and do not have a view of an embodied God. Erroneously, colonial (Mill, 1817) and modern popular (Shouler & Anthony) views hold that Hinduism has many Gods, all of which can be likened to a person. Indeed, the faith has the potential to cause confusion with the millions of manifestations of God physically presented in sacred texts and worshipped (Dasa, 2012). However, these manifestations are physical representations of one supreme being, which for Gandhi (and most followers of Vedic traditions) is seen as Truth. God, as the ideal of Truth and not as a person, has a knowledge of all things.

Seeing God as Truth in the Vedic tradition is a complex exercise, which I explore in greater detail in Chapter Two. Broadly speaking, in the context of Gandhi’s Truth, God is seen as an ideal to aspire to, and is that which provides guidance and defines who we should be and how we should act in the world. By equating God with Truth within the Hindu tradition, Gandhi has defined Truth as omniscient; that is to say, Truth is a knowledge of all things.

As an ideal to aspire to, it could be said that Gandhi believes that one can attain a knowledge of all things. This partial reading is in stark contrast to Gandhi’s position. Understood as the Absolute or Whole Truth, God has a knowledge of all things. One’s aspiration to come closer to this Truth is found through one’s own partial truths which are defined as truth through their relationship to the Absolute and Whole Truth\(^2\). It is in the relationship between partial and Whole truth that the notion of ahimsa is of

\(^2\) I use the terms Absolute and Whole Truth, Absolute Truth, and Whole Truth interchangeably throughout this dissertation as it represents the same idea, yet the terms having particular relevance in particular contexts.
paramount importance. At the risk of oversimplifying this complex relationship, a visual representation is useful to demonstrate the relationship between partial truth, Absolute and Whole Truth, and ahimsa:

Both the relationship between many partial truths and between partial truths and Whole Truth is characterized through the direction of ahimsa. It is only through ahimsa that one’s partial truth can reflect the Absolute and Whole Truth. Furthermore, one’s partial truth(s) are always in relationship to another’s partial truth with the joint relationship to Absolute and Whole Truth again characterized by ahimsa. It is important to note here that partial truths, while relative to one another are always first relative to the Absolute and Whole Truth. In philosophical terms, the Absolute and Whole Truth can be seen as the objective Truth; partial truth in relation to one another and in relation to the Whole Truth can be seen as subjective truths.

One’s subjective truths are also to be characterized by ahimsa. That is to say, to be considered truth, our subjectivities must account for and draw in another’s subjectivity through the lens of ahimsa. Placing this responsibility to the other by way of
the objective requires a very particular view of the self and one's relationship to the other. Gandhi’s focus on ahimsa as a way of being in the world with a goal to do no harm therefore has implications on how we conceive of subjectivity.

The predominant philosophical view of subjectivity stems from the Enlightenment tradition, whereby the capacity to reason and determine truth and therefore make judgements is placed at the centre of an individual’s subjectivity (see Kant, 1784/1980). Though Gandhi himself does not use either the terms subjectivity or objectivity in the context in which I am employing them, they are useful in developing a philosophical position that contributes to the broader understanding of how we can engage and relate to others and the world, especially in the context of peace education. Yet a contrast of my interpretation of Gandhi’s views of subjectivity and objectivity to how these views are articulated in the Enlightenment tradition is significant, but potentially a distraction. The two frameworks and their underlying assumptions, which I explore in chapter two, are in many ways contrasting. The Enlightenment’s dichotomous insistence that an individual’s capacity to reason is what defines one’s subjectivity cannot incorporate Gandhi’s framework of Truth and its relationship to ahimsa. There is, however, a complementary philosophical position that Gandhi’s framework can be mapped into, namely intersubjectivity as found in philosophy of education discourse. Through its conceptualization of subjectivity through the other, the intersubjectivist position adheres to the relationship between Absolute and Whole Truth, and partial truths.
**Intersubjectivity**

Intersubjectivity draws attention to the relationship between people as the predominant determinant of subjectivity. This is not to imply that the notion of individuality is rejected. Rather, intersubjectivity holds the space in between individuals as the determinant of individual subjectivity (Bai & Chinnery, 1999; Biesta, 1999). Intersubjectivity as discussed in philosophy of education discourse seeks to move beyond the trappings of dichotomous philosophical traditions, like Enlightenment theories, through focusing upon the individual and the other, holding that individual subjectivity is determined through relationships with others.

As a result, intersubjectivity seeks to move away from the autonomous self focused on in the Enlightenment tradition. The Enlightenment tradition places the individual capable of reason at the centre and therefore (albeit arguably) fails in its attempt to recognize other significant factors contributing to individual subjectivity (Haste, 1996; Walzer, 1990). Working within Descartes' premise that “I think therefore I am”, the Enlightenment tradition assumes that individuals can be seen as individuals as a result of their capacity to think, and act on this reason without interference from others. To refer to the individual in this context is to emphasize the characteristics of individuals that most centrally feature in their capacity for thought. In this case, the individual can be understood as one who is sovereign insofar as he or she exercises reason autonomously (Kant, 1785/1992).

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3 Within philosophy of education discourse, the focus on intersubjectivity is upon interconnected subjectivities. Although dialectic theories of knowledge can in some ways be closely paralleled to this position, intersubjectivity's focus on subjectivity is a marked distinction from the dialectic theories of knowledge. The distinction is beyond the scope of this discussion (see Arnove & Torres, 2003; Guisinger & Blatt, 1994; James, 1980; McPeck, 1990; Mueller, 1958; Popper, 1940; Sabine, 1973; Walton, 1998).
It is the Cartesian claim of the Enlightenment tradition that the intersubjectivist rejects, namely that we are human through consciousness. Instead, through assuming that the individual and consciousness are not synonymous concepts, intersubjectivity examines those factors that influence the individuals’ consciousness (Biesta, 1999). It is at this point that the “other” and his or her role becomes of paramount importance. Assuming an individual comprised of relationship with others, the intersubjectivist maintains that no subjectivity can dominate or manipulate given that it is a relationship defined by its intersubjective nature.

Yet, intersubjectivity, in general, does not define, describe or characterize the nature of such intersubjective relationships. In this way, the relationship between Gandhi’s philosophy and intersubjectivity is one of reciprocal benefit. Intersubjectivity provides, in philosophical terms, an extrapolation an individual’s interrelatedness to Gandhi’s philosophy of Truth. The relationship between Truth and ahimsa provides intersubjectivity a context in which to define the space in between individuals.

Ahimsa in this context provides a framework in which intersubjective relationships can exist. Calling on one’s individual capacity to reason, intuit, and imagine and to see, respect, and draw upon these same capacities in others, ahimsa provides an objective way in which to relate and engage with one another and to see oneself through the other. To relate and engage with one another with the intent of doing no harm, one must accept his or her knowledge to be partial as Gandhi has described, and therefore unfinished. Such a position requires humility.
Humility

Humility is often thought of as a religious characteristic. In Christian traditions, humility is touted as a virtue. Humility, in this Christian context, is interpreted as a subduing and moderating virtue. It is often seen as the virtue that removes obstacles to faith and is characterized by a modest evaluation of one’s own worth in light of one’s submission to God (Devine, 1910). In such a context, individuals are encouraged to recognize their complete dependence upon God because of their inferiority to His knowledge. Humility removes pride and makes way for the reverence God commands.

Found in ahimsa is a conception of humility. Humility through ahimsa highlights the violence found in absolute claims to knowledge. Humility understood through the lens of ahimsa sees claims to certainty and objectivity by their very definition as violent given one’s inability to come to know fully. Yet Gandhi’s ahimsa also provides an objective framework for the ways in which one uses these various capacities. Gandhian humility relies on partial truths that are shaped by Absolute and Whole Truth, which is characterized by ahimsa. As a result, Gandhian humility may lead to relative subjectivities, but not relativism. This distinction is of particular importance in the conceptual framework of this dissertation. A commitment to Absolute Truth is itself a universal. Therefore, “humility in the form of accepting limits to our knowledge does not mean we give up the quest for wisdom and understanding” (Rud, 2007). Instead, it means we recognize the partiality of our own subjective knowledge and engage with others to come to a fuller sense of self, the other, and the world we live in.
Philosophical Argument Made in This Thesis

Gandhi’s philosophy contributes to the conception of intersubjectivity as found in philosophy of education discourse through its engagement of a more inclusive theoretical framework which offers a pragmatic position with a basis in the foundation of ahimsa. Ahimsa and its embedded notion of philosophical humility with an enhanced notion of intersubjectivity makes significant contributions to the field of peace education. As a result, I look to the ways in which peace education theory can benefit from a combined notion of intersubjectivity and Gandhian ahimsa.

This is an especially relevant philosophical undertaking when we seek to question Audrey Lordes’ (2003) popular proposition and ask: “Can we dismantle the master’s house using the master’s tools?” If we answer with an affirmative “yes”, pursuing this study is futile as we already have the tools to do the deep work peace education seeks to complete. But if we answer this question with a possible “maybe” or a definitive “no”, this dissertation will guide peace education discourse down a path that redefines our way of knowing, and how we engage and relate to others.

Theoretical Stance

While the writings by and on Gandhi are vast, my focus here remains on his understanding of ahimsa, how it relates to subjectivity as discussed by theorists of intersubjectivity in philosophy of education discourse, and the contribution it can make to peace education scholarship. To do this, I employ a conception of philosophy that is highly integrated. That is to say, I do not focus solely on a logical, rational, political, or epistemic conception of philosophy.
This quality of his thought sometimes gets lost because, on the one hand, the popular interest in him has been keen to find a man of great spirituality and uniqueness and, on the other, the social scientist’s and historian’s interest in him has sought out a nationalist leader with a strikingly effective method of non-violent political action. It has been common for some decades now to swing from a sentimental perception of him as a "Mahatma" to a cooler assessment of Gandhi as "the shrewd politician". (Bilgrami, 2003)

By adopting a canonized vision of philosophy that focuses on one approach, I am limiting the robust understanding of Gandhi I wish to explore. Gandhi’s philosophical project provides a theoretical framework that allows for philosophical questioning, diverse perspectives, and approaches that seek to do no harm.

Applying Gandhi’s ideas of Truth and ahimsa to peace education further contributes to my theoretical framework. Most notably, my theoretical stance views education as a political and social act (Freire, 1993). My focus on individual subjectivity is to explore education’s political and social potential to promote ahimsa. I hold that given the shared goals of peace education and Gandhi’s overall philosophy, the adoption of ahimsa as a philosophical framework has the capacity to redefine and remould the political and social in which we act while educating.

Peace education cannot be “something done or experienced by individuals in isolation from each other” (Fisk, 2000, p. 163). As a result, philosophy has a responsibility to question how we conceptualize the individual and how we define subjectivity, a question that intersubjectivity seeks to address. For peace education, intersubjectivity seen within the framework of ahimsa will prove invaluable.
Although a significant concern, my dissertation will not deal specifically with violence in schools and possible resolutions/solutions to particular violences. In part, I do not discuss physical violence from an empirical perspective because mine is a philosophical question. I understand the ways in which this can be seen as a false dichotomy; however the (blind) adoption of philosophical discourses and the lack of further exploration of philosophy in the field of peace education discourse requires, in my view, an attentive focus. Instead, I focus on some philosophical components that can contribute to existing discussions of school violence (Alger, 2002; Bekerman, 2000; Danesh, 2006; Davies, 2005; Goncalves, 2004; Groff, 1996; I. Harris, 2002; S. Harris & Lewer, 2005; Pepinsky, 2000; Synott, 2005; Tamatea, 2005).

Research Questions

Peace education has made significant and meaningful strides into the development and maintenance of social justice initiatives. In an effort to add to the discussion, I look to the ways that Gandhi’s philosophical position can contribute peace education research, both theoretical and empirical, through a conceptualization of ahimsa understood through the lens of intersubjectivity. Through its adoption of a philosophical approach based on science, peace education risks further perpetuating the violence it seeks to address. As a result, my primary research question is as follows: in what ways can Gandhi’s notion of ahimsa viewed through the lens of intersubjectivity contribute to peace education theory and the issues of violence it seeks to address?
**Supplementary Research Questions:**

1. What philosophical contributions can Gandhi’s conception of ahimsa make to existing conceptions of intersubjectivity?

2. How does intersubjectivity presently engage with humility as found in Gandhi’s conception of ahimsa? In what ways does it fall short?

3. How does peace education theory presently engage with ahimsa? What philosophical shifts in peace education are needed to promote a theory of ahimsa?

**Outline of Chapters**

Chapter Two, entitled “Theoretical Framework: The Enlightenment in Contrast to Dharma”, is intended to provide a new lens through which to read Gandhi. By displacing the dominant Enlightenment framework, I provide a framework for a more robust reading and understanding of Gandhi’s notion of ahimsa. In this chapter, I provide an examination of the categorical imperatives found in both the Enlightenment tradition and dharma (duty). My exploration of dharma demonstrates a relation to karma (action) and moksha (spiritual enlightenment).

Chapter 3, “Truth and Ahimsa”, is an analysis of Truth and its relationship to ahimsa. I begin with a discussion of Gandhi’s political ideal, namely satyagraha (or Truth-Force) to further understand ideas of action and responsibility in the world in relation to Absolute and Whole Truth. I then explore the impact of Absolute Truth in the world, namely through the enactment of and engagement with partial truths. As a result of this enactment and engagement, I describe the concept of ahimsa and the embedded requirements of responsibility.
In Chapter 4, “Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity”, I begin by outlining the connection between Absolute and Whole Truth and ahimsa to put forth an understanding of moral responsibility. In so doing, I outline Gandhi’s conceptualization of objectivity and autonomy in order to compare and contrast the intersubjectivist framework.

Chapter 5, entitled “Humility Through Ahimsa” provides the central thesis of this dissertation. In this chapter I explore the possibilities of promoting a Gandhian intersubjectivist framework given the foundationalist and pragmatist debate. I offer humility through ahimsa as a solution to the intersubjectivist framework to circumvent the foundationalist’s and pragmatist’s potential objections.

In the concluding chapter, entitled “Intersubjectivity and Ahimsa for Peace Education”, I demonstrate the ways in which a Gandhian intersubjectivist approach can contribute to peace education discourse. Furthermore, I return to the initial research questions outlined above to provide a brief response to each. Finally, I explore three potential directions for future scholarship.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework: The Enlightenment in Contrast to Dharma

Introduction

Without an exploration of Gandhi’s philosophical assumptions – or theoretical framework – an understanding of ahimsa as a philosophical concept is incomplete. Ahimsa is a concept found throughout Indian philosophical traditions. This in and of itself is a challenging statement as ahimsa is closely linked with Buddhist, Jain and Hindu traditions and is therefore easily seen as a religious as opposed to a philosophical concept. Within most Indian philosophical traditions, this is a false dichotomy that limits the potential of philosophical exploration (Perl & Tuck, 1985). Rather than focus on ways in which philosophical concepts and priorities can provide a solution to the confines of religion, generally speaking, Indian philosophical traditions have accepted and celebrated the relationship while focusing on a broad range of philosophical studies, including logic, metaphysics, existentialism, and phenomenology.

The lack of distinction between religion and philosophy, however, is in stark contrast to dominant philosophical frameworks that insist that the two are mutually exclusive concepts. The distinction is found at the root of the West’s most dominant philosophical tradition, namely the Enlightenment tradition, and those stemming from it, most notably liberalism. Within the Enlightenment tradition, there is an insistence upon
a primacy of reason. More specifically, the Enlightenment tradition insists upon an individual’s capacity to reason independent of external influences, specifically religion. As such, the Enlightenment can be seen as a direct response to religion’s authority over individuals and the supremacy of individual reason in the establishment of knowledge, and in turn morality.

A reading of ahimsa through the lens of the Enlightenment’s framework results in only a partial reading. Instead, examining the notion of ahimsa through the concept of dharma, ethical goodness, as found specifically in the Hindu philosophical tradition proves far more holistic and meaningful. My efforts in this chapter are focused on outlining the lens through which we commonly read Gandhi - the Enlightenment tradition - and the benefit of reading Gandhi through his own lens - dharma. It is not, therefore, intended to be a critique of Enlightenment traditions, however problematic, as this topic has been well explored within a variety of philosophical communities (Halle, 2004; L. Harris, 2000; Jaggar, 1983; Spivak, 1999; Ward & Lott, 2002). Instead, by highlighting key elements of the Enlightenment tradition that present limits to our understanding of Gandhi’s ahimsa, and outlining the elements of dharma that most heavily impacted Gandhi’s understanding of ahimsa, proceeding chapters will be contextualized within Gandhi’s philosophical framework.

Although the two traditions differ greatly in their conclusions, they maintain a shared agenda: establishing a categorical imperative for the determination of morality. That is to say, both the Enlightenment and dharma set as their task a commitment to establish morality without exception or qualification within their broader philosophical paradigms. In this chapter, I begin with an examination of the Enlightenment tradition
as explored by Kant to establish the dominant theoretical framework in which Gandhi is often read. I do this through a description of duty and the categorical imperative. I then turn to an examination of Gandhi’s theoretical framework as found within the Hindu tradition. I focus on the idea of dharma and its relation to karma (action) and moksha (spiritual enlightenment) to establish the lens best suited for a clear reading of Gandhi’s notion of ahimsa.

The Enlightenment

By the mid-18th century, Western philosophical discourse was consumed by the ideas of the Enlightenment. The validity of deference to the authority of the church or the King to govern moral actions was under re-evaluation and scrutiny. Instead, the question had become an ethical one, namely of the laws governing free moral action. No longer was a church or a King seen to be in a position to dictate individual thoughts and actions. As a result, the Enlightenment was primarily concerned with the release from the external authority of the church. Such an authority was seen to be problematic given that it assumed that one was unable to “make use of [his] (sic) understanding without direction from another” (Kant, 1784/1980, p. 3). The Enlightenment tradition was consumed by its idea of liberty, whereby given people’s capacity to reason, people should be extended freedom and the right to govern themselves according to their own conceptions of the “good life”. As an individual responsible for his or her own actions, he or she must be free to act in accordance to the realization of his or her definition of the good life with as little interference from external authorities as possible.

1 Of course, Kant, writing in the 18th century was not concerned with the “she” I have added here. Kant was specifically appealing to men’s reason.
People’s capacity to think had become synonymous with their capacity and right to act in accordance to their individual reason. The challenge faced by the Enlightenment tradition then was how morality was to be determined in an environment of free will based solely on rationality. Put another way, how, in a society of free-thinking individuals, are people committed to a sense of moral responsibility without appealing to an external moral authority?

**Duty and The Categorical Imperative**

To respond to this question, Immanuel Kant developed a theory that outlined the duty of people to be moral; a challenge given that duty appears, on first glance, counterintuitive to the person free from external authority and interference. Kant’s commitment was to show that moral duty could indeed be established while at the same time respecting and prioritizing his basic premise of the primacy of our capacity to reason.

Formulated through reason and operating on the assumption that people are rational creatures, he offered what is generally accepted as the categorical imperative of the Enlightenment tradition: “I should never act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law” (Kant, 1784/1980, p. 1001), where a maxim is understood as the principle used to make a decision and not the decision itself. Kant’s categorical imperative focused on the moral action as opposed to the end. That is to say, the principle must be universalizable insofar as everyone in every situation could perform the same moral action. Through questioning whether one would want every person to act in every situation using the same principles to justify the act, an individual finds him- or herself in a position to establish the universal law using his
or her own reason. Kant offers the example of a promise. Making a promise with no intention of keeping it cannot be deemed a universal law, regardless of the fear of the consequences in not making such a promise. Within the context of Kant’s categorical imperative, the individual must ask if she or he would really want false promises to become the universal law for himself and others regardless of the desired outcomes. Indeed, there would be no real promises at all as a result since people would find no way to believe what one has promised. Hence, rather than only proving useful with reference to a certain goal or set of goals, the categorical imperative moves the individual beyond particular goals and creates universal standards to judge actions. Such universal standards, however, begs another question: without an external authority, how is the categorical imperative enforced?

To address this question, Kant turns to the issue of moral duty. Put simply, “when we do something because it is our moral duty... we are motivated by the thought that, insofar as we are rational beings, we must act only as this fundamental law of (practical) reason prescribes, a law that would prescribe how any rational being in our circumstances should act. Whatever else such a law might be, it is, in virtue of being a principle of reason, true of all rational agents” (Robert Johnson, 2012). That is to say, one’s duty to reason is one's only duty; this duty is the only measure of moral actions. Without reason, duty cannot be deemed morally good or bad. It is the only way of knowing why one has acted in a particular way.

The most poignant and relevant example Kant provided in the context of my broader work is a person who finds joy in service of others. He argued that those who find inner pleasure and rejoice in serving others and spreading joy have no true moral
worth. As moral worth cannot be determined in the absence of reason, feelings or emotions that may be found in the service of others - honour, praise or encouragement - do not have the capacity to determine moral duty. However, if this same person loses their sympathy for those in distress, for whatever reason, and is therefore no longer moved by his or her inclinations, Kant argued the moral worth of the action changes:

Suppose then the mind of this friend to mankind (sic) to be clouded over with his (sic) own sorrow so that all sympathy with the lot of others is extinguished, and suppose him (sic) still to have the power to benefit others in distress, even though he (sic) is not touched by their trouble because he (sic) is sufficiently absorbed with his (sic) own; and now suppose that, even though no inclination moves him (sic) any longer, he (sic) nevertheless tears himself (sic) from this deadly insensibility and perform the action without any inclination at all, but solely from duty - then for the first time his (sic) action has genuine moral worth... just here does the worth of character come out; this worth is moral and incomparably the highest of all, viz., that he (sic) is beneficent, not from inclination, but from duty. (1785/1992, p. 999).

The morally significant element to action is, therefore, not the consequence but the way an individual thinks when they make the choice to act. In determining the good of one’s will, we must focus our efforts on those acts derived from a duty to the categorical imperative and not to our personal wants and desires. In sum, an action must be done from duty to the moral law to have any moral worth. Furthermore, it becomes clear in this example that the moral law is not based on

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2 In the present context, this could be likened to the notion of disinterest, however within Kant’s work, disinterest has particular meaning related to notions of beauty and the aesthetic (see Campbell, 2002).
the outcome of any particular act. That is to say, the moral law does not specify a particular moral action in order to achieve a particular end, in the case of this example helping others, but instead prescribes moral action irrespective of the ends it achieves. For Kant, it is impossible to determine whether the effect of actions could have come about through other causes and therefore there is no way of knowing that the end was brought about by the individual's commitment of his or her duty to the moral law.

With such careful pains taken to secure the supremacy of reason, and with this tradition's adoption into modern day liberalism, it becomes difficult not to read Gandhi and his philosophy of ahimsa through the lens of rationality and moral duty offered by Kant. How could Gandhi's statements such as “we must believe in God if we believe in ourselves” (Gandhi, 1932/2010) or “[i]t is our actions which count. Thoughts, however good in themselves, are like false pearls unless they are translated into action” (Gandhi, 1932/1990) be reconciled within the realm of Kant's categorical imperative and rational moral duty? Indeed, we would require significant finessing to fit Gandhi's philosophy into the clean framework proposed by Kant; we are better served through an understanding of dharma as Gandhi engaged it through his work.³

Dharma

Although any reference to an entire philosophical tradition with such broad brushstrokes will inevitably lead to response and possibly criticism, there is a shared agreement that dharma focuses on an intimate relationship between philosophy and

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³ It may appear that I have over simplified Kant's argument in this section. The goal of this work is to explore Gandhi's contributions to philosophical discourse and not to explore Kant and the many interpretations of his work, I have selected what I see to be the more generous and relevant reading here (see Campbell, 2002; Halle, 2004; Robert Johnson, 2012).
life, which therefore requires practical application. Generally speaking, *dharma* is a conceptual challenge to Western philosophical traditions. "Modern Western philosophy (or at least certain branches of it) is liable to be hostile to spiritual philosophy generally - a liability that Indian philosophy, ancient and modern, does not carry" (Parel, 2008, pp. 42-43). Furthermore, it is a difficult word to translate to English. In part this difficulty is intensified through its multiple meanings found in multiple texts. "The word has been used in various contexts to signify a prescribed course of conduct, duty, ordinance, law, usage, practice, custom, customary observances of caste, religion, piety, justice, equity, virtue, morality, nature, character, and characteristic quality" (Sharma, 2005, p. 71). Despite the multiplicity of understanding, there is agreement that *dharma*, generally speaking, refers to one's duties at every stage of life. As a result of dharma's philosophical and spiritual entanglement it is difficult to organize and compartmentalize. "In Sanskrit, there is no separate word for religion apart from morality or duty. *Dharma* stands for all three" (Sharma, 2005, p. 75). There are some basic underpinnings of Hindu spirituality that therefore must be established to fully grasp the implications of the entanglement.

Gandhi drew upon a variety of religious traditions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Jainism, yet he mainly identified as a Hindu (Gandhi, 1978/1993). It is for this reason that I focus here on Hindu conceptualizations of *dharma*. Even more specifically, I focus here on Gandhi's interpretation of *dharma* as it is found in the *Bhagavad-Gita* (The Song Celestial), also known as the *Gita*. The *Gita* is found within the larger Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*. Overall, the *Mahabharata* explores philosophical and devotional concerns, most notably the *purusharthas* or the
goals of life. These goals are *artha* (wealth and purpose), *kama* (pleasure and desire), *dharma*, and *moksha* (spiritual awakening) (Parel, 2008; Puligandla, 2008). Specifically, the *Gita*, as Gandhi read it, focuses, although not exclusively, on *dharma* and *moksha* and their relation to *karma* (action).

The *Gita* is but a short section comprised of only 700 verses found in the grandiose *Mahabharatha*. It is a meditation on how one should live one's life and, more importantly how and when to act. It stirs philosophical questions regarding how to define oneself and the consequences of actions given one's responsibilities and duties (our *dharma*) of acting in the world. “*Dharma* stands for all those ideals and purposes, influences and institutions that shape the character of man (*sic*) both as an individual and as a member of society” (Radhakrishnan, 1922, pp. 1-2). These duties are seen to affect how society functions and therefore are dependent upon knowing oneself as an individual and as individuals as a part of a broader social world.

The *Gita* pursues the examination of duty metaphorically through exploring the philosophical underpinnings of a conflict between two ruling Indian families, the Pandavas and Kauravas. In the face of battle, the warrior Arjuna finds himself questioning his duty to fight. Arjuna engages in conversation with Lord Krishna, depicted in his incarnation as Arjuna's charioteer.

It is important to note here that Lord Krishna is understood as a manifestation of the divine, God. Despite the multiple deities found in Hinduism, they are all manifestations of one entity - the Ultimate Reality. Unlike in Abrahamic faiths, in Hinduism God is not seen as anthropomorphized, despite often found taking a physical form. Instead, God “is without beginning, immaculate, and without any attribute or
form” (Gandhi, 1978/1993, pp. 36-37). In general, the metaphor of God as a person is a continual conception in Abrahamic faiths alone. For example, although Andrew Davis argues that there are “increasingly theistic narratives of the Bhagavad-Gita [in which] Krishna could play an analogous role in the genesis of the relevant Hindu beliefs” (2010, p. 137), this position decontextualizes Krishna’s embodiment as Lord Vishnu. Even with such embodiment, the metaphor of God as person may not hold, as Lord Vishnu is not God either. In Hinduism, God “is an impersonal energy. Ultimately God is beyond language and anything that can be said about God cannot capture the reality” (Flood, 2009). Furthermore, “to attempt a description of God is indicative of failure to appreciate the most elementary truth about him (sic), namely, that he (sic) is inconceivable and undefinable, that he (sic) is beyond human knowledge because he is illimitable and infinite” (Woodburne, 1925, p. 59). Hindu gods or goddesses (note the small ‘g’) represent particular aspects of God (note the capitalized ‘G’). A god or goddess in Hindu tradition is an avatar used to represent parts of the illimitable and infinite, yet never in God’s entirety. An avatar in this sense is understood as a physical manifestation or appearance of God. The Gita describes the role of avatars as that which brings dharma back to the social and cosmic order (Matchett, 2001). “For when Right declines and Wrong prevails, then, O Bharata, I come to life” (Gandhi, 2000, p. 8). In the case of Arjuna, his questioning of his responsibility to fight exhibits his need for a renewed faith in his dharma. Lord Krishna appears in order to guide Arjuna in fulfilling his dharma, or duty.

One’s duty is derived from one’s varna, often narrowly defined as one’s caste or one’s family and social status. A broader, more holistic understanding of varna is acting
upon what is right in any particular situation in accordance to one’s membership in a group. It is the “logical expression of the fact that men (sic) have different natures and abilities, and their social duties correspond to this fact” (Creel, 1972, p. 156). The Gita, as a result, is interpreted by Gandhi as the struggle between Arjuna’s responsibility to his family and his responsibility as a warrior. In the remainder of the Gita, Krishna expounds the virtues of fighting the righteous war. As Arjuna sees his family on both sides of the opposing armies, he is disheartened by the task of killing his own family in battle. “He is unhappy not at the thought of killing, but at the thought of whom he was required to kill” (Gandhi, 2000, p. 32). As a warrior, Arjuna’s dharma based on his varna is to fight. The Gita, therefore, can be seen as the duty to fulfil one’s role in the world as an expression of one’s nature. “The social role, with its accompanying status, is an expression of what one is. To go against or to neglect one’s dharma is never merely to disregard the teachings of one’s forefathers or to cease doing things the way the group specifies; it is to go against the grain of one’s nature” (Creel, 1972, pp. 156-157). The realization of one’s nature, however, is not derived from a detailed and specific examination of the individual; rather, one’s nature is realized through action – action that happens in the world and therefore ties us to humanity.

*Karma Yoga*

Hence, the Gita is also focused on one’s karma, coming from the Sanskrit word kri meaning “to do” and is often translated as activity or deeds. Activity or deeds in this context includes all actions one performs, be it in body, speech or mind (Mulla & Krishna, 2006, p. 27). In its simplest form, the law of karma states “that all actions have consequences which will affect the doer of the action at some future
time” (Reichenbach, 1988, p. 399). From a more philosophical and holistic perspective its implications are far broader, whereby it is understood as the “application of the law of cause and effect in the moral sphere” (Wadia, 1965, p. 145). That is to say, **karma** is the enactment of **dharma** referring “to the same broad area of human behaviour, but with different foci of interest. **Dharma** refers to where one is at a particular moment and the duties correlative to that position; **karma** refers to the pilgrimage of the Self through time and gives the individual a sense of his (sic) proper placement in an order that is legitimated on other grounds” (Creel, 1972, p. 161-162). **Karma** is not, therefore, simply a system of punishment or retribution. It is better seen as an extension of consequences, a system of cause and effect, of one’s actions and deeds. **Karma** refers to the totality of one’s actions and their related reactions in one’s life, all of which determine our future. We have choices to make and, as depicted through Arjuna in the **Gita**, in the face of conflicting choices, a metaphysical struggle ensues. The concept of **karma** is intended to mediate this struggle through providing a point of reference and guidance in which to base one’s actions.

Actions, however, are not a fulfillment of **dharma** in and of themselves. To be seen as a fulfillment of one’s **dharma**, one must act skillfully. The idea of skill in action is explored and demonstrated in the concept of **yoga**. Although **yoga** in a Western context has become a popular activity contributing to physical health and well-being, **yoga** in this context is fundamentally one’s skill in action. Indeed, the popular adoption of **yoga** embodies this definition, yet **yoga**’s relationship to **karma** is (often) absent. **Yoga** is derived from the Sanskrit **yuj** which mean to join. **Karma yoga** can be understood as the path of **union through action**, where the union is of oneself and one’s
action to the world (Mulla & Krishna, 2006). “Action in this world was important since union with God without concern for the good of one’s neighbour was imperfect” (Adenwalla, 1961, p. 22). A philosophical and spiritual journey committed to *karma yoga* therefore requires examination of the self and the relationship of the self to others. That is to say, if one is to act, we must discover how one’s duty is best manifested in the larger context of our social world. *Karma yoga* is, therefore, a way of acting in accordance with one’s duty, *dharma*, without consideration of how one’s actions serves one’s own desires, likes or dislikes. *Karma yoga* is acting in a way that considers one’s relationship with the world, however still without consideration of consequences or ends.

*Karma yoga*, within the context of *varna*, cannot be focused on the fulfilment of duty while also focused upon the consequences of action. The consequences of actions, if acted upon in accordance with one’s *dharma* will produce desired outcomes as needed by the social order. To fulfill one’s *dharma*, there can be no desire for specific outcomes from one’s action. Furthermore, there can be no desire for personal egotistic consequences derived from our actions (Mathur, 1974, p. 35). These conditions, however, appear counterintuitive outside of the context of *dharma*. If good acts produce good consequences, how are we to act without consideration for consequences? *Karma yoga*, to be enacted in accordance with the universal law of *dharma*, can only focus on the action and not the consequences of actions. “Desire for fruit is the only universal prohibition. Desirelessness is obligatory” (Gandhi, 2000, p. 23). One must seek to act skillfully in the world, *karma yoga*, to realize the self, understood as both the *Atman*, soul, and one’s physical embodiment. It is to this
distinction that I now turn.

The Self: Body and Atman

Despite the absence of desire, the impetus to act does indeed come from the self, where the self is distinguished between the body and the Atman (Gandhi, 2000, p. 35). The body is seen as our physical reality (the empirical) and Atman is seen as the spiritual reality (the transcendental) (Shideler, 1960). The Atman is both the soul and the divine within each person. It is unique and individual while at the same time being a part of the larger whole. “The Gita… holds that the empirical self is caught up in the causal nexus… while the “real” self [the Atman] remains eternally free, transcendent, pure, and unaffected by the temporal concerns of the former” (Mathur, 1974, p. 41).

The transcendental reality is the ultimate reality and is to be sought for the realization of the self.

Behind everything - people, things, and events - there is a reality that binds them together and gives them a shared reality (Rao, 1970; Shideler, 1960). Yet:

… Atman cannot be defined because it is self-existent reality transcending the phenomenal world. The urge and restlessness of man (sic) to know himself (sic) is a positive proof that his (sic) real nature transcends the world. He (sic) who does not wrestle with the question of the nature of his (sic) own being, has not embarked upon the quest of truth nor has he (sic) understood the meaning of life.” (Rao, 1970, pp. 378-379)

Despite both the body and the Atman contributing to a holistic view of the self, the Atman is limited by the body. One’s physical embodiment is restricted by the limitations of the body, including attachment to ego and worldly desires (Puligandla, 2008, p.
To fulfil one’s *dharma*, through *karma*, one must act without attachments to the body. This in and of itself is the overarching journey of fulfilling one’s *dharma*. The unconditioned being, the *Atman* “cannot be experienced as an object other than itself. As the innermost being or the ground of being, it is prior to all knowledge” (Rao, 1970, p. 379). In addition to being present in the self, the *Atman* is present in all knowledge, experience, and action, and seen both within and beyond the categories of *reason*. As the divine within oneself, the *Atman* drives one to discipline and temper selfish passions and desires, and therefore perform their *dharma*.

In the *Gita*, Arjuna can be seen to prioritize his physical embodiment over the *Atman*. To encourage Arjuna to recognize the temporal nature of his physical reality, Lord Krishna demonstrates Arjuna’s responsibility to act skillfully, *karma yoga*, to the ultimate reality, the *Atman*, reminding Arjuna that to fight is his responsibility to his *varna*. “Having declared the highest truth - the immortality of the *Atman* and the fleeting nature of the physical body - Lord Krishna reminds Arjuna that a *Kshatriya* [a warrior] may not flinch from a fight which comes unsought. He then then shows how the highest truth and the performance of duty incidentally coincide with expediency” (Gandhi, 2000, p. 44). It could be said that the *Atman* is all and none at the same time. All because it is present in everything - thoughts, deeds, natural phenomenon - and none as it is not known, it is realized.

The realization of the *Atman* is in and of itself knowledge of reality and it is in this realization that one attains *moksha*, freedom from ignorance, bondage and suffering. *Moksha* is a liberating knowledge. “The man (*sic*) who has attained [*moksha*] is freed once and for all from ignorance, illusion, delusion, fear and attachment. By overcoming
ignorance by the knowledge of the real, he has brought the karmic chain to an end and thereby has broken out of the circle of births and deaths. He has thus gone beyond birth and death and attained immortality” (Puligandla, 2008, p. 252). Immortality in this context is not to be understood as that which is in an unknown world.

[Moksha], absolute freedom, is not a state to be looked forward to after death. On the contrary, [moksha] is the attainment of the highest state of consciousness… to be attained here and now while one is still in one’s bodily existence. He (sic) who attains such consciousness is … the living free… he (sic) has overcome that nightmare of ignorant philosophies - the opposition between freedom and necessity and good and evil. Having attained knowledge of the real, one has overcome all forms of alienation - alienation from the world, from other men (sic), and from oneself. [Moksha], then, is the state of self-knowledge, peace, freedom, and wisdom. (Puligandla, 2008, pp. 252-253)

Pursuit of the Atman along side transcendence of the things one normally thinks of as real and important is the realization of moksha (Prasad, 1971). The pursuit of this discovery, as demonstrated through Arjuna and Lord Krishna’s dialogue, finds its basis in the fulfilment of one’s dharma. “Our dharma is to rise even higher until at last we can rise no more. We can have no rest till we have reached the goal. There will be eternal peace when we have reached it, that is, the peace of moksha” (Gandhi, 2000, p. 88). Hence we must pursue knowledge of the Atman through our dharma within the context of karma yoga to achieve moksha.

Dharma, karma, and moksha are woven together into the same cloth, are interdependent and known only partially in their separation. Intertwined, they provided
Gandhi with his theoretical framework, and provide us with a clear and more accurate lens through which to view his conception of ahimsa.

**Moral Duty**

It can be concluded, therefore, that both the Enlightenment tradition and *dharma* expound a moral duty, however the categorical imperatives of each differ greatly. I also conclude that the Enlightenment tradition necessarily excludes the tradition of *dharma* with its insistence and focus on the primacy of reason; the framework of *dharma*, while not denying rationality, requires an understanding of the self through both body and *Atman*. There may indeed be elements of reason embedded in the exploration of the *Atman*, however to restrict this exploration to solely rational discourse denies the infinite nature of the *Atman*.

The principle of Truth as a philosophical concept is independent of religious distinctions and practices. Although Gandhi saw himself as firmly rooted in the Hindu faith, his belief in Truth moves beyond mere religious dogma. Perhaps the clearest support of this claim is found in my own belief in Sikhism, also a Vedic, non-Abrahamic faith. Here, I couple the literal translation of *sikh*, to learn, with one of its first teachings, “*na koi hindu na koi musalman*: there is no Hindu, there is no Muslim” (McLeod, 1997, p. 8) to demonstrate that if we accept that we are all on a path to Truth, the dogmatics of religion or philosophical traditions need not be a concern. One must accept that this path is both individualized and responsible to that which is found beyond and within. The path differs for every individual and is not outside the realm of reason. However, in the tradition of *dharma*, reason is not the only determinant of the path to Truth.

In this chapter, I have examined the differing theoretical frameworks found in the
Enlightenment tradition and *dharma* as found in the Hindu tradition. I have explored the concepts of duty and the categorical imperative of each to contextualize Gandhi’s conception of Truth and ahimsa presented in the next chapter.
Chapter 3: Truth and Ahimsa

Introduction

The preceding chapter provided the theoretical framework within which I read and interpret Gandhi's work. This chapter will do a grave injustice to Gandhi's work and to the engagement of his theoretical framework in certain ways. My efforts here are limited to an examination of Gandhi's political writings and activities and interpret them for the benefit of philosophy and, in turn, peace education. I will address all too briefly the liberation of India by this astonishing political figure. I will instead focus the bulk of my analysis on his political writings to extrapolate his contribution to philosophical discourse.

Pursuing an examination of Gandhi's political actions and writings as an demonstration of Gandhi's understanding for Truth reveals an action-based moral philosophy dependent on the principles of *karma yoga* and a commitment to *dharma*. As stated in the previous chapter, action in the context of *karma yoga* is not limited to one's physical actions alone; it includes one’s words and thoughts. One must act (*karma*), and act skillfully (*yoga*), engaging in the world and recognizing one’s role in it, to achieve Truth. Here skillfully implies to act with intent and purpose to pursue efforts to fulfill our *dharma*, duty, and realize the *Atman*. Therefore, for Gandhi, Truth is dependent on our actions in the world. The union signified in the term *yoga* demonstrates the interconnectivity between all things, and in the case of *karma yoga*, in all actions. It is for this reason that my focus in this chapter will begin with a brief
overview of his action-based philosophy, *satyagraha* (with its relationship to Truth and ahimsa) in order to uncover the impact of Gandhi's understanding of and responsibility to Truth. I furthermore demonstrate that, in Gandhi's philosophy, to act skillfully was to act through ahimsa; that is, to act with the intent of doing no harm. This exploration will contribute to the subsequent chapter, which considers the concept of ahimsa's impact on how one views oneself and one's responsibility and engagement to the world, in a philosophical context.

**Satyagraha**

Gandhi's achievements in the political realm are well known and documented. He is popularly touted as one of the great revolutionaries of our time (Attenborough, 2001; Cenkner, 1970; Lelyveld, 2011; Vaitheswaran, 1976), and as the father of a modern Indian nation (Basham & Bhattacharjee, 1988; Jain, Murty, Dayal, Arlekar, & Chaubey, 2001; Lal, 1995). These labels focus on the end result of the political movement at the time, namely the independence of India from nearly a century of British rule (Brown, 1989). Indeed, it is simple to focus on these results, as there were tangible outcomes that coincided with the timing of Gandhi's political efforts (the British did indeed leave India). However, precisely why and how India achieved its independence is a subject of much debate. Some argue the timing of the British exit from India was a result of a shift globally in the conception and perceived validity of colonization. Others hold that the exit was a result of financial strain placed on the British government during and post World War II. And, of course, others attribute the independence of India to Gandhi's efforts (Brown, 1989; Cain & Hopkins, 1987; Cohn, 1996; Darwin, 1984; White, 2000). To argue any one of these points is beyond the scope of the study of Gandhi's
philosophy and therefore beyond the scope of this work. The political context is, however, significant for my discussion in a different light.

Most notably, a particular shift in his political work demonstrates his commitment and insistence upon a particular definition of Truth rather than particular political end. In earlier works, Gandhi was not insistent that the British leave India. When asked what he would say to the British, he responded:

I admit you are my rulers. It is not necessary to debate the question whether you hold India by the sword or by my consent. I have no objection to your remaining in my country, but although you are the rulers, you will have to remain as servants of the people. It is not we who have to do as you wish, but it is you who have to do as we wish. (Gandhi, 1909/1956, p. 118) (emphasis added).

It was not until late 1929, after years of appealing to the morality of the British government that Gandhi announced that a complete exit of the British from India was a requirement for independence: “I do not want to say swaraj [self-rule] within Empire is possible at all, and we clearly say that swaraj means complete independence” (Gandhi, 1929/1999). Rather than focus on the inconsistency of end-goals, I hold this shift in Gandhi’s thinking demonstrates his commitment to his philosophy of Truth and its relationship to ahimsa, irrespective of the political end-goals he sought for the nation.

Satyagraha was the political movement that placed Gandhi’s ideas of Truth and ahimsa squarely within the context of karma yoga. The word itself is derived from the Sanskrit satya and graha, meaning Truth-Force, and was also translated by Leo Tolstoy as Soul-Force or Love-Force (Gandhi, 1914/2010). Gandhi did not, however, write a
political or philosophical treatise to develop methodically the relationship between ahimsa, Truth and *karma yoga*. His ideas were communicated through the mass media of the time (newspapers, flyers, and radio) and through personal letters to friends, colleagues, and critics of his ideas. The actions of the *satyagrahi* (one who practices *satyagraha*) were systemically codified to ensure the movement remained authentic to the ethic of ahimsa (see Gandhi, 1930/2010a). Examinations of these codes are far beyond the purpose of this work. Rather, I focus here on the development of *satyagraha* through its relationship to Truth and action from a philosophical perspective.

Drawing on movements before his, Gandhi initially proposed a movement of passive resistance however quickly realized that such a definition left his movement vulnerable to misinterpretation. Passive resistance had been a successful political strategy used throughout the world, including New Zealand (see Diamond, 1999), Trinidad (see Littell & Littell, 1846), and Germany (see Ackerman & DuVall, 2001). While the goals set out by these movements were indeed achieved, passive resistance was seen as a tool for those without access to the resources and weaponry needed to engage in physical warfare (see Scott, 1985). These movements were frequently initiated by Christian groups and as a result the term *passive* was often related to the Christian dictum of “turn the other cheek”. Although this was not, generally speaking, true, rather than situate his movement within the confines of this perception, Gandhi insisted upon *satyagraha*. “I often used ‘passive resistance’ and ‘*satyagraha*’ as synonymous terms: but...passive resistance...has been universally acknowledged as a weapon of the weak. Therefore it is different from *satyagraha* in three essentials:
Satyagraha is a weapon of the strong; it admits of no violence under any circumstance whatever; and it ever insists upon truth” (Gandhi, 1921/1999). His movement was firmly grounded in his belief in and understanding of Truth. He did not want access to the means of violence, as this would be in contrast to his interpretation of Truth. Instead, his vision was to establish the framework for a community that lived through and by Truth. Embedded in Gandhi’s distinction are key elements of his overall philosophy, namely Truth and ahimsa. It is to these elements that I now turn.

**Absolute and Whole Truth**

Gandhi highlights the significance of Truth through an examination of its etymology: “The word satya (truth) comes from sat which means “to be” or “to exist””. Therefore, to live through Truth is “to be” or “to exist”. As such, satya can be interpreted as that which is at the very core of humanity and human beings. “Gandhi never hesitated to interweave ontological components of satya...with more epistemological (truth as “factual correctness”), pragmatic (truth as “selfless political action”), psychological (truth as “honesty”) and religious (truth as “God”) notions of satya, he remained... firmly wedded to the...position regarding the difficulty of ever grasping satya in its fullness” (Steger, 2006, p. 342). That is to say, for Gandhi, a person’s existence is deeply intertwined with a wide variety of ways of understanding Truth simultaneously. In such a context, Truth can be a basic knowledge of things or facts: 2+2 = 4; or have a deeper meaning of what should be in order to interact effectively with the world, for example do not pollute as it is bad for the environment. Truth can also direct one in how to reflect upon the world: honesty; and in determining what one believes: God exists. As a result, unlike modern Western philosophical traditions that
insist upon self-contained justifications for its various schools of thought, Gandhi's philosophy maintains an overarching and all-embracing philosophical position as a result of its multifacetedness.

To grasp the complex nature of Truth, it is best seen through two distinct lenses: Absolute and Whole Truth, and partial truth. Absolute and Whole Truth can be seen as truth in its fullness. It can only be pursued through skillful action, \textit{karma yoga}. Through action, one reveals partial truths relative to Whole Truth. In this context partial truth does imply relativeness to other partial truths. Yet at the same time all partial truths are to be understood as relative to Absolute Truth:

Generally speaking, \textit{[observance of the law of]} Truth is understood merely to mean that we must speak the truth. But we … should understand the word \textit{satya} or Truth in a much wider sense. There should be Truth in thought, Truth in speech and Truth in action. To the man (\textit{sic}) who has realized this Truth in its fullness, nothing else remains to be known, because…all knowledge is necessarily included in it. What is not included in it is not Truth, and so not true knowledge; and there can be no real bliss without true knowledge. If we once learn how to apply this never-failing test of Truth, we will at once be able to find out what is worth doing, what is worth seeing, what is worth reading. (Gandhi, 1930/1999).

Truth is not simply understood in its common meaning as a responsibility to speak or behave honestly. More significantly, partial truths are the very expression of morality in the world as a result of their relation to Absolute and Whole Truth. Before discussing one’s responsibility to Absolute Truth, a deeper exploration of Absolute Truth is necessary.
Truth, for Gandhi, is firmly rooted in the Hindu faith. Absolute Truth is the Ultimate Reality. His belief in the teachings found in the Gita is transparent, and clearly motivated his action-based philosophy. “[T]here is one absolute Truth which is total and all embracing. But it is indescribable, because it is God. Or say, rather, God is Truth. All else is unreal and false. Other things, therefore, can be true only in a relative sense” (Gandhi, 1921/1999). As discussed in the previous chapter, God in the Hindu sense is not seen as a person, despite having a number of avatars (physical worldly appearances of the divine) to embody the Ultimate Reality that is God. Avatars provide an appearance to the ideas of the Ultimate Reality - Krishna in the Gita is one such example - however are not God him or her/itself  

It is proper to speak of God as a Person if in so doing we seek to provide for the possibility of being intimate with Him, or (as Gandhi would say) of listening to His voice or of being “in His hands”. But if the word ‘person’ be taken in the sense of an agent who is limited and who is different from his law, and partial in his dealings, then God cannot be a person. (Khanna, 1985, p. 23).

God for Gandhi is divine, an external force and agent with an unfathomable and all-encompassing role throughout the universe. Hence, when Gandhi says “I can live only by having faith in God. My definition of God must always be kept in mind. For me there is no other God than Truth; Truth is God” (1932/1990, p. 156), he is referring to God in the sense of the unchanging, undefined, yet all defining.

1 Gandhi often refers to God as “he” in his writing. This is an interesting grammatical move. Sentence structure in English requires that a noun is preceded by a possessive adjective. For example, the second line of morning prayers in the Sikh tradition is often translated as “His name is Truth”, however in Gurbani there is no reference to a possessive adjective: it simply states Sat nam, Truth-name. The insertion of “his” as a possessive pronoun of the word “name” is a grammatical requirement of English, as is the verb “is”. Indeed, Gandhi’s gendered assignment of his or he is problematic, however should not be interpreted to anthropomorphize God.
There is only one God who is real. The real God is beyond conception. He (sic) neither serves nor receives service. He (sic) cannot be described by any epitaphs, being not an external power but something dwelling in our heart. Since we do not understand the ways of God, we have necessarily to think of a power beyond our conception. And the moment we think of it, the God of our imagining is born. The fact is that belief in God is a function not of the intellect but of faith. Reasoning is of little help to us in this matter and once we accept God the ways of the world cease to bother us. Then we have to accept that no creation of God can be purposeless. (Gandhi, 1932/1990, pp. 157-158).

Any reduction of the term God to semantics, as I myself have done in previous work (2006a, 2006b), is to deny the essence of faith embedded in Gandhi’s work. His commitment to his faith is not found merely in his use of the term God, but in its equation to the term Truth. The currency of the term God, understood as an all-pervasive and and all defining principle, positions Truth as the cornerstone of his philosophical discourse. Furthermore, the synonymous uses of the terms God and Truth represents his devotion to Absolute Truth. Finally, it further solidifies his theoretical framework in the context of dharma and its relationship to the Atman.

In addition to God, Gandhi also defined Absolute and Whole Truth as Love. Gandhi’s choice of the term “Love” is interesting because of its intensity. Rather than discuss care or responsibility, which are open to interpretation of scope and passion, Love denotes a very particular, albeit indefinite, depth and zeal. At the same time, its definition is not limited to these elements. Kierkegaard describes how this is the case in Works of Love:
There is no word in human language, not one single one, not the most sacred one, about which we are able to say: If a person uses this word, it is unconditionally demonstrated that there is love in that person. On the contrary, it is even true that a word from one person can convince us that there is love in him (sic), and the opposite word from another can convince us that there is love in him also. It is true that one and the same word can convince us that love abides in the one who said it and does not in the other, who nevertheless said the same word. (1946/1995, p. 13).

Kierkegaard shares in Gandhi’s view that the emotion of love is best expressed through action, yet neither does so without ever providing a steadfast definition of Love. Combine the indescribable yet value-laden emotion Love with Gandhi’s ideas of God and Truth, and the use of the term Love to describe Truth in action becomes apparent. Truth as Love underscores the all-embracing nature of Absolute Truth.

A potential challenge to understanding Truth as God and Love in this context, however, is that there is no scientific definition provided that allows for a clear measurement of Absolute Truth.

The problem is that Absolute Truth is so multifaceted that it cannot adequately be captured by any one mind or manifested entirely in any given human life. The task of worldly action is doubly difficult. Not only are human beings attempting to transcend worldly limitations by finding the totality of truth, this endeavour is further complicated by the fluid and pluralistic nature of the Truth they seek. Most human beings are, in practice, deeply limited in their capacity to see Absolute Truth, and any one person’s grasp of moral knowledge is necessarily incomplete.
This lack of clear distinction embodies the essence of Gandhi’s overall philosophical work and religious commitments. As opposed to providing a steadfast definition of Absolute Truth, Gandhi chose to apply conditions to Truth, in order to “realize God as that which really is: and that this is also the basic (derivative) meaning of Truth” (Khanna, 1985, p. 26). The realization of Truth, therefore is acting with skill and purpose in the world, acting through *karma yoga*.

**Partial Truths**

As such, Gandhi embraces Absolute and Whole Truth as an ideal to aspire toward, while recognizing the unattainability of its fulness. This unattainable Truth is thus practiced in the world through partial truths, which are intended to guide human thought and action. Partial truths are embodied aspirations of Truth. Where Absolute Truth is characterized by its fixed and unalterable nature, partial truths are those definitive ideas that practically inform one’s way of being in the world and with others. However, although fixed and unalterable, Truth remains undefined and therefore one cannot make claims to knowledge of it or of its attainment. Yet the inability to attain Truth does not diminish its importance. Instead, Gandhi insists upon the need for partial truths to maintain as their guiding principle, and remain relative to, the idea of Absolute Truth. The term relative here may be seen as problematic given its bad reputation in modern philosophical discourse. However it is critical to distinguish these notions of relativity. Gandhi’s relative is not the relativity found in modern and post-modern philosophical work.

In most philosophical circles, relativity is seen as a comparative exercise between
various truths held by individuals/institutions/etc. (see Swoyer, 2010). In this framework, one thing is true because another thing is not true. For example, the earth is round is true because the earth is not flat; the chair is a chair because it is not a cup; a candy is sweet because it is not salty. While relativism may not be problematic in the context of tangible things, it is the source of great debate in metaphysical, epistemological and ethical realms. In these debates, addressing questions of relativism might ask: can we apply the rule “do not steal” in the context of the brother stealing from a shopkeeper to provide for his family?

“Relative” in the context of Gandhi is not relative subjectively but rather objectively as a part in relation to the Whole. A popular Vedic teaching makes the distinction clear:

There was once a king who brought together all those who had been born blind. When they were all assembled, the king commanded that an elephant be led before them. The beast was brought and he told some of them to feel his head, others his ear, others his tusk, others his trunk etc., and the last one the elephant’s tail. Then the king asked them: “How does an elephant look?” Those who had touched the elephant’s head, replied, “An elephant is like a pot”; those who had touched the ear answered, “An elephant is like a winnowing basket”; those who had touched the tusk said: “An elephant is like the pole of a plough,” etc.; and those who had felt the tail maintained: “An elephant is like a broom.” A great tumult now arose. Each one maintained “An elephant is like this, and not otherwise; he is not like that, he is like this”; until at last they came to blows, at which the king was mighty amused. Even so, concluded the Buddha, is the case of the persons who have seen only a portion of the truth, and who then maintain:
“This is truth and not otherwise; truth is not thus, but thus.” (Bhatta, p. 224)

Through this metaphor, it is clear that the partial truths of the elephant are describable and definable. The elephant’s tusks can be described as smooth, its tail coarse, or its skin tough. However, as a whole, no one description fully captures the essence of the elephant while at the same time, all conditions are true. Partial truths are the form of truth that is attainable in our human embodied condition (Khanna, 1985, p. 41) or the temporal world. Returning to the question of the brother stealing to provide for his family, it could be said that the brother and the shopkeeper share in their belonging to the “whole”. Although the material goods of that which is being stolen do indeed belong to the shopkeeper, the shared responsibility to the whole would allow the brother to provide for his family. Indeed, in the context of partial and whole truths, defining the act itself as “theft” could be seen as problematic. The shopkeeper him/herself is equally denying his/her responsibility to the whole.

The metaphor of the elephant also highlights another key element in Gandhi’s theoretical framework: the essence of experience. Within Hindu traditions, the capacity to see does not solely stem from one’s ability to rationally see the world; it is the experience of seeing itself that is significant, and only after seeing do thinking, reasoning, speaking, writing, and other more temporal aspects come to realization. “The knowledge of … truths is said to be derived from the internal spiritual “experience” of the “seers”. Such knowledge is not derived in the first instance from reason or empirical sources” (Parel, 2008, p. 43). The intent and skill found in movement and not movement itself that is defined as action, karma yoga, and as the experience of “seeing” in the world.
The presentation of Truth put forth here could be interpreted as extremely dangerous. A relative relationship to Absolute Truth as presented up until this point could be used to justify mass human atrocities, for example, legitimately making claims to intent, skill and a belief in Absolute Truth. However, thus far I have only provided the casing for which Gandhi’s broader framework is to be applied, namely his position that Truth be guided by a distinct notion of ahimsa.

**Ahimsa and Responsibility**

Ahimsa is the fundamental characteristic of Truth for Gandhi, and therefore ahimsa too becomes the core of our being. Ahimsa is a concept found within most Vedic traditions and is generally understood as “to do no harm”. This includes non-injury and absence of physical violence. In this sense, ahimsa is nonviolence and can be seen as a response to physical phenomena in the world around us. It would be simple to reduce ahimsa to this definition, especially given the literal translation of ahimsa from Sanskrit. Its root, himsa, is translated as violence, or more broadly as the use of force, where force is defined as the use of coercion, physical violence, and threats (Coates, 2008). ‘A’himsa is therefore the antithesis of this – the absence of the use of force. Reducing ahimsa to solely this definition denies the intimate relationship the notion of ahimsa has with Truth.

In the context of Gandhi’s Truth, ahimsa embraces much more than the absence of force. It requires an active engagement in the world through deeds, speech and thought. Such engagement requires that we act skillfully, *karma yoga*, and therefore ahimsa cannot truly be practiced in the absence of action. Specifically, “ahimsa means the largest love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of ahimsa, I must love my
enemy” (Gandhi, 1916/1999, p. 252). As such, ahimsa maintains characteristics that are *a priori* to the execution of action and is focused upon action as intention and skill as opposed merely to the end result: most notably, the characteristics of love and attachment to the skill of an act which drives and motivates action. The ability to act with intent and skill is the ability to act through and for ahimsa. Specifically, ahimsa is “the greatest force man [sic] has been endowed with. Truth is the only goal he [sic] has. For God is none other than Truth. But Truth cannot be, never will be, reached except through [ahimsa]” (Gandhi, 1926/2010, p. 240). Thus, although we cannot define or know Absolute Truth, we can strive to know through ahimsa.

In this chapter, I have discussed Gandhi’s notion of *satyagraha* to highlight the significance of and his commitment to an action-based philosophy, and therefore *karma-yoga*. With his commitment at the forefront, I examined his understanding of and application of Absolute and Whole Truth and partial truths. I conclude that one’s responsibility to act relatively to Absolute Truth is manifested through ahimsa, as ahimsa is that which can define one’s thoughts and actions. As a result, ahimsa becomes the moral imperative, whereby one’s autonomous decision to act is not denied, however the overarching defining factor of morality is action’s relationship to ahimsa. Seen through the Enlightenment lens, this could be seen as Gandhi’s objective moral position. While a fair partial conclusion, it is only part of a complex re-evaluation of traditional understandings of one’s realization of the self and the responsibility one has to others. It is to this re-evaluation of the conception of the self that I now turn.
Chapter 4: Truth and Intersubjectivity

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explored the notions of Truth and ahimsa as interpreted by Gandhi. In this chapter, I seek to further explore the impact of Gandhi’s Truth on notions of objectivity and subjectivity and how we come to understand these notions. I further seek to explore the impact and application of this Truth in existing philosophical traditions.

In modern philosophical traditions, most notably the Enlightenment tradition, one’s capacity to think has become synonymous with one’s capacity to reason. Rather than examine what one’s capacity to think signifies, one’s capacity to reason has been placed at the centre of philosophical discourse. This would not be so problematic if reason were accepted as a broad and fluid concept; however reason, as predominantly understood, is bound in a confined definition, namely that offered by Kant: reason is the ability to understand the rational principles of morality. Indeed, Kant does dive deeply into how to approach transcendental arguments in order to come to conclusions about experience, thought or what we think we know, however these conclusions stem from a firmly grounded belief in our capacity to employ reason and logic (see Kant, 1999). Given the insistence that morality can be deduced from an individual’s capacity to think, the Enlightenment tradition assumes that an individual’s ability and capacity to reason can govern one’s moral actions and conception(s) of the good life. Understood in this way, an individual is responsible for her or his own actions.
and must be free to act in accordance to the realization of his or her good life with as little interference as possible. Embedded in this definition is the assumption that people have the ability to reasonably determine right and wrong – objectivity, and have the ability to act upon these conclusions without interference from others – autonomy.

Enlightenment is man’s (sic) release from his (sic) self-incurred tutelage.

Tutelage is man’s (sic) inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. It is self-incurred when its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. Sapere aude! “Have courage to exercise your own understanding! – that is the motto of enlightenment. (Kant, 1784/1980, p. 4)

The individual is at the centre of all rational moral action, where the individual is understood as one who is sovereign insofar as he or she exercises reason objectively and autonomously. Also found in this definition of reason are ideas of morality, and conceptions of knowledge itself – all of which find their focus, as a result, on the relation of the individual to everything else.

Although Gandhi never housed his philosophy within the context of objectivity and subjectivity, understanding it in this context, as I see it, is an important step to making relevant his notion of ahimsa in our current world. Ideas of objectivity and subjectivity are often seen in the context of private or universal and public or specific (see Boyd, 2004), whereby that which is public or universal is seen as objective and that which is private or specific is seen as subjective. The objective is seen as that which is true for everyone and everything, derived from outside of individualized interpretations and interests. On the other hand, the subjective is that which is a more personalized
reflection of the world. The objective is seen as static and unchanging, a universal or a Truth that should apply to all people and contexts at all times in all situations. The subjective, on the other hand, is seen as fluid, personal, and influenced by a variety of (possibly opposing) forces and independent of the objective. These characteristics of objectivity and subjectivity are admittedly primarily found in Enlightenment traditions, however my goal here is to focus on Gandhian interpretations independent of the dominant view with an understanding that references to the dominant view are inevitable. I will explore what objectivity and subjectivity mean in the context of Gandhi’s philosophy and their impact on what can be defined as moral action. Furthermore, I will look to current philosophy of education discourse of intersubjectivity to demonstrate an alignment to Gandhian ideas.

Absolute and Whole Truth, Partial Truths and Ahimsa:

Our Moral Responsibility

A broad brushstroke of Gandhi’s moral philosophy can be summarized as follows: Absolute Truth uncovers partial truths realized through a striving for ahimsa. This, in a philosophical context, begs the question: is ahimsa the objective universal or is it the subjective particular? If all actions considered moral have an underlying principle of ahimsa, ahimsa is rightly positioned as the moral objective. In addition, because of its relationship to partial truths, ahimsa maintains a personalized quality. Ahimsa is to guide one’s individual acts and deeds and therefore can be seen as the subjective. Indeed, the enactment of ahimsa is left to the individual, whereby one is left to interpret the “right” way to act in relation to the Absolute and Whole Truth. Yet there is no one
way to enact it, morally speaking, except as a path to Truth. When ahimsa is understood as a characteristic of the objective, Absolute Truth, in the world, enacted through one’s interpretation of what it means to do no harm, the steadfast lines of the subjective and the objective become somewhat blurred, especially when viewed through Gandhi’s interpretation of the person.

Gandhi maintained that the person is seen through two interconnected lenses: the body and the Atman. As discussed in chapter two, the Atman is the spiritual divine inside one’s self. It shares many of the same characteristics as Truth. Within Hindu traditions, there are many perspectives on this close connection between Truth as God and the Atman. Some assert that the Atman, as a result of its undefinable nature, is a servant of God; others claim that the Atman, embodied in the self, can be identified as God (Flood, 2009). Gandhi appears not to subscribe to either of these claims and instead looks to the Atman to support his belief in ahimsa. “Violence is needed for the protection of things external; non-violence is needed for the protection of the Atman” (Merton, 1965, p. 38). Whether the Atman is or is not God within is beyond the scope of this work. What is relevant in this conversation, however, is the presence of Truth within the individual and the relationship, in turn, this presence denotes with the world.

Gandhi’s metaphor is useful here for a robust understanding of the individual and its relationship to the “public” or the universal:

Individuality is and is not even as each drop in the ocean is an individual and is not. It is not because apart from the ocean it has no existence. It is because the ocean has no existence, if the drop has not, i.e. has no individuality. They are
beautifully interdependent. (Gandhi, 2000, p. 174).

Here, the individual’s identity is both constitutive of and constituted by the public or universal. One cannot know oneself without a knowledge of their role as a part of the whole. In much the same way the elephant’s tusk is part of the elephant, a person is a defining part of the community and the community part of the person. The tusk is both part of the definition to be an elephant and is a particular thing because of its belonging to the elephant. That is to say, the elephant’s tusk is not a walrus’ tusk (Joshee, 2012). As the individual cannot be seen as a distinct entity from that which surrounds her or him, one acts as a result of one’s relationship to the community.

More specifically, such an understanding of the self is deeply rooted in an idea of responsibility. The shape of this responsibility is found in Gandhi’s understanding of yajna or “an act directed to the welfare of others” where “act here must be taken in its widest sense, and includes thought and word, as well as deed. Others embraces not only humanity but all life” (Gandhi, 1930/2010b, p. 379). Gandhi admits that his interpretation of yajna is an expansion of the definition found in the Vedas, where it is understood as sacrifice and/or offering, historically by people of animals. However, using an etymological approach similar to that employed in his development of the notion of satyagraha, Gandhi’s understanding of yajna is derived from the root yaj, meaning “to worship”. For Gandhi, worship for God (which for Gandhi is the equivalent of worshiping Absolute Truth) is achieved through physically acting in the world. Again, Gandhi looks to the Gita for a justification for this expansion: “With this may you cherish the gods and may the gods cherish you. Thus cherishing one another may you attain the highest good” (Gandhi, 2000, p. 65). This he interprets to mean, “Gods… must be
taken to mean the whole creation of God. The service of all created being is the service of the gods and the same is sacrifice” (2000, p. 66). Holistically speaking, therefore, service to others is service to Absolute Truth. Service to others is a service to the Atman, and one’s self cannot be seen outside of the context of our relationship to the others. “To serve without desire is to favour not others, but ourselves even as in discharging a debt we serve only ourselves, lighten our burden and fulfill our duty… yajna is not yajna if one feels it to be burdensome or annoying” (Gandhi, 1930/2010b, pp. 381-382). Gandhi is not forgoing elements of happiness or joy through his interpretation of yajna. Instead, yajna is seen to be a path to happiness and joy, where happiness and joy for oneself are found in and through the service of and to others. Therefore autonomous decisions must be justified as they relate to others in order to show the decision’s moral position. The individual, acting as an autonomous agent, has a social responsibility that is inseparable from him- or herself. This responsibility must inform the moral decisions that are made at an individual level. Gandhi pays significant attention to the individual but always within the context of the role of the individual in a broader society.

Objectivity and Autonomy

As a result of his blurring the lines of ‘private’ or specific and ‘public’ or universal, the trust in moral judgment comes from an interested, engaged, and socially responsible position, a trust in the relationship of the individual and the community. Moral judgments, or more accurately in Gandhi’s case moral actions, are determined by an individual’s capacity to objectively act with skill and respect to and for his or her position in society and his or her responsibility to the community with an understanding
that acting in this way is an act of ahimsa for oneself and for the other.

Gandhi’s understanding of objectivity is most clearly articulated through his presentation of Truth as it is, in a sense, through Truth that the individual embedded in society lives. Gandhi places his trust in moral deliberations that find their basis in Truth. That is to say, while Truth holds broad categorizations, it is in the interpretation of Truth that moral judgments find their justification. Moral deliberations are seen as attempts to come as close as possible to Truth. However, because Gandhi does not define, that is to say he does not place boundaries around the definition of Truth, individuals are left to engage subjectively in moral deliberations.

Gandhi holds one of the most significant characteristics of Truth to be ahimsa. “A commitment to ahimsa… requires an appreciation of our common humanity and the connection between all living things” (Joshee, 2006). Moral judgments, as a result, find their justification in their relation to ahimsa. It can be further deduced that Gandhi holds that to do harm to the other is to do harm to oneself because of the inseparability of the individual and the other. As a result, to do harm to others necessarily means violence to the individual. Understood in this light, harm to the individual is not merely harm to the body. It is harm to the Atman. The Atman, being the divine in every person and that which joins each individual together cannot be justifiably harmed as to do so is to harm the essence of one’s being. Given the interconnectedness of one’s self to others and the broader society, harm to others is harm to the Atman. To pursue Truth, and therefore realize the Atman, ahimsa must become the core of one’s being and that which drives one’s actions. Therefore, ahimsa, driven by a desire for Truth, provides a
form of objectivity\(^1\) by which to determine the trustworthiness of moral judgments and actions, *karma yoga*, because of its interpretative qualities.

While Gandhi does not refer to his interpretation of truth as autonomy, it is evident that this is indeed what individuals, defined by their membership in community, engage in when making moral judgments that are partial of the Whole Truth. The interpretation of *ahimsa* as it relates to Truth provides the space for autonomous decisions. These interpretations are determined within a definition of the individual that includes the individual's relationship to the other.

Gandhi's ideas of Truth allow people to interpret moral principles in a way that preserves the individual while at the same time embodying an understanding of the individual as part of the Whole. Accepting this as Gandhi's understanding of the individual, Gandhi's Truth allows the individual to find the 'best actions' for moral situations. As a result of Gandhi's understanding of the individual in relation to the other, autonomy is a shared undertaking, whereby both individuals and the community have the goal of realizing Truth. It is not merely individual autonomy. The concept of autonomy must incorporate an idea of community or society as it relates to individual autonomy when making moral judgments.

Gandhi's understanding of autonomy, which includes a characteristic of social responsibility, is not the only way in which Gandhi incorporates autonomy as a way of making moral judgments. As outlined above, Gandhi also ensures that individuals have

\(^1\) Objectivity here is understood from the feminist perspective, which takes insist objectivity take subjectivity into account (Code, 1981, 1994, 1995, 2012). This understanding holds that “the grounds for knowledge are fully saturated with history and social life rather than extracted from it” (Harding, 1993, p. 57).
the right to interpret, and act upon moral principles as they see fit, based on their own interpretation of partial truths in the world. Absolute and Whole Truth without definition leaves itself without boundaries, open to inquiry, and encourages personal assessment. Even though Gandhi puts forth a notion of Truth that is to guide moral judgments, he does not confine the notion to how we must make judgments. Instead his notion of Truth seeks to provide a method for allowing his conception of the individual in a community and a community within the individual, rather than an individual that stands alone, for determining moral judgments. As a result, the pursuit of Truth is both a collective and individual venture. Each person strives to know Truth through one’s own truths while engaging with others. The effort here can be seen through the metaphor of a puzzle whereby one engages with others in an effort to put pieces of the puzzle, albeit never with the ability to show an entire picture, together.

Indeed, moving way from the metaphysical into the real world, such a philosophical position seems idealistic and utopian. Systemically violent embedded power limits the application of this philosophical position. It is within the context of sarvodaya that Gandhi’s theory of power emerges. Writing in the context of the liberation of India from colonial rule, his theory of power is itself a nonviolent search for truth, developed through daily interactions with those social groups most disenfranchised by and exposed to the colonial power. While Gandhi did not engage directly with discussions of power, Gene Sharp (Ackerman, Kruegler, Sharp, & Schelling, 1994; 1979, 1980; Sharp & Paulson, 2005) has used much of Gandhi’s work to systematize a nonviolent theory of power. Sharp holds that there are two key concepts in an overall theory of power: ruler-subject and consent. The first of these
concepts, ruler-subject, is specific to institutional power (see Hobbes, 2010; Lemos, 1978; Lewis, 2006), exploring the relationship between the institutions of the state - most notably the government, police and military - and those subjected to those institutions. The second, consent, seeks to explore why individuals agree to obey. He insists that there is no single reason why one obeys, citing fear, habit, moral obligation, self-interest, and indifference as contributing factors. Within this framework, for Sharp, power is dependent upon the subject, who must consent to the ruler’s power. In the context of nonviolent power, the power of the ruler collapses with the withdrawal of consent in an active way. “The ruler will not be threatened by grumbling, alienation or critical analyses alone. Passivity and submissiveness are of no concern to Sharp; he is interested in activity, challenge and struggle, in particular with nonviolent methods of action” (Martin, 1989, p. 214). Derived from Gandhi’s insistence upon action alongside nonviolence, Sharp systemically provides a theory of power that is dependent upon Gandhi’s notion of ahimsa.

**Sarvodaya**

The most prescriptive and direct affirmation of my interpretation of the interconnectedness of the subjective and objective in Gandhi’s thought and of Sharp’s interpretation of power can be found in Gandhi’s idea of *sarvodaya* or the uplift of all. Gandhi initially faithfully adopted John Ruskin’s political philosophy, as found in the four essay series *Unto This Last* (1862). Writing primarily with a focus on the economy in these essays, Ruskin was writing in response to the capitalist economists of the 18th and 19th centuries. He was critical of the destructive effects of industrialism on the natural world, including people. *Sarvodaya* evolved, through further exploration and
application of the notion of ahimsa, into a unique philosophy committed to Gandhi’s understanding of Truth.

The term *sarvodaya* is made up of two parts: *sarva* meaning “all” and *udaya* meaning “to raise”. Jaya Prakash Narayan described it as a “permanent revolution” whereby a person begins to see the world through Truth, through God’s eyes so to speak, and feels the pain and suffering of the most oppressed as one’s own pain and suffering. As a result, “raising” the oppressed is a “raising” of oneself (Narayan, 1975).

Gandhi’s primary concern was for the uplift of all, however, it was not limited to simply the material or social well-being of people. He included a concern for the spiritual amelioration of all. For Gandhi, this came from a belief in people’s ability to have faith in Truth. In fact, Raghavan Iyer goes so far as to say that Gandhi “restored to contemporary politics the classical concern with the common good” (2010, p. 19).

Yet the predominant definitions of the common good do not do justice to the intimacy and depth that defines *sarvodaya*. For example, Gandhi’s concern for the common good did not exclude economic matters but rather incorporated them into an overall understanding of oneself and one’s role in the service of others. It is significant to note that in the paradigm of *sarvodaya*, the good of the individual and the good of the community are not distinguished, and therefore there is no hierarchical relationship between the two. Instead, his focus was on an all-encompassing philosophy that favours the theory and practice of common goods whereby the individual is included in the definition of common. Therefore the common good is more appropriately termed “common goods”, whereby common goods are necessarily understood through ahimsa. That is to say, nothing that is part of the common good can do harm to anyone
or any part of creation (Joshee, 2012).

*Sarvodaya* understood in this context is not a subscription to any particular ideology or political position. Instead, it is best seen as an epistemic and existential position, as a result of its commitment to Truth understood by Gandhi as the fulfillment of one’s *dharma*. A commitment to *sarvodaya* is the truest expression of our subjectivity and the point at which we are most human.

Although Gandhi’s Truth and its impact upon understanding subjectivity and objectivity are unique and significant, some parallels in philosophy of education traditions can be found, the closest of which is the notion of intersubjectivity. It is to this philosophical position I now turn in order to, in the next chapter, demonstrate Gandhi’s contribution to this stream of thought.

**Intersubjectivity**

Intersubjectivity, as it is addressed in philosophy of education discourse, is a philosophical position that offers alternatives to the stark distinctions found in the Enlightenment and its traditions. It seeks to reconceptualize popular understandings and interpretations of how one lives *in* and engages *with* the world. As a result, intersubjectivity cannot simply be seen as a response to traditional ontological or phenomenological questions. Instead, it begins by re-casting modern philosophy’s basic Cartesian assumption that distinguishes between consciousness and the world (Smith, 2012). In the intersubjectivist philosophical position, a stark distinction between consciousness and world ceases to exist. Intersubjectivity’s primary focus is on how the relationship between individuals defines one’s own subjectivity and hence moves away from the “prioritis[ing] and privileging of the autonomous self”.
Subject and Subjectivity

Intersubjectivists hold that subjectivity is determined by one's interactions with others (Bai, 1998, 2002; Bai & Banack, 2006; Bai & Chinnery, 1999; Biesta, 1994, 1998, 1999, 2003, 2004; Todd, 2001). Gert Biesta (1994) defines intersubjectivity as the “programmatic assumption that we should not understand human intersubjectivity out of human subjectivity, but human subjectivity out of human intersubjectivity. Subjectivity is considered to be a function of intersubjectivity” (p. 301). Philosophically, this demands a shift from a theory of consciousness to a theory of intersubjectivity, and insists that a definition of subjectivity be derived from outside of oneself, from the other. As a result, intersubjectivity seeks to address questions not only of subjectivity but also of reason, autonomy, and objectivity.

The Enlightenment tradition assumes that individuals are subjectively atoms as a result of their capacity for consciousness and therefore reason, and act based on this reason without interference from others. This assumes that people have the ability to reasonably assess right and wrong (objectivity) and have the ability to act upon these conclusions without interference from others (autonomy). To refer to the individual in this context is to emphasize the characteristics of individuals that most centrally figure in their capacity for thought. In this case, the individual can be understood as one who is sovereign insofar as he or she exercises reason objectively and autonomously (Kant, 1784/1980).

Intersubjectivists take issue with the first claim of the Enlightenment tradition, namely that we are human through consciousness. For Kant, the rational being’s activity of thinking is the highest point of understanding (Campbell, 2002). Heesoon Bai
describes the impact of an individual’s capacity to think as follows: “until the human being has established a sense of core self and disciplined it to abide by moral principles or rules, he or she has not become an autonomous moral agent… [and therefore] [the self] is not capable of wielding influence and mastery over what is outside the self – the Other” (1998). The individual and his or her consciousness are one and the same, whereby an individual does not come into autonomous being until he or she exercises the capacity for reason. This is a claim that intersubjectivity categorically rejects (Biesta, 1999). The synonymous characteristics awarded by the Enlightenment tradition to one’s capacity to reason and to the self, for the intersubjectivist, is unfounded. They hold that this position fails to acknowledge how rationality is established, namely and most notably through relationships. As a result, a position of intersubjectivity rejects that the individual and consciousness are equivalent concepts. Instead, intersubjectivity holds that an individual is comprised of relationships with others, which cannot seek to dominate and manipulate given the relationship’s intersubjective nature.

Intersubjectivity, therefore, is that which is both self and other in tandem, and meeting the other who is also both self and other:

Subjective experience is seen as a permanent and inevitable opening to the other… Thus…the experiences of subjectivization should not just be processes in which you ‘fatten yourself up’ with the assimilable foods coming from the other. They should also, especially, be characterized as shared experience and transformations (and transformations imply work)
in the face of that which in principle tends to be excluded. (Coelho & Figueiredo, 2003, p. 202).

In the context of intersubjectivity, therefore, the development of subjectivity is not the simple task of absorbing the other into oneself. Nor is it simply only seeing oneself through the other. Nor does it necessitate an erasure of subjectivity: “When subjectivity is viewed as heteronomous responsibility, one becomes an ethical ‘I’ – a responsible agent – only to the extent to which one agrees to depose or dethrone oneself in favour of the other” (Chinnery, 2000, p. 70). The responsibility denoted here is not solely to be seen as responsible to the other; it is also a responsibility to the self.

Many philosophers of education, including Heesoon Bai, Anne Chinnery, Gert Biesta, and Sharon Todd, appeal to the work of Emmanuel Levinas to challenge “the ‘wisdom of the Western tradition’ in which it is assumed that ‘human individuals… are human through consciousness’….” (Biesta, 1999, p. 213) through the lens of intersubjectivity. Primarily, this appeal stems from Levinas’ insistence that there is “no self without another who summons it to responsibility” (Chinnery, 2000, p. 68). It is to the self’s responsibility to the other, and therefore to the self, that I now turn.

**Responsibility, Relationship, and Other**

Through asserting that the subject has a responsibility to the other, intersubjectivity enters into the realm of ethics, though not ethics as understood in the traditional sense of ethics stemming from the self’s intentional act. Levinas’ thesis of “ethics as first philosophy” means that the traditional individualized philosophical pursuit of knowledge is but a secondary feature of a more basic ethical duty to the other. Specifically, as a first philosophy, intersubjectivity requires a reconceptualization
of choice and responsibility whereby “responsibility for the other is not a responsibility that we can either choose to take up or to neglect, since this would only be possible if we were an ego or consciousness before we were inscribed in this relationship. In this sense it is 'a responsibility that is justified by no prior commitment’” (Biesta, 1999, p. 213). Because intersubjectivity does not rely on an a priori knowledge of self, knowledge itself is dependent upon the relationship between selves.

The other, for Levinas, does not merely mean another person. As another person, the other could be seen as just like the self – through gender, culture, or age – or in relation to the self – employer, sister, or friend – and thereby reducing the other to a relative position of to the self. Instead, the intersubjective position is “the person in his or her strangeness, alterity, difference, foreignness. The other does not fit within my categorization and expectations…” (Joldersma, 2001, p. 182). The other cannot, therefore, be a part of my totality in light of the other’s uniqueness and variations. As a result, “Levinas’ ethics resists any appeal to sameness, even in its thinnest (hence most inclusive) sense…” (Chinnery, 2000, p. 68). The focus, for Levinas, therefore is not upon a relation to the other, but instead upon the responsibility for the other. “One is responsible for the other because one’s existence as an individuated subject derives from one’s “pre-ontological” responsibility for the other; and subjectivity – as the ethical relation of one-for-the-other – thus already signifies “total altruism”… there is no pre-ethical subject; it is only by suspending adherence to ontological priority itself that his conception of subjectivity can begin to make sense at all” (Chinnery, 2000, p. 70). With no pre-ethical subject, no central individual with a capacity to enter into the world and establish a relationship with it, and instead an individual who comes into the world
through a responsibility to the world, the traditional conception of autonomy is called into question.

It is for this reason that Levinas, in his later work, completely rejects autonomy as ethics. A belief in the moral authority of external influences, however, does not mean a blind subordination to external influences beyond the individual or a lack of freedom or self-determination (see Kant, 1785/1992). In the Enlightenment tradition, autonomy means knowing oneself through reason which is natural and internal to the self and, therefore liberating oneself from external authority. Within this framework, an individual cannot be seen as autonomous until they have independently established his or her core self. The implications for this is “that there are aspects of oneself that need to be negated and subdued, to be put under control of the rational part of the self” (Bai, 1998) and therefore can be seen as a form of violence to the self. Furthermore, the pursuit of reason by the autonomous self also applies the conditions of rationality to the other, therefore subduing, silencing, and, in effect, dominating the other (Bai, 1998).

Hence, the danger of the Enlightenment framework, for the intersubjectivist, is “[i]f we think we live in a universe of linear causality, composed of discrete beings whose intentions and movements that self … can control, then we are more likely to move towards ethics and politics of power where the subject dominates and manipulates the object, resulting in exploitation and violence” (Bai & Banack, 2006, p. 13). Levinas argued that autonomy does violence to the other, reducing the other to a thought found in the autonomous self:

Freedom, autonomy, the reduction of the other to the same, lead to this formula: the conquest of being by man (sic) over the course of history.
This reduction does not represent some abstract schema; it is man’s (sic) ego. The existence of an ego takes place as an identification of the diverse... [T]he ego remains the same by making of disparate and diverse events a history – its history. And this is the original event of the identification of the same, prior to the identity of a rock, and a condition of that identity. (1998, p. 48).

Instead, Levinas appeals to the concept of heteronomy. Kant used the term heteronomy to mean being ruled or governed by the other. Levinas’s use of the term is in stark contrast to this definition. For him, heteronomy is the state of the self approached by the other with a responsibility for and to the other. In this sense, one is indebted to the other and ‘ruled’ by them in a non-reciprocal relation of responsibility.

Levinas’ heteronomy, therefore, also requires a new definition of freedom, and in turn sovereignty. Freedom can no longer be seen as sovereignty from external forces as the other is by definition, and not merely physically, external. It is the reciprocal responsibility, with an understanding of self-as-self and as self-as-other in subjective terms that supports Levinas’ argument for “heteronomous freedom”. The idea of heteronomous freedom appears (within the Enlightenment framework) paradoxical. How can freedom be understood as dependent on anything external when freedom’s very definition relies solely on one’s individual and internal rationality? Intersubjectivity positions freedom as a freedom to (know the other), which is starkly distinct from the Enlightenment’s freedom from (interference of the other). Simply stated, Levinas and his supporters insist that the very concept of freedom rests in one’s experience within a context of social relationships. Here, intersubjectivists hold that we discover “individual
freedoms in response to the [demands] of human existence, prominent among which are relations with others… Discovering one’s freedom in experience of the other person is similar to an elevation, a promotion, in which the self locates incessantly, unveils a new necessary commitment to the well-being of others” (Hutchens, 2004, p. 19). More specifically, the responsibility of the ongoing development of one’s subjectivity is placed on the other. Therefore becoming known to the other in order to know oneself is an expression of freedom.

[Intersubjectivity] calls the self’s freedom into question and then demands that it use it responsibly. It challenges the self’s very right to exist, as well as its being what it thinks it is, even as it demands that self-affirmation. It is right there in the midst of the self’s experience, yet it eludes the self’s grasp and appears to come up behind the self’s perception of it. The other person has an experiential effect that one might associate with an otherworldly being, and indeed it is ‘as if’ something of that other world shines through its face. (Hutchens, 2004, p. 21)

The call to responsibility to the other is inherently indistinguishable from the responsibility for oneself and therefore freedom is only known through responsibility – a heteronomous responsibility of knowing of the other along side a knowing of our own otherness.

As a result of this understanding of heteronomous freedom, rather than ask, “what do I need to know about myself in order to live with others?” the intersubjectivist asks “what relation to the other is necessary in order for knowledge to be possible?” In so doing, the intersubjectivist moves the language of “other” out of the realm of the
external, social, and into the realm of the internal, consciousness. That is to say, rather than look outward at the other, one draws the other in to see oneself. The question of the “other” is not a result of attaining knowledge of oneself; instead knowledge of the “other” becomes a part of knowing oneself and knowledge itself. Knowledge, as a result, is the difference found in the other and as such, “without difference, subjectivity is itself unthinkable” (Todd, 2001, p. 69). However, such a distinction requires a rethinking of one of our most basic understandings of the context in which individuals come together in society, namely community.

**Community**

In addition to their meaning, Zygmunt Bauman contends that some words... also have a “feel”. The word “community” is one of them... To start with, community is a “warm” place, a cosy and comfortable place. It is like a roof under which we shelter in heavy rain like a fireplace at which we warm our hands on a frosty day. Out there, in the street, all sorts of dangers lie in ambush; we have to be alert when we go out, watch whom we are talking to and who talks to us, be on the lookout every minute. In here, in the community, we can relax... (quoted in Chinnery, 2006, p. 330)

The community Bauman describes here is a modern one, an Enlightened one. The community exists, in part, as a result of sameness – perhaps a shared desire to live in a particular neighbourhood or city, or to follow a particular spiritual path, or to study a particular topic or set of ideas. The coming together of individuals to create a whole with shared subjectivities that define the community precedes the individual's responsibility to the other. Discomfort arises when a different subject, an other, enters
into the community, however the insistence upon sameness quickly resolves any conflict. A community may insist upon the subject assimilating into the community or it may creatively find ways that the subject already fits: “I don’t see colour, I just see people” (Fey & Carlock, 2007). Or a community may find ways to extradite the other out of its comfortable place – by making the other unbearably uncomfortable through its insistence upon sameness, for example. In this sense, the preservation of sameness of individuals who make up a community is what defines community itself. This sameness could be derived from a shared world-view, for example a community of Republican supporters who as a result share a particular view of women’s rights; or it could find its sameness in its physical composition, for example a community comprised solely of a particular cultural group. However, such communities cannot exist in the intersubjective framework, where subjectivity finds its basis in the very difference the Enlightened community actively seeks to destroy. Instead, in coming to know the community one comes to know oneself, and thus the community is defined. Neither is a priori to knowledge of oneself, the other, or the community; all three are mutually dependent.

The responsibility to oneself, the other, and the community is not, however, immune to violence by nature. The intent to hold oneself responsible to the other can possibly perpetuate violence. The teacher who provides extra time, for example, to students he or she perceives to be responsible for contributing to their family income may be interpreted by the student to be disenfranchising or marginalizing. Although the intention of the teacher is to hold himself responsible to his students, the assumption of the teacher do harm to the students’ subjectivities. This potential
violence is recognized by Gandhi as inevitable so long as one remains in one’s physical body: “I believe it impossible for one living in this body to observe non-violence to perfection. While the body endures, some degree of egotism is inescapable. We retain the body only so long as egotism persists. Bodily life, therefore, necessarily involves violence… This view does not imply craveness of spirit or pessimism but certainly there is humility in it” (Gandhi, 1928/1999). That is to say, although the inevitability of violence exists, an insistence on humility must persist.

**Complexity in Knowing the Other**

Gandhi’s understanding of the *Atman*, its relationship to Truth, its impact on objectivity and subjectivity, and how in turn this understanding impacts the way in which we engage with others and the world can, in part, be seen as an intersubjective position. One cannot distinguish oneself from their relationship with and responsibility to the other. Returning to his metaphor, the drop is both a drop and a part of the ocean. When the drop and the ocean come together, a knowledge of both ensues. Borrowing from the intersubjectivist position, this view is an expression of heteronomous freedom, whereby there is a freedom for the drop to come to know the ocean and therefore come to know itself.

In this chapter, I have examined the impact of Absolute and Whole Truth, partial truths and ahimsa on an understanding of responsibility and its relationship to objectivity and subjectivity. I then proceeded with a discussion of intersubjectivity. In so doing, it can be said that while providing a lens for which to view Gandhi’s conception of the self, intersubjectivity does not address a key element in Gandhi’s philosophy, namely the requirement to act skillfully, where action includes activity and thought, with
the intent to do no harm. Indeed, Gandhi and intersubjectivists would agree that there need be a “respect for the particular embodied sensitivity of the person” (I. M. Young, 1997, p. 50). What, if anything, defines this respect for the embodied individual? I maintain that we can look to Gandhi for this definition, specifically his notion of ahimsa and its relationship to humility. It is to this discussion I now turn.
Chapter 5: Humility Through Ahimsa

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I explored conceptions of objectivity and subjectivity as offered by both Gandhi and the intersubjective position as found in philosophy of education discourse. Intersubjectivity does indeed make significant contributions to rethinking our relationship and responsibility to the other. Its insistence upon our interdependence on defining our “selves” is a significant step towards a rethinking of the world one wants and one’s responsibilities to others. In this chapter, I hope to contribute to the discussion by applying Gandhi’s notion of ahimsa to the intersubjective paradigm in order to make philosophical contributions to the overall intersubjective framework. In so doing, I hope to contribute to the intersubjective dialogue by providing a robust and socially responsible philosophical paradigm that acknowledges the complexity of social interactions through a new light. I hold that although intersubjectivity finds its roots in responsibility, this responsibility needs definition that extends beyond that offered by intersubjectivists, namely to establish subjectivity. I offer further definition to this responsibility through calling for a need for ahimsa in the intersubjective relationship. In this context, I contend that harm has a particular definition that impacts the very definition of “knowledge”. I begin this task by expanding intersubjectivity’s framework to include ideas of responsibility as found in the concept of dharma. I then turn to intersubjectivity’s space between subjects to
explore the possibilities for a space in between with the objective to do no harm while at the same time establishing one's subjectivity.

**Considering Action**

Intersubjectivity finds its theoretical framework in the need for a subjective, the need to “know” oneself. It is for this reason that the intersubjective person finds him or herself through a knowledge of the other. A knowledge of the other provides the lens through which one can see oneself. This is a significant move away from the Enlightenment’s insistence upon our capacity to think as the defining subjective position. It does not address, however, the way we act in the world and what our moral momentum should be when acting.

It is understandable that philosophers would omit action in the world in an attempt to re-negotiate an understanding of subjectivity. Subjectivity is intended to be a “personal” concept, restricted to the confines of the individual and his or her interpretation of the world. However, in the context of Gandhi’s individual and within his theoretical framework, the individual would be incapable of divorcing him or herself from his or her actions, in addition to being unable to separate from the other. The individual’s duty, his or her dharma, is to act in the world (karma), and to act skillfully and with intent (yoga). As a categorical imperative, for Gandhi, action holds a moral position. As it relates to the self, it defines one’s subjectivity. How we act in the world defines how we come to know the world and what the world “looks” like.

What I see as the challenge embedded in the intersubjectivist’s framework and how it relates to Gandhi’s philosophical positioning is a distinction of foundational and
antifoundational (or pragmatism) philosophical discourse. It is to this debate that I now turn.

**Foundationalism and Pragmatism**

The debate of the foundations of knowledge and justified belief is long standing and rich in philosophical inquiry (see Alston, 1976; Bates & Poole, 2003; Henson, 2003; O. A. Johnson, 1978; Jonsson, 1999; Lakemeyer & Nebel, 1994; Pollock, 1974; Quinton, 1966; Shiner, 1977; Shulman, 1987; Sowa, 2000; Stump, 1991; J. Young & Braziel, 2006; Zagzebski, 1996). It has particular importance for my discussion here and requires an additional layer of inquiry and attention. Particularly, an exploration of the foundationalist relationship provides the lens that highlights the differences between the intersubjectivist and Gandhian positions.

As its name implies, “foundationalism is a view about the structure of justification or knowledge. The foundationalist's thesis in short is that all knowledge and justified belief rest ultimately on a foundation of noninferential knowledge or justified belief” (Fumerton, 2010). That is to say, for the foundationalist there must be a sound, incontestable knowledge or a justified reason for holding a belief. This foundation can be seen as objective whereby the foundationalist makes claims to a Truth that can be known without reference to a logical justification. In this instance, “Truth is what is supposed to distinguish knowledge from well-grounded opinion – from justified belief…” (Rorty, 1999, p. 32). According to foundationalists, all justification is ultimately traceable to the foundations. Thus, justified beliefs form a structure. There cannot be any justified beliefs not linked to foundations.
In addition to the structure of justified belief, foundationalism is also concerned with the content of the foundations. The justification of foundations must be direct. That is to say justification cannot be relative, for example, to time or space. For example, a belief cannot be justified if and only if it occurred in Nicaragua between 1980 and 1985; nor can other beliefs be a justified if subsequent beliefs stem from it. The justifications for the foundations of a theory, in this example, are far too indirect to count as foundational theory. The beliefs are justified only because the content of the belief is about something that happened in a particular place or at a particular time; indeed my example presents both. If one moved the justified belief from Nicaragua to India, or from 1983 to 1990, the belief is no longer justified and therefore all beliefs stemming from the original Nicaraguan example are no longer justified (Kvanvig, 1986).

Is the intersubjectivist a foundationalist? The answer to this question is not easily deduced. From the foundationalist perspective one could say “no”, given that the relationship between individuals is not guided by an overarching principle guided by justified belief. However, there is indeed a justified belief found in the intersubjectivist’s framework whereby the responsibility for and to the other contributes to the knowledge of oneself and the knowledge of the other. For the foundationalist, this is not enough to be seen as a foundation for knowledge, despite intersubjectivity’s premise that responsibility to and for the other is to be seen as noninferential. Furthermore, at first glance, it appears that the answer to whether Gandhi is a foundationalist is an easy “yes”. His belief in the supremacy of Absolute Truth is clear and constant. However Gandhi does not define Absolute Truth, opting to characterize it with over-arching, indescribable understandings of God and Love. As a result, within the context of
foundationalism, Gandhi could, in part, be considered an intuitionist whereby his Truth is a self-evident, or intuitive, proposition about which actions one has an obligation to perform. The intuitionist also holds that one can acquire knowledge propositions by going through processes of non-inferential reasoning (Prichard, 1912/1949; Ross, 1930/2002). Additionally, Gandhi’s position can be paralleled to Freire’s universal ethic whereby self-evident truth is based on concrete lived experience. The universal human ethic, for Freire “ought to be [committed to] helping poor and marginalized.. to develop their curiosity from a state of ingenuousness to a state of critical awareness and functioning” (Benade, 2009). Therefore, while there is an element of intuition embedded in Gandhi’s thought, there is also a commitment to the experience of oneself and of others in the world.

Partial truths are always relative to both the Whole Truth and to other partial truths, however are not solely based on the premise of reason. Partial truths are always conditional on time, space, social location, and other factors. In sum, neither the intersubjectivist nor Gandhi fit neatly into the foundationalist view. The counter-argument to foundationalism, or anti-foundationalism provides further insight into this discussion.

The central claim of anti-foundationalism is that any attempt to ground practice on something outside of practice will always be disingenuous (Rorty, 1999). Through grounding action relative to some pre-determined foundation or Truth, the foundationalist confines one’s actions to comparison with other actual and/or possible social practices and therefore are in a constant state of looking to something beyond ourselves and beyond the action at hand. The anti-foundationalist finds this position
limited and disadvantageous to action in the world. As such, the anti-foundationalist is often synonymously referred to as a pragmatist (Brint, Weaver, & Garmon, 1995) with an interest in linking theory and practice for useful practices in the world. In this view, there can indeed be universal claims however these claims must always be culturally, not metaphysically, grounded (Trifiro, 2010, p. 69).

Richard Rorty is perhaps the most famous pragmatist of recent history. Most significantly for this discussion is his claim that “truth is not an epistemic concept”, implying that truth is not a question of knowledge at all. He goes so far to say “no interesting connection will ever be found between the concept of truth and the concept of justification.” Instead, Rorty holds that “a believer who is…a fully fledged member of her community will always be able to produce justification for most of her beliefs – justification which meets the demands of that community.” As a result, “inquiry and justification have lots of mutual aims, but they do not have an overarching aim called truth… There would only be a ‘higher’ aim of inquiry called ‘truth’ if there were such a thing as ultimate justification – justification before God, or before the tribunal of reason, as opposed to any merely finite human audience.” In fact, Rorty holds that the “only point in contrasting the true with the merely justified is to contrast a possible future with the actual present” (Rorty 37-39, emphasis in original).

Take, for example, how we currently refer to tissues. The foundationalist would insist that a tissue is, by definition, a tissue. The development of the product and the subsequent naming of the product has provided a justified belief for how to refer to what we see when we see a tissue. We have come to know the tissue as a tissue. On the other hand, a common way of referring to a tissue is to call it a Kleenex. The
pragmatist finds no issue in referring to a tissue as a Kleenex as the brand has established a certain relation to the human consciousness in coming to know a tissue. Should Kleenex, as a company, produce a new product that is not a tissue, the pragmatist would find no issue continuing to call tissues Kleenex as how we have come to know tissues remains through the brand. Should Kleenex no longer signify tissues, a pragmatist would simply no longer refer to tissues as such. The foundationalist, however, would insist that the use of the term Kleenex is not a clear expression of what we truly see when we see a tissue. What if the tissue we see is a different brand? For the pragmatist, the use of the term Kleenex does not provide a true, justified belief.

In my (perhaps over-) simplified contrast of the foundationalist approach with the pragmatist approach, there are ample reasons to believe that both the intersubjectivist and Gandhi are pragmatists. Both hold that truth must be found in the other, and therefore universal claims are always grounded in worldly conceptions and understandings. However, as discussed above, there is indeed inquiry and justification found within both the intersubjectivist and Gandhian framework that has an overarching justified belief. Perhaps in the intersubjectivist framework it is not a metaphysical and guiding truth as is the case for Gandhi, however the aim of a realization of truth – a responsibility for the other – is prescriptively offered by the intersubjectivist. For the intersubjectivist, whatever one’s family history, social status, religion, sexual-orientation, ability, etc. matter in how one acts in the world. One’s identity forms only from one’s place in the world as a result of living with others; this living together is what constitutes whatever one may know about the world.

Pragmatic intersubjectivity takes as a given the intersubjective assumption that subjectivity is lived at the borderline between oneself and another. That is to say, one’s self-constitution is always dependent upon social interaction. Pragmatic intersubjectivity weds to this intersubjective perspective the pragmatist notion that humans beings flourish only when social interaction serves as a means to further ends. So meeting an other is first necessary for becoming a subject. But, meeting an other is not an end in itself. One will only flourish as a subject if the other is put to good use. The other must serve as a means to another end, which, in turn, will become a means to a further end, and so on. (p. 245)

In the context of the pragmatist intersubjectivist, would an application of Gandhi’s Truth turn intersubjectivity into a foundationalist position? If Gandhi is concerned with the way we are in the world while at the same time maintaining a commitment to a foundation of Truth, could one not say that Gandhi can rightly be seen as a pragmatic foundationalist? Gandhi’s Truth is indeed “justified” as a result of the role Truth plays in how we should act in the world and how we should relate to the other. Here, Gandhi’s notion of Absolute Truth lays at the foundation, however this understanding of Truth does not exclude a pragmatic approach in the world. Rather, it is this Truth that encourages the establishment of partial truths relative to the Whole Truth.

Intersubjectivity also approaches the task of meeting subjectively through assigning moral responsibility to the subjective itself. For the intersubjectivist, a knowledge of the other and a knowledge of the relationship of the other to oneself is
the moral good. Yet, how does intersubjectivity encourage one to “act” on what one
“knows” – that is to say, how does one promote “doing” the “right thing”?

Again I look to Gandhi and his notion of Truth. Coming to know oneself through
the other must have an agenda, a foundation, to translate to moral action in the world.
Focusing on the space between subjects to come to know oneself is not enough.
Simply put, so what? So now we know the other and know ourselves always in relation
to the other but what is the prescriptive to act morally? What principles guide action?
Acting in, with, and for the other, in the the world through ahimsa rather than simply
looking to the other in an effort to know them and know ourselves contributes to an
enactment of Truth in the intersubjective space. The responsibility Gandhi proposes
extends far beyond one’s responsibility to the other or an individual’s responsibility to
oneself. It insists upon a responsibility to the world and how one acts in it. I hold that
there must be a consideration of the element of harm between subjects that will not
only provide an understanding of the other and oneself, but also dictate what to do with
such knowledge. To do this, there need be a clear commitment to searching for Truth in
the other in order to dictate how our partial truths interact with other partial truths in and
for the world.

In the intersubjectivist position, an individual makes no prior commitment to
oneself. A knowledge of the self is derived from a knowledge of the other. One
suspends his or her own subjectivity in the interest of knowing both oneself and the
other. This, intersubjectivists argue, is our responsibility for the other and therefore our
ethical responsibility. This definition of ethics, however, poses a significant challenge to
the Gandhian philosophical paradigm I have put forth. One arrives in the world with a
duty, one’s *dharma*, to Truth for Gandhi. Seeing the other in and as oneself is a part of this Truth, as is seeing oneself in the other can be seen as part of the Whole Truth, however it cannot be seen as *the* Whole Truth. The Truth Gandhi describes is indefinable. As a result, the intersubjectivist position can be seen as a partial truth, which interacts with an other’s partial truths. The responsibility to and for the other outlined by the intersubjectivist can be seen to contribute to the pursuit of one’s of *dharma*. For Gandhi, we are responsible *a priori* to Truth, which includes the other. This position is not, however, a pre-ethical one, nor is it a pre-ontological one. The presence of Truth is that which drives the intersubjective relationship; responsibility to Truth is an ontological part of the ethical subject.

As a result, the individual does not maintain a pre-ethical relationship to the other. The unity (*yoga*) of individuals to one another and to the world, coupled with the requirement to act (*karma*), is the ethical for Gandhi. Failure to unite with the other is a failure to fulfill one’s *dharma*. Furthermore, the failure of an individual to act impacts the other in so far as the lack of interaction in the world restricts the other’s capacity to fulfill his or her *dharma*. As a result of the shared responsibility to act, failure to act in favour of the other is a dehumanizing act.

Gandhi’s strong sense of the unity of all life meant that for him the notion of ahimsa was construed widely enough to include not treating another with less dignity that was warranted by a shared humanity. Not only does dehumanization pave the way for violence, but dehumanization is violence… violence does more than maintain structures of oppression – it also prevents the fulfillment of human
potential by blocking the honest application of shared humanity which is a prerequisite. (Weber, 2006, pp. 213-214).

Given Gandhi’s conception of the individual, a failure to encompass the other into one’s knowledge of the world is an act of dehumanizing the other.

Dehumanizing as himsa, or harm, is not only harm to the other but also harm to oneself. This is not simply because we are unable to see our subjectivity through and with the other. It is also harm to oneself and the other because we fail to see the other in his or her fullness. Perhaps problematically, Gandhi insists that the only Truth is Absolute Truth. Everything else, to be true, must be considered a partial truth of the Absolute and Whole Truth. If this is the case, making Absolute any of one’s partial truths is seen, philosophically speaking, to be excluding the other and therefore, as an act of harm given its a restriction of Truth. That is to say, in holding that this as opposed to that is the right way to know necessarily excludes other ways of knowing.

Take, for example, the property known as H₂O. Some may describe it as a warm vapour, others a wet liquid, and others still a cold solid. All of these descriptions are truths about H₂O, although none of them capture the whole truth. Indeed, there is a universal property to H₂O, in that certain things cannot be said about it, i.e. it cannot be said truthfully that water is furry, although there are multiple truths that can be spoken of H₂O (Sihra & Anderson, 2007).

Both intersubjectivists and Gandhi would hold that to conclude H₂O is defined as any one of these manifestations is problematic. Accepting any one definition fails to see the contributions of other definitions. In a Gandhian framework, accepting just one characteristic of H₂O is to cause harm to another who “knows” another characteristic.
Addressing differing characteristics of a particular thing or idea, however, is not entirely faithful to his notion of Absolute Truth. What does the enactment of this knowledge look like in the world? How would a defined knowledge of H₂O manifest itself in the communities we live? Holding an open mind about the basic definition of H₂O, while necessary, is not an “anything goes” position; if it were, one could justifiably allow, for example, sugary sodas to be considered H₂O, which, philosophically speaking, is the danger of relativity. If we accept the intersubjectivist premise of the pre-ontological self, how do we come to know H₂O as water, vapour and gas without allowing the intersubjective definition to include sugary soda? In a Gandhian framework, the danger of relativity is addressed through an intersubjective commitment to do no harm. Not only do we potentially do harm by insisting that H₂O has a particular relevant property (a pragmatist approach); we also do harm by not defining some basic conditions to H₂O itself (a foundationalist approach).

The example of H₂O is a simple one. Indeed, put into a sociological context, the relation of partial truths to the whole is far more complex. Take, for example, the person addicted to cocaine. Some may define the addict through his or her chemical dependence, others through his or her psychological dependence, while others may define the addict through his or her negative impact on him or herself, loved ones and his or her surroundings. There are, of course, offers made by many, such as the medical, psychological, and sociological communities, intended to contribute to an overarching definition of cocaine addiction. As a result, one may claim that the cocaine addict is addicted to a particular chemical substance, namely cocaine. One cannot truthfully say that the cocaine addict is addicted to, say, heroine. Or one may claim that
the cocaine addict has a distinct impact on society, unique to his or her use of cocaine. In a Gandhian intersubjectivist framework, what one cannot truthfully say about the cocaine addict is that his or her sickness has no impact on oneself. Nor can one claim that he or she is a social pariah. Contributing to truths about the cocaine addict is a responsibility to and for him or her, as he or she must be seen as a part of one’s very self. Failure to define some basic conditions of the cocaine addict is to do harm (foundationalist); failing to engage with the addict (pragmatist) is also harm.

Hence, Gandhi can be seen as both a foundationalist and a pragmatist. Recognizing that it is impossible to see the whole truth as once, the realization of partial truths must be pursued through and with humility. The meeting of the pragmatist and foundationalist approach is what I call humility through ahimsa.

**Humility Through Ahimsa**

Assuming we accept that the intersubjectivist is a pragmatist and that Gandhi is a foundationalist, joining the two together appears an unlikely fit, philosophically speaking. Yet a proposal of Gandhian intersubjectivity as I have put forth demonstrates the ways in which both the intersubjectivist could be seen as a foundationalist and Gandhi as a pragmatist. Embedding Gandhi’s notion of ahimsa into the framework of intersubjectivity encourages one to approach the other with humility. It is to the concept of humility through ahimsa that I now turn.

My use of the term humility in this context implies a specific meaning. On the one hand, it is understood through its verb format, “being humble”. Being humble is often associated with ideas of modesty and respectfulness, while at the same time being associated with ideas of insignificance, inferiority, or subservience. Possessing
Humility is often related to religious virtue. In a religious context, individuals are encouraged to recognize their complete dependence upon an external authority, such as God, because of one’s inferiority to His knowledge. In Christianity, for example, II Corinthians 12:9,10 states: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (Murray, 1982). In this conceptualization of humility, weakness and inferiority to God is celebrated and seen to be the hallmark of humility.

Humility through ahimsa, while similar in some ways, must be nuanced from this type of religious humility. Indeed, there are many religious traditions that do not subscribe to the idea of an external authority in quite the same way as I have described, Gandhi's being one of them; however, given the predominance of this view in current contexts - and in dominant traditions - the distinction between religion and philosophy here, and in this context, is significant.

In some ways, the idea of an external authority can be applied to humility through ahimsa. We are encouraged to inquire about what we do not know and strive to come closer to what we may know. Humility through ahimsa accepts that there are things we cannot know, but not because of an anthropomorphic external authority that clearly dictates our actions. Instead, it relies upon characteristics we already possess, including reason, intuition, imagination, and sensations.

There is much debate around the existence of humility in philosophical traditions that seek to uncover an all-encompassing truth or knowledge of things. Leo Strauss
(1968), for example, looks at ancient theorists like Plato and concludes that a small number of privileged elite can indeed attain and possess knowledge of things and with it comes the responsibility to incorporate this knowledge into the lives of the ignorant masses. This is but one reading of Plato, however. Philosophers like Tim Simpson (2002) hold that Plato was arguing something significantly different.

Simpson argues that Plato did not believe that philosophy is a pursuit to possess knowledge. Instead, the presence of dialogue, myths, and dreams in Plato’s writings actually suggests attention to the limits of knowledge. Simpson cites Josef Pieper, who writes on Plato’s rejection of a pursuit to possess wisdom:

The quest for essence really implies a claim on comprehension. And comprehension is to know something in such a way as it is possible for it to be known...but there is nothing that the human being can know in this way or comprehend in this strict sense... It is a property of philosophy that it reaches toward a wisdom that nevertheless remains unreachable by it; but this is not to say that there is no relationship at all between question and the answer. This wisdom is the object of philosophy but as something lovingly sought, not as something "possessed"... It therefore belongs to the nature of philosophy that it only "has" its object in the manner of a loving search. (2002, p. 67).

The search Pieper describes must begin with humility; without humility, wisdom is not sought, it is possessed. A "search" means there is something to look for, to uncover, to discover. Searching does not mean there is something to be acquired. That is to say, for Plato, there is no end to the search, and therefore it can never be possessed.
An examination of *aporia* as found in Plato’s work contributes to an understanding of my conceptualization of humility through ahimsa. Key to Plato’s search for wisdom is the notion of *aporia*, understood by Simpson to be more than the mere recognition of a logical puzzle. "The purpose of *aporia* is not simply to clear the ground of faulty reasoning, as important as that is. But, more importantly, it is to suspend comfortable conceit - pride -- and elicit a more humble attitude for the search" (2002, pp. 68-69). *Aporia* functions to clarify faulty reasoning and to establish a stronger foundation for inquiry. The "logical puzzle" does not, therefore, necessarily imply a fitting together of pieces to assemble the larger picture. *Aporia* serves, in a way, to disassemble the pieces of inquiry and question what one thinks one knows.

Plato’s *aporia* provides a general overview of the way Gandhi conceptualized the relationship of partial truths in the world. For Gandhi, we must, through our actions (where action is defined as both activity and thought) to come to know pieces of the Whole Truth, understanding that the complete ‘picture’ of the Whole Truth can never be fully pieced together in any particular shape as it is indescribable and infinite. As a result, Plato’s *aporia* as understood by Simpson is too specific for Gandhi’s Truth; the metaphor of the puzzle is somewhat problematic. An examination of the metaphor and an extension of the metaphor to Gandhi’s work shows why this is the case.

For Simpson, it could be said that the puzzle has a visual representation as follows:
Through aporia, the puzzle could be depicted as follows:

Through these two images it becomes evident that there are two main characteristics of knowledge are impacted as a result of *aporia* for Plato. (1) Knowledge or Truth ceases to have a defined end. In the first image, there are clear boundaries and
edges, whereas the second image depicts a puzzle without boundaries, that potentially goes on at infinitum. (2) There is individual interaction with the pieces of the puzzle whereas in the absence of *aporia*, as depicted in the first image, the piece already exists and simply needs to fall into place. That is to say, for Simpson, there is indeed an image of knowledge created by and for individuals when knowledge is pursued through *aporia*.

In a Gandhian intersubjectivist framework, however, the Whole Truth does not have any shape or tangibility. In fact, in many ways, the puzzle is both Truth, knowledge, and the individual at the same time. Truth, through its relation to the *Atman*, is in each individual. As one strives to realize Truth, one is also striving for a realization of the *Atman*. At the same time, while the *Atman* is that which is found within and shared by each person, it is both that which makes each individual unique and that which makes each individual a part of the larger whole. Realizing the *Atman*, the soul, as we have seen in previous chapters, is realizing one’s “true self”. Truth as a knowledge of things is indistinguishable from knowledge of the self. Therefore, Gandhi’s partial truths that define the self and a knowledge of things, in relation to the whole truth, could be depicted as follows:
alongside which creates
at infinitum. There are two distinctions made in Gandhian intersubjectivity that distinguishes it from Plato’s notion of *aporia* through these images. (1) There is no shape to Whole Truth. There is indeed a knowledge that other pieces exist, as they surround an individual, yet just how these pieces come together and what shape they take are indescribable. (2) The partial truths of individuals can indeed come together to create new partial truths, however the extent to which this becomes a part of the whole truth is unknown. The intersubjectivity of each individual further defines how one comes to know the puzzle piece one currently holds as the other pieces surround the individual. For Gandhi’s puzzle pieces, knowing that the other pieces exist, yet not knowing what shape they together take calls for humility through ahimsa.

My conception of humility through ahimsa can be summarized as follows: fulfilling one’s *dharma*, duty, through *karma yoga*, skillful action, one comes to know that his or her partial truth is a part of the infinite Whole Truth which is both part of an
intersubjective relationship and responsibility to others, the world, and oneself. The intersubjective nature of the relationship to the other denotes that one only comes to know oneself through and with the other. We, together through responsibility and relationship as laid out in an intersubjective notion of heteronomous freedom, whereby one has a freedom to come to know the other and, in so doing, know oneself. For the Gandhian intersubjectivist, we must piece together each respective partial truth, realized intersubjectively, to come to a clearer, although never complete, realization of the Whole. I return to the image shared in the Introduction to highlight the relationship of partial and Whole Truth and to present an analysis of the relationship of humility through ahimsa.

In this diagram, ahimsa as a metaphorical fluid that holds partial truths together, all within the context of Absolute and Whole Truth. For the Gandhian intersubjectivist, one needs humility through ahimsa to recognize the others’ partial truths, as embedded in the notion of ahimsa is the premise that to do harm to another is to do harm to oneself.
Ahimsa surrounds the partial truths of individuals and is the overarching characteristic of the Absolute and Whole Truth. To claim an absolute knowledge of any partial truth is to do harm to the other and his or her understanding of his or her partial truth; and therefore cannot justifiably be considered to have any relation to the Absolute and Whole Truth. Humility through ahimsa is the ability to accept that one’s truth is always only partial.

In a foundationalist framework, the proposition of humility may appear problematic, however coupled with the justified belief of ahimsa, and its relationship to Truth, the foundationalist can indeed be satisfied with the foundation of knowledge. Alternatively, the pragmatist may ask what the notion of humility through ahimsa “does” for our actual world. In conclusion, this chapter has brought together the preceding two chapters through a discussion of action as it applies to philosophical traditions, concluding that Gandhi’s Truth contributes to both the foundationalist and pragmatist position. In the final and concluding chapter, I demonstrate the significance of its application in the context of peace education.
Chapter 6: Intersubjectivity and Ahimsa for Peace

Education: Implications and Contributions to Further Areas of Study

In the preceding pages, I have shown (1) that reading Gandhi through a framework of *dharma* provides (2) a clearer and more robust reading of Absolute Truth and its relationship to relative truth which makes (3) distinct contributions to understanding of objectivity and subjectivity which share some resemblance to those ideas found in ideas of intersubjectivity as they are found in philosophy of education discourse. I have proceeded on this path to demonstrate that (4) a Gandhian intersubjectivist position promotes a notion of humility through ahimsa.

In so doing, there are a number of critiques that may be levied against the work. Most notably, my exploration of Gandhi’s philosophy may appear vacillating by nature and therefore useful only in particular contexts or for particular studies. Despite its universal nature, humility through ahimsa in an intersubjective framework insists that partial truths be universal and temporary at the same time. However the temporary nature of partial truths are always relative to the Whole and Absolute Truth which, as I have demonstrated, is unchanging and universal. My insistence on humility finds its basis in the unknowable nature of Whole and Absolute Truth in its entirety. It is the culmination of partial truths that bring us closer to Truth, hence the need for intersubjectivity.
My offering here, of course, has had an agenda. I have come to this work through the path of a political scientist, who has focused primarily upon why we fight and why we should not fight. Along my path, I was introduced to the discipline of peace studies. Although well intentioned and clear in its objectives, I still found some unease in my understanding of the discipline. A pragmatic discipline indeed, it is concerned primarily with where we are now and how peace can be realized in our current context. I recall being at the 2004 International Peace Research Association Conference in Calgary, Alberta. The presentations were full of rich and dynamic discussions of international conflicts, educational practices that bring peace into the classroom, and proposed policy changes that could contribute to the development and maintenance of peace in our world today. With all that this conference contributed to my knowledge of peace studies in general and peace education in particular, I still didn’t have an answer to why we fight and why we shouldn’t. When asked while preparing for my presentation what I was presenting on, I replied Gandhi’s philosophy of ahimsa, which was met with a confused tone asking what I was doing there. Indeed, there was limited discussion of Gandhi at the conference, however in my discussion with my questioner, it was the philosophy component that had him puzzled. Although not exhaustive, I feel that I finally have come to a closer understanding through the process of this dissertation of why we fight; and as a result may have a contribution to make to peace education overall.

When I first began to familiarize myself with the literature of peace studies, I found myself frustrated with the lack of recognition and reference awarded to Gandhi. As I saw it, Gandhi played an integral role to the establishment of the field given his
extensive writings and political action. There could be multiple reasons for his absence, most notably an outright discrimination, a presence of religion and spirituality, a lack of a coherent prescriptive text to draw upon. That is to say, is this actually a ethnocentric or xenophobic omission? Could Gandhi’s lack of scientific, positivistic inquiry imply a lack of rigour in the realm of peace studies? Or is it because peace studies as promoted by Johan Galtung and his adopters (peace research that moves away from the idea of peace as a response to war) rely upon a positivistic, scientific rationality that is in contrast to Gandhi’s work? If the answer to any of these questions is the affirmative, then is there a place, philosophically speaking, for Gandhi in modern day peace research? Are followers of Gandhi’s philosophy necessarily excluded from the dominant dialogues of peace studies or is there a way for us to work together to reconceptualize our way of knowing ourselves, others, and the world that further enhances and promotes the objectives of peace education? I return to the discussion of peace education initiated in Chapter One to provide just one example of how an application of humility through ahimsa can impact peace education.

**Peace Education and Humility Through Ahimsa**

Specifically, humility through ahimsa questions the theory of peace education put forth by Ian Harris (2004). Although not an exhaustive offering, Harris’ postulates for peace education theory serve as an overall summary of a variety of theories contributing to the definition of peace education (Biaggio, De Souza, & Martini, 2004; Fisk, 2000; Galtung, 1973; Hicks, 2004; Oravec, 2004; Salomon, 2004a). For this reason, I focus on his work in order to demonstrate my position. To restate, the five postulates of peace education put forth by Harris are as follows: (1) it explains the roots
of violence; (2) it teaches alternatives to violence; (3) it adjusts to cover different forms
of violence; (4) peace itself is a process that varies according to context; and (5)
conflict is omnipresent.

**Postulates of Peace Education: Revised**

Within the context of Gandhian intersubjectivity and the subsequent humility
through ahimsa I have advocated for, the postulates of peace education could be
restated as follows: (1) it accepts that harm to the other is harm to oneself; (2) it asserts
that claims to whole knowledge of anything is a violent act; (3) there is a capacity for a
loving search for knowledge that is in each individual that must be nurtured and
appreciated; (4) achieving shared goals is a shared process; and (5) ahimsa is
omnipresent. As each individual is part of the larger whole, peace education must seek
to develop how one interacts and and engages with the world in the interest of the
whole and oneself. Rather than solely focus on the ways in which violence manifests
itself in the world - be it through physical, structural, or cultural violence (Galtung, 1969,
1973, 1990) - an adoption of a theory that demonstrates how we are all connected and
responsible for one another provides a more robust approach to achieving the future
peace education seeks to achieve.

The application of these postulates is demonstrated through Reva Joshee’s
(2006) pedagogy of ahimsa, which seeks to address the violence embedded in both
learning and teaching. In demonstrating the ways in which ahimsa is related to
education, Joshee offers three key components to the development of a pedagogy of
ahimsa: “a re-evaluation of our understanding of power in all relationships, a conscious
move from debate to dialogue as the dominant for of public discussion, and an
emphasis on creativity and imagination” (p. 8). These components are tackled through ahimsa’s connection to three other important ideas central to Gandhi’s thought:

“sarvodaya (the uplift of all), satyagraha (the power that comes from acting in ways consistent with the principles of ahimsa) and trusteeship (the notion that we should think of all that we possess as things we hold in trust and that we should use what we have for the benefit of others)” (p. 7). When these ideas are read through the lens of humility through ahimsa, their potential for addressing educational violence is invaluable.

**Revisiting Research Questions**

To conclude this work, I will revisit my initial research questions, providing a brief response to each given the argument and analysis throughout.

**Primary research question**

In what ways can Gandhi’s notion of ahimsa viewed through the lens of intersubjectivity contribute to peace education theory and the issues of violence it seeks to address?

Through my conceptualization of humility through ahimsa, I offer a way for peace education to incorporate the philosophical work of Gandhi and intersubjectivists. In so doing, peace education is well positioned to benefit from the work of both philosophical traditions. It has the capacity to redefine the relationship of the teacher to the student, the student to the other, and the student to the world. The embedded notion of responsibility places both the teacher and the student into the issues at hand, be it structural, cultural, or physical and insists upon action. My analysis has offered a way of conceptualizing peace education theory and practice that is philosophically robust and aligns more fully to the objectives of peace education in comparison to the
scientific approach offered by Galtung. Most notably, my work here has provided the philosophical conditions to support the introductory claim made in *Peace Philosophy in Action* (Carter & Kumar, 2010):

Commitment to the purpose of achieving peace sustains the needed actions, especially when we are facing challenges. With commitment is knowledge that includes the ideological basis of peace development: the foundational principles. Comprehension and articulation of those principles is the basis for further peace steps, for example, from individual to community, community to society, society to nation and nation to other nations.

In providing a framework that relies on a fusion of ahimsa, intersubjectivity and humility, I have provided a philosophical and ideological basis for peace development that is both pragmatic and foundational.

**Supplementary Research Questions**

1. What philosophical contributions can Gandhi’s conception of ahimsa make to existing conceptions of intersubjectivity?

Given intersubjectivity’s insistence that we can only know ourself through our relationship with the other, Gandhi’s conception of ahimsa defines that knowledge and contributes to an overall principled (read foundationalist) approach to the intersubjective position.

2. How does intersubjectivity presently engage with humility as found in Gandhi’s conception of ahimsa? In what ways does it fall short?

Intersubjectivity does indeed embrace a notion of humility. It holds that we are not present in the absence of others, philosophically speaking. However insofar as the
requirements of humility through ahimsa, intersubjectivity falls short. The need for a defining characteristic that individuals come to know one another is found through Gandhi’s conception of ahimsa, and my offering of humility through ahimsa. Accepting that one cannot know the Whole Truth and is forever partial in his or her conception of the self, and therefore knowledge, requires an understanding of the limits of knowledge and the harm of making claims to a knowledge of the Whole.

3. How does peace education theory presently engage with ahimsa? What philosophical shifts in peace education are needed to promote a theory of ahimsa?

Through adoption a scientific positivist approach, peace education limits its interaction with Gandhi’s ahimsa. They physical and temporal aspects of Gandhi’s ahimsa are indeed present within the philosophical framework put forth by peace studies and adopted by peace education. However peace education scholarship, in general, is not concerned with conceptions of the individual. The focus remains on the “other” and therefore fails to recognize intimate relationship and responsibility of the individual to the other, and the other’s responsibility to the individual.

**Directions for Future Research**

This dissertation encourages several future research directions. In this dissertation I have married the work of Gandhi and the intersubjectivist position for the benefit of peace education theory. My focus on theory has been to make clear the theoretical framework for future approaches to peace education, which in turn, has provided the framework for future research possibilities in both the theoretical and practical realm. First, examining the application of humility through ahimsa in an actual
classroom and determining what objectives it achieves is a practical application of this work. This would require both qualitative and quantitative analysis of institutions, educators, and students committed to peace education practiced with humility through ahimsa. I have witnessed one such school, namely the Digital Study Hall/Prerna Project in Lucknow, India. A qualitative analysis would require an organizational exploration of the school's commitments, while a quantitative analysis would require the establishment of measurable means or outcomes that support my claim.

Also, humility through ahimsa is not restricted in its application. Given my corporate entanglements, I am deeply interested in the ways in which the notion of ahimsa can be applied in the context of for-profit organizations, specifically in the creation of organizational culture and leadership. Initially, this I envision would be a theoretical examination of a particular organization's written policies and stated commitments, with a subsequent examination of mechanisms in place to achieve these policies and commitments. In turn, I would propose alternatives to, likely, both the overall objectives of the organization and ways to achieve humility through ahimsa.

Finally, I look forward to the opportunity to move beyond a conceptualization of the individual and look further into the impacts this newly defined individual has on the world from a perspective of praxis. Indeed, there are many present day examples (Carter & Kumar, 2010), perhaps most notably Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma. Her extraordinary commitment to the principles of ahimsa and sarvodaya have indeed garnered her international recognition and acclaim. Although Aung San Suu Kyi had no aspirations for formal political life, she found herself the leader of the largest popular revolt in Burma’s history, and winning a landslide victory in Burma’s first free elections.
in thirty years (Taylor, 2012). A further exploration of her interpretation of her sense of responsibility to others and herself (and of those like her) as demonstrated in political work and writings would further contribute to an understanding of how Gandhi’s philosophy of ahimsa can be put into practice by teachers and students alike.

The evolution of peace education theory continues. In the 3rd Edition of Ian Harris and Mary Lee Morrison’ book, Peace Education (2013), the five postulates are expanded and include a call for students to be empowered as agents of social change. Upon first glance, it could be said that Harris and Morrison are calling for responsibility and engagement as laid out in this dissertation. While indeed casting a wider net, the key to the argument made in this dissertation is a call to move away from responding to what currently is, and explore a different way of thinking and being in the world. Rather than focus on students who are taught to be ‘agents of social change’, my work here calls for an intersubjective search between student and teacher that is defined by a goal to do no harm. As a result, peace education theory cannot see the goal of peace education as a project simply of imparting knowledge into students. The student is indeed an agent, as is the teacher. My call is for these agents to co-emerge and intersubjectively come to being. As I move forward in my work I hope to engage with more peace educators to think together about what this type of intersubjectivity could mean for the field as a whole. For now, as I finish this dissertation I think about you the reader and wonder how we have engaged together and what this might mean for each of us and our sense of interbeing.
Bibliography


Todd, S. (2001). *On not knowing the other, or learning from Levinas*.


