

The Role of Virtue in Developing Trustworthiness in Public Officials

Hope K. Fitz, Professor of Philosophy, Eastern Connecticut State University

Abstract

In this paper, I am concerned to show that trustworthiness in public officials, which I judge to be necessary for trust in government, is made possible by teaching virtues, or more specifically a virtuous way of life, to children in a society. Furthermore, the individual development of the shared virtues of a society requires the support of those virtues by citizens of that society. To show how this has worked in the past, I examine Aristotle's notion of *eudaimonia* as virtuous activity and how he believed that his theory of virtue would make possible the development of moral members of the polis or city state. Although Aristotle's virtue theory was practiced to a great extent in Athens, it cannot be practiced in modern nation states as it only works in small communities. Such is the case because it is based, in large measure, on the different types of friendship which Aristotle described.

A virtue theory which could work in different nation states involves the ancient belief of *ahimsa* which originated in Hindu thought over 3,500 years ago and was developed and practiced by Hindus, and later by Jains and Buddhists. This development culminated in the what can be viewed as the virtue theory of Mahatma Gandhi. As Gandhi understood *ahimsa*, it meant no (intentional) harm to any living being by thought, word or deed and the greatest love, i.e., compassion for all creatures. Gandhi brought the belief of *ahimsa* into the social/political arena with his *satyagraha*, i.e., Truth Force against oppression. Instead of fighting oppressors with weapons that can harm, Gandhi "fought" with non-cooperation and later civil disobedience, based on *ahimsa*, as ways to combat his oppressors. He believed that he could shame the oppressors and eventually convert them to *ahimsa*. He fought with courage and never let up on an issue of human rights or a quest for peace. In his engagements, he told his *satyagrahis*, i.e., followers of *satyagraha*, never to harbor anger let alone hatred for one's oppressors. With *satyagraha*, grounded in *ahimsa*, he won many rights for the Indian people whom he represented in South Africa and he spearheaded the freedom fighters that eventually brought about India's independence from Great Britain.

The Role of Virtue in Developing Trustworthiness in Public Officials

By education (Ph.D. in Asian and Comparative Philosophy), teaching, research and writing, I am a Comparative Philosopher (western/non/western). Because of my background, I have an interest in and will broach the subject of virtue as it affects trustworthiness of public officials from both a western, specifically Aristotelian, and non-western, namely, Gandhian, perspective. However, I will examine both the Aristotelian and Gandhian perspectives from what ethicists in western philosophy call "*Aretaic*" or "Virtue" Theory.

Aretaic or Virtue Theory, unlike *Deontic* or Duty Theory, is not rule-based. Rather, it is concerned with character and the virtues that form character. The virtues are, in general, derived from the values and beliefs of a society or culture. Furthermore, historically and traditionally, these values and beliefs have developed within a particular religious or philosophical tradition¹. Thus it is that various traditions have given rise to different virtues that are fundamental within given societies or cultures. In general, virtues can be taken to be dispositions to act in certain

¹ Hope K. Fitz, "Comparative Philosophy: Theory and Praxis," a Key – Note Address at the National Student Conference at SUNY ONEONTA, April 8 – 12, 2006. I discuss this subject in the address which will soon to be published in a book along with the best of the student papers.

ways. Hence if a person is said to be just in the sense of fair, we expect that all of her or his actions will express that disposition towards fairness.

In this paper, I will be focusing upon two ancient virtue theories, one by Aristotle and one that Mahatma (a title meaning the great one) Gandhi was taught and developed for his time. With one exception, these theories or philosophies emphasize different virtues. Yet they both share the following beliefs: 1. living virtuously or according to virtue is an activity or a way of life; 2. virtue must be taught and practiced so that it can be developed; and 3. a community or a large segment of a society must share the values and beliefs underlying the virtues so that they will be supported and upheld. As I lay out the two different philosophical views of virtue as held by Aristotle and Gandhi, note that they both take courage to be a specific virtue that is fundamental to living a virtuous life.

With regard to Aristotle's Virtue Theory, I will examine what he had to say about *Eudaimonia*, i.e., happiness as virtuous activity. This examination will involve his account of what virtues are and how they function to form moral character, the belief that virtue must be taught and practiced and, perhaps most importantly, the conviction that the *polis* will support that teaching and practice. As I will explain later, a *polis*, often referred to as a city-state, is better understood as a community of citizens who are involved in their government rather than as a "state," as we understand it today.² Furthermore, as we shall see, friendship was fundamental to the *polis*.

With regard to virtue as understood by Gandhi, there is a fundamental virtue that he believed in and practiced called *ahimsa* which originated in the ancient Hindu tradition and was developed in that tradition and in the ancient Jain and Buddhist traditions. This development culminated in the thought of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi, was a Hindu, but he was greatly influenced by Jainism and Buddhism as well as Hinduism. For him, *ahimsa* came to mean: no (intentional) harm to any living being by thought, word or deed

² Hope K. Fitz and Christopher Vasilopoulos, "Conditions for Individual Freedom as Applied to the European Union", published in the book of essays on Contemporary Philosophy, *Humanity at the Turning Point*, edited by the late Sonja Servomaa, published by Rnvall Institute Publications 23, Helsinki, Finland. What my colleague and I describe as a *polis* in this paper is a far cry from the notion of a state in a nation state. In general, the nation is thought of as having to do with the culture and history of a people bound together by a social contract. When we say "state" in this context, we are generally referring to the laws and power of that political entity. It was my colleague and the co-author of this essay that made this point clear to me.

and the greatest love, i.e., compassion for all living creatures.³ I will examine Gandhi's notion of *ahimsa* and his beliefs concerning its practice. It is significant that he brought *ahimsa* into the political arena with his development of *satyagraha*, i.e., a Truth Force against oppression. With that force, he was able to challenge oppressive laws and oppressive or corrupt government officials and thereby obtain a number of rights for Indian people living in South Africa and later to gain India's independence. As most of us are aware, both South Africa and India were under the colonial rule of Great Britain.

What will become clear during the exposition of my subject and approach as stated, is that if *ahimsa* were fully developed as a virtue so that it formed part of one's *weltanschauung*, i.e., world perspective, and attitude towards life and living beings, one would automatically act with the virtues that Aristotle outlined. Hence, that person would not violate the laws or trust of her or his people. Furthermore, a person practicing *satyagraha*, i.e., a *satyagrahi*, would be engaged in activities against oppression or corruption by a government or government officials. Because of these considerations and because Aristotle's *Eudaimonia* is limited to small communities where friendship can prevail, I will suggest that the development of *ahimsa* within a democratic society could make possible the kind of virtuous society wherein trustworthy public officials were the norm. However, such a society must be based on natural as well as civil rights and citizen participation in government. Furthermore, as I noted earlier, the development of virtues requires the teaching and practice of those virtues and the support of the community. This is key for our understanding of how to establish trustworthiness within public officials. For it is only in a community, or a society, wherein a large segment of the populace lives virtuously, or strives to do so,⁴ that we can have trust in our public officials.

Having set forth the topic and approach to this paper, let us turn to a consideration of Aristotle's Virtue Theory.

Virtue Theory:

Aristotle's *Eudaimonia*:

³ Mohandas Gandhi, "Modern Review," October 1916, as quoted in *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, by Raghavan Iyer, Concord Grove Press, c. 1983, 179-180.

⁴ Rather than "living the virtuous life," I like Kant's notion of "striving to be moral." Kant made clear that a mature person was autonomous and, as such, was rational, sentient and striving to be moral. This is discussed in "The Integral Nature of the Categorical Imperative, by Hope K. Fitz and Margaret Jewett, *The Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. XXXV, Nos 1 & 2, Panjabi University, Patiala, India, 1996.

As Aristotle makes clear in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Eudaimonia* is happiness, although not in any hedonistic utilitarian sense of pleasure and only secondarily in Kant's sense of well-being that is the result of living a moral or virtuous life. According to Aristotle, happiness is a virtuous activity which he equated with functioning or living virtuously. He spoke of happiness as the highest good (*kalos*). There are two kinds of goods for humans that he described in the text. Let us distinguish them as good (small g) and Good (capital G).

Aristotle gave a number of examples to show that the good (small g), of a human is *ergon*, i.e., function⁵. "Function" is a broad concept that can relate to performance as he showed with the examples of artists; also, as he noted, it can refer to how different parts of the body operate⁶. However, it was the human function, in general, with which he was concerned. Based upon his classification of living things, the function of humans, unlike plants or animals who could not function with reason, was to act in accord with reason.⁷

What is important in Aristotle's analysis of living virtuously is the distinction between functioning and functioning-well. To function-well, in the case of humans, is to live-well which means to act in accord with reason and the appropriate virtue(s) for a given act.⁸ However, as we shall see, a careful study of Aristotle's "Golden Mean" makes clear that one must know not only what virtue(s) to apply, but when and where to apply that virtue or virtues as well as with what emphasis and to what degree.⁹

As we consider a person living a virtuous life, according to Aristotle, it is important to recall that the citizens of the polis were male, free born and privileged both by birth and wealth. Given that limited state of citizenry, a person living or functioning virtuously was: a member of the *polis* or community of citizens who, in some capacity, were involved in the governing or functioning of the *polis*;¹⁰ had a *telos*, i.e., goal, end or aim of life of *eudaimonia*, i.e., to live

⁵ *The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. By J.A.K. Thomson, New York, Revised with Notes and Appendices by Hugh Tredennick, Introduction and bibliography by Jonathan Barnes, Penguin Books, Revised edition, 1976, p. 75.

⁶ Ibid, 75-76.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid. 97

¹⁰ Ibid. Book VIII on "Types of Government," and Book IV on "justice;" *The Pocket Aristotle*, tr. By W.D. Ross, introduction by Justin D. Kaplan, New York, Washington Square Press, Inc., 9th printing, 1979, "Politics," Book I.

¹¹ Ibid, *Nicomachean Ethics*,. 75-77.

virtuously;¹¹ had developed the virtues held as fundamental to the Greeks;¹² which we will shortly consider, and had various friendships within the *polis*.¹³ As we shall see, according to Aristotle, friendships are essential to living a virtuous life. However, let us first examine the virtues that were central to Aristotle's virtue theory.

Aristotle called virtues "excellences." Since Greeks were concerned with excellence in all aspects of life, one can begin to understand the importance of these virtues in forming character. When developed, the virtues were taken to be dispositions to act. The cardinal virtues for the ancient Greeks were basically courage, temperance, justice, especially as fairness, and wisdom which embraces the other three. Thus, if one were said to be of a temperate character, the other citizens would expect that his actions would be both moderate and appropriate for a particular situation. He would not be prone to an excessive display of emotion or erratic behavior. On the other hand, he would act with the appropriate enthusiasm and concern for a given event.

In Aristotle's *Nichomachen Ethics*, he analyzed the cardinal virtues and what he took to be related virtues.¹⁴ All of the cardinal virtues are involved in the topic of this paper which, as stated, is the role of virtue in establishing trustworthiness of public officials. However, obviously, the most fundamental virtue is justice. As we shall see, according to Aristotle, if one had developed justice as a virtue, she or he would be trustworthy. However, since justice is unlike the other virtues in that it does not fit the pattern of the "Golden Mean," let us first discuss a virtue that does so that we can understand how complex the development of virtue is.

Focusing on Aristotle's "Golden Mean," and realizing that a seemingly simple formula of a virtue being the mean between its excess and lack will never teach one how to acquire the virtue, let us take Aristotle's famous account of courage. Obviously, the lack of it is cowardice. However, as he says, the excess is a kind of rashness. I would add that this rashness is often dangerous. Let us analyze this from a modern perspective. What is necessary for courage is a degree of fearlessness, but if what the ancient Greeks called *hubris*, i.e., excess pride or arrogance, and an unwarranted self-confidence are combined with fearlessness, a person could

¹² Ibid, 104, 127-202.

¹³ Ibid. Books VIII and IX.

¹⁴ Ibid. Books II – V.

¹⁵ Ibid. 172/

act in such a way as to harm himself and/or others. There are many examples of what Aristotle took to be an excess of courage that we can think of in the lives of people whom we have known or at least heard about. However, the example that always comes to mind when I teach this subject is that of a soldier who, acting rashly, unnecessarily puts his troops in harms way because he wants to test what he considers his courage or to gain some recognition for valor.

Turning now to justice as a virtue, and recognizing its binary state of justice/injustice rather than a mean between extremes, let us consider how Aristotle defined what is just. He said that what is just is what is either lawful or fair (equitable).¹⁵ So far, this is in accord with what we generally take to be justice, namely, moral rightness or fairness or the administration and procedure of the law.¹⁶ Aristotle also said that an unjust act is contrary to a just act. That too seems reasonable and in accord with what we believe.

In regard to how justice functions, Aristotle said that “justice is the only virtue that is regarded as someone else’s good, because it secures advantage for another person either an official or a partner.”¹⁷ He added that, “the worst person is the one who exercises his wickedness towards both himself and his friends, and the best is not the one who exercises his virtue towards himself but the one who exercises it towards another because this is a difficult task.”¹⁸

Aristotle distinguished two categories of justice. One is universal and the other is particular. Universal justice, as he described it, seems to be on a par with virtue itself or the virtuous life.¹⁹ He says that “universal justice has the same field of action as the Good man.”²⁰ What he seems to mean is that both the Good man and universal justice are concerned with the happiness, i.e., virtuous activity of the *polis*. He actually speaks of “a just act,” in this sense, as anything that tends to produce or consider the *eudaimonia* or happiness of a political association.²¹ In another description of universal justice, Aristotle says that it is a “sovereign virtue.”²² I think that we would say that justice, in this sense, reigns supreme. This is not to devalue wisdom which incorporates, justice, courage and temperance,

¹⁶ *The American heritage Dictionary*, International Edition, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, c. 1979.

¹⁷ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 174.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 173 -176.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 175.

²¹ *Ibid.* 173

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.* 176 -177.

but, for Aristotle, a wise person would be just and a just person who operated with universal justice would be wise.

Particular justice, according to Aristotle is basically distributive, i.e., having to do with property and proportion, or what is rectifiable, i.e., making right what is an inequitable division of property.²³ Furthermore, there is what Aristotle calls voluntary distributive justice which means that both parties, at least in theory, consent to a transaction.²⁴ Examples he gives are: buying, selling, lending of interest, pledging, lending without interest, and depositing.²⁵ Involuntary transactions are either secret such as theft, adultery, poisoning, procuring, enticement of slaves, killing by stealth and testifying falsely; or violent, e.g., assault, forcible confinement, murder, robbery, maiming, defamation and public insult.²⁶

Obviously, justice is a virtue that was very important to Aristotle's Virtue Theory. It is also key for our consideration of the role of virtue in developing trustworthiness within public officials. Given what has been said about justice, in the Aristotelian sense, I think it is clear that if one were just, she or he would be trustworthy. However, to strengthen the teaching and development of virtues within the *polis*, Aristotle held that there had to be friendship. Also, friendship binds people together for different purposes and that binding strengthened the *polis* as a community.

To understand the role of friendship in Aristotle's *polis*, let us again return to the notion of a *Polis* as a community of citizens wherein each, to greater and lesser extents, takes part in the governing or functioning of the community.²⁷ As noted, friendship, at various levels, binds citizens together with other citizens, hence they are more committed to the *polis* at large. There are three different levels of friendship that Aristotle identifies: 1. Friendship based on Utility; 2. Friendship based on Pleasure; and 3. Perfect Friendship based on Goodness. For the purposes of this paper, it will be sufficient to briefly consider each of these kinds of friendship.²⁸

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Although one comes to understand the nature of a *polis* from both Aristotle's ethical and political writings, Chapter IX in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, "On the Grounds of Friendship" and Chapter X, "The Pleasure and the Life of Happiness: make this quite clear.

²⁸ *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII.

²⁹ Ibid. Chapter X "Education is Best Undertaken by the State," 337-340.

Friendship based on Utility is based on some benefit that one or both of the parties hopes to gain. Aristotle says that the elderly frequently have this kind of friendship because they are basically more needy. I would add that in today's world, many people in business or politics are prone to form friendships based on utility.

Friendship based on pleasure is undertaken by those who are interested in their own pleasure and the opportunity of the moment. Aristotle says that the young are often involved in this kind of friendship because they are regulated primarily by feelings and, I would add, that they are exploring the world to find out who they are and what they want to do with their lives.

Neither of the foregoing kinds of friendship is expected to last as they are based on changeable ends. Perfect friendship is entirely different however. It is based on persons of character meaning persons who are living virtuous lives. If the virtues that Aristotle considered are developed, as they must be by both parties in a Perfect Friendship, then neither one of the friends is so interested in what he can gain from the other, but what he can give to or share with the other. Also, it is not pleasure that motivates the friendship. In our terminology, it is respect for oneself and respect for the other. One who is virtuous respects and is drawn to another person who is also virtuous.

Given Aristotle's Virtue Theory of *Eudaimonia*, we see that the *Polis* is logically prior to the individual.²⁹ It is in place, so to speak, with its emphasis on and support of living virtuously, strengthened by various friendships and individual involvement. Such being the case, it would be difficult for a person who was unjust, hence, not trustworthy to become a public official and even more difficult to hold such a position. The friendships formed, especially at the highest level of government, which one would expect would have more Perfect Friendships, would discourage someone holding office who was not of virtuous character. Furthermore, should such a person somehow fool the people and gain such an office, he would quickly be recognized and soon removed from office. What we can see from Aristotle's Virtue Theory is that if a *polis* were to function according to that theory, it would be rare indeed to have someone in office who was untrustworthy.

Although Aristotle's Virtue Theory, which functioned to a great extent in Athens, would enable a great political and democratic system to flourish, it would not be easy to follow in this

³⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre in his famous book *After Virtue*, actually seems to suggest that in order to live a life of virtue, we humans living now should establish small communities in which to live.

age because it is limited to small communities wherein people know one another and can form friendships.³⁰ The best alternative to such a government that is available to the nation states of today is to follow some form of democracy which is based on a social contract theory, especially the kind that John Locke described, in which citizens have natural and civil rights and they are both expected and encouraged to actively participate in government.³¹ The problem is that this form of government does not rely on the kind of virtuous activity or living virtuously that the *polis* did. However, there is a Virtue Theory, or moral system which will be analyzed from a Virtue Theory perspective, that if followed can form virtuous character. Furthermore, since it is not based on friendship, it can be combined with a democratic theory of a nation state. This Virtue Theory is based on one major virtue called *Ahimsa*. As I stated earlier, its roots are in the ancient Hindu tradition. However, the ancient Jains and Buddhists, as well as the Hindus, developed it and it culminated in the thought of Mahatma Gandhi.

Virtue Theory:

Gandhi's Views as to the Nature and Uses of *Ahimsa*:

It was about fifteen years ago that I began in-depth research into Gandhi's philosophy. Also, since one cannot study that philosophy without being immersed in Gandhi's beliefs as to the nature and uses of *ahimsa*, my research into these subjects began. As my research deepened, I became more and more interested in the origins and development of *ahimsa* and how this development had affected Gandhi's thought on the subject. What I learned is that Gandhi's philosophy of *ahimsa* constitutes the culmination of a long development of the belief-in and practices concerned with *ahimsa*.

³¹ Hope Fitz and Christopher Vasilopoulos, "Conditions for Individual Freedom as Applied to the European Union," published in a book *Humanity at the Turning Point: Rethinking Nature, Culture and Freedom*, the Renvall Series of Publications, The University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland, 2006.

³² *The RG (pronounced Rig) Veda* is taken to be the first book of the four books of the Vedas (Rg, Sama, Yajur and Atharva). As most South Asian scholars know, a conservative estimate as to the written form of the Rg Veda is 1500 B.C.

³³ *Atharva Veda III E*. However, it was an oral tradition long before it was written.

This development involved the three great Indic traditions, namely, Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism.

As previously noted, the roots of *Ahimsa* originated in the Hindu tradition. A conservative estimate of when this began is about 3,500 years ago but it may have been even earlier.³² Expressions of these roots appear in the *Vedic* Literature (the sacred literature of the Hindus including the Vedas, i.e., the Hindu “bible”, and supplemental writings). They include: 1. respect within a family and to authority;³³ 2. harmony in a community;³⁴ 3. universal friendliness;³⁵ 4. no ill-will towards others;³⁶ 5. no killing of humans or animals who do not pose a threat;³⁷ and 6. a concern for humans and animals and even some plant life.³⁸ Later, these and other kernels of what *ahimsa* would come to be were greatly affected by a moral distinction that came into being which had to do with killing. Because the killing of some humans, primarily enemies in battle, and animals who were sacrificed for religious ceremonies, were accepted in the Hindu tradition, there had to be a distinction between what constituted an acceptable killing and what did not. The term *himsa*, in Sanskrit, basically means to harm, to hurt, to kill or to injure. So killing that was not morally acceptable was deemed *himsa*. *Ahimsa*, by contrast, was the term used to describe killing that was sanctioned.

Without going into detail as to the future development of *ahimsa* within Hindu thought, which is not needed for the present purposes, let me just note that a high level of development of *ahimsa*, its origins in ego and how it is overcome are to be found in the great *Yoga Sutra* by Patanjali. This was the basic text of the Yoga School of Hindu Philosophy and it was written somewhere between 500 and 200 B.C.E.

³³ *Atharva Veda* III. 30.1; and III., 30.2 and III. 30. 3,4 as quoted in *Ahimsa: Buddhist and Gandhian*, Delhi, India, Indian Bibliographies, by Indu Mala Ghosh, Delhi, India, Indian bibliographies Bureau, Co- Publisher, Balji enterprises, c. 1980, 34.

³⁴ *Atharva Veda* III. 30, 3,4,5,6 as quoted in *Ahimsa: Buddhist and Gandhian*, by Indu Mala Ghosh.

³⁵ Indu Mala Ghosh, *Ahimsa: Buddhist and Gandhian*.,

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.* 1-3. In this passage, Indu Mala Ghosh quotes the Manusmriti 5, 45 as hold that *himsa* means injury to all harmless beings. (The term *smriti* in this context refers to the traditional Hindu scriptures. In this case, the reference is to the *Dharmasastras* (scriptures having to do with Religious duty) of which the great code of Manu is a part.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 1-3. 44.

³⁹ *Jaina Philosophy and Religion*, tr. By Nagin J. Shaw, Delhi, India, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, c 1998, 44 – 50.

Focusing again on the *himsa/ahimsa* distinction, the Jains broke with the belief in sacrifice. They did not believe in killing any living creature.³⁹ The Jains developed and live by the most advanced and comprehensive belief system based on *ahimsa*, as non-harm to any living being by thought, word or deed. They also believe that one needs to take a vow to live by this *ahimsa*. Last summer, I spent two months studying Jainism, in depth, at the International Summer School of Jain Studies, ISSJS, in India. I can only report that what I had heard and studied about these people was confirmed. The Jains as a people, with few exceptions, live the life of *ahimsa* as non-harm.

While it is the case that Jains also expressed and do express a concern for, and even compassion for all living beings, it is the Buddhists who, accepting the belief in non-harm to any living beings, developed compassion for all creatures to the greatest level. Given that compassion, there is no desire to harm any creatures. In fact, there is a natural prohibition against it. This great compassion is made possible by the metaphysics of Buddhism's founder, namely, Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha (enlightened one). Because of his belief in "Dependent Origination," (*Paticcia Samuppada*), according to which all beings are interconnected, interrelated, interdependent, co-arising and co-existing, there can be no God, no soul or abiding state of reality (Everything is in a constant state of flux and change.). Such being the case, ego is taken to be a construct. When one comes to this realization,⁴⁰ she or he knows that life is a dynamic, integrated whole with no "boundaries of the self." Hence, to have compassion for others is as natural as to love oneself.

As noted earlier in the paper, Gandhi's genius was to take the development of *ahimsa* as non-harm and compassion and bring it into the political arena. Before we look at how he did that and how it affects the trustworthiness of officials in government, let us look first at his mature view of *ahimsa*.

As noted earlier, Gandhi described *ahimsa* as: no harm to any living creature by thought, word or deed and the greatest love, i.e., compassion for all creatures.⁴¹ He also added that one

⁴⁰ This realization, according to Buddhists, requires accepting the Four Noble Truths and The Eight –Fold Noble Path. The Four Noble Truths are; 1. There is suffering. 2. Suffering is caused. 3. If you end the cause, you extinguish the suffering. 4. The Eight Fold Noble Path. The Eight – Fold noble Path involves: 1. Right View. 2. Right Intention or Resolution. 3. Right Speech. 4. Right Action. 5. Right Livelihood. 6. Right Effort. 7. Right Mindfulness. 8. Right Concentration.

⁴¹ See Endnot 3.

⁴² Mohandas Gandhi, *Truth is God*, compiled by P.K. Prabhu, Ahmedabad, India, Navifivan Publishing House, c. 1955, 13 -14.

needed to take a vow not to hurt any living being. As must be clear, this statement concerning non-harm expresses the high level of *ahimsa* as non-harm that was developed by the Jains while the greatest love expresses the high level of compassion developed by the Buddhists. However, in Gandhi's uses of *ahimsa*, the Hindu influence is also very evident. There are basically three uses of *ahimsa* found in Gandhi's writings. They are:

1. *Ahimsa* is the means to Truth. Truth (with a capital T), for Gandhi, was the goal of life. He equated it with God and God was equated with love.⁴² Hence, by a hypothetical syllogism, Truth is equated with love. Gandhi held a view of God that had two aspects, namely, an impersonal absolute and a personal deity.⁴³
2. *Ahimsa* is the basic virtue in one's moral life that when combined with courage enables one to speak out for truth (small t), i.e., what one understands to be both true and/or right. (As we shall see later, courage was fundamental to Gandhi's virtue theory.)
3. *Ahimsa* is the foundation of *satyagraha*, i.e., the Truth Force against oppression that Gandhi developed when he was in South Africa defending the rights of the Indian people who lived there.

Let us turn our attention to Gandhi's development of *satyagraha*, which is based on *ahimsa*, and how he used *satyagraha* in his struggles to overcome the many abuses of his people in South Africa and later to establish and lead the freedom fighters in his native India and ultimately to secure India's independence.

Looking closely at *satyagraha*, we can see that *ahimsa* is the basis of this Truth Force. *Satya* is a Sanskrit word meaning truth and *graha* can mean to be firm or to take hold of. Hence, *satyagraha* came to mean a Truth Force. This Truth Force is not passive. It is an active force against oppression. The oppression that Gandhi was concerned with was that of oppressive and/or corrupt governments and government officials.

With *satyagraha*, one was to fight an oppressor, not with the weapons of a soldier or warrior, but with the tools of *ahimsa*. Furthermore, a *satyagrahi* was not to harbor anger, let

⁴³ Hope Fitz, "Gandhi's Ethical/Religious Studies, *The Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. XXVII, Spring-Autumn, Nos. 1 and 2, Panjabi University, Patiala, India, 1995. In this article, I explain that Gandhi did not try to resolve this seeming inconsistency, but it was done by a great Indian thinker called Sri Aurobindo. The resolution of the problem is reminiscent of Heraclitus' "ground" that embraces opposites. What is key for our consideration is that Gandhi took Truth to be not only the ultimate state of reality but the love that was part of that state.

⁴⁴ Raghavan Iyer, Chapter 10, "Satyagraha."

along hatred, against the oppressor. Can you imagine walking unarmed, in this frame of mind, towards your adversaries in order to change an unjust or oppressive law, as Gandhi did with his *satyagrahis* (and as Martin Luther King Jr. did in the Civil Rights marches after he and his wife Coretta King had studied Gandhi's *satyagraha* in India)? This takes courage, great courage. Gandhi had it. He never backed down from a confrontation that he thought was necessary. Also, he was a great strategist who seemed to know what would work. Furthermore, his patience is renowned. He would sit in jail or go back to his *ashram* and bide his time until the opportunity arose for him to confront his adversaries. Note, however, that he was never condescending to any person. He truly believed that it was the act that must be fought not the person. He wanted his *satyagrahis*

to convert others to *ahimsa*. He thought that this could be done by shame them for the harm that they had inflicted on others.

In South Africa, when Gandhi first developed *satyagraha*, he held that the method of resistance would be non-cooperation. One would simply not go along with an unjust law or what corrupt government officials decreed. He was also employing civil disobedience, but at this time, he called this a right, not a duty. Later in his career, he changed his mind and civil disobedience as well as non-cooperation were taken to be duties.⁴⁴ However, he thought that one should only resort to civil disobedience when all other possible actions had been exhausted.

Based upon what I have said so far about *satyagraha* and *satyagrahis*, one might think that Gandhi was a pacifist as was his friend Tolstoy. Such is not the case. He condoned violence in certain circumstances. He even said that though he abhorred violence, sometimes it was the lesser of two evils.⁴⁵ The form of violence which he condoned was defense. This defense could be of oneself,⁴⁶ one's loved ones, other

⁴⁵ Ibid. 201.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ The Harijan Weekly Paper, October 1938, Navajivan, as quoted by Raghavan Iyer in his Book, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*. When speaking about nations, Gandhi said: "Europe has sold her soul for the sake of seven day's early existence. The peace Europe gained At Munich is a triumph of violence; it is also its defeat. If England and France were sure of victory, they should certainly have fulfilled their duty of saving Czechoslovakia or of dying with it. But they Quailed before the combined violence of Germany and Italy." Obvious Gandhi was not aware that Chamberlain agreed to an appeasement with Germany because he knew that England had not the Military might to take on Germany at that time. Neither did France. Even the United States, which Had been weakened by the Depression, did not have the military might or even the desire to fight Germany at that time.

persons or even, at times, one's nation.⁴⁷ However, one only resorted to violence if all efforts to resolve a conflict peacefully had been exhausted and a life or lives were threatened.

For years, it seemed to me that there was an inconsistency in Gandhi's writings concerning violent actions. On the one hand, acts of violence were condoned in cases of defense under the conditions described above. However, on the other hand, *satyagrahis* were not to resort to violence even when their lives were threatened. Then, finally, last summer, when I was lecturing on Gandhi and *ahimsa* in India,⁴⁸ I suddenly realized what I think was Gandhi's position that resolves the apparent inconsistency. Here is what I think that he held regarding this matter: In general, a person can, as a last resort, use violence in defense. However, *satyagrahis* are like soldiers or fighters on a mission. They comprise a Truth Force against oppression. As fighters on duty, they must not resort to violence, even in self-defense, because when one is engaged in a fight against corruption or oppression, one must not resort to *himsa*, i.e., harm, as *ahimsa* is the basis, means and method of that Truth Force.

I believe that Gandhi's use of *ahimsa* as the goal, major virtue and the basis of *satyagraha*, is what is needed in today's world to develop people of virtuous or moral character:

1. As a goal, people who developed *ahimsa*, or saw that it is essential for peace and individual well being, would want to live virtuous lives, as did Aristotle's citizens of the *Polis*.
2. As a basic virtue, if it were taught to and practiced by members of a society and supported by a number of the people, there would be citizens of virtuous character who would be trustworthy. They, in turn, would work to produce trustworthy government officials.
3. As the foundation of *satyagraha*, there would be a force of *satyagrahis* that could "fight" against oppressors in the form of corrupt or unjust officials. Of course, as we have seen, how one "fights" is the key. In an article published in the "Times of India, August 7, 2006, I wrote that most modern-day *satyagrahis*, and I consider myself to be one, have many options which were not available to Gandhi. Especially in democratic societies, we can become informed, speak our minds, vote to

⁴⁸ This past summer, I gave eith lectures on my this subject in three Inian cities, namely, Delhi, ahmedabad and Mumbai (Bombay). This subject is the theme of my book, in progress, *Ahimsa: a Path to Peace*. The talks were organized and scheduled by Mr. R. P. Jain, one of the owners and publishers of Motilal Banarsidass Publishing. One of the places where I spoke was the International Centre of Gandhian Studies and Research. This is the place where Gandhi was shot. Gandhi's granddaughter, Mrs. Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee, was one of the commentators on my paper.

⁴⁹ I discuss this at length in the book that I am writing, *Ahimsa: a Path to Peace*.

elect trustworthy officials and, though it is difficult and takes time, remove from office those who are corrupt or untrustworthy. The internet and other forms of mass communication offer us so many opportunities that were not available in the past. Also, those of us who are teachers and/or writers can teach and write both about living with virtue and exposing and eliminating untrustworthy public officials. These opportunities, although probably not as effective as Aristotle's friendship, can help us to elect more trustworthy officials. However, again, let me state that, unless the majority of people in a society or community are virtuous, we will not have virtuous public officials. To a great extent, these officials mirror our best and worst traits. So, as Aristotle and Gandhi argued, in order to develop a virtuous or moral society, the citizens must be taught and practice shared virtues. Also, we need the support of a large contingent of the people.

As I stated earlier, I believe that if one would develop *ahimsa* as a *weltanschauung*, or world view, and as an attitude towards all life, she or he would automatically act with Aristotle's virtues and also know which virtue to act upon, as well as when and where and how to act. I have also stated that unlike Aristotle's Virtue Theory which is dependent upon friendship, that confines it to small communities, *ahimsa*, in all its uses, could be taught and practiced within large nation states that have democratic governments which are based on natural as well as civil rights and considerable involvement of the citizenry in government. In fact, I have come to believe that if *ahimsa* were loosened from its Indic moorings, it could be taught to people around the world, especially children by *dedicated* teachers who understand *ahimsa*. It would not be imposed, but only offered to people from different traditions, cultures, societies or communities. How it would be employed would depend upon the people to whom it was offered.⁴⁹

Reference List

Books:

1. Aristotle: *The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. by J.A.K. Thomson, New York, Revised with Notes and Appendices by Hugh Tredennick, Introduction and bibliography by Jonathan Barnes, Penquin Books, revised edition, 1976.
2. Ghosh, Inda Mala: *Ahimsa: Buddhist and Gandhian*. Delhi India, Published by Indian Bibliography Bureau and Co-Publisher, Balji Enterprises, c. 1980.
3. Gandhi, Mahatma: *Truth As God*, Compiled by P. K. Prabhu, Ahmedabad, India, Navjivan Publishing House, c. 1955.
4. Iyer, Raghavan: *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, New York, Concord Grove Press, c. 1983.

Forum on Public Policy

5. MacIntyre, Alisdair: *After Virtue*, London, N W, Gerald Duckworth + Co. Ltd., The Old Piano Factory, 43 Gloucester Crescent, 1981.
6. _____: *Jaina Philosophy and Religion*, tr. by Nagin J. Shaw, Delhi, India, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, c. 1998.

Articles:

1. Fitz, Hope: “Comparative Philosophy: Theory and Praxis” a Key-Note Address at the National Student Conference, State University of New York, April 8 – 12, 2006. (This paper is to be included in a book, presently in the process of publication, that will include the best papers of the students.)
2. Fitz, Hope: “Gandhi’s Ethical/Religious Studies,” published in *The Journal of Religious Studies*, Volume XXVII, Spring-Autumn, Nos. 1 and 2, Panjabi University, Patiala, India, 1995.
3. Fitz, Hope and Vasilopoulos, Christopher: “Conditions for Individual Freedom as Applied to the European Union,” published in the book of essays on *Contemporary Philosophy, Humanity at the Turning Point*. Edited by the late Sonja Servomaa, published by Ravall Institutue Publications 23, Helsinki Finland.
4. Fitz, Hope and Jewett, Margaret: “The Integral Nature of the Categorical Imperative.,” *The Journal of Religious Studies*, Volume XXXV, Nos 1 & #, Panjabi University, Patiala, India, 1996.

Dictionaries:

1. *The American Heritage Dictionary*, International Edition, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., c 1979.

Published by the Forum on Public Policy

Copyright © The Forum on Public Policy. All Rights Reserved. 2006.