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Gandhi's Devotional Political Thought  
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The political thought of Mohandas K. Gandhi increasingly has been used as a paradigmatic example of hybrid political thought that developed out of a cross-cultural dialogue of Eastern and Western influences. With a novel unpacking of this hybridity, this article focuses on the conceptual influences that Gandhi explicitly stressed in his autobiography and other writings, particularly the works of Leo Tolstoy and the Bhagavad Gītā. This new tracing of influence in the development of Gandhi's thought alters the substantive thrust of Gandhi's thought away from more familiar quasi-liberal interpretations and toward a far more substantive bhakti or devotional understanding of politics. The analysis reveals a conception of politics that is not pragmatic in its use of non-violence, but instead points to a devotional focus on cultivating the self (ātmam), ultimately dissolving the public/private distinction on which many readings of Gandhi's thought depend.

The Historical Significance and Contemporary Relevance of the Four-Seven Debate  
Philip J. Ivanhoe  

This essay concerns some of the ways that the Four-Seven Debate, as represented by the extensive and systematic exchanges between Yi Hwang 李滉 (Toegye 退溪) (1501-1570) and Gi Dae-seung 奇大升 (Gobong 高峰) (1527-1572) and further developed in the correspondence between Seong Hon 成渓 (Ugye 牛渓) (1535-1598) and Yi I 李珥 (Yulgok 禹谷) (1536-1584), has been and remains philosophically significant for people today. It first attempts to describe why those involved in the Four-Seven Debate took it so seriously and were inspired to produce such a remarkable legacy. It then endeavors to show how the debate relates to issues that have been explored by important thinkers within the Western philosophical tradition and how these remain problems for contemporary moral metaphysics and moral psychology.

Though He Is One, He Bears All Those Diverse Names: A Comparative Analysis of Jayanta Bhaṭṭa's Argument for Toleration  
David Slakter  

This essay examines Jayanta Bhaṭṭa's argument for toleration in his play, the Āgamaṇadāmbara, and proposes that it is an argument with contemporary relevance. The merits and relevance of Jayanta's argument are demonstrated by comparison with arguments for toleration given by John Locke and Pierre Bayle. The aim of such a comparison is twofold. First is to show that Jayanta,
Major interpretations of Gandhi’s philosophical and political thought claim that his conceptual framework developed through a dialogue between Hindu traditions and Western political institutions, resulting in a distinctly hybrid framework. While this idea of Gandhi as a hybrid thinker is promising, an exegetical analysis of his thought reveals that his conceptual framework did not arise from pragmatic political interactions with Western-style institutions, but rather from a serious engagement with Western and Hindu religious thought. While many acknowledge the hybrid aspect of Gandhi’s thought, no comprehensive attempt has been made to unpack this hybridity in a systematic fashion. This article thoroughly investigates his hybridity to uncover Gandhi’s coherent system of thought, which is best understood as bhakti or devotional.

Our unpacking of the development of Gandhi’s political thought begins with Leo Tolstoy’s peculiar Christianity, requiring an examination of the biographical and conceptual evidence of Tolstoy’s powerful influence on Gandhi, especially on the latter’s understandings of truth and ahimsa (non-violence). Following our analysis of Tolstoy, we explore the Hindu influences on Gandhi. While Tolstoy’s thought heavily influences Gandhi’s approach to and interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita, Gandhi creatively fuses these influences with concepts found in the Gita, which results in more sophisticated hybrid conceptions of the atman (self), satyagraha (non-violent resistance), swaraj (self-rule), and Ramarajya (the kingdom of God). These novel conceptualizations alter the substantive thrust of Gandhi’s thought away from more familiar quasi-liberal formulations and toward a bhakti or devotional conception of politics.

Gandhi: An Exemplary Case of Hybridity

A brief survey of notable positions regarding the cultural orientation of Gandhi’s political thought can help to situate how Gandhi’s political thought has been misread. Existing positions can be parsed into three general categories: the first reads him predominantly as a Western thinker, the second as an Indian-Hindu thinker, and
the third as a cross-culturally hybrid thinker. A. L. Herman places Gandhi in the first category, arguing that he was a fundamentally non-Indian-Hindu thinker whose philosophy of *satyagraha* was fundamentally Western in origin and drawn entirely from his reading of Henry David Thoreau’s *Civil Disobedience* and Leo Tolstoy’s *The Kingdom of God Is within You.* In contrast, A. L. Basham argues that Gandhi’s political thought is fully grounded in Hindu traditions: “the fundamental concept of Gandhi’s philosophy [i.e., satya, or truth] owes nothing to Western sources.” Both of these readings are deeply flawed. A more accurate reading of Gandhi is found in a third position, which emphasizes cross-cultural aspects of his political thought. Anthony Parel and Bhikhu Parekh are well-known proponents of this position. On the one hand, Parekh reads Gandhi as a hybrid political thinker, arguing that “Gandhi’s political theory cuts across several moral, religious and philosophical traditions and rests on an unusually broad philosophical foundation, showing . . . the rich harvest that can be garnered from . . . cross-cultural dialogue.” Parekh’s interpretation foreshadows ours by explaining that Gandhi’s “biculturally grounded and bilingually articulated political theory shows one way in which a global political theory required by the increasingly interdependent world might be constructed.” On the other hand, Parekh claims that Gandhi “was one of the first non-Western thinkers of the modern age to develop a political theory grounded in the unique experiences and articulated in terms of the indigenous philosophical vocabulary of his country.” While this interpretation may appear compelling at the outset, one could ask whether Parekh can have it both ways. Does developing a political theory “grounded in . . . unique experiences” that uses the “indigenous philosophical vocabulary” of one’s country also mean that one is employing or relying upon indigenous philosophical categories and concepts? Are we talking about mere vocabulary, or conceptual bedrock? Parekh does not appear to provide a clear answer to this question. We argue that Gandhi’s cross-culturally hybrid thought is deeply novel in its fusion of concepts from multiple traditions. It therefore cannot be fully appreciated so long as one remains within the scope of Parekh’s interpretation.

Similarly, Anthony Parel provides two useful, though flawed, analytic frameworks with which to approach Gandhi’s political thought. Parel sets the stage for his first frame in this way: “[the] Indian theory of the purushartha (the aims of life) . . . opens the vast storehouse of Gandhian ideas [and] enables us to enter a truly Indian intellectual edifice.” This analytic frame is the Indian theory of the *purushārtha*, also known as the four overarching goals of human life. Building upon K. J. Shah, Parel argues that Gandhi’s political thought reconstituted and clarified the mutually harmonious relationship between the *purushārtha*, and did so in an innovative fashion. In subsequent work Parel better places Gandhi in the literature by situating Gandhi’s canonical updates within the broader historical framework of ancient Indian political thought. Accordingly, Parel argues that an older canon of Indian political thought can be identified at least since the time of Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* (fourth century B.C.E. to fourth century C.E.) and that Gandhi “updated [this] old Indian canon and made the innovated version suitable for a recognizably Indian way of thinking about modern politics.”
More recently, he has invoked a second frame distinguishing between “Indian political thought and political thought in India.” In this frame he argues that two distinct genres of political thought emerged in India between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, each with its own intellectual framework attended by its characteristic ideas and assumptions “about reality, the cosmos, and the place that humans occupy in it.” The first genre, which he calls “political thought in India,” entails an entirely Western intellectual framework that had been adopted by two key groups: radical Indian nationalists and Indian Marxists and neo-Marxists. The second genre, which he calls “Indian political thought,” entails a distinctly Indian intellectual framework—albeit one that was updated by thinkers such as Gandhi. Thus, Parel argues, Gandhi’s thought developed primarily through a dialogue between particular Indian traditions and contemporary Western-style thinkers in India.

Although Gandhi’s hybridity is widely acknowledged, few have examined this relationship in significant depth. For example, Satish Sharma undertakes an examination of Leo Tolstoy as one of Gandhi’s teachers, but concludes merely that “Tolstoy’s Kingdom and thought had great impact on Gandhi,” without explaining the precise nature of this impact. Martin Green also examines similarities and influences between Tolstoy and Gandhi, but limits himself to biographical investigations focused primarily on the historical context surrounding the two, without a conceptual analysis of Gandhi’s central political ideas. Thus, we are left with the question about the exact nature and depth of this “impact” on central Gandhian concepts.

**Tolstoy’s Influence on Gandhi**

Gandhi’s biography provides strong reasons for suggesting a minimal significance of Hindu traditions for Gandhi’s early political and religious thought. As a youth, he recalls readings of the Bhagavad Gītā as “uninspiring,” with his first serious exposure to the Gītā in English translation during his second year in England, around 1890. He did not make it a subject of daily study for some time after that, and suggested his own understanding of Sanskrit was insufficient to read it in the original. Gandhi made no real attempt to rectify this lack of knowledge over the next decade, recalling in 1902 that his “Samskrit study was not much to speak of, and that... [his]... acquaintance with the translations [of the Gītā] was of the slightest.” It was not until 1918, after a near-death experience, that Gandhi begins to “devote all... waking hours to listening to the Gītā.” His first serious lectures on the Gītā did not appear until 1920.

Instead, Gandhi’s first serious intellectual engagement involved the non-fiction essays of Tolstoy prior to his studies of the Gītā. During his time in England from 1888–1891, three decades prior to his Gītā lectures, a number of Christians attempted to convert Gandhi. Gandhi was presented with a copy of Tolstoy’s *The Kingdom of God Is within You*, which “overwhelmed” him. Over the following years, he went on to make “an intensive study of Tolstoy’s books,” which included
The Gospels in Brief and What to Do? and “other books,” likely including What I Believe, the precursor to The Kingdom of God. Gandhi himself would repeatedly claim that these readings made a “deep” and “abiding” impression on him, so much so that he would consistently include Tolstoy among the moderns who “left a deep impression on . . . [his] . . . life and captivated” him. Gandhi’s engagement with Tolstoy did not stop with his books, as the two exchanged a number of letters late in Tolstoy’s life. Gandhi initiated these letters in an attempt to gain permission to reprint Tolstoy’s Letter to a Hindu, with some modifications, though Tolstoy himself resisted these changes.

Of the various concepts that Gandhi inherits from Tolstoy, truth is the most significant. Contrary to Basham (and to a lesser extent Parekh and Parel), Gandhi did not inherit his early conceptual framework from Hindu traditions, especially when it comes to his understanding of truth. In both What I Believe and the Kingdom of God Tolstoy identifies heavily with the concept of truth that Gandhi mirrors. While Tolstoy identifies Christianity as the religion of truth, it is important to note that this does not mean that he believes Christians are correct in their beliefs. Rather, the practice of Christianity, on Tolstoy’s account, is “the recognition of truth and following it, in a greater and greater attainment of truth.” Truth is not understood as being discovered or revealed through reason or the proper divine text, but instead, Tolstoy asserts, truth is experienced. By experiencing a reduction in suffering in particular, Tolstoy believes an individual will experience the truth of the doctrine. To put this another way, if following a doctrine reduces suffering, then the doctrine must be true. The only way to know the truth of a doctrine is through experimentation and experience, not through abstract rational proofs.

Tolstoy does not limit this understanding to Christianity and argues that Hinduism also has true elements to it. Tolstoy places this line from Kṛṣṇa early on in the Letter: “Whenever thou feelest that thy feet are becoming entangled in the interlaced roots of life, know that thou has strayed from the path to which I beckon thee: for I have placed thee in broad, smooth paths, which are strewn with flowers. I have put a light before thee, which thou canst follow and thus run without stumbling.” With this Tolstoy suggests that the path toward truth is one that ought to be easy to walk, even if finding the path itself may be exceptionally difficult. This is not a new idea in Tolstoy’s thought and can be seen in What I Believe, where Tolstoy suggests that Christ has provided a view of the path that will lead away from misery, “even in the midst of those who do not” follow that same path. Through experiencing a reduction in suffering by following true doctrine, whether it be Christian, Hindu, or otherwise, Tolstoy believes an individual will experience the truth of the doctrine. Tolstoy’s Kṛṣṇa, almost identical to Tolstoy’s Christ, suggests that if life becomes such that one’s feet become metaphorically entangled and make it harder to live, then one knows one is headed down the wrong path. This is known because it is experienced.

Gandhi largely accepts this formulation of truth from Tolstoy. In subtitling his autobiography The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Gandhi indicates he understands truth as attained through experimentation and not through rational thought or divine revelation. For Gandhi, truth “is the sovereign principle, which includes nu-
erous other principles,” including “non-violence, celibacy and other principles of conduct.”35 Furthermore, “truth is not only truthfulness in word, but truthfulness in thought also, and not only the relative truth of our conception, but the Absolute Truth, the Eternal Principle, that is God.”36 Quite similar to Tolstoy, Gandhi remarks, “In the march towards Truth, anger, selfishness, hatred, etc., naturally give way, for otherwise Truth would be impossible to attain,”37 indicating that the path of truth is one that leads away from suffering generally. This Tolstoyan conception of truth takes center stage for Gandhi’s thought insofar as it provides the foundation for his formulation of ahimsā and, ultimately, for God.

Ahimsā, which is usually translated as universal non-violence, including non-violence to animals, is intimately connected to Gandhi’s Tolstoyan use of the concept of truth. For Gandhi, the way to attain—and experience—truth is through ahimsā. In his autobiography he remarks, “the only means for the realization of Truth is Ahimsa,”38 but notes that it “seems to me that I understand the ideal of truth better than that of Ahimsa, and my experience tells me that, if I let go my hold of truth, I shall never be able to solve the riddle of Ahimsa.”39 Paradoxically, ahimsā leads Gandhi to the experience of truth, but truth seems necessary to make sense of ahimsā. This is, at the very least, as non-rational (or even anti-rational) as Tolstoy’s own accounts of truth.

For Tolstoy, the experienced truth of Christ and Kṛṣṇa is that God is love. Although he associates this with the God discussed by Christ, this God should not be mistaken as the God of the Old Testament. He remarks, “People who believe in a wicked and senseless God—who has cursed the human race and devoted his own Son to sacrifice, and a part of mankind to eternal torment—cannot believe in the God of love.”40 In saying this, Tolstoy is suggesting that the God of the Old Testament is not the God that Christ is discussing.41 For Tolstoy, this means that any religious or philosophical thinker who is discussing love, or gods associated with love, can be understood as talking about the true God. This should not be understood as an inherently Christian God.

Likewise for Gandhi, God is truth, and truth is intimately tied to universal love. In his autobiography he states: “My uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God than Truth.”42 He further explains: “To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest creation as oneself.”43 There is a strong reason to believe that Gandhi found the linkage between truth, God, and love in Tolstoy when he remarks, “I made too an intensive study of Tolstoy’s books. The Gospels in Brief, What to Do? and other books made a deep impression on me. I began to realize more and more the infinite possibilities of universal love.”44 As late as 1928, Gandhi continued to understand these terms as deeply linked, remarking, “To follow truth, the only right path in this world is that of non-violence. Non-violence means an ocean of love.”45

This conception of truth is so central to Gandhi’s thought that he derives the Gujarati word for his non-violent movement, satyagraha, from the word sadagāraha, which Gandhi breaks down as sat = truth plus agraha = firmness.46 The term was the result of a contest that Gandhi ran through Indian Opinion in order to provide a more
appropriate Indian word for passive resistance. Here we see, in explicit contrast to Basham,\textsuperscript{47} that Gandhi’s “truth” was not derived from a reading of Hindu traditions. Prior to the contest, Gandhi primarily used the English phrase “passive resistance,” which he eventually viewed to be “too narrowly construed.”\textsuperscript{48} Therefore, truth, in a Tolstoyan understanding, takes center stage in his political thought and action. Gandhi’s original formulation of satyāgraha does not originate from a Hindu tradition or concept at all, but rather from Tolstoy’s reading of Christ. Gandhi goes so far as to say that the Hindu conception of dharma is insufficient when compared to a Tolstoyan conception of love. In 1928 he explains: “Such non-violence is not limited to refraining from killing disabled creatures. It may be dharma not to kill them, but love goes infinitely further than that.”\textsuperscript{49}

However, as we shall see below, one cannot simply reduce Gandhi to a restatement of Tolstoy. Extensive portions of Gandhi’s thought cannot be traced back to Tolstoy but instead to an entirely different tradition, best associated with Gandhi’s studies of the Gītā. While satyāgraha is heavily (though not exclusively) indebted to Tolstoy’s thought, it is more difficult to locate the origin of some of Gandhi’s other major concepts within Western traditions, especially when we begin to talk of concepts such as ātman, swarāj, and Ramarajya. Ultimately, Gandhi’s Tolstoyan influences affect his reading of the Gītā, and his reading of the Gītā refines and modifies his Tolstoyan concepts.

\textit{Hindu Influences on Gandhi and Bhakti Political Philosophy}

Beginning in the mid-1920s Gandhi shows increasing interest in Hindu ideas and texts, and in particular the Bhagavad Gītā.\textsuperscript{50} This is apparent not only in Gandhi’s increasingly detailed comments on the Gītā in \textit{The Story of My Experiments with Truth} and as editor of journals such as Navajivan,\textsuperscript{51} but especially in his lectures on the Gītā given at the Satyagraha Ashram, Ahmedabad (India), in 1926. Between February and November of 1926, Gandhi withdrew from mass political activity and translated the Gītā from Sanskrit into his native Gujarati.\textsuperscript{52} While his orientation to the Gītā by this point in his life would be prefigured in many ways by his Tolstoyan influences, distinct Hindu ideas also begin to emerge in Gandhi’s thought. For example, he was influenced by Gokhale, Rajchandra Ravjibhai Mehta, and the Gītā’s emphasis on dharma (law, duty), and his position bears philosophical similarities to Rāmānuja’s (ca. 1017–1137) Viṣiṣṭādvaita Vedānta (qualified nondualist) position.\textsuperscript{53}

Most pertinent to our argument here, Gandhi’s interpretation of the Gītā shows distinct similarities to Rāmānuja’s Viṣiṣṭādvaita philosophical interpretation insofar as it emphasizes the importance of the category of devotion (bhakti) in relation to God (Kṛṣṇa). Both Rāmānuja and Gandhi understand the Gītā to privilege devotion to God as the final emancipatory path to mokṣa, or liberation. In addition, Gandhi’s interpretation coheres with both Śaṅkara’s (eighth–ninth century C.E.) and Rāmānuja’s insofar as he understands an empirical plurality of transmigrating selves (ātma).\textsuperscript{54} We make these points to show that Gandhi’s interpretation of the Gītā, while unique in some respects, shows important similarities with those of traditional Hindu exe-
getes. In particular, Gandhi’s understanding of the self (atman) and bhakti (devotion) were crucial in the development of his political thought.

The Self

The metaphysics of the self in the Gītā will help us clarify Gandhi’s own understanding of this concept. The Gītā poses a distinction between the unmanifest and transcendent absolute (brahman) and primal matter or material nature (prakṛti). According to the evolutes or modes of prakṛti, the atman must rule or have control over the buddhi (higher mind, intellect), which must then rule over the lower faculties such as the mind (manas) and sense faculties (indriyas) such as sight, hearing, and touch. The Gītā explains: “They say that the senses (indriya) are higher. The mind (manas) is higher than the senses. While the intellect (buddhi) is higher than the mind, he (the dehin, atman, soul or self) is higher than the intellect.”55 One thus finds a basic hierarchical relationship between the different aspects of the self, whereby the atman should rule over the buddhi, manas, and indriyas. These concepts help elucidate the basic Hindu metaphysical framework that influences Gandhi’s religious thought, especially starting in the mid-1920s.

When examined in more detail, however, Gandhi poses a rather complex but coherent understanding of the individual self (atman) in his writings, which he variously referred to as heart, soul, or spirit. According to Gandhi the atman is unborn, indestructible, and, most importantly, distinct yet connected to other beings within the broader world.56 Gandhi explains: “The world is not separate from us or we from the world. All are connected with one another in their inmost essence.”57 The atman’s compassionate and non-violent nature would partly stem from this underlying sense of connectedness.58 At its most fundamental level, the soul is a metaphysical or spiritual entity and transcends the body.59 In contrast to the atman, the jīva is merely a deficient mode of the soul whereby individual creatures only see themselves as separate from other creatures and not interconnected through the universal soul, or God.60 This point then raises Gandhi’s distinction between a universal and individualized human atman.61 The latter, he explains, transmigrates after death and does not die with the physical body’s death.62 Nevertheless, it is generally asleep in us and needs to be reawakened.63 When awakened, it is powerful and we have a responsibility to realize and cultivate its power.64

An individualized atman thus dwells in each one of us, and knowledge of God or truth can only be attained by better understanding and gaining access to our atman. In turn, this is only possible through faith or devotion, which then leads to firsthand experience of our atman and its relationship to the whole, in a way that is reminiscent of Tolstoy’s experience of truth.65 Accordingly, each of us also possesses a svadharma (one’s own duty), which we are responsible for identifying and adhering to in a devoted fashion.66 While these characteristics of the atman are all spiritual in nature, Gandhi also explains that to access and realize the atman’s reality and power, we must “forget the body” and “renounce the desire for hoarding.”67 This is because the desire for material objects and attaching ourselves to the fruit of our actions pushes us to neglect the underlying reality that the body is not the ultimate
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“doer” of the actions. Nevertheless, Gandhi reminds us that the body does have great value because it is the house of the ātman and ultimately of God: “And thus, for the purity of the ātman, purity of the body is also essential [because] ‘A pure ātman can dwell only in a pure body.’" Ultimately, the ātman serves as the underlying agent and basis for individual agency on both a personal and political level: “I do not deliver speeches merely for the pleasure of it. I do what the ātman bids me to do.”

We can now examine how this understanding of the self relates to Rāmānuja’s Viśiṣṭādvaita conception of the self, including ideas found in the Brahmāsūtra of Bādarāyana. Gandhi believes that the self is intimately connected to God and God’s creative capacity: “I believe God to be creative as well as non-creative. This too is the result of my acceptance of the doctrine of the manyness of reality. From the platform of the Jains I prove the non-creative aspect of God, and from that of Ramanuja the creative aspect.” Gandhi thus aligns himself with Rāmānuja, who allows for the reality of individual selves and maintains that these selves are individualized, creative manifestations, modes, or aspects of God—or of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma, if we invoke Gandhi’s Hindu-devotional side. As Richard King explains, for Rāmānuja individual selves are real, not illusory, modes (prakāra) of brahman and “are effected by their own actions, intentions and desires and are reincarnated accordingly.”

As explained above, Gandhi posits both a universal soul (God) and individualized human souls (ātman). In a similar fashion, Rāmānuja explains that brahman—which is iśvara, Lord, and the creator—is the one supreme self, or paramātman. This one supreme, pure self (for it is untainted by karma and impurity) transforms itself into individual selves, or jīvātman, through the creative process of māyā. Therefore, the creator is connected to all its creations or manifestations, and vice versa, which is the type of reciprocal connectedness between God, human beings, and all living beings that Gandhi defends. As Surendranath Dasgupta states: “So the one Brahman has transformed himself into the world, and the many souls, being particular states of Him, are at once one with Him and yet have a real existence as His parts or states.” Gandhi invokes this sort of creative transformation process when he claims that God or brahman is the ultimate “doer” of things. However, this conception of God and the individual self does not entail a lack of individual agency. Gandhi maintains that we can speak of “our” ātman and svadharma, and thus individual duties or responsibilities to cultivate our true “soul-power.” This position will have significant political implications.

In addition, the Brahmāsūtra puts forth the doctrine of the absolute as “difference-cum-non-difference,” or bhedābheda-vāda, which explains the relationship between an individual self (ātman) and the absolute (brahman). Accordingly, each ātman is part (aṃśa) of brahman, which is the ātman’s creative cause. As the Brahmāsūtra explains, a distinction (bheda) thus remains between the plurality of individual ātman and the unmanifest absolute (brahman). This understanding resembles Gandhi’s “drop in the ocean” metaphor insofar as one can distinguish the individual parts (drops of water) once they have manifestly emerged from an absolute source (the ocean) that possesses no such manifest distinctions. As Gandhi suggests, the ocean (brahman) cannot exist in an individualized, manifest form except
through the drops of water (ātmans). Their existence is fundamentally co-dependent. This “drop/ocean” conception thus resembles the doctrine found in the Brahmasūtra, whereby brahman (or God) is an essentially part-less whole, though not manifestly part-less, and dwells in each individual self as a sort of unaffected “cosmic soul.” Individual manifest selves or ātmans, on the other hand, are affected by karma and impurities, and thus responsible for working out their own “karmic residue.” Here one can envision an individual drop of water working its way through the water cycle: first becoming manifest through evaporation, then falling as rain, and subsequently responsible for finding its way through the dirt and traveling back to the ocean by way of muddy streams and rivers. As King explains about Rāmānuja’s position on the Brahmasūtra, “The apparent imperfections and injustices (vaiṣāmya) of the world . . . are not attributable to brahman since they are dependent upon the actions (prayatna) of individual selves.” Therefore, these individual selves are not absolutely identical with brahman and are responsible for their own actions and svadharma—we might say “paths back to the ocean.”

While Gandhi has his advaita moments in his writings and clearly expresses belief in some sort of underlying oneness or nondualism, he ultimately falls closer to the qualified nondualist position of Rāmānuja, and thus on the Viśiṣṭādvaita side of the Vedānta spectrum. In addition, just as Rāmānuja interprets the Lord in the Brahmasūtra as saṅgaṇa brahman, or brahman endowed with personal qualities and attributes, Gandhi’s conception of God is more personal and qualified in nature—one thinks of his constant references to Kṛṣṇa in the Gītā and Rāma in the Rāmāyaṇa. This diverges from the nondualist (advaita) idea that individual selves are ultimately non-different from brahman. Thus, Gandhi does not posit absolute metaphysical unity and identity between individual ātmans and brahman, or God.

Devotion
Having clarified Gandhi’s conception of the self and individual agency, its relation to God, and its similarity to Rāmānuja’s Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta position, we can now examine the concept of bhakti, or devotion. The concept of devotion, or faith, also played a significant role in the development of Gandhi’s normative political thought. Beginning with his reading of the Gītā, Gandhi believes the most important path leading to mokṣa (liberation) from saṃsāra (the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth) is bhakti-yoga, or the path of devotion to god, which entails engaging in devotional practices and honoring God (or Kṛṣṇa, in the Gītā’s case). Again, Gandhi concurs with Rāmānuja that the paths of knowledge (jñānayoga) and action (karmayoga) find fulfillment in the path of devotion to the Lord (bhaktiyoga) as the best means of achieving liberation (mokṣa), as we see in the Gītā. In 1925, Gandhi explains: “If I had to talk about mokṣa all the time we should spend our time in bhakti. Without bhakti there can be no deliverance. Only he, therefore, wins deliverance who is devoted to duty and fills his heart with love of God.” Gandhi also distinguishes between faith and reason or logic, claiming that each belongs to a different sphere and that faith alone “helps us to cultivate inner knowledge, self-knowledge, and thus leads to inner purity.” He clearly privileges the “inner world,” where faith
and devotion provide the correct path to understanding and purifying that world. This is the world of the \textit{ātman}, which then points toward and allows us to glimpse God and truth. Here Gandhi claims that “the pursuit of Truth is true \textit{bhakti}, devotion. . . . It is the path that leads to God.”\textsuperscript{87}

God and truth, much as for Tolstoy, are intimately connected for Gandhi: “Hence we know God as \textit{Sat-chit-ananda}, one who combines in Himself Truth, knowledge and bliss. Devotion to this Truth is the sole justification for our existence. All our activities should be centered in truth.”\textsuperscript{88} Devotion thus leads to the very center of what is most important in Gandhi’s thought: the soul, truth, and God. Theistic Hinduism and religion are fundamentally intertwined with Gandhi’s political activism, as he further explains: “[H]e alone can offer \textit{satyagraha} who has true faith in religion. . . . But anyone who has true religion and faith in him can offer \textit{satyagraha}.”\textsuperscript{89} To be a \textit{satyagrahi} one must first pursue truth and have faith in truth

Within this inner world whose sole inroad is faith and devotion Gandhi also posits a duality between good and evil, and this is where his devotion to Rāma clearly surfaces. Gandhi associates goodness, truth, and sovereignty in the heart with Rāma, whom he claims is always battling with Rāvaṇa:

Rāma . . . dwells in our heart and is its sovereign master. The Rāma dwelling within us is continuously waging war against the Rāvaṇa. Rāvaṇa too is the terrible form given to the base desires which dwell within us. Rāma is the very embodiment of compassion. . . . Rāma the eternal is a form of \textit{Brahman}, the image of truth and non-violence.\textsuperscript{91}

Elsewhere Gandhi also equates Truth to God, \textit{brahman}, and Rāma.\textsuperscript{92} In this statement above we can glean a few important points. First, the most important action takes place in the heart or inner world, which Gandhi is most concerned about, even when it comes to politics. The proper “soul-order” must precede “state-order” for Gandhi, as the state of our politics will ultimately reflect the state and order of our souls. Second, Rāma is associated with hierarchical sovereignty while Rāvaṇa is associated with “base desires,” and this hierarchical relationship will be intimately tied to his understanding of ruling. Third, we see further evidence of Tolstoy’s influence regarding the importance of truth, love, and compassion. Finally, we can identify another central facet of Gandhi’s devotional thought: embodiment.

The claim that the eternal Rāma is a form or embodiment of \textit{brahman} exposes yet another similarity between Gandhi and Rāmaṇuja along theistic Hindu lines. In Vaiṣṇava theology, Lord Viṣṇu manifests himself in various \textit{avatāras}, or divine incarnations. Accordingly, the Supreme Self becomes embodied in its \textit{avatāras}, with Rāma and Kṛṣṇa being two of the most famous embodiments. As King points out, under the influence of Pañcarātra theology, one way in which Rāmaṇuja interprets the \textit{paramātman} (Supreme Self, or Lord) is by using an analogy of the “body-embodied relationship” (\textit{sarīra-śarīri-bhāva}).\textsuperscript{93} As Viṣṇu ensouls the embodied Rāma, so \textit{brahman} ensouls the various \textit{ātman}s, and individual \textit{ātman}s ensoul individual bodies. This coheres with Gandhi’s claim that Rāma is an embodied form of \textit{brahman}, with the latter being the creative wellspring of the individual \textit{ātman}s discussed above that serve as the basis for individual agency. This devotional-theological point also
coheres with the fact that Gandhi consistently mentions Rāma and Kṛṣṇa as important objects of devotion for himself and other Hindus in India.

Bhakti Political Philosophy
This analysis of Gandhi’s hybridity, along with his understanding of the self and devotion, leads us to a new understanding of his political thought along devotional lines and what we call a bhakti political philosophy. This philosophy contains three major conceptual components: universal equality, responsibility, and interconnectedness. All human beings are fundamentally equal predicated on a belief in ātman-equality. Individuals, being equal and distinct, are also responsible for acknowledging and working through their own paths (svadharma) toward liberation and salvation. That is, each of us is responsible for accepting who we are and who we have been (svadharma, karmic residue), ruling ourselves in the proper manner (ātman ruling over buddhi, manas, and indriyas), and ultimately comprehending our true relationship to God. As we saw above, this can only be fully achieved through devotion. Even though this responsibility presumes a rather robust degree of agency and individuality, Gandhi believes that all people are fundamentally connected with one another, other living beings, and the natural environment. As we also saw above, because the entire manifest world is a creation of God, we are connected to one another in being aspects of the same eternal, absolute source. Gandhi believes this interconnectedness should mitigate the violence we express toward one another, adding a deeply communal dimension to his political thought that helps prevent atomistic forms of individualism serving as a basis for politics. The self is thus deeply socio-relational in nature. Below we will show how these components inform and support his political concepts of satyagraha (non-violent resistance), swaraj (self-rule), and Ramarajya (lit., “the rule of Rāma”), his ideal government, the kingdom of God on earth.

The first political concept we will examine is satyagraha. To begin, we can see how Tolstoy’s ideas about love, non-violent resistance, and experimentation influenced Gandhi’s early understanding of the proper methods of political activism when he explains in 1909: "Tolstoy’s life has been devoted to replacing the method of violence for removing tyranny or securing reform by the method of non-resistance to evil. He would meet hatred expressed in violence by love expressed in self-suffering. He admits of no exception to whittle down this great and divine law of Love."94 Later, in 1919, Gandhi states: “Hence it is that I have considered satyagraha in social and political matters a new experiment. The late Tolstoy was the first to draw my attention, in a letter of his to me, to its being such.”95 Nonetheless, Gandhi increasingly finds support for such resistance and non-cooperation in the Gītā, creatively fusing his Tolstoyan influences with the Gītā’s teaching of renouncing the fruit of action. He states: “I have felt that in trying to enforce in one’s life the central teaching of the Gītā, one is bound to follow Truth and ahimsa [non-violence]. When there is no desire for fruit, there is no temptation for untruth or himsa [harm, violence].”96 According to Gandhi, the Gītā’s teaching of renouncing attachment to the fruit of one’s actions should prevent the temptation to commit harm. In the public sphere
this principle thus informs the practice of non-violent resistance that follows from one’s devotion and duty to pursue truth. But, one could ask, satyāgraha toward what end? Gandhi believed that non-violent resistance should be aimed in part at achieving political equality, which, for example, could be embodied in the new Indian constitution: “Of course, we should guarantee equality of treatment of all religions as also of the so-called untouchables.”

Here we observe the glaring importance of equality. Social status does not equate to one’s moral worth because the qualitative status of one’s soul is predicated on one’s devotion to God and truth, and human beings are equal in their capability of devotion and cultivating “soul power.” Devotion is equally available to everyone and at all times. Gandhi’s conception of equality also operates at the metaphysical basis of the ātman. All individual ātman or ātmanas are equal as ātman, so regardless of their various karmic residues, a more fundamental qualitative distinction does not exist among them. In contrast to readings that claim Gandhi’s is similar to a liberal conception, this understanding of the ātman supports a conception of political equality that does not rely on Western liberal notions of autonomy. To revisit briefly Gandhi’s “drop/ocean” metaphor, in a liberal conception it would be as if the individual drops emerged from nowhere and had no ocean to return to. His later understanding of equality can also be linked to his reading of the Gītā, whereby the nature of the ātman exposes an underlying metaphysical and ontological equality between all human beings and living things. Because Gandhi’s religious views condition his political views, a notion of equality grounded in the theology, metaphysics, and ontology of the Gītā supports his view that political activity should work toward realizing the truth of fundamental human equality. “Soul-force” then becomes the essence of non-violent resistance for Gandhi, whereby satyāgraha is a way of tapping into and activating “soul-force,” putting it to work in the political sphere. Gandhi explains: “It is because we are ignorant of our strength that other weaknesses grow. We doubt the very existence of the atman in us, have no faith in its powers.”

Discussing equality, non-violence, ātman, and their relation to politics, Gandhi states:

I am certain that non-violence is meant for all time. It is an attribute of the ātman and is, therefore, universal since the ātman belongs to all. Non-violence is meant for everybody and for all time and at all places. If it is really an attribute of the ātman it should be inherent in us. Nowadays it is said that truth cannot help in trade and politics. Then where can it be of help?

He thus explains how the ātman is an eternal force underlying all human beings and provides the ground for their being, which, in turn, supports both a fundamental equality among all human beings and points toward a better understanding of God. Therefore, while Tolstoy influenced Gandhi’s initial turn to non-violent resistance as a desirable form of political activity and his understanding of the important role that love plays in such activity, Gandhi fuses his early Tolstoyan influences with various Hindu ideas that he increasingly extracts from the Gītā beginning in the 1920s. This discussion now brings us to our second major political concept, swarāj.
Gandhi's conception of self-rule or autonomy, swaraj, indicates perhaps his greatest divergence from Tolstoyan moorings. While Tolstoy's Letter influences Gandhi's early understanding of swaraj, the primary conceptual underpinnings are located in the Gītā. Noting that Gandhi's allegorical reading of the Gītā takes the field of dharma (duty) and Kurukṣetra (the battlefield of the Gītā) to be the human heart, we can begin to see how Gandhi develops his conceptualization of swaraj. Gandhi believes that if one takes Kṛṣṇa's (or God's) teaching seriously and devotedly follows the path of duty that points toward truth, one will be able to rule effectively over oneself, and this will then render national politics and state-operated judicial mechanisms unnecessary. For Gandhi, the concept of self-rule means precisely that: self-rule. Gandhi explains in Hind Swaraj that "Real home-rule is self-rule or self-control," and "It is swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves. . . . But such swaraj has to be experienced, by each one for himself." If one recalls our earlier discussion of the metaphysics of the self, the Gītā provides a theological and ontological explanation of why one should rule over oneself before turning one's attention toward others. In 1931, after his increased engagement with the Gītā in the mid-1920s, he explains: "In such a state [i.e., of 'enlightened anarchy'] everyone is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour. In the ideal state therefore there is not political power because there is no state." To achieve this condition, a well-ordered soul (ātman) must be arranged in the appropriate hierarchical fashion.

It is partly because his understanding of ruling begins with the individual and only moves outward after self-rule is achieved that Gandhi's broader vision of self-rule, and a central aspect of his ideal political system, is the inverse of a top-heavy, state-centered system. A central aspect of Gandhi's ideal is that it is village-centered, with power most authoritative at the small community level where panchāyatras (small, popularly elected bodies in charge of running village affairs) had legislative, executive, and judicial power, and weakest at the federal level. Here we maintain that Gandhi's reading of the Gītā strongly influences his understanding of proper rule. His belief that political power should be dispersed and is hence strongest at the individual and communal levels emanates from his understanding of the ātman and individual self-rule. That is, proper rule is not to be found in some distant institution or in the hands of only a few people, but rather in the closest "institution," the self or ātman, and exercised by everyone in close conjunction with one another within small, self-governing communities. As Gandhi puts it: "The key to swaraj is in our hands. . . . It is in your pocket and mine." Therefore, we must be devoted to what is in our own "pockets" and accept responsibility for cultivating swaraj. Gandhi's swaraj also distances him from Tolstoy insofar as his vision of decentralized, self-governing village communities is completely foreign to Tolstoy's critiques of government.

This understanding of self-rule leads us to a core aspect of his ideal political system and devotional politics, namely Ramarajya. As we discussed earlier, the ātman, and by implication swaraj, point toward and bring us closer to God. We argue that this is what Gandhi means when he speaks of Ramarajya. This is not some mythical...
divine kingdom he has in mind, but rather a spiritual or existential condition connected to his understanding of swarâj—a condition he believed could produce positive political reform and perhaps a “manifest” Ramarajya. For Gandhi the eternal Râma is a form of God or brahman, and God has created all those âtmans that are the basis for our individuality and precondition for agency. Devotion, then, is the key path and mechanism with which one accesses and cultivates “soul-power.” When people can rule over themselves through faith and devotion they not only achieve Gandhi’s swarâj but are also taking the necessary steps toward Ramarajya. Because individual âtmans are modes of God, when they are finally able to become “ciphers” (in Gandhi’s terms) they achieve a state of being in which the higher and purer entity (God, Râma, Krâunchâ) rules over the lower, impure aspects of oneself, such as the manas (mind) and indriyas (sense faculties). Accordingly, swarâj is achieved when the âtman and higher parts of the soul rule over the lower parts. This then leads toward Ramarajya, which is the highest form of ruling and Gandhi’s ultimate goal. Faith and devotion are the sole means of achieving this state of affairs, and we suggest that swarâj is ultimately subservient to and aims toward Ramarajya. Given the importance of Râma as an object of Gandhi’s devotion, it makes sense that his political ideal would exhibit such devotion. Scholars who have focused solely on swaraj without relating it to the religiously loaded concept of Ramarajya have thus overlooked an essential devotional component of his political thought.

One may ask whether or not this reading squares with some of Gandhi’s central statements about Ramarajya. We have suggested that Ramarajya should be understood, first and foremost, as a more abstract, moral state of being as opposed to a particular external state of affairs and form of political organization. This appears to rub against Gandhi’s statement that Ramarajya is a “kingdom of God.” The phrase “kingdom of God” reminds us of Tolstoy’s The Kingdom of God Is within You, which is clearly not a reference to a social and political organization, but a way of organizing one’s soul. Gandhi explains that Ramarajya entails “sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority.” It is a mistake to think that the first part of this statement concerns popular political sovereignty, as the second part stressing moral authority is of greater significance for Gandhi. By “pure moral authority,” Gandhi is referring to the hierarchical type of ruling we have discussed above, whereby the higher parts of the self rule over the lower parts and God or Râma ultimately rules over the whole. This form of authority and ruling are “pure” because only God is pure, untainted by karma and sin. Therefore, the rule of God would be “pure moral authority.”

Gandhi also claims that this Ramarajya is “a type of swaraj.” This squares with our argument above insofar as Ramarajya is an outgrowth of proper swarâj. Here we can also think of Gandhi’s distinction between the universal Soul and individual, human souls. Accordingly, Ramarajya would be a type of swarâj whereby the universal Soul rules over individual human souls. Finally, as we explained above, these individual âtmans are fundamentally equal. Gandhi thus explains: “Today there is gross economic inequality... There can be no Ramarajya in the present state of inequitable inequalities in which a few roll in riches and the masses do not get enough
A manifest form of Ramarajya can only be achieved when all people are recognized and treated as individually responsible yet interconnected equals, which is anchored in a particular ontological understanding of ātman that owes less to liberal notions of autonomy than it does to philosophical and theistic Hindu influences. We can thus summarize Gandhi's notion of Ramarajya in the following way: only when people take God and truth as their object of devotion will they be able to understand the true nature of the self, which points toward God and the harmonious, liberating rule of the higher over the lower parts of our souls.

Bhakti Politics: Implications and Applications

We argue that this new devotional interpretation changes our understanding of Gandhi as a historical thinker as well as the substantive thrust of his theoretical and conceptual framework. We are in agreement with existing claims in the literature that “One cannot understand Gandhi’s various concerns, specific use of language, and diverse formulations without understanding the specific economic, political, cultural, and ethical contexts within which he lived, read texts, and struggled with opponents and alternative approaches.” We also agree with the claim that “The fact is that individual themes in Gandhi’s philosophy make full sense only when they are seen in their relationship to one another and to the whole.” With these two claims in mind, we can consider how the unpacking of the development of Gandhi’s ideas, in light of his influence from Tolstoy and Hindu thought, develop into what would be better understood as bhakti or devotional politics.

Parel’s claim that Gandhi’s thought originates in Hinduism, as Indian political thought, is problematic given the amount that Gandhi borrows from Tolstoy in a way that Parel does not adequately acknowledge. After a very brief conversation on The Kingdom of God Is within You and Letter to a Hindu, Parel goes on to say, “Though Gandhi had gathered his ideas from different sources, it was Indian philosophy that gave them their unity and coherence.” Gandhi himself suggests otherwise. As we have argued, the initial formulation of his understanding of truth is heavily derived from Tolstoy’s own formulation, and, furthermore, the attempt to render Hindu ideas consistent with this version of truth and non-violence was a project initiated by Tolstoy. This renders Parel’s argument for the originality of Gandhi as the first truly modern Indian thinker problematic.

Bhikhu Parekh’s historical reading of Gandhi has similar issues. Much of the originality that Parekh highlights in Gandhi’s Political Philosophy we have shown to be far more derivative from Tolstoy and more innovative with Hindu ideas than had been previously realized. When discussing Gandhi’s philosophy of religion, Parekh attempts to dismiss the influence of Tolstoy by claiming that Gandhi had remained utterly “unpersuaded” by Christianity. It is absolutely true to claim that Gandhi was unpersuaded by Christianity, in the abstract, but Tolstoy’s particular Christianity looks nothing at all like what Gandhi was referring to when he made that comment, and there is no indication in Gandhi’s writing that he lumped Tolstoy’s writings in with a general conception of Christianity.
Parekh’s mistaken dismissal of Tolstoy’s influence leads him to overemphasize the originality of Gandhi’s thought when it comes to his discussion of satyagraha and Gandhi’s understanding of rationality. While Parekh claims that “satyagraha . . . was an ingenious combination of reason, morality and politics,” we have shown how this understanding is not nearly as novel as Parekh makes it out to be. While there are a number of innovative aspects to Gandhi’s thought, satyagraha is an advance on the original Tolstoyan formulation of experiential truth and non-violence, not an entirely new creation as Parekh asserts. Parekh goes to great length to claim that Gandhi possesses a special critical position that is unavailable to Western critics of modern civilization, and explicitly contends that Gandhi can see things that Tolstoy cannot. Our unpacking of Gandhi’s debt to Tolstoy suggests that Parekh may have been too quick to pass over Gandhi’s own conceptual teachers in an effort to stress Gandhi’s originality.

Nevertheless, we do not wish to overstate our case here. Parel and Parekh both make an abstract claim about Gandhi’s hybridity that is correct, even if they arrived there through a flawed understanding of the development of Gandhi’s thought. It would be fair to say that we are also arguing that Gandhi’s thought developed out of a creative dialogue between Western and Hindu systems. However, where Parel and Parekh claim that the hybrid nature of Gandhi’s thought comes from exchanges between Hinduism and Western liberalism, we argue that Gandhi’s political thought developed primarily through his application of a peculiar Western religious framework—Tolstoyanism—to Hindu philosophic and theistic ideas. The outcome may ultimately look similar, even if the process by which it developed differs rather dramatically. For those interested in the development of political ideas, this difference is significant even if it may be subtle at times.

We also believe our analysis of Gandhi’s influences alters the substantive thrust of his political concepts. Since it is often assumed that Gandhi’s thought developed as part of a pragmatic process, it is not uncommon to see political theorists attempting to decouple certain concepts in Gandhi’s thought to make them more relevant to circumstances outside Gandhi’s specific metaphysical, religious, and devotional understanding. Often this takes the form of suggesting that Gandhi’s spiritual (or private) project is not the same as his broader public project. This would make sense if Gandhi was trying to reconcile his own domestic beliefs with a Western conception of liberalism, which depends on a public/private divide, especially on matters of religion. Our analysis suggests that this attempt to create any sort of public/private distinction in Gandhi’s thought is a mistake.

Parel provides a good example of this misreading. Believing that Gandhi’s political thought develops out of a constructive dialogue with liberal political actors in India, Parel claims that there is a clear difference in Gandhi’s thought between non-violence as creed and non-violence as policy. This distinction does not seem to come from any explicit reference in Gandhi’s own writings, but seems to derive from Parel’s broader understanding of Gandhi’s project. Parel claims, “Non-violence as policy or civic non-violence is what he [Gandhi] expects from the average citizen.” Furthermore, Parel goes on to claim that this civic non-violence “permits the lawful
use of violence for the sake of the public good, such as the maintenance of pub-
lic order and the exercise of the right of self defense.”124 This contrasts with non-
violence as creed, which Parel calls heroic non-violence, as “an option available
only to exceptional individuals.”125 Given that this entire discussion in Gandhi’s Philosophy lacks any references to Gandhi’s written or spoken word, it is difficult
to see where Parel gets these claims. Most likely, Parel devises this civic/heroic split
due to his understanding that Gandhi’s political thought developed in dialogue with
existing liberal political institutions. That is to say, Parel believes that Gandhi was
engaged in his own private spiritual journey, in heroic acts of non-violence as
an exceptional individual. At the same time, he was also engaged in a separate act
of moderate reformation of the increasingly liberal-democratic political institu-
tions of India. Of these two, the latter provides a justification for a more limited
conception of non-violence. The practical realities of politics would virtually de-
mand this split if Gandhi had developed his thought primarily in dialogue with
liberal political institutions.

Since Gandhi’s conceptual framework does not grow out of a political dialogue
with liberals, but instead out of a critical reading and expansion of Tolstoy’s religious
thought and Hindu ideas, there is much less reason to believe that Gandhi main-
tained a division between non-violence as creed and non-violence as policy. It is
likely that Gandhi is not very optimistic in his expectations of individuals living up to
the standards of truth that he advances. This is not, however, an automatic division
between higher and lower. Gandhi, like Tolstoy, believes that the attainment of truth
is an almost impossibly difficult task and, ultimately, that all will fall short. However,
this does not mean there are large groups that should never make the heroic effort;
Gandhi is not nearly as elitist as Parel makes him out to be. Gandhi’s devotional
politics is equally available to and practicable for everyone, and it is based on a
Hindu-inspired conception of the self, or ātman.

Contrary to our analysis, Parel claims that satyagraha is a practical political
activity and not the more robust, spiritual formulation of satyagraha that we suggest
Gandhi endorsed. Pare’s formulation of satyagraha as policy appears mistaken when
the origins of the concept have been uncovered. We thus suggest Parel is incorrect
when he states that “Satyagraha is concerned with civic non-violence rather than
with the heroic variety, its aim being to secure the good of society rather than the
private good of the citizen.”126 Rather, we argue that Gandhi’s modified Tolstoyan
conception of truth, which grounds the concept of satyagraha, is far more expansive
and transcends mere civic matters. This activity is fundamentally intertwined with the
transformative inner politics of the soul and the corresponding potential change at
the level of civic activity and political institutions.

As our analysis of Gandhi and the Gītā suggests, he was not merely attempting
to reform liberal political institutions. At best, Gandhi may be understood as a friendly
critic of liberal democracy, with the implication that he was not a supporter of those
institutions. More likely, Gandhi’s conceptions of swarāj and Ramarajya, as peculiar,
evolving notions of self-rule that he derives from Hindu philosophic and theistic tra-
ditions, provide the basis for how Gandhi understood ideal political associations as
well as his desires for everyday political thought and action. Swarāj and Ramarajya do not point to traditional liberal institutions, nor do they suggest more familiar Western concepts such as the lawful use of violence. As we have shown, Gandhi's commitment to truth also leads him to emphasize ahimsā (universal non-violence). Swarāj and Ramarajya are compatible with these commitments, whereas liberal political institutions—with their demand of a public/private split—are not. With this in mind, our exegesis of Gandhi's particular influences suggests a rather important shift in how we interpret Gandhi's normative thought.

This analysis thus leads us to what one may call a devotional or bhakti politics. Rather than thinking about Gandhi's political thought in terms of a private/public distinction amenable to a liberal democratic politics and civic non-violence, devotional politics is self- or ātman-centered. He does not conceive this self-centered politics in a way that either presupposes a private/public distinction or emphasizes civic activity as such. Any positive civic effects of Gandhi's satyagraha and swarāj are felicitous consequences. That is, they are a result of devotion (bhakti) to truth-seeking and placing the self (ātman) first. If individuals do not accept the responsibility to start with themselves and devote themselves to swarāj, and ultimately something akin to Ramarajya (similar to what Tolstoy referred to as the kingdom of God within), then any subsequent political activity will be qualitatively diminished. Hence, there is a sort of paradoxical nature to Gandhi's political thought: politics is not primordially a public or civic matter, but rather an activity that begins in the ātman, self, or soul. The most basic level of ruling exposes an "inner politics" that is constantly going on within each of us, that is, between the higher (Rāma, ātman, buddhi) and lower (Rāvaṇa, manas, indriyas) parts of ourselves. This is the first and most important level at which we must engage in politics. Moreover, his is not a liberal understanding of the self. As we explained earlier, individual selves point toward truth and God, which is the source and basis for a plurality of interconnected selves. Therefore, the substantive thrust of Gandhi's political thought pushes us back to the level of our individual selves in a devoted, truth-seeking fashion. His political thought turns things inside out. In sum, ruling begins with a devotional turn inward and requires that the higher parts of our being rule over the lower parts.

Gandhi's devotional politics thus suggests that politics begins with each and every one of us, in the strongest possible sense. As Gandhi puts it, swarāj "is in your pocket and mine."127 Gandhi's politics asks each of us to navigate, with strength and humility, the treacherous waters inside ourselves. As the Gītā explains: "When the mind (manas) follows the roving senses, then it carries away one's understanding, like the wind carries away a ship on the water."128 Gandhi's political thought helps highlight the potential in every citizen to effect change not by rushing outside themselves into the public sphere, but by starting within themselves to realize the true power of "soul-force." Ultimately, a devotional politics would dissolve the private/public and self/other binaries. Gandhi's hope is that this process would lead to the eventual dissolution of a top-heavy political system and result in a truly bottom-up swarāj.
Our analysis began with the premise that Gandhi’s political thought is cross-culturally hybrid, and our first move was to argue against those who wish to situate him neatly within either a Western or Hindu conceptual framework. While we are not alone in making this move, those who have acknowledged his hybridity have failed to do so to a sufficient extent. Many begin with Gandhi as a muse and appeal to his political thought as a resource, considering the various lessons and applications we might derive from them. While these types of projects are perfectly valid and laudable in many respects, we have taken a different track and attempted to “get behind” Gandhi to better identify his oft-cited cross-cultural influences. In doing so, we find that Tolstoy and particular Hindu ideas played a central role in the development of his political thought.

This analysis also led us to reconsider the substantive thrust of Gandhi’s political thought. Accordingly, we argue that Gandhi’s political thought is a devotional one that is self-centered, aiming at true swaraj and eventually Ramrajya. Gandhi thus suggests a rather counterintuitive set of moves: a prior devotional move to truth-seeking, an inner politics, and a proper ordering of our own selves. Such self-rule does not merely entail a people ruling over itself in some representative, democratic fashion. Instead of running directly into civic activity, Gandhi suggests we run into ātman (self-) activity. Once we do this Gandhi believes that true self-rule becomes possible, first at the individual level and subsequently at the public level. As Gandhi explains in 1925: “Bhakti, moreover, does not imply ineptitude in practical affairs. . . . A true devotee, though fully attentive to practical affairs, brings the spirit of bhakti into them. His conduct will always be in harmony with dharma.”¹²⁹ One implication of this re-interpretation is that Gandhi turns out to be, at best, a friendly critic of liberal democratic thought and institutions. Peeling back the layers of Gandhi’s political thought thus reveals a devotional substrate that has been sorely neglected.

Notes

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2 Other interpreters we argue against do not always or necessarily deify Gandhi as an explicitly liberal political thinker. Our main claim is that their interpretations suggest or imply that Gandhi’s thought is more or less compatible with liberalism, or at the very least reconcilable with liberal-democratic thinking on a broad level.


6 Parekh, *Gandhi’s Political Philosophy,* p. 195.

7 Ibid., p. 4.

8 Ibid., p. 3 (emphasis added).

9 For example, see Anthony Parel, *Gandhi’s Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); “Gandhi and the Emergence of the Modern Indian Political Canon,” *Review of Politics* 70, no. 1 (2008): 40–63; “From Political Thought in India to Indian Political Thought,” in *Western Political Thought in Dialogue with Asia,* ed. Takashi Shogimen and Cary J. Nederman (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009).

10 Parel, *Gandhi’s Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony,* p. 5.

11 These four goals are: kāma, or sensual pleasure, including sexual and aesthetic experience; artha, or economic and political well-being, “encompassing notions of wealth and power”; dharma, or “the cosmic ordering principle that regulates every aspect of individual, social, and cosmic life, finding expression on the human plane in a comprehensive system of sociocultural norms and duties”; mokṣa, or “liberation from samsāra, the cycle of birth and death, which is the supreme goal of human existence” (Barbara Holdrege, “Dharma,” in *The Hindu World,* ed. Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby [New York: Routledge, 2004], pp. 237–238).

13 – Parel, Gandhi’s Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony, p. 9.

14 – Parel, “Gandhi and the Emergence of the Modern Indian Political Canon,” p. 40.

15 – Parel, “From Political Thought in India to Indian Political Thought,” pp. 187–207.

16 – Ibid., p. 187.

17 – Ibid., pp. 188–189.

18 – Ibid., p. 194.


20 – Ibid., p. 325.


22 – Although the early influence of Hinduism may be minimal, it is not completely nonexistent. The claim here is not that Gandhi completely avoided all influence of his cultural context while growing up, just that such a context was not central to his early thought.


24 – Ibid., p. 57.

25 – Ibid.

26 – Ibid., p. 190.

27 – Ibid., p. 319.

28 – Ibid., p. 106.

29 – Ibid., p. 121.

30 – Ibid., p. 71.


36 – Ibid.

37 – Ibid., p. 247.

38 – Ibid., p. 355.


41 – In the *Kingdom of God Is within You*, he remarks: “The Sermon on the Mount, or the Creed. One cannot believe in both. And Churchmen have chosen the latter” (p. 67), suggesting that most Christians are actually worshipping a false God.


43 – Ibid., p. 356.

44 – Ibid., p. 121.


47 – Basham, “Traditional Influences on the Thought of Mahatma Gandhi.”


50 – The Gītā was the most important Hindu influence on Gandhi’s political thought—more important, for example, than G. P. Gokhale or the theory of the puruṣārthas (contra Parel, *Gandhi’s Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony* and “Gandhi and the Emergence of the Modern Indian Political Canon*”). We grant that Gokhale, whom Gandhi labeled his “political guru” (Gandhi, *Moral and Political Writings*, 1:115), did influence Gandhi’s political thought regarding the importance of duty, or political service to one’s country. How-
ever, we tend to depart from Parel (Gandhi’s Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony, and “Gandhi and the Emergence of the Modern Indian Political Canon”) in suggesting that the most distinct and significant Hindu aspects of Gandhi’s political thought are based primarily on his understanding of the Gitā’s central teaching as opposed to a theory of the puruṣārthas (four goals of human life). While it is easier for scholars to read a harmonization of the puruṣārthas into Gandhi (Parel, Gandhi’s Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony), it is more difficult to read such a theory out of Gandhi. Gandhi’s primary knowledge and interpretation of the puruṣārthas came from his reading of the Gitā, as Parel himself acknowledges (ibid., p. 21). However, Gandhi is quite clear about what he takes the central teaching of the Gitā to be (see Mahatma Gandhi, The Bhagavad Gītā according to Gandhi ed. and trans. John Strohmeier [Berkeley: Berkeley Hills Books, 2000]), and it did not center on the puruṣārthas. While Gandhi may have discussed the puruṣārthas in some of his writings, we hope to show how the core Hindu influences of Gandhi’s hybrid political thought have more to do with other concepts found in the Gitā and their relationship to satyagraha, swarāj, and Ramarajya.

51 – For example, see Gandhi, “Meaning of the Gita,” in Moral and Political Writings, 1:77–83.

52 – Gandhi, The Bhagavad Gītā according to Gandhi, p. 10.


55 – Bhagavad Gītā 3.42. Translations from the Gītā are our own. Further evidence is found in the passage: “Having laid down all actions with the mind, the embodied one (dehin, ātman) sits happily as ruler in the city of nine gates (i.e., the body), neither acting nor causing action” (ibid., 5.13).


57 – Ibid., 2:174.

58 – Ibid., 2:235.

59 – Ibid., 2:27, 339.


63 – Ibid., 1:122, 308–309.

64 – Ibid., 1:308–309, 310.

65 – Ibid., 1:588.

66 – Ibid., 2:81–82.
67 – Ibid., 2:80, 93.
68 – Ibid., 2:174.
69 – Ibid., 2:553, 348.
70 – Ibid., 2:402.
73 – For example, see Gandhi, Moral and Political Writings, 2:553.
74 – Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy, 3:199.
75 – See Gandhi, Moral and Political Writings, 2:174. See also Bhagavad Gītā 4.19–23, 5.12. According to the Gītā’s metaphysics, the idea that a given human being is the actor and ultimately responsible for action in the material world is an illusion: it is ultimately God who acts (e.g., see 4.13, 5.8). For a general agreement with this metaphysical position, see Gandhi, The Bhagavad Gītā according to Gandhi, p. 17.
76 – Gandhi, Moral and Political Writings, 1:588; 2:81–82.
77 – King, Indian Philosophy, p. 221.
78 – Brahmaṣṭra 2.3.43.
79 – Gandhi, Moral and Political Writings, 2:27.
80 – King, Indian Philosophy, p. 228.
81 – Ibid.; Brahmaṣṭra 2.1.34, 2.3.42.
82 – For example, Gandhi, Moral and Political Writings, 1:451.
83 – In the Gītā, while Kṛṣṇa is Arjuna’s friend and charioteer, the former is actually an incarnation—an avatāra (avatar)—of Viṣṇu, or God. As such, Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Being and “highest brahman” (see Bhagavad Gītā 10.12).
84 – For example, Bhagavad Gītā 9.27–28.
85 – Gandhi, Moral and Political Writings, 1:22–23.
86 – Ibid., 1:32; see also 2:234.
87 – Ibid., 2:163.
88 – Ibid., 2:162.
89 – Ibid., 3:38; see also 3:48.
90 – Ibid., 3:37.
91–Ibid., 2:318; see also 1:118 and 2:108.
93–King, Indian Philosophy, p. 226.
94–Gandhi, Moral and Political Writings, 2:288.
95–Ibid., 3:64.
96–Gandhi, The Bhagavad Gita according to Gandhi, p. 22.
97–Gandhi, Moral and Political Writings, 1:411.
98–Gandhi cites a verse from the Gitā as evidence against untouchability and in favor of equanimity toward all: “The Gitā says the same thing: ‘To the man who looks on all with an equal eye, a Brahmin, a dog and an Antyaja [untouchable]—all are the same’ (Moral and Political Writings, 1:71). This verse from the Gitā (5.18) refers to the wise person who sees the same reality underlying every living thing—namely, brahman.
99–Moral and Political Writings, 1:308–309.
100–Ibid., 1:430.
101–The logic of satyāgraha relies on the concept of love. Beginning in his earlier writings, Gandhi explains how a non-violent resister is supposed to love his enemy and in so doing activate a moral sense, including love and compassion, in his enemy that could not otherwise be activated through violence. In Hind Swaraj, see Gandhi’s example of the robber in his discussion of brute force (Moral and Political Writings, 1:242, 245).
102–Here we again diverge from Parel (Gandhi’s Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony) in assigning more weight to concepts other than the puruṣārthas in assessing Gandhi’s conception of swarāj. Because the core idea of swarāj is that of ruling oneself, it makes more sense to turn to Gandhi’s conception of the self (ātman) and not necessarily to the theory of the puruṣārthas. In turn, to understand Gandhi’s later, more developed understanding of the self and related concepts such as God, we must turn to his interpretation of the Gitā, which he only begins to elaborate upon after writing Hind Swaraj.
103–See Gandhi, Moral and Political Writings, 1:399–400 and 2:121.
104–Ibid., 1:264.
106–Ibid., 1:399.
107–Parekh, Gandhi’s Political Philosophy, pp. 110–141, 114, 238.
109–Gandhi, Moral and Political Writings, 1:121.

111 – Ibid., 3:607.

112 – Ibid., 3:370.

113 – Ibid.

114 – Ibid., 3:586.


116 – Parel, Gandhi’s Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony, p. 3.

117 – Ibid., p. 119.

118 – Parekh, Gandhi’s Political Philosophy, p. 65.

119 – Ibid., p. 142.

120 – Ibid., p. 156.

121 – Ibid., p. 33.

122 – Parel, Gandhi’s Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony, p. 122.

123 – Ibid.

124 – Ibid.

125 – Ibid.

126 – Ibid.

127 – Gandhi, Moral and Political Writings, 1:121.

128 – Bhagavad Gītā 2.67.