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ARTICLE

A Dangerous Idea: Nonviolence as Tactic and Philosophy

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While some American civil rights activists professed belief in the "philosophy of nonviolence," others declared nonviolent civil disobedience to be "a tactic rather than a philosophy." Like many dichotomies, the tactic-versus-philosophy distinction combined as much as it divided. Those who viewed nonviolence as a tactic or method were treated as akin regardless of how much they differed in their tactics or methods. Similarly, those who believed in the philosophy of nonviolence were lumped together with each other and with those who saw nonviolence as a "way of life." The history of the tactic-versus-philosophy dichotomy provides a unique window on the role of nonviolence within the American civil rights movement.

In March 1965, an African American teenager named Charles Mauldin was asked a difficult question: "You really believe in non-violence?" A few weeks earlier, he had been on Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge when Alabama state troopers attacked six hundred unarmed marchers. He escaped by climbing down the bridge to the river below. Undaunted, he joined hundreds of other protesters marching toward the state capital, Montgomery, to demand the right to vote. It was dark when a local kid, another African American teenager, approached Mauldin and asked whether he really believed in nonviolence. "I do," he replied. "I used to think of it as just a tactic, but now I believe in it all the way."[1]

Mauldin's distinction between nonviolence as tactic and nonviolence as belief was common among civil rights activists. While Martin Luther King Jr professed belief in the "philosophy of nonviolence," others declared nonviolent civil disobedience to be, in the words of freedom rider Jimmy McDonald, "a tactic rather than a philosophy." Like many dichotomies, the tactic-versus-philosophy distinction combined as much as it divided. Those who viewed nonviolence as a tactic or method were treated as akin regardless of how much they differed in their tactics or methods. Similarly, those who believed in the philosophy of nonviolence were lumped together with each other and with those who saw nonviolence as a "way of life." That pairing of philosophical belief with a "way of life" had become something of a cliché by the time veteran activist James Farmer declared in 1968 that he

[1]Renata Adler, "Letter from Selma," *New Yorker*, 10 April 1965, in Clayborne Carson, ed., *Reporting Civil Rights*, vol. 2, *American Journalism 1963–1973* (New York, 2003), 367–94; David Horsey, "The Road to Selma: Remembering the Stories of True American Heroes," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 March 2015, at www.latimes.com/opinion/topoftheticket/la-na-tt-road-to-selma-20150302-story.html#.

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did not believe in "nonviolence as a total philosophy or as a way of life." According to Prathia Hall, a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), "Most of us subscribed to this philosophy of nonviolence as a personal principle for life as well as a strategy for public protest." But what did it mean to embrace nonviolence as a philosophy or as a way of life? A range of ideas, beliefs, and emotions were associated with the "philosophy" of nonviolence. A short list includes pacifism, patience, stoicism, gentleness, opposition to armed self-defense, and a commitment to love one's enemies. Which of these were essential? And was believing in nonviolence as a philosophy the same as accepting it as a way of life?[2]

Often, the idea of nonviolence as a "way of life" was invoked in order to discredit the concept as foreign or hopelessly idealistic. Hosea Williams, one of the leaders of the bloody march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, later opined that "nonviolence as a way of life was just as foreign to blacks as flying a space capsule would be to a roach." Yet Williams, like James Farmer and Jimmy McDonald, used nonviolent civil disobedience repeatedly and in profoundly dangerous situations. If it was not "a way of life," if it was "a tactic rather than a philosophy," then nonviolence was a tactic that required a deep commitment not unlike what led Charles Mauldin to state that he believed in nonviolence "all the way."[3]

Historians have largely accepted the tactic-versus-philosophy dichotomy. Few have questioned what it meant to believe in nonviolence, to accept it as a "way of life," or to adopt it as a philosophy. Consider a few examples. It is unclear what David Halberstam meant when he wrote that one nonviolent activist "understood the basic philosophy, but at first he accepted it as tactical, nothing more." How did the "basic philosophy" go beyond the tactical, and what did it mean to "understand" a philosophy in the midst of a sit-in? Similar questions arise from Adam Fairclough's assertion that "black people could respect King without necessarily accepting the philosophy of nonviolence." Whose philosophy of nonviolence? And what would it mean to accept it? To be clear, statements like those of Halberstam and Fairclough are easy to support with evidence. I am not suggesting they are false; on the contrary, I think most historians have been generally accurate when reproducing the philosophy-versus-tactic trope. The problem is that the trope has remained unquestioned, its ambiguities unmapped, its rhetorical and intellectual purpose unexamined. There were many differences between activists like Diane Nash or John Lewis who read key texts in nonviolent theory and publicly espoused nonviolence, and figures like Stokely Carmichael or Bernice Johnson Reagon who were less enamored with the theory and rhetoric associated with nonviolence. But very few civil rights activists fit easily on one side of the tactic-versus-philosophy divide. Why, then, did so many repeat that dichotomy? Given the pervasive, almost universal nature of its use, the distinction between nonviolent philosophy and method provides a unique window on the role of nonviolence in particular, and of ideas more generally, within the civil rights movement. Yet rather than opening

[2]Derek Charles Catsam, *Freedom's Main Line: The Journey of Reconciliation and the Freedom Rides* (Lexington, 2009), 81–2; Prathia Hall, "Freedom-Faith," in Faith S. Holsaert, Martha Prescod Norman Noonan, Judy Richardson, Betty Garman Robinson, Jean Smith Young, and Dorothy M. Zellner, eds., *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC* (Urbana–Champaign, 2010), 172–80, at 173.

[3]Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York, 1986), 158.

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a conversation, historians have treated the distinction as a rhetorical and intellectual dead end.[4]

Even those scholars who have questioned the philosophy-versus-tactic divide have stopped short of exploring how it functioned in the movement. Historian David Chappell denounced as a "false dichotomy" what he called the "long, generally sterile debate within SNCC over nonviolence as a tactic versus nonviolence as a way of life." I agree with Chappell that the debate was often sterile, but why did so many civil rights activists think differently? There are good reasons for political scientist Chaiwat Satha-Anand to argue that "the demarcation line drawn between nonviolence as a way of life and as a pragmatic strategy is indeed illusory." But why did that line seem compelling for so many advocates of nonviolence—and for their critics? Like Chappell and Satha-Anand, the political scientist Karuna Mantena has rejected the "distinction between principled and strategic nonviolence." According to Mantena, treating "nonviolence as either discrete tactics and mobilization strategies or normative concepts and ideas … leads contemporary activists to praise the political acumen of Gandhi's and King's campaigns while disavowing the very philosophy upon which their strategic thinking was based." I appreciate Mantena's call to reexamine the philosophical roots of nonviolent civil disobedience. Yet even if the tactics-versus-philosophy divide obscures those roots, examining the history of that divide can provide a way to reassess nonviolence as theory and practice.[5]

The chronology of the divide is revealing. African Americans creatively employed nonviolent tactics—from boycotts to marches to sit-ins—long before the "classic phase" of the civil rights movement. In the 1920s and 1930s, the global popularity of Mahatma Gandhi inspired many Americans to consider employing nonviolent methods against Jim Crow. During the Second World War, small groups of antiracist activists explored Gandhian techniques and the labor leader A. Philip Randolph suggested using Gandhian methods on a large scale. Yet even in those years, at a time of widespread debates about the efficacy of nonviolence, those debates were rarely structured in terms of a divide between philosophy and method. It was not until the 1960s that hard distinctions between

[4]David Halberstam, *The Children* (New York, 1998), 158; Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890–2000* (New York, 2001), 246, 307. Also see Charles E. Cobb Jr, *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible* (Durham, NC, 2016), 115, 239, 242; Catsam, *Freedom's Main Line*, 80–81; Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (Oxford, 2006), 3, 9; Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill, 2003), 193; Jenny Walker, "The 'Gun-Toting' Gloria Richardson: Black Violence in Cambridge, Maryland," in Peter Ling and Sharon Monteith, eds., *Gender in the Civil Rights Movement* (New York, 1999), 179; Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, 1995), xvi–xvii; Emily Stoper, *SNCC: The Growth of Radicalism in a Civil Rights Organization* (New York, 1989), 26–27, 106.

[5]David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill, 2005), 84, 313; Chaiwat Satha-Anand, "Overcoming Illusory Division: Between Nonviolence as Pragmatic Strategy and a Principled Way of Life," in Kurt Schock, ed., *Civil Resistance: Comparative Perspectives on Nonviolent Struggle* (Minneapolis, 2015), 289–301, at 290; Karuna Mantena, "Showdown for Nonviolence: The Theory and Practice of Nonviolent Politics," in Brandon M. Terry and Tommie Shelby, eds., *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Cambridge, MA, 2018), 78–101.

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nonviolent philosophy and method peaked at the same time as civil disobedience as a tactic was seen increasingly as insufficiently radical.[6]

Critics attacked nonviolence as a philosophy or a "way of life" for a variety of reasons: to justify armed self-defense, to reject moral suasion, and to assert a particular conception of masculinity. The philosophy of nonviolence became a proxy for other targets—from pacifism to integration to moderation. What united such attacks was a willingness to draw a sharp divide between philosophy and tactic. In the eyes of its critics, the philosophy of nonviolence became singular rather than plural, static rather than dynamic. By contrast, the most creative advocates of nonviolence linked theory and method to each other and approached both with humility. Such proponents of nonviolence did not always agree on questions of philosophy or method. Indeed, their disagreements revealed several fundamental elements of the nonviolent "way of life"—an openness to being wrong, a tolerance for contingency and complexity, and a corresponding suspicion of dichotomies, particularly any dichotomy that separated ideas from actions.

This essay begins with the most influential advocate of nonviolence in the modern world, Mahatma Gandhi. Critics of nonviolent philosophy often referenced Gandhi as an authority on nonviolence, routinely forgetting the centrality of experimentation within his philosophy and activism. Gandhi had no use for the divide between theory and method because he saw nonviolent civil disobedience as an "experiment in truth." His early American supporters debated the ethics of his ideas and methods and their relevance within the United States, but rarely separated nonviolence as a philosophy from nonviolence as a tactic. Examining the early translation of Gandhian nonviolence into the United States reveals how ideas and actions spread together, transcending the borders of nations and cultures, as well as the divide between philosophy and method.

The second section of this article probes how Gandhi's ideas about nonviolent action were taken up by two of the most prominent advocates of nonviolence within the civil rights movement: Martin Luther King Jr and James Lawson. I argue that both King and Lawson demonstrated the dialectical relationship between philosophy and action that had long marked nonviolence. Unlike earlier advocates of nonviolence, both King and Lawson found it useful to distinguish between nonviolent philosophy and nonviolent tactics. As a dialectic depends on the creation of opposites as well as their eventual resolution, so the tactic/philosophy divide played an important role in the work of King and Lawson. While both men transcended that divide, they nevertheless reproduced it and helped popularize it in order to argue, in an act of dialectical synthesis, that nonviolent methods needed to be infused with a particular conception of nonviolent philosophy. In the last section of this article, I contrast such a dialectical approach with the hard dichotomy between philosophy and tactic that became increasingly popular over the course of the 1960s. After mapping several distinct ways the dichotomy was used, I

[6]Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge, MA, 2012); Sean Chabot, *Transnational Roots of the Civil Rights Movement: African American Explorations of the Gandhian Repertoire* (Lexington Books, 2012); Sean Scalmer, *Gandhi in the West: The Mahatma and the Rise of Radical Protest* (Cambridge, 2011); Joseph Kip Kosek, *Acts of Conscience: Christian Nonviolence and Modern American Democracy* (New York, 2009); Sudarshan Kapur, *Raising up a Prophet: The African American Encounter with Gandhi* (Boston, 1992).

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argue that what united critics of nonviolence as philosophy or "way of life" was a rigid certainty about what such a philosophy or way of life entailed. They ignored the pluralism, experimentalism, and humility that marked advocates of nonviolence for whom a strict separation between philosophy and method was itself a kind of violence.

Ahimsa, satyagraha, and truth

In December 1931, near the end of a long visit to London, Mahatma Gandhi was asked a question that was not unrelated to the one Charles Maudlin would field in Alabama thirty-four years later: "How, Mr. Gandhi, can satyagraha be effective when followed merely as a method and not as a principle?" Gandhi began his answer by returning to the etymology of "satyagraha," the word he preferred for what had often been known as "passive resistance." There was nothing passive about Gandhi's vision of social change. Linking the Sanskrit for "truth" and "holding firm," the term "satyagraha" communicated the force and power that Gandhi associated with his tactics. It also suggested a spiritual and philosophical depth that resisted the divide between tactics and what the reporter in London called "principle." As Gandhi explained in response to the reporter's question, "'Satyagraha' means utter insistence upon truth. When a man insists on truth, it gives him power. If a man without real perception uses it, he is taking its name in vain." The word "truth" might suggest a certain kind of intellectual mastery. But to approach satyagraha with "real perception" required more than knowledge; it was a moral act. Without "moral backing for the action," Gandhi explained, "One of us is a civil resister, the other is a criminal resister." Such a stark dichotomy seemed to offer a clear answer to the reporter's question: satyagraha without "principle" was neither effective nor moral. But Gandhi concluded by complicating the dichotomy between civil and criminal resistance. "The true conscientious objector is correct in his conduct, for he has a spiritual backing," he stated. "But the act is correct whether there is spiritual backing or not. The difference is that the conduct in one case is correct throughout, and, in the other only up to a point." For Gandhi, a purely tactical nonviolence was not inherently amoral. His insistence on the spiritual and moral facets of nonviolence did not lead him to dichotomize "principled" and tactical nonviolence; on the contrary, his nonviolence led him to be suspicious of such a dichotomy. Nonviolence was, for Gandhi, a way to the truth, and the truth required a radical integrity that rejected dichotomies. The philosopher Akeel Bilgrami has distinguished two aspects of "Gandhi's integrity": the way he "tried to make his actions live up to his ideals," and the extent to which "his thought itself was highly integrated." Nonviolence bridged those two facets of Gandhi's integrity, linking his ideas to each other and to his actions.[7]

[7]"Interview to Journalists," 1 Dec. 1931, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (*CWMG*), e-book (New Delhi, 1999); Akeel Bilgrami, "Gandhi's Integrity: The Philosophy behind the Politics," *Postcolonial Studies* 5/1 (2002), 79–93. Also see Ajay Skaria, *Unconditional Equality: Gandhi's Religion of Resistance* (Minneapolis, 2016); Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi before India* (New York, 2014); Skaria, *Gandhi: The Years That Changed the World* (New York, 2018); Aishwary Kumar, *Radical Equality: Ambedkar, Gandhi, and the Risk of Democracy* (Stanford, 2015); Ananya Vajpeyi, *Righteous Republic: The Political Foundations of Modern India* (Cambridge, MA, 2012).

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The word "nonviolence" was itself a bridge that connected two Gandhian keywords: satyagraha and ahimsa. An ancient term, ahimsa literally means non-harm. Like satyagraha, ahimsa was, for Gandhi, intimately linked to truth. "Without ahimsa it is not possible to seek and find Truth," Gandhi wrote. "Ahimsa and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them." Many observers used "satyagraha" to refer specifically to nonviolent civil disobedience, and "ahimsa" to refer to a more abstract conception of nonviolence. Such a contrast between satyagraha and ahimsa mirrors the divide between nonviolence as tactic and nonviolence as philosophy. But for Gandhi both satyagraha and ahimsa were simultaneously philosophical and tactical. Both were ways of seeking the truth by fighting for justice.[8]

Gandhi developed his ideas of ahimsa, satyagraha, and nonviolence by blending a range of sources, from Hindu and Jain philosophy to the writings of Tolstoy and Thoreau, to the actions of British suffragettes. He saw nonviolence as a universal force that operated across the boundaries of nation, religion, culture, and race. He has been attacked for using racial epithets to describe black South Africans, for employing racial distinctions between blacks and Indians, and for failing to work with black South Africans against white rule. While such criticisms are valid for many of Gandhi's years in South Africa, his critics often ignore the evolution of his views on race. He had already become a fierce critic of white supremacy by the time he declared, in the winter of 1936, that "it may be through the Negroes that the unadulterated message of nonviolence will be delivered to the world."[9]

Gandhi issued this prophecy after meeting with a delegation of African American theologians that included the Reverend Howard Thurman, the dean of Rankin Chapel at Howard University. Thurman was one of several prominent African American theologians who played a central role in bringing Gandhian nonviolence into the struggle against American racism. "In the case of the Civil Rights Movement," the scholar Allison Calhoun-Brown has written, "the receptivity of African-American religious culture to the message of nonviolence is what really linked the black church to the movement." That link was shaped and strengthened by African American theologians like Thurman, William Stuart Nelson, Benjamin Mays, and Mordecai Johnson, all of whom developed their own grounding in Gandhian theory and practice. As historian Dennis Dickerson has written, "To effect social change and activate the masses, theology needed to be tied to tactics. Nonviolence, 'soul force,' or Satyagraha bound together theology and tactics in ways that made each intrinsic to the other."[10]

[8]"Letter to Narandas Gandhi," 28/31 July 1930, *CWMG*.

[9]Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed, *The South African Gandhi: Stretcher-Bearer of Empire* (New Delhi, 2015); Maureen Swan, *Gandhi: The South African Experience* (Johannesburg, 1985); Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, 101–7, 134. For examples of Gandhi's antiracism see "Letter to Franklin Roosevelt," 1 July 1942, *CWMG*; Mahadev Desai, "British and American Nazism," *Harijan*, 15 Feb. 1942, *CWMG*.

[10]African Americans had used civil disobedience long before Gandhi. See Marjorie M. Norris, "An Early Instance of Nonviolence: The Louisville Demonstrations of 1870–1871," *Journal of Southern History* 32 (1966), 487–504; and August Meier and Elliott M. Rudwick, "Early Boycotts of Segregated Schools: The Alton, Illinois Case, 1897–1908," *Journal of Negro Education* 36/4 (1967), 394–402. Also see Sarah Azaransky, *This Worldwide Struggle: Religion and the International Roots of the Civil Rights Movement*

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The effort to translate Gandhian nonviolence into the American context was a profoundly intellectual process, rich with ideas, theoretical debates, and key texts. Two books were especially influential: Richard Gregg's *The Power of Nonviolence*, published in 1934, and Krishnalal Shridharani's *War without Violence*, published in 1939. Both Gregg and Shridharani offered theoretically rich examinations of Gandhian tactics, and thus blurred the distinction between theory and method. Both presented Gandhian nonviolence as a form of ideological struggle. According to Gregg, power came "from ideas and sentiments—a scheme of values, a set of ideals or activities which people desire and believe to be right." In comparison to Gregg, Shridharani might be taken as an advocate of nonviolent tactics shorn of philosophical baggage. At a time when many Americans saw Gandhi through the misty glasses of orientalism, Shridharani offered a practical guide to nonviolent conflict. It was with good reason that the social reformer Oswald Garrison Villard wrote in the introduction to *War without Violence*, "Now the curious thing about non-violent resistance is that it is entirely practical and not unworldly." Yet, like Gregg, Shridharani consistently linked Gandhian theories and tactics, as when he discussed the Gandhi Seva Sangh's efforts to advance "Satyagraha as a technique and as a social philosophy." The point is not to reify nonviolent philosophy by suggesting that it was somehow always present even in the most tactical of texts; on the contrary, what united theologians like Thurman and Mays with secular advocates of nonviolence like Shridharani was a striking disinterest in separating philosophy from method.[11]

One of the most careful readers of Shridharani was a young African American activist named Pauli Murray. In the spring of 1940, Murray was arrested on a segregated bus in rural Virginia. "We did not plan our arrest intentionally," she wrote friends. "The situation developed and, having developed, we applied what we knew of *Satyagraha* on the spot." In her memoirs, Murray remembered that her knowledge of satyagraha was "sketchy"; she had "no experience in the Gandhian method." But she had long pondered how to bring Gandhian nonviolence into the struggle against Jim Crow, and was quick to put to use all she had learned from Shridharani and others. Over the 1940s, a range of activists would take up Gandhian methods in the struggle against American racism. Like Murray, many approached their work with a combination of deep study, striking courage, and profound humility.[12]

(Oxford, 2017), 152; Randall Maurice Jelks, *Benjamin Elijah Mays, Schoolmaster of the Movement* (Chapel Hill, 2012), Allison Calhoun-Brown, "Upon This Rock: The Black Church, Nonviolence, and the Civil Rights Movement," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 33 (2000), 168–74; Quinton Dixie and Peter Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World: Howard Thurman's Pilgrimage to India and Origins of African American Nonviolence* (Boston, 2011); Dennis Dickerson, "African American Religious Intellectuals and the Theological Foundations of the Civil Rights Movement, 1930–55," *Church History* 74 (2005), 217–35.

[11]Richard Gregg, *The Power of Nonviolence* (Philadelphia, 1934), 136–7; Krishnalal Shridharani, *War without Violence* (New York, 1939), xiv, 239. Also see Lewis Perry, *Civil Disobedience: An American Tradition* (New Haven, 2013), 181–211; Joseph Kip Kosek, "Richard Gregg, Mohandas Gandhi, and the Strategy of Nonviolence," *Journal of American History* 91/4 (2005), 1318–48.

[12]Pauli Murray, "Summary of Facts Leading up to Arrest of Pauli Murray and Adelene McBean," 24 March 1940, Box 4, Folder 85, Pauli Murray Papers (PMP), Schlesinger Library, Harvard University; Pauli Murray, *Song in a Weary Throat: An American Pilgrimage* (New York, 1987); Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, 202.

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Nonviolence called for humility because it was dangerous. In the 1960s, critics would attack nonviolence as insufficiently radical. In the 1940s, by contrast, most critics focused on the dangers of what was widely seen as a radical method. Accepting the risks as inevitable, most nonviolent activists embraced suffering as a central facet of Gandhian nonviolence. In 1942, in an article entitled "The Negro and Nonviolence," Bayard Rustin wrote, "Nonviolence as a method has within it the demand for terrible sacrifice and long suffering." Rustin was a leading figure in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), a group dedicated to using Gandhian methods against racism. While Rustin's conception of social change changed over years of struggle, the centrality of suffering to nonviolence remained important to him. In 1958, he declared, "In the nonviolent struggle, the exploited, in spirit and tactic, voluntarily accept the irreducible suffering upon themselves." Such "irreducible suffering" resulted from beatings, imprisonment, and other forms of violence, as well from the challenge of striving to live in accord with nonviolent principles.[13]

Some dedicated activists strove to live a nonviolent "way of life." In the words of historian Victoria Wolcott, members of CORE like Rustin "circulated among small interracial communities who practiced 'prefigurative' politics, living the life they envisioned for a future society." Such communities at times generated conflict over the demands of nonviolence. Living in one such community, the Harlem Ashram, Pauli Murray resisted strict "Gandhian" norms like a ban on smoking. "If the ashram is to become a convent or a monastery," she wrote, "then I have no place here." Unlike many of the activists who joined CORE, the majority of civil rights activists were unconcerned with the finer details of Gandhian living. As historian Leila Danielson has written, "Gandhi's belief in the power of spiritual purity held limited appeal for African American civil rights activists, and they rarely used tactics like fasting and simple living as part of their nonviolent campaign for freedom and equality." Even those most dedicated to living a nonviolent way of life recognized that the contours of such a life were contested and contingent.[14]

When Martin Luther King visited India in 1959, he was asked whether his conception of nonviolence included vegetarianism. He responded with one word: "no." King's brevity was well considered. His trip to India was a carefully staged effort to solidify his reputation as, in the words of the *Hindustan Times*, "the American Gandhi." He toured one of Gandhi's ashrams, slept in a Bombay home Gandhi

[13]Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise, *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin* (San Francisco, 2003), 9, 306. Also see Bayard Rustin and George Houser, *We Challenge Jim Crow!* (Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1947), at http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CivilRights/id/3675; Jake Hodder, "Toward a Geography of Black Internationalism: Bayard Rustin, Nonviolence, and the Promise of Africa," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 106/6 (2016), 1360–77; John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (New York, 2003); Daniel Levine, *Bayard Rustin and the Civil Rights Movement* (New Brunswick, 2000); Jervis Anderson, *Bayard Rustin: Troubles I've Seen: A Biography* (New York, 1997).

[14]Murray, "Diary Excerpts, 1940–42," Folder 26, Box 1, PMP; Victoria Wolcott, "Radical Nonviolence, Interracial Utopias, and the Congress of Racial Equality in the Early Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of Civil and Human Rights* 4 (2018), 31–61; Leilah C. Danielson, "'In My Extremity I Turned to Gandhi': American Pacifists, Christianity, and Gandhian Nonviolence, 1915–1941," *Church History* 72/2 (2003), 361–88; Anthony C. Siracusa, "From Pacifism to Resistance: The Evolution of Nonviolence in Wartime America," *Journal of Civil and Human Rights* 3/1 (2017), 55–77.

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frequented, and met with several of the Mahatma's most prominent disciples. King was drawn to many facets of Gandhi's legacy—his struggles against white supremacy, his opposition to untouchability, his concern for the poor—but it was nonviolence that became central to how most people linked the two men. It was his commitment to nonviolence that made King "the American Gandhi." Yet unlike King, Gandhi believed that a nonviolent way of life entailed vegetarianism. Even among those who espoused the philosophy of nonviolence, there was no consensus on what such a philosophy required. Such a diversity of opinion was not a problem, however. For Gandhi, pluralism was essential to the strength of nonviolent philosophy. It should be noted, for example, that many of his followers ate meat, and he himself was tolerant of meat eaters. For both Gandhi and King, the philosophy of nonviolence called for inclusivity, tolerance, and humility. Unlike many early interpreters of Gandhian nonviolence, King at times distinguished nonviolent philosophy and method. His goal was to suggest that nonviolent tactics required a philosophical grounding, and to advance a particular conception of that grounding. Yet his dialectical approach to nonviolence helped popularize a distinction between method and philosophy that he himself rejected.[15]

The dialectic of nonviolence

Of the leading civil rights figures associated with nonviolence, King was by far the most prominent. Many came to see him as unusually, even uniquely, committed to nonviolence. After declaring, "I'm not ashamed to say that I've never believed in nonviolence as a philosophy of life," Hosea Williams added, "And I don't know nobody else who did but Martin Luther King, Jr." It was not just King's commitment to nonviolence that was renowned; equally important was the philosophical nature of that commitment. At the March on Washington, A. Philip Randolph called King "a philosopher of a nonviolent system of behavior." Randolph's emphasis on behavior might have drawn attention to how King connected his philosophy of nonviolence to his politics or even his personal life. If King was uniquely committed to nonviolence as a "philosophy of life," shouldn't that commitment have been manifested in unique forms of behavior? Of course, speaking and writing are forms of "behavior" that can constitute a "way of life." Perhaps that is why it was so easy for commentators to elide any differences between believing in a philosophy and embracing a "way of life"; their primary example was a man whose public life was defined by writing and speaking. King himself contributed to such an elision, but not by equating nonviolent philosophy with a nonviolent way of life or suggesting singular definitions of either. On the contrary, in his writings and speeches, King portrayed nonviolence as complex, multifaceted, and fundamentally dialectical—not just with regard to the relationship between philosophy and "way of life," but also with regard to the link between philosophy and method.[16]

[15]On Gandhi's vegetarianism see Nico Slate, *Gandhi's Search for the Perfect Diet: Eating with the World in Mind* (Seattle, 2019); Parama Roy, *Alimentary Tracts: Appetites, Aversions, and the Postcolonial* (Durham, NC, 2010); Joseph S. Alter, *Gandhi's Body: Sex, Diet, and the Politics of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, 2000). Also see Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, 224–6.

[16]Perry, *Civil Disobedience*, 181; Charles Euchner, *Nobody Turn Me Around: A People's History of the March on Washington* (Boston, 2010), 191; Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 158. Also

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King embraced his role as a philosopher of nonviolence. Many of his writings and speeches make reference to nonviolence as an ethical principle, a philosophy, and a way of life. His first book, *Stride toward Freedom*, includes a chapter that maps his "intellectual pilgrimage to nonviolence." The chapter unfolds as a series of intellectual encounters that culminate with his introduction to Gandhi. King's adoption of nonviolence is presented as the result of a distinctly academic journey, as if he read his way to becoming "the American Gandhi." As a range of scholars have demonstrated, many of King's writings were written by advisers or included language taken from other authors. *Stride toward Freedom* was collaboratively produced in an effort to present King in the best possible light. That involved describing him as an intellectual steeped in a distinctly highbrow philosophical tradition. Here is a passage worth quoting in full:

> The intellectual and moral satisfaction that I failed to gain from the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill, the revolutionary methods of Marx and Lenin, the social-contracts theory of Hobbes, the "back to nature" optimism of Rousseau, the superman philosophy of Nietzsche, I found in the nonviolent resistance philosophy of Gandhi. I came to feel that this was the only morally and practically sound method open to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.

One sentence after citing the "philosophy of Gandhi," King described nonviolence as a "morally and practically sound method." He did not draw a sharp distinction between nonviolent philosophy and method. Indeed, he asserted that it was the experience of wielding nonviolent tactics that solidified his commitment to nonviolent philosophy. "Living through the actual experience of the protest," he wrote, "nonviolence became more than a method to which I gave intellectual assent; it became a commitment to a way of life. Many of the things that I had not cleared up intellectually concerning nonviolence were now solved in the sphere of practical action." Such an account could be used to separate nonviolent "method" from "a commitment to a way of life." Indeed, such a distinction is a key part of King's narrative. But rather than lump together nonviolence as philosophy and "way of life," rather than opposing both with nonviolent method, King explained that it was the practice of nonviolent civil disobedience that led him beyond the theory of nonviolence to a deeper "commitment to a way of life."[17]

see Greg Moses, *Revolution of Conscience: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Philosophy of Nonviolence* (New York, 1997); Kenneth Smith and Ira Zepp, *Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Lanham, 1986); Warren E. Steinkraus, "Martin Luther King's Personalism and Non-violence," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34 (1973), 97–110.

[17]Jake Hodder, "Casting a Black Gandhi: Martin Luther King Jr., American Pacifists and the Global Dynamics of Race," *Journal of American Studies* (2019), doi:10.1017/S0021875819000033; Martin Luther King Jr, *Stride toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York, 1958), 97. On the authorship of King's writings and speeches see David L. Chappell, *Waking from the Dream: The Struggle for Civil Rights in the Shadow of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York, 2014), chap. 6; S. Jonathan Bass, *Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Martin Luther King Jr., Eight White Religious Leaders, and the "Letter from Birmingham Jail"* (Baton Rouge, 2001); Clayborne Carson, Peter Holloran, Ralph E. Luker and Penny Russell, "Martin Luther King, Jr. as Scholar: A Reexamination of His Theological Writings," *Journal of American History* 78/1 (1991), 93–105, 94, Keith D. Miller, "Composing Martin Luther King, Jr." *PMLA* 105/1 (1990), 70–82.

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King left unclear what such a commitment entailed, but his emphasis on the bus boycott and on transcending "intellectual assent" suggested that nonviolence required active struggle against injustice. King praised nonviolence as an idea, a tactic, and a way of life without making clear what distinguished nonviolent philosophy or explaining what it meant to commit to nonviolence as a "way of life." But although these distinctions remained blurry—and their blurriness is important—King did offer several key ideas that were central to his understanding of nonviolent philosophy and nonviolence as a "way of life." The most important was a concept that he often called "reconciliation." At the founding gathering of SNCC in April 1960, he told the press that the student activists had "embraced a philosophy of mass direct nonviolent action." His emphasis on "action" suggested that the philosophy of nonviolence was intimately connected to nonviolent tactics. But he did not entirely dispense with the distinction. "The students will certainly want to delve deeper into the philosophy of nonviolence," he declared. "It must be made palpably clear that resistance and nonviolence are not in themselves good." Without strong philosophical grounding, nonviolent methods were dangerous. "There is another element that must be present in our struggle," he explained, "that then makes our resistance and nonviolence truly meaningful. That element is reconciliation." To clarify his conception of reconciliation, he turned to one of the concepts most strongly associated with a philosophical approach to nonviolence. "Our ultimate end," he proclaimed, "must be the creation of the beloved community." A distinctly Christian concept formulated by the philosopher Josiah Royce, the "beloved community" became a popular way for many civil rights activists to describe the goal of the movement. But although it was often presented as a distant goal, the beloved community served rhetorically as a reminder to connect ends to means and, in particular, to approach the movement with a Christlike and Gandhian spirit of love and "reconciliation." Replacing the word "philosophy" with the telling word "spirit," King concluded, "The tactics of nonviolence without the spirit of nonviolence may indeed become a new kind of violence."[18]

For King, the philosophy of nonviolence was the "spirit of nonviolence." Both were grounded in a Christian conception of reconciliation, love, or, to use the Greek term King favored, *agape*. King elaborated on such reconciliation when he spoke to another SNCC gathering in October 1960. The title of his address, "The Philosophy of Nonviolence," had been suggested by conference organizers. A handwritten outline of King's speech offers insights into his vision of "the philosophy of nonviolence." The outline restates the dichotomous nature of nonviolence: "It is not only a philosophy, but a technique of action." Yet King makes clear again that his conception of philosophy cannot be separated from action. The outline includes a series of moral commandments: activists should refuse "to inflict injury upon another" and should center their "attention on the evil system and not the evil

[18]Martin Luther King, "Statement to the Press at the Beginning of the Youth Leadership Conference," at https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/statement-press-beginning-youth-leadership-conference. Also see David L. Chappell, "Martin Luther King: Strategist of Force," in Melvin L. Rodgers and Jack Turner, *African American Political Thought: A Collected History* (Chicago, forthcoming), 859–900; Gary Herstein, "The Roycean Roots of the Beloved Community," *The Pluralist* 4/2 (2009), 91–107; Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (New York, 2006).

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doer." These commandments are divided into the "external" and the "internal." It is not enough to avoid causing physical violence; one's mental and emotional state must also remain nonviolent. In King's words, "The highest expression of non-injury is love." Love as reconciliation was at the core of King's conception of nonviolence. This would become one of the key hallmarks of the philosophy-versus-method divide: those who embraced nonviolence as a philosophy were required to love their opponents, while those who saw nonviolence solely as a method could hate their attackers so long as they remained nonviolent in action.[19]

Loving one's enemies was intimately related to another key dimension of King's philosophy of nonviolence: the moral imperative to align means and ends. The outline of "The Philosophy of Nonviolence," King's address to SNCC, includes the statements "means must be as pure as the end" and "non-violence seeks to achieve moral ends through moral means." In the years ahead, King would repeatedly use the latter phrase, "moral ends through moral means," to explain his commitment to nonviolence. As he explained in his last Christmas sermon, given in Atlanta in 1967, "Means and ends must cohere because the end is preexistent in the means, and ultimately destructive means cannot bring about constructive ends."[20]

Aligning ends and means and loving one's enemies did not mean that nonviolence was weak, passive, or nonconfrontational. In his speech to the First Montgomery Improvement Association mass meeting in December 1955, King declared, "Not only are we using the tools of persuasion, but we've come to see that we've got to use the tools of coercion." In order to explain how nonviolence could be powerfully coercive while lovingly nonviolent, King distinguished *agape* from *eros* and *philia* in order to make clear that, as he put it at Illinois Wesleyan University in 1966, "It would be nonsense to urge oppressed people to love their violent oppressors in an affectionate sense." That same year, in his annual report to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), King declared that "influence and moral suasion may continue to prepare the climate for change, but there must be present an actual power for change if we are to achieve our purpose." He concluded, "So far our work is but an experiment in power, as Gandhi called his work an experiment with truth. There is no contradiction in these two in-so-far as our work grows from a commitment to the philosophy of nonviolence." What matters is not just that King's philosophy of nonviolence bridged power and truth, and thus rejected any divide between theory and method. Equally important is King's Gandhian emphasis on experimentation. A profound humility marked King's approach to nonviolent philosophy and the nonviolent "way of life," and

[19]"Outline, The Philosophy of Nonviolence," at https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/outline-philosophy-nonviolence.

[20]"Outline, The Philosophy of Nonviolence"; "An Address by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr." Cornell College, Mount Vernon, Iowa, 15 Oct. 1962, at https://news.cornellcollege.edu/dr-martin-luther-kings-visit-to-cornell-college; "Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., speaking in London at City Temple on December 7th, 1964," at www.commondreams.org/news/2018/01/15/newly-discovered-1964-mlk-speech-civil-rights-segregation-and-apartheid-south-africa; "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Speech at Illinois Wesleyan University, 1966," at www.iwu.edu/mlk; Martin Luther King Jr., "Christmas Sermon," Ebenezer Baptist Church, 25 Dec. 1967, at https://onbeing.org/blog/martin-luther-kings-last-christmas-sermon.

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that searching humility is also evident in the writings and actions of other prominent proponents of the philosophy of nonviolence.[21]

For many movement activists, particularly the young people in SNCC, the most influential philosopher of nonviolence was not King but the Reverend Jim Lawson. Born in Uniontown, Pennsylvania in 1928, and raised in Ohio, Lawson moved to Nashville to join the struggle against Jim Crow after King told him, "We don't have anyone like you down there." It was Lawson who drafted SNCC's founding statement, a statement that began, "We affirm the philosophical or religious ideal of nonviolence as the foundation of our purpose, the presupposition of our faith, and the manner of our action." When one student proposed discussing the "goals, philosophy, future, and structure of the organization," Lawson urged that the students first discuss the philosophy of nonviolence and only then explore the goal of integration. Like King, Lawson often distinguished the philosophy of nonviolence from methods or tactics, even while arguing that nonviolent tactics were more effective when guided by nonviolent philosophy.[22]

Lawson was only one year older than King and, like his more famous counterpart, was the bookish son of a preacher. Also like King, Lawson approached the philosophy and practice of nonviolence via a radical Christian faith. The way SNCC's statement paired "the philosophical or religious" was typical of Lawson. "As a technique," he later declared, "every nonviolent strategy is determined and shaped by the essential faith, Love, and the Cross, the gracious work of God both in the past and now." It was the spiritual nature of nonviolence that meant that "expediency is always ruled out. The pure technique loses out to the faith in action, to the resistance in love which retains a quality of creativity throughout the social process. Means and ends become one and the same thing."[23]

While Lawson's relationship with nonviolence was profoundly intellectual, he was not content with studying nonviolent theory. In the spring of 1949, as a student at Baldwin Wallace College in Berea, Ohio, Lawson took a course on philosophy and ethics that covered the work of Reinhold Niebuhr. "All social and political systems are sinful," Lawson wrote in his class notes. "Must not try to escape sinful method with some ideal." He added, "Pacifism out of core with Christianity—a Christian should participate in struggles to help make things better." Such Niebuhrian precepts resonated with the young Lawson, who was actively grappling with how to use nonviolent means to fight injustice. Not all of his pacifist friends were similarly moved. One wrote him a note decrying "the futility of political action in general," and citing "the waves of rioting and hatred which sweep India now" in

[21]Martin Luther King Jr, "Address to First Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) Mass Meeting, at Holt Street Baptist Church," 5 Dec. 1955, at www-personal.umd.umich.edu/~ppennock/doc-KingMontgomery.htm; "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Speech at Illinois Wesleyan University, 1966," at www.iwu.edu/mlk; King, "SCLC President's Annual Report," 10 Aug. 1966, King Papers Digital Archive, The Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Atlanta, quoted in Bo Wirmark, "Nonviolent Methods and the American Civil Rights Movement, 1955–1965," *Journal of Peace Research* 11 (1974), 115–32.

[22]Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA, 1981), 23; Ted Dienstfrey, "A Conference on the Sit-Ins," *Commentary* (June 1960), 526.

[23]Catsam, *Freedom's Main Line*, 80–81; Jim Lawson, "On Nonviolence," *Southern Exposure* 9/1 (1981), 31.

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order to "show how little Gandhi's efforts to move large masses have achieved." Lawson was unimpressed by such reasoning. Although his response to his friend is not in his papers, Lawson's speeches, writings, and actions make clear that he believed in "political action" guided by nonviolent philosophy. Like King, Lawson embraced a dialectical relationship between nonviolent methods and philosophy.[24]

In a speech given while he was at Baldwin Wallace, Lawson celebrated Gandhi for teaching "that the way to achieve Indian independence was through non-violence and truth." Like King, Lawson emphasized the centrality of reconciliation to Gandhian nonviolence. He praised Gandhi for teaching his followers that "they could hate the actions of the British, but must never hate the British soldier or British people." Lawson hoped to use nonviolent means to attack American racism and thus "to establish practices within America which are consistent with democracy and Christianity." But it was not until King urged Lawson to come south that he found a way to do so. In Nashville, Lawson enrolled in the divinity school at Vanderbilt and began to offer workshops on nonviolence to a small group of younger students, many of whom would go on to become key leaders in SNCC and the movement more generally. One of Lawson's students, Diane Nash, recalled that Lawson's workshops offered "an excellent education in the philosophy and strategies of nonviolence."[25]

King also hired Lawson to work for SCLC, and to travel the South offering workshops on nonviolence. Many of SCLC's key texts reveal Lawson's influence. A document entitled "The Philosophy of Nonviolence and the Tactic of Nonviolent Resistance" includes the statement, "nonviolence is a way of life as old and permanent as Jesus of Nazareth, as new and growing as Mohandas K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr." Although the title of the document rehashed the philosophy-versus-tactic dichotomy, the text itself suggests that nonviolent philosophy without action was futile. In words Lawson or King could have written, the text states that nonviolence is "not pacifism or cowardice." "It is an active way of living: it resists." Here, embracing nonviolence as a "way of life" is not contrasted with nonviolent method; it is nonviolent methods that constitute the nonviolent "active way of living."[26]

Lawson explored the rich complexities of nonviolence—complexities that blurred the distinction between philosophy and method—in a book written in 1961 in the wake of the sit-in movement. He noted that "certain intellectual circles enjoy equating nonviolence and violence. The argument runs that nonviolence is simply another method of socio-political action, on the same level as violence

[24]"Baldwin-Wallace—Classes—Philosophy and Ethics—Spring 1949," Box 28, Lawson Papers; letter from Jere (JB), 14 Feb. 1949, "Baldwin-Wallace—Correspondence—Incoming—1949," Box 28, Lawson Papers. Also see "The Theological Basis of Nonviolence," "Book Draft—Chapter III," Box 45, Lawson Papers.

[25]"College Orator's Speech on Gandhi Wins Ohio Title," newspaper clipping, "Baldwin-Wallace—Speech—"Alternative to Destruction"—ND," Box 28, Lawson Papers; Janet Dewart Bell, *Lighting the Fires of Freedom: African American Women in the Civil Rights Movement* (New York, 2018), 97.

[26]Southern Christian Leadership Conference, "The Philosophy of Nonviolence and the Tactic of Nonviolent Resistance," Folder 26, Box 12, Vertical File Collection, Civil Rights Documentation Project; "Book Draft—Chapter II," Box 45, Lawson Papers.

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since coercion is used." He admitted that "force is the concomitant of coercion" but rejected the idea that "all force is violent." According to Lawson, "Coercion remains a neutral necessity of life, but the kind of force which accompanies it determines its moral value." Lawson contrasted African American boycotts of segregated department stores with the way the White Citizens Councils used boycotts "to keep the Negro and liberal whites in their places." In the latter case, "the motives around the boycott make it a weapon of violence." By contrast, "Nonviolence deliberately baptizes the boycott method. It becomes non-cooperation with evil and not a self-righteous effort to inflict vengeance on others." But wouldn't a segregationist argue that their boycott was also an effort at "non-cooperation with evil"? If it was only the goal that decided the legitimacy of a method, how could one be sure that one's cause was just and thus one's efforts were valid? In an effort to defend his distinction between violent and nonviolent coercion, Lawson turned from goal to method. He suggested that nonviolent activists would "remain humble; i.e., always willing to negotiate, to accept compromises towards the goals, ready to withdraw and wait for another day." Gandhi would have agreed with such an emphasis on humility and compromise. Lawson's defense of humility, compromise, and self-sacrifice reveal how many advocates understood the philosophy of nonviolence.[27]

Lawson acknowledged that activists could use nonviolent methods successfully without harboring any particular philosophical beliefs. "Of course in a large and sprawling movement," he wrote, "most participants will rank technique over nonviolence as a total approach to life. We cannot help but have large numbers who believe in nonviolence as an apt strategy for the moment." Such clear-eyed pragmatism was common among the most prominent advocates of nonviolence. As Bayard Rustin told King, "The great masses of Indians who were followers of Gandhi did not believe in nonviolence. They believed in nonviolence as a tactic." While King, Lawson, and Rustin encouraged activists to study nonviolent philosophy, they never attempted to turn away protesters deemed insufficiently schooled in nonviolent philosophy. Working with those committed only to nonviolent tactics was part of the inclusivity and pluralism demanded by the nonviolent philosophy associated with Gandhi's legacy.[28]

Part of the appeal of the term "philosophy" was its call to critical thinking and its suggestion that nonviolence was not an easy path, but rather a discipline that required not just extensive study and preparation but the willingness to listen to others, to admit failure, and to change course. It took tremendous courage and willpower to sit at a lunch counter and let white thugs spit on you, pour hot coffee on you, or drop lit cigarettes down the back of your shirt—all without yelling, pushing, or otherwise defending yourself. But it took even more mental and emotional fortitude to survive such an encounter while still believing in a truly integrated society. Here is how John Lewis explained "the essence of the nonviolent way of life" that he learned from Jim Lawson in Nashville:

[27]"Book Draft—Chapter I" and "Book Draft—Chapter II," Box 45, Lawson Papers.

[28]"Book Draft—Chapter II," Box 45, Lawson Papers; Bayard Rustin, "Reminiscences of Bayard Rustin" (Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, 1988), 137–40, quoted in Stewart Burns, ed., *Daybreak of Freedom: The Montgomery Bus Boycott* (Chapel Hill, 1997), 169.

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> When you can truly understand and feel, even as a person is cursing you to your face, even as he is spitting on you, or pushing a lit cigarette into your neck, or beating you with a truncheon—if you can understand and feel even in the midst of those critical and often physically painful moments that your attacker is as much a victim as you are, that he is a victim of the forces that have shaped and fed his anger and fury, then you are well on your way to the nonviolent life.

"And it is a way of life," Lewis added. "This is something Lawson stressed over and over again, that this is not simply a technique or a tactic or a strategy or a tool to be pulled out when needed."[29]

By arguing "over and over again" that nonviolence was not "simply a technique or a tactic," did Lawson foster the divide he wanted to transcend? Lawson, King, John Lewis, Diane Nash, and other advocates of nonviolent philosophy had reason to suggest that extensive study of nonviolent theory would help prepare activists to survive the cauldron of protest without losing faith in the beloved community. Such faith was more than an emotion, and as the phrase "beloved community" suggested, it was as much about the goal of the struggle as about the need for nonviolent methods. When Lawson or King distinguished method from philosophy it was in order to suggest that they be connected in a dialectical process of growth through struggle. As Bayard Rustin said of King, "He came to a profoundly deep understanding of nonviolence through the struggle itself, and through reading and discussions which he had in the process of carrying on the protest." Over the course of the 1960s, that dialectical process became obscured as "the philosophy of nonviolence" became increasingly presented—particularly by its critics—as a singular and singularly narrow worldview.[30]

Between nonviolence and violence

In the summer of 1962, Mildred Forman Page joined a protest outside the Fulton County Jail in Atlanta. When the police decided to make arrests, the protesters lay down and, in keeping with established nonviolent practice, forced the police to drag them to the door of the jailhouse. Worried about the physical toll on her body—and on her new clothes—Page decided to walk into the jail willingly rather than join her fellow protesters in going limp and being dragged across the hard pavement. But when she stood up to submit to be arrested, one of the policemen pushed her down. She explained that she would go peacefully but the policeman's eyes "were filled with hate" and he seemed determined to hurt her. "At that moment," Page later recalled, "I remembered that nonviolence was only a tactic, not my Chicago way of life. Somehow my arms became uncrossed, my limp wrists became rigid, and my fists balled up. I proceeded to fight him. I fought him all the way to the jailhouse door."[31]

[29]John Lewis, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York, 1998), 77–8.

[30]Rustin, "Reminiscences of Bayard Rustin," 137–40, quoted in Burns, *Daybreak of Freedom*, 169.

[31]Mildred Forman Page, "Two Variations on Nonviolence," in Holsaert et al., *Hands on the Freedom Plow*, 53–4.

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Many civil rights activists came, like Page, to see nonviolence only as a tactic and not as a philosophy or a "way of life." In the words of historian Charles Payne, the "philosophical commitment to nonviolence was always rare and became more so over time." Historian Clayborne Carson noted that as early as SNCC's 1962 meeting "there was little discussion of the philosophy of nonviolence." Of thirteen SNCC staff members interviewed that year, "Six reaffirmed their belief in nonviolence as a feasible way of life, but only three felt that most SNCC workers accepted this belief." It was not until 1969 that SNCC would officially change its name to the Student National Coordinating Committee—severing any official ties to the rhetoric of nonviolence. But the philosophy of nonviolence had lost much of its cachet years earlier.[32]

The most prominent argument against philosophical nonviolence involved the vexed question of armed self-defense. In 1965, Fannie Lou Hamer questioned whether even Martin Luther King believed in nonviolence. "He preaches nonviolence," she told a reporter, "but it's very strange when he go from place to place he got armed protection. That makes me believe he doesn't even believe it." Many movement figures concluded that to believe in nonviolence was to reject armed self-defense. "The first public expression of disenchantment with nonviolence arose around the question of 'self-defense,'" Martin Luther King wrote in *Where Do We Go From Here*. "In a sense this is a false issue," he explained, "for the right to defend one's home and one's person when attacked has been guaranteed through the ages by common law." While defending the right to self-defense, King rejected the rhetoric of armed self-defense as counterproductive. Such a rejection became an important facet of the story of his "pilgrimage to nonviolence." Consider one of the most famous episodes in King's evolution to nonviolence. Bayard Rustin had traveled to Montgomery to advise King on Gandhian methods. Rustin was about to sit down in King's living room, when he spotted a gun on the couch. In the weeks ahead, as historian David Garrow puts it, "Rustin attempted to persuade King that even the presence of guns was contrary to the philosophy that he was increasingly articulating." Garrow had good reason to frame the issue in terms of a philosophical conflict rather than a religious matter or a public-relations problem. The debate concerning armed self-defense was often waged on philosophical grounds. With the help of Rustin and other nonviolent advisers, King's evolution towards philosophical nonviolence became an essential component of his public narrative—as did the rejection of armed self-defense.[33]

[32]Carson, *In Struggle*, 67–68; Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, xvi–xvii.

[33]"Oral History Interview with Fannie Lou Hamer," KZSU Project South interviews, 1965, at https://purl.stanford.edu/zb317wv2717; Martin Luther King Jr, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York, 1997), 57; David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York, 1986), 73. Also see Akinyele Omowale Umoja, *We Will Shoot Back: Armed Resistance in the MS Freedom Movement* (New York, 2013); Simon Wendt, *The Spirit and the Shotgun: Armed Resistance and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Gainesville, 2007); Christopher B. Strain, *Pure Fire: Self-Defense as Activism in the Civil Rights Era* (Athens, GA, 2005); Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill, 1999). Also see the debate between King and Robert Williams: Robert Williams, "Can Negroes Afford

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Some movement leaders saw no contradiction between nonviolence and armed self-defense. As Charles Cobb stated in a recent history of guns in the movement, "Because nonviolence worked so well as a tactic for effecting change and was demonstrably improving their lives, some black people chose to use weapons to defend the nonviolent Freedom Movement." Cobb offered the example of Hartman Turnbow, a black farmer who was vital to the movement in Holmes County, Mississippi. One night, Turnbow returned the gunfire of white supremacist thugs. The next morning, he told SNCC volunteers, "I wasn't being non-nonviolent; I was just protecting my family." Turnbow was far from alone in distinguishing armed self-defense from violence. As Bob Moses put it in 1964, "It's not contradictory for a farmer to say he's nonviolent and also pledge to shoot a marauder's head off."[34]

Moses aimed to occupy a middle ground between advocates of nonviolent philosophy and those who rejected nonviolence in order to embrace armed self-defense. As he recalled in an interview, "I don't think violence versus nonviolence is such a good dichotomy, but the question of self-defense and what you do, what the limits are, what means you take toward defending yourself." He recalled that the extreme violence activists faced in Mississippi forced many to move "toward a self-defense posture" and "weakened the hold that the nonviolent philosophy had on the organization." "Lawson's particular approach and commitment to nonviolence died in Mississippi," Moses explained. "So you were left with this more practical program of voter registration organizing which didn't require either on the part of the staff or the people a commitment to nonviolence." But while the Mississippi movement did not require a philosophical commitment to nonviolence, Moses found it unhelpful to draw a sharp divide between violence and nonviolence, and preferred engaging "the real practical issues" to debating the merits of nonviolence as a philosophy or a way of life.[35]

While embracing armed self-defense, those who rejected the philosophy of nonviolence often also espoused another common justification for rejecting nonviolence as a way of life: an unwillingness to love one's enemies. The renowned psychologist Kenneth Clark attacked Lawson and King's approach to nonviolence by arguing that "any demand that the victims of oppression be required to love those who oppress them places an additional and intolerable psychological burden upon the victim." In 1964, Robert Penn Warren read that passage to Bob Moses during an interview. Moses replied, "We don't agree with King's philosophy." Most students, he explained, were "not sympathetic to the idea that they have to somehow love the white people that they are struggling against." King's repeated emphasis on coercion became obscured as the idea of loving one's enemies became bound up with moral suasion. "The Nashville group believed in nonviolence as a

to Be Pacifists?", *Liberation* 4 (Sept. 1959), 4–7; and King, "The Social Organization of Nonviolence," *Liberation* 4 (Oct. 1959), 5–6.

[34]Cobb, *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get you Killed*, 2–3, 108.

[35]Joe Sinsheimer, "Interview with Robert Moses," Cambridge, MA, 19 Nov. 1983, 19–21, at https://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/media/jpg/sinsheimerjoseph/pdf/sinsi02005.pdf. Also see Laura Visser-Maessen, *Robert Parris Moses: A Life in Civil Rights and Leadership at the Grassroots* (Chapel Hill, 2016); Eric Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them: Robert Parris Moses and Civil Rights in Mississippi* (New York, 1995).

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philosophy and a way of life," SNCC activist Courtland Cox recalled. "The people at Howard, we viewed nonviolence as a tactic." According to Cox, the Nashville people felt that "you could appeal to men's hearts." He rejected such an approach, explaining, "you might as well appeal to their livers." Like Cox, many critics of nonviolent philosophy overlooked the importance of conflict and coercion to the nonviolence advocated by King and Lawson.[36]

Nonviolent philosophy came to be seen as weak and unmanly. In the early 1960s, the willingness to accept violence without retaliation was part of the radical cachet of the movement. The courage required to face the violence of white thugs, police dogs, and firehoses gave nonviolence a reputation for radicalism that aligned with how King, Lawson, and others saw it—a "way of life" that demanded confronting injustice and embracing self-suffering. But as armed self-defense became increasingly contrasted with nonviolent protest, nonviolence lost its radical sheen. Advocates of armed self-defense came to reject what Malcolm X called King's "turn-the-other-cheek cowardly philosophy." Consider the example of a young SNCC activist who was passing out leaflets in front of Woolworth's in Times Square. A white man asked, "Suppose I take that flyer and slap you in the face with it, will you turn the other cheek?" The SNCC activist later recalled what happened next: "I said yes, and his friend said, what would you do if I slapped you on that cheek? And I said I'll put all my tens and a halfs right up your ass. Now I thought that was the way I had to react as a man." Such a gendered rejection of nonviolence was often related to the responsibility men felt to protect their families. In a discussion of his ambivalent relationship with nonviolence, the Reverend Daniel Speed recalled, "If that man slaps my wife, I'll break his neck." As Mildred Forman Page's embrace of the "Chicago way of life" makes clear, women also rejected the philosophy of nonviolence. But a certain conception of masculinity was, along with an embrace of armed self-defense and a rejection of moral suasion, a common reason why civil rights activists moved away from the philosophy of nonviolence.[37]

What united the many critics of the philosophy of nonviolence was a willingness to narrowly define that philosophy in a way that obscured the pluralism and radicalism that had long marked advocates of the nonviolent way of life. In an undated draft manuscript, written in the late 1960s, Jim Lawson complained that the term "nonviolence" had "been captured by the culture and made to mean passivity or non-militancy; doing nothing or as some black militants maintain, supporting

[36]Robert Penn Warren interview with Robert Moses, at https://whospeaks.library.vanderbilt.edu/interview/robert-moses; "Courtland Cox," interview by Joseph Mosnier, Washington, DC, 8 July 2011, Civil Rights History Project Collection (AFC 2010/039), American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, at https://cdn.loc.gov/service/afc/afc2010039/afc2010039_crhp0030_cox_transcript/afc2010039_crhp0030_cox_transcript.pdf; "Charles McDew," interview by Joseph Mosnier, Albany State University, 4 June 2011, Civil Rights History Project Collection (AFC 2010/039), American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, at https://cdn.loc.gov/service/afc/afc2010039/afc2010039_crhp0021_mcdew_transcript/afc2010039_crhp0021_mcdew_transcript.pdf.

[37]Malcolm X, "The Race Problem," African Students Association and NAACP Campus Chapter, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, 23 Jan. 1963, at http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/mmt/mxp/speeches/mxt20.html; Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 158, 164; Catsam, *Freedom's Main Line*, 82.

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the status quo." On the contrary, Lawson asserted, "Both violent and non-violent direct action are forms of power, as defined by Plato (the ability to be) or by Martin Luther King (the capacity to perform)." Lawson called for "the recruitment and training of armies of soul force warfare who can engage in warfare with the system. Such warfare must take the form of social dislocation, work stoppages, strikes, massive civil disobedience." While that particular framing bears the mark of the late 1960s, Lawson's nonviolence had always been connected to action. Yet while Lawson and King offered a dialectical vision of nonviolence as an opportunity to link action to self-reflection and independent inquiry, their nonviolence was increasingly caricatured as passive and rigid.[38]

Such a caricature ignored the dynamism of nonviolence—as well as the humility and openness with which many activists debated the role of nonviolence within the civil rights movement. Consider a discussion that occurred at the Highlander Folk School, one of the nerve centers of the movement, on the morning of 15 August 1960. Participants included teenagers in a Highlander summer camp, their slightly older counselors, and a few veteran activists including Ella Baker and an unidentified woman who lived in Savannah, Georgia. The woman, whom I will call Jane, began the debate by describing an elaborate system used to maintain an African American boycott of downtown stores. Volunteers patrolled downtown looking for black shoppers. To distinguish themselves, the volunteers wore red paper corsages with black streamers. If they encountered an African American person without such a corsage, the volunteers would add that person's name, address and phone number to a "traitor's list" which would be read publicly at the weekly mass meeting. Thus, through surveillance and public shaming, the movement prevented wayward shoppers from breaking the boycott.[39]

Several of the young people at Highlander found such tactics excessively harsh. One young man asked, "Don't you think that you should be a little more sympathetic with these people because a lot of people just don't know." Perhaps an educational campaign might work to prevent local people from buying downtown. "You must keep after them and explain the situation to them," the young man suggested, "and I think maybe you'll get better results than forcing this on them and telling them to do something and they don't do it and you call them a traitor and read their names." Jane was unimpressed and unrepentant. "This isn't by force," she stated. The movement was continually "conducting boycott meetings and instructing people and telling them that it's still on." Such education meant that public shaming was justified and not "by force." If someone breaks the boycott, Jane concluded, "That person is bound to be classed as a traitor. It isn't forced."[40]

Unconvinced, the young people blurred tactical arguments about efficacy with more ethical challenges to the kind of shaming that Jane praised. A young woman named Annie Brown offered a categorical defense of freedom of conscience: "I think people have the right to believe whatever they want to or to react however

[38]"Violence and Nonviolence," "Book Draft, Writings—Violence and Nonviolence—n.d.," Box 45, Lawson Papers.

[39]"Workshop on School Desegregation Morning Session," Youth Project Campers Panel, 15 Aug. 1960, Folder 8, Box 15, Highlander Folk School Manuscript Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archive.

[40]Ibid.

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they want to." But if people had the right to "react however they want to," what of the "rights" of the segregationists themselves? As Jane put it in her response, "Where it concerns school desegregation, wouldn't it be better to try to enlighten the public rather than to leave them to their own thinking?" Brown tried to shift the debate by offering a counterexample. If one of her classmates "said he wouldn't want to go to a white school," she "wouldn't feel right condemning him or embarrassing him in front of the class." In a statement of self-suffering of the kind often linked to the philosophy of nonviolence, she added, "I'd rather hurt myself for doing this. I'd think that I was definitely wrong for this. I'd feel hurt myself." Jane responded by acknowledging that "it depends upon the person's feelings," but added, "I do believe that even if this student would come up and say that he didn't want to attend this school I see no reason why that same particular person wouldn't be able to encourage somebody else to go." Put differently, a community boycott, in which participation from a majority of supporters is necessary, was not the same as a school integration effort that requires a few brave volunteers.[41]

The tide of the conversation began to turn toward shame as a necessary component of the movement. Another young participant, Jesse Douglas, offered a striking analogy: "The whole thing might be called a war between justice and injustice and you know yourself that when a country's at war with another country, Uncle Sam doesn't ask any man who wants to go. He grabs him and if you don't go, you're a traitor. And if you go and you don't cooperate then they shoot you." One of the counselors joined the new bandwagon in support of shame. "In this situation of a boycott," he argued, "those who go into the store are actually undoing, they are preventing the success." He concluded, "I think that if you are fighting for something you are naturally not going to stand idly by and watch individual people destroy what you are fighting for and that you are going to go to these extremes and maybe they are justified."[42]

The consensus seemed to have shifted strongly in support of public shaming when Ella Baker, the veteran organizer and strategist, offered a careful intervention. Her opinion was clear, but she strove to present it in a way that would afford dignity to all involved. In that way, she avoided the kind of public shaming at the heart of the discussion, and modeled the philosophy of nonviolence at its most inclusive. "I wonder if we really aren't having a debate here on two schools of thought," Baker began. "I think most of the young people share the school of thought that in dealing with individuals you try to preserve as much of the individual's capacity to save face and to preserve his personality … to not injure the personality of the individual. At no time do you try to make the individual seem small in his own eyesight or in the eyesight of his friends." Baker linked such a commitment to "the philosophy of non-violence that I think many of the students who have been involved in sit-ins are now adopting." Baker left unclear her own relation to the philosophy of nonviolence. Instead, she turned to Jane: "Your philosophy as expressed by the boycott in Savannah is more of the philosophy, I won't say of violence, but it's a philosophy that believes in the end justifying the means, that you use whatever means possible to get to your end."[43]

[41]Ibid.
[42]Ibid.
[43]Ibid.

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Baker would later distinguish herself from those who, like King and Lawson, embraced nonviolent philosophy as a way of life. She admitted that she had no "dedication to the concept of nonviolence." "I frankly could not have sat and let someone put a burning cigarette on the back of my neck as some young people did," she explained. "If necessary, if they hit me, I might him them back." But in this conversation, her heart was on the side of the position that she herself associated with the philosophy of nonviolence. She began diplomatically. "Now I don't think we're going to resolve that today here," she explained, "because I'm sure that the lady from Savannah being very well steeped in her philosophy and our young people seemed steeped in their philosophy." She could have ended the conversation there, with everyone agreeing to disagree. Instead, she concluded,

> But I do think it well for us to think in terms of how do you build a new world? Can you build a new world with the old attitudes, the attitudes that showed so little respect for the individual that you're willing to violate his personality by embarrassing him? Or do you build a new world in which you respect the personality of everyone but disrespect some of the things they do?

Thus Baker defended the beloved community—without offering such religious language—and echoed the pluralistic approach to the philosophy of nonviolence advanced by Gandhi, King, and Lawson. What united nonviolence as philosophy, as method, and as a way of life was the humility that came from fighting to "build a new world" in which difference would be respected, aware not only of the entrenched power of the status quo, but also of the challenge of holding firm to one's beliefs while remaining open to being wrong.[44]

Conclusion

To ask what it means to believe in nonviolence is to ask what it means to believe, and that question was at the heart of the African American freedom struggle. At stake was more than the competition between various ends, whether concrete goals like a new job or a paved road, or expansive ideas like the "beloved community" or "freedom now" or "black power." At issue was the more fundamental question of how belief related to action. This essay began with Charles Mauldin being asked, "You really believe in non-violence?" The black teenager who asked that question began the conversation by seeking advice on how to start a student movement in Lowndes county. The principal of the local school opposed such action. Given the principal's opposition, Mauldin suggested that the students "stay underground" until they had "everybody organized." The teenager replied, "Some of us think that for the march we might be better off staying in school." Perhaps they could accomplish more by working within the educational system. Mauldin was unconvinced. "If you stay in school you're saying that you're satisfied," he declared. It was at that point that the teenager asked whether Mauldin really believed in nonviolence. "I do," Mauldin replied. "I used to think of it as just a tactic, but now I believe in it all the way." It is fitting that his statement of belief in nonviolence was connected to a question of educational reform. The power of knowledge was

[44]Baker quoted in Payne, *I've Got the Light*, 93; and Ransby, *Ella Baker*, 193.

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central to the movement. Criticizing the idealization of nonviolence, the way it was treated as a narrow philosophy, does not entail rejecting the importance of ideas in the movement. To the contrary, nonviolence had power precisely because it inspired people to connect new ways of thinking to new ways of acting.[45]

Even as the philosophy of nonviolence came under attack within the civil rights movement, the dialectical link between nonviolent ideas and actions continued to inspire activists within the United States and abroad—from South Africa to Poland and beyond. In our age of heightened nationalism and xenophobia, of walls and borders, it would be easy to celebrate the remarkable journey of the idea of nonviolence, passed from generation to generation and from country to country. But there is a danger in telling the story of nonviolence as an intellectual history in which the idea becomes the hero—more important than the people who thought it and lived it. There is a danger in ignoring what historian Jim Kloppenberg has called the "embodied" and "embedded" nature of texts and ideas. Consider a remarkable note from Richard Gregg to John Nevin Sayre, two veteran theorists of nonviolence. On 9 September 1960 Gregg wrote,

> We have seen the full extent of the growth of the idea of loving nonviolence and the acceptance by increasing numbers of people of a belief in its power and effectiveness. The two times that I have spoken to Southern Negro audiences were most satisfying to me. They didn't listen as if it were an interesting but starry-eyed idea. They wanted it; they had felt the increase in self respect from its use; they wanted to put it to work promptly more and more. What they have done and their discipline thrill me. Young high school girls and boys full of courage and deep belief in the power and religious content of this thing. It is a wonderful time to be alive and see dreams come true.

While Gregg's enthusiasm is understandable, there is something troubling about his focus on his own dreams coming true rather than on the violence and danger facing the young black activists he found so inspiring. It was as if the idea of nonviolence mattered more to him than whether American racism could be defeated, and at what cost.[46]

Nonviolence is still often treated as an idea. It is telling, for example, that Mark Kurlansky's popular account of the history of nonviolence is subtitled "a dangerous idea." Of course, nonviolence was and is an idea, but one shaped by complex and dynamic local contexts that are often ignored in accounts that track the movement of nonviolence across time and space. Even those who see nonviolence as a tactic and reject moral or philosophical arguments often treat nonviolence as a remarkably generic and thus portable idea. Perhaps the most renowned contemporary

[45]Adler, "Letter from Selma"; Horsey, "The Road to Selma."

[46]Richard Gregg to John Nevin Sayre, 9 Sept. 1960, "Gregg, Richard, 1946–1969," Sayre Papers, Series A, Box 6, DG-117, SCPC; James T. Kloppenberg, "Thinking Historically: A Manifesto of Pragmatic Hermeneutics," *Modern Intellectual History* 9/1 (2012), 201–16, at 202, 207, 209; José-Antonio Orosco, *Cesar Chavez and the Common Sense of Nonviolence* (Albuquerque, 2008); Stephen Zunes, "The Role of Non-violent Action in the Downfall of Apartheid," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 37/1 (1999), 137–69; Debjani Ganguly and John Docker, eds., *Rethinking Gandhi and Nonviolent Relationality: Global Perspectives* (London, 2008).

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advocate of nonviolence, Gene Sharp, wrote in his best-selling book, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, that "nonviolent action is a technique used to control, combat, and destroy the opponent's power by nonviolent means." "Nonviolent action is thus not synonymous with 'pacifism,'" he wrote. "Nor is it identical with religious or philosophical systems emphasizing nonviolence as a matter of moral principle." While Sharp maintained the dichotomy between philosophy and tactic, he did not dispense with the practice of treating nonviolence as an idea. To the contrary, it is a capacious conception of "nonviolent action" that links together the varied strategies and tactics that Sharp offers like a menu written for universal consumption.[47]

Sharp was not especially invested in the philosophy-versus-tactic dichotomy; indeed, his belief in the universal relevance of nonviolent action led him to reject the distinction as unimportant. In a 1979 volume entitled *Gandhi as a Political Strategist*, he included a chapter called "Nonviolence: Moral Principle or Political Technique?" "If, as Gandhi believed, the ethical course of action and the practical course of action are ultimately identical," Sharp wrote, "then the 'believer' in nonviolent ethic must be involved with the practical development of the political technique, and the 'practical politician' can explore the possibility of substituting effective nonviolent means in place of violence in one specific problem area after another." Note Sharp's emphasis on the transportability of nonviolent means. It was the ease of transfer from situation to situation that rendered nonviolence both an idea and a tactic. "If such a stage-by-stage substitution proves viable," Sharp explained, "the behavior of the practical politician would in the end become virtually indistinguishable from that of those who profess their belief in the universal moral principle."[48]

What matters is not whether nonviolence was treated as an idea—nearly everyone did so, and for good reason—but whether the idea of nonviolence was abstracted from the specific contexts of time and place. In the words of sociologist Stellan Vinthagen, "Nonviolent action is normally described as either a religious–moral superior force or an effective technique in a power struggle. One the one hand, it is a tool that makes the gods smile; on the other, it is a tool to influence humans. Either way, it is portrayed as one dimensional." In September 1950, Sharp offered a more complex understanding of the embedded nature of nonviolent thought and practice in a letter he wrote to Jim Lawson. Sharp praised Gandhi and his followers for drawing on multiple traditions of resistance. They "did not renounce the things which were good in the traditions in which they were raised,

[47]Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action, Part One: Power and Struggle* (Boston, 1973), 4, 68; Mark Kurlansky, *Nonviolence: Twenty-Five Lessons from the History of a Dangerous Idea* (New York, 2006). Also see Judith Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence: The Ethical in the Political* (New York and London, 2000); Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Nonviolent Struggle: Theories, Strategies, and Dynamics* (New York, 2015); Mark Engler and Paul Engler, *This Is an Uprising: How Nonviolent Revolt Is Shaping the Twenty-First Century* (New York, 2016); Kurt Schock, *Civil Resistance Today* (Cambridge, 2015); Michael N. Nagler, *The Nonviolence Handbook: A Guide for Practical Action* (Oakland, 2014); Dustin Ells Howes, "The Failure of Pacifism and the Success of Nonviolence," *Perspectives on Politics* 11 (2013), 427–46; Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York, 2011); Jonathan Schell, *The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and the Will of the People* (New York, 2003); Peter Ackerman and Jack Duvall, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York, 2000).

[48]Gene Sharp, *Gandhi as a Political Strategist* (Boston, 1979), 503.

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but rather took those parts which they thought were the best, gave them a fresh and vital interpretation and sought to practice this and propagate this which they thought held the solution to the ills of their day." Like all global ideas, nonviolence was spread via a creative process of translation and local contestation.[49]

Nonviolence required flexibility and the willingness to change in light of new evidence. Like Gandhi, who famously titled his autobiography *My Experiments with Truth*, Jim Lawson linked the educational power of nonviolence to a religious understanding of truth. "Nonviolent action does not stand alone," he wrote; "it stands primarily because of its oneness with Truth, God, Love; the action itself has little or no merit or worth; it derives its character from Truth. It has force, power and meaning merely because it represents or rather it is the natural outgrowth of Truth seeking." As historian Daniel Rodgers wrote about the American revolution, the key actors in the movement were not abstract terms like "'liberalism' and 'republicanism' but men and women thinking their way eclectically through the range of questions that revolutionary politics thrust upon them." The dichotomous nature of nonviolence depended on an idea about ideas—that they are personal rather than social, more about belief than action, more static and rigid than open and dynamic. That is a dangerous idea too.[50]

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[49]Stellan Vinthagen, "Four Dimensions of Nonviolent Action: A Sociological Perspective," in Schock, *Civil Resistance*, 259; Gene Sharp to James Lawson, 19 Sept. 1950, "Baldwin-Wallace—Correspondence—Incoming—September 1950," Box 28, Lawson Papers.

[50]"Methods of Nonviolence," "Book Draft—Chapter V," Box 45, Lawson Papers; Daniel T. Rodgers, "The Commitments of Democracy," *Modern Intellectual History* 16/2 (2019), 595.

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