

CENTER FOR REFLECTION ON THE SECOND LAW

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James Hunt, a professor of religion at Shaw University in Raleigh is writing a book about Mohandas K. Gandhi. Jim has devoted many years to this project and is eminently qualified to talk about this utterly amazing person. He did so at the last meeting of the study group and I'll try to put down here a few thoughts from that discussion.

Of great interest is the fact that Gandhi got a large share of his inspiration from Western thinkers, among them, Henry Thoreau; John Ruskin, Edward Carpenter (the English Thoreau) and Leo Tolstoy (who turned into an outspoken advocate of non-violence in his later years.) Quoted below are a few extracts from a mini-anthology which Jim passed out. I hope the reader will get a sensing of what Gandhi is all about and perhaps go on to study him further.

On But who is God. God is not some person outside ourselves or away from the
God universe. He pervades everything, and is omniscient as well as omnipotent.
and He does not need any praise or petitions. Being immanent in all beings, He
Prayer hears everything and reads our inmost thoughts. He abides in our hearts and
is nearer to us than the nails are to the fingers. What is the use of telling
Him anything?

When we speak out loud at prayer time, our speech is addressed not to God, but to ourselves, and is intended to shake off our torpor. Some of us are intellectually aware of God, while others are afflicted by doubt. None has seen Him face to face. We desire to recognize and realize Him, and seek to gratify that desire through prayer. Prayers represent a mode of spiritual cleansing. We join these prayers in order that they may sustain us in our life. Man's need for prayer is as great as his need for bread.

On Non-violence implies love, compassion, forgiveness. The Shastras describe
Non- these as virtues of the brave. This courage is not physical but mental. I
violence am fascinated by the law of love. It is the philosopher's stone for me. In
my view the path of non-violence is not the path of the timid or the unmanly.
The law of love will work, just as the law of gravitation will work, whether
we accept it or not. Just as a scientist will work wonders out of various
applications of the laws of nature, even so a man who applies the law of love
with scientific precision can work greater wonders. For the force of non-
violence is infinitely more wonderful and subtle than the material forces of
nature, like for instance, electricity. The men who discovered for us the law
of love were greater scientists than any of our modern scientists. Only our
explorations have not gone far enough and so it is not possible for every one
to see all its working. Such, at any rate is the hallucination, if it is one,
under which I am labouring. The more I work at this law, the more I feel de-
light in life, delight in the scheme of the universe. It gives me a peace and
a meaning of the mysteries of nature that I have no power to describe.

All society is held together by non-violence, even as the earth is held in her position by gravitation. But when the law of gravitation was discovered, the discovery yielded results of which our ancestors had no knowledge. Even so when society is deliberately constructed in accordance with the law of non-violence, its structure will be different in material particulars from what it

is today. What is happening today is disregard of the law of non-violence and enthronement of violence as if it were an eternal law. Non-violence is an active force of the highest order. It is soul force or the power of the godhead within us.

On
Disobe-
dience

Up to the year 1906 I simply relied on appeal to reason. I was a very industrious reformer. I was a good draftsman, as I always had a close grip of facts which in its turn was the necessary result of my meticulous regard for truth, but I found that reason failed to produce an impression when the critical moment arrived in South Africa. My people were excited—even a worm will and does sometimes turn—and there was talk of wreaking vengeance. I had then to choose between allying myself to violence or finding out some other method of meeting the crisis and stopping the rot, and it came to me that we should refuse to obey legislation that was degrading and let them put us in jail if they liked. Thus came into being the moral equivalent of war.

Before one can be fit for the practise of civil disobedience, one must have rendered a willing and respectful obedience to the state laws. A Satyagraha (a word Gandhi invented to denote a person firmly in control of the soulforce within himself and who seeks to touch the heart of persons acting unjustly) obeys the laws of society intelligently and of his own free will, because he considers it to be his sacred duty to do so. It is only when a person has thus obeyed the laws of society scrupulously that he is in a position to judge as to which particular rules are good and just and which unjust and iniquitous. Only then does the right accrue to him of the civil disobedience of certain laws in well defined circumstances.

That's about all there is room for here. I have extra copies of Jim Hunt's handout. If you have further interest you might read Gandhi's autobiography.

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Some comments received lately pertain to the fact that recent circulars seem not to be directly related to considerations of the Second Law. To which I plead that the objective of this endeavor is to seek to understand what Thomas Berry calls the "earth process" and the place of the human in it. The second law, as I interpret it, carries an obligation to be thrifty and uncomplicated; to find earth-compatible and life-compatible ways to live; to derive an ethical system out of an understanding of the earth. To know best how to think about anything is to have a firm basis in the earth system. Ilya Prigogine has said that gravitation and the second law are the driving forces of the universe. Many, including Gandhi, equate gravity with love and I have no trouble substituting the second law into that equation. Nothing would move if it were not for the fact that energy does work, and energy would not be energy if it did not flow spontaneously from higher to lower potential, in conformance with what has come to be known as the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Do not perceive the second law to be a curse. It's not. It blesses all in the same way gravity does. But it carries a fearsome corollary: It will not move spontaneously from lower to higher potential.

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October 27th - Lynn White, Jr., The Historic Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis.

November 24th - Eric Goodrun, The American Indian.