

## Chapter 1

# Gandhi as a Postmodern Thinker

*Formerly I used to resent the ignorance of my opponents. Today I can love them because I am gifted with the eye to see myself as others see me and vice versa.*

—M. K. Gandhi

*A dawning realization that I have no idea what “postmodernism” means has led me to wonder whether I ever knew what I meant by “modernism.”*

—Richard Rorty

Gandhi is usually seen as a forceful critic of modernism and it is generally assumed that he proposed a return to premodern modes of thought. While this was a reasonable hypothesis to his contemporaries and most commentators since his death, it is now time to reevaluate Gandhi's philosophy in light of postmodern modes of thought. Radhakrishnan's first impression of Gandhi was that he possessed a “medieval attitude of mind,”<sup>1</sup> but he later saw that he was mistaken. In this book I will not only be revising my first reactions to him as premodernist, but I shall also go beyond my second impressions of him as a modernist thinker. I believe that a postmodern Gandhi can be defended and that he may offer significant contributions to a postmodern view of self, ethics, religion, and political philosophy. I shall also suggest that it is a constructive rather than a deconstructive postmodernism that suits him best.

Let me say at the outset that I am not equating, as Gandhi may have done, modernism with modernization in the sense of industrialization and urbanization. Modernism is also not necessarily European and premodernism is not primarily Asian. (Recognizing the profound effect of Euro-American

thinkers on him, Gandhi did not see his own reform program as one that would divide East from West.) Furthermore, modernism is not something new and recent and premodernism something old and ancient. Finally, I contend that we can also discern the beginnings of a postmodernist response among the ancient philosophers, most notably Confucius, Zhuangzi, and Gautama Buddha.<sup>2</sup> Some commentators claim that Śāṅkara is a forerunner of postmodern thought,<sup>3</sup> but it seems to me that Brahman as the ultimate, undifferentiated substance is a premodern assumption.

## **Gandhi as Premodernist**

The crisis of the modern world has led many to believe that the only answer is to return to the traditional forms of self and community that existed before the Modern Age. Such a move would involve the rejection of science, technology, and a mechanistic cosmology. Ontologically the modern worldview is basically atomistic, both at the physical and the social level. The cosmos is simply the sum total of its many inert and externally related parts, just as modern society is simply the sum total of social atoms contingently related to other social atoms. (The modern state is simply the social atom writ large on an international scale, acting as dysfunctionally as the social atom does in smaller communities.) The modernist view of time is also linear, with one event happening after the other, with no other purpose than simply to continue that way. The modernist view of the sacred has been to reject it altogether, or to place God in a transcendent realm far removed from the material world. The latter solution is the way that some Christian theologians have reconciled themselves with mechanistic science.

By contrast the premodern vision of the world is one of totality, unity, and, above all, purpose. These values were celebrated in ritual and myth, the effect of which was to sacralize the cycles of seasons and the generations of animal and human procreation. The human self, then, is an integral part of the sacred whole, which is greater than and more valuable than its parts. And, as Mircea Eliade has shown in *Cosmos and History*, premodern people sought to escape the meaningless momentariness of history (which Eliade called the “terror of history”) by immersing themselves in an Eternal Now. Myth and ritual facilitated the painful passage through personal and social crises, rationalized death and violence, and controlled the power of sexuality. One could say that contemporary humankind is left to cope with its crises with far less successful therapies or helpful institutions.

When Gandhi says that “in order to restore India to its pristine condition, we have to return to it,”<sup>4</sup> most commentators have taken this to mean that he has joined the premodernist revolt against modernism. The pristine India

was for him the village communities where a vast majority of Indians still live today. In the villages Gandhi found people who “overflowed with faith” and “whose wisdom was boundless.”<sup>5</sup> Because of his confidence in these people, he called for a dismantling of centralized state authority and a return to what he called “village republicanism.” He also supported the caste system as long as the scourge of untouchability was removed. Otherwise Gandhi insisted that the son should follow the father’s occupation, as long as that job did not involve immoral activity. A critic once countered that, according to this logic, Abraham Lincoln should not have aspired to become president of the United States. Gandhi answers that, as long as he keeps his profession, the scavenger can otherwise be anything that he wants to be.<sup>6</sup>

Modern philosophy generally separates fact and value, the “is” and the “ought,” science and faith, politics and religion, the public from the private, and theory from practice. Gandhi rejects each of these distinctions in what again appears to be a return to premodern modes of thought. Even more pointed is his disavowal of modern technology, mechanized industry, centralized bureaucratic administration, and the rule of science in all areas of life. Most of us would probably agree with Gandhi that the modern state does indeed swallow up individual persons, even as it is, ironically, celebrating their autonomy, and that it has also destroyed the intimate ties of traditional community life. Gandhi reaffirms his own Hindu tradition that the goal of human life should be truth and virtue rather than wealth and power. According to *The Laws of Manu*, the attainment of family and prosperity is only a stage on life’s way, a stage that is eventually replaced by the person who takes vows of nonviolence, nonpossession, and chastity.

In addition to the terror of history, many premodern peoples also saw the body and senses as a hindrance to the spiritual life. This view was sometimes connected, as it was in Advaita Vedānta, with the view that the natural world as a whole is illusory or at most only a derivative reality. Again Gandhi appears to be in agreement with premodernism on the first point. (He never speaks of the world as unreal or illusory, so his connection to Advaita Vedānta, as I will argue later, is problematic.) Gandhi frequently affirms a strict dualism between soul and body, and he speaks constantly of a Manichean battle between our spiritual natures and our animal natures. The body is given to us because of our karma: “We are enslaved in the body because of our sinful deeds.”<sup>7</sup> The body is “a filthy mass of bones, flesh and blood”; and “when it is under the control of God it is a jewel, but when it passes into the control of the Devil, it is pit of filth.”<sup>8</sup>

Gandhi’s Manicheanism is pervasive and it may have come from Christian influences as well as his own Indian tradition: “In God there is no duality. But as soon as we descend to the empirical level, we get two forces—God and Satan, as Christians call them.”<sup>9</sup> Gandhi claims that we are necessarily

violent because of life in a body, so that is why we should aim to be rid of it or at least train ourselves to become impervious to its needs. Interestingly enough, a mind-body dualism characterizes much of modern thought, but it is formulated in a much more subtle and sophisticated form. Cartesian dualism does not impute evil to the body, so Gandhi's dualism is definitely more premodern than modern—it is more Manichean than Cartesian—and it stands as the greatest obstacle to a postmodern interpretation of his thought. Curiously, Gandhi rejects the synthetic dialectic of opposites embedded in his own tradition—namely, that both good and evil are found in the Godhead—for a Manichean exclusion of opposites.

When Gandhi speaks of a person's spiritual development, he argues that it is not a passive and static affair, but it involves making war on the enemy's camp. True to the Manichean spirit, the enemy is first and foremost the body: "The spirit in me pulls me one way, the flesh in me pulls in the opposite direction. ... This struggle resolves itself into an incessant crucifixion of the flesh so that the spirit may become entirely free."<sup>10</sup> When Gandhi writes about his philosophy of education, he calls for a harmony of intellect, heart, and body,<sup>11</sup> a view that obviously conflicts with the passages just cited. Furthermore, Nair Pyarelal's analysis of *brahmacharya* as involving the unity of one's entire life, including the spirit and the body, reflects Tantrism rather than Manicheanism.<sup>12</sup> (Indeed, the Tantric tradition is the most provocative answer to the ascetic rejection of the body.) As interpreters of Gandhi, we should take every opportunity to stress the aspects of his thought that emphasize the unity of heart, mind, body, and spirit.

As we now look beyond Gandhi as a premodernist, it is important to note that, although he admired the achievements of the ancient India, he realized that he could not take the *dharma* of another age as his own. Distinctively modern, or even postmodern, is Gandhi's principle that each society, as each individual, has its own truth, and that simply reviving ancient truths was not only anachronistic but unworkable. As Bhikhu Parekh states, "Every *yuga* or age had its own distinctive problems and needed to come to terms with them in its own way. For [Gandhi] as for Hindus in general the past was a source of inspiration and self-confidence, never a model or blueprint for the present."<sup>13</sup> The integration of past truths combined with a constructive critique of modernism is the principal methodological goal of constructive postmodernism.

## The Modernist Gandhi

Modernism has been described as a movement from *mythos* to *logos*, and this replacement of myth by logic has been going on for at least 2,500 years. Almost simultaneously in India, China, and Greece, the strict separation of

fact and value, science and religion was proposed by the Lokāyata materialists, the Greek atomists, and the Chinese Mohists. These philosophies remained minority positions, but it is nevertheless essential to note that the seeds for modernist philosophy are very old. The Greek Sophists stood for ethical individualism and relativism; they gave law its adversarial system and the now accepted practice that attorneys may “make the weaker argument the stronger”; they inspired Renaissance humanists to extend education to the masses as well as to the aristocracy; and they gave us a preview of a fully secular modern society. Even though maintaining teleology and the unity of fact and value, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle affirmed ethical individualism and rationalism, and Aristotle supported representative government, held by many as one of the great achievements of the modern world.

One of Gandhi’s most basic assumptions was his firm belief in the integrity of the individual: “The individual is the one supreme consideration”;<sup>14</sup> “[I]f the individual ceases to count, what is left of society?”<sup>15</sup> Gandhi said that he feared the power of the state, because “it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality, which lies at the root of all progress.”<sup>16</sup> For Gandhi individuals must act on their own truth regardless of the consequences and regardless of whether others think they are in error. This proviso is foundational to Gandhi’s experiments with truth. This affirmation of the integrity and reality of the individual is the principal reason why Gandhi cannot be related to Advaita Vedānta. If individuation is ultimately illusory, the very foundations of Gandhi’s political ethics are dissolved.

It is important to observe that the doctrine of karma is modernist in assuming the concept of individual moral responsibility. It is also significant that individual karma is most consistently expressed in the Jain-Yoga-Sāṃkhya philosophies that anticipate the modernist idea of autonomous selves. Individual moral responsibility becomes problematic only in the *bhakti yoga* of the Hindu saviors’ forgiveness of human sins and the distribution of the Bodhisattvas’ excess merit. Some philosophers have struggled to make intelligible the idea of collective karma,<sup>17</sup> but the basic logic of karma dictates individual responsibility for individual acts and a corresponding individual resolution of guilt related to these acts. It is clear that even with his theistic tendencies Gandhi always affirms individual personal responsibility.

Gandhi’s experiments with truth are distinctively modernist with their firm assumption that the individual is the final arbiter of action. To assert a source of authority outside of the Torah, Dikē, the Dharma, or the laws of any God is a sure sign of the modernist mind. (Sometimes, however, Gandhi does identify the inner voice as the command of God, so this gives us a premodern view of the matter.) Gandhi also rejects a premodern cyclical view of history in favor of a modernist view of linear moral progression. A very modernist Gandhi states, “The force of spirit is ever progressive and

endless. ... The remedy [from self-destruction] lies in every individual training himself for self-expression in every walk of life, irrespective of response of the neighbours."<sup>18</sup> This is not only progressive and individualistic, it also appears to undermine his premodern view that one should train in the profession of one's father.

The possibility of people's "inner voices" offering conflicting results raises the issue of relativism, a position associated with modernism but, again, one that is at least as old as Protagoras's dictum of *homo mensura*. Because of our finitude and fallibility, Gandhi firmly asserted that we can only attain relative truths. French postmodern philosophy is also criticized for its relativism, but the difference between it and Gandhi is that he believed in an absolute truth behind our failed attempts to reach it. Therefore, Gandhi's position on truth does not conform to French deconstruction, but it is more compatible with constructive postmodernism. Although he formulates his views in a much more sophisticated way, Charles Sanders Peirce shares Gandhi's dual commitment to fallibilism and epistemological realism.<sup>19</sup> Peirce distanced himself from James and Dewey primarily because of their rejection of realism. Process philosophers Whitehead and Hartshorne also preserve epistemological realism while at the same time affirming the antiessentialist and process metaphysics that characterizes their form of constructive postmodernism.

Gandhi's conception of religion could be called modernist as well. He believed that all religions are equal, and all are to be tolerated. Gandhi was a fervent believer in prayer and he also chanted Rāma's name, but even these practices are sometimes given a modernist rendering. Gandhi said that for him Rāma was not the king of the *Rāmāyāna* or an incarnation of Viṣṇu, but the name simply means "purity of conduct" and the "search for truth."<sup>20</sup> His usual explanation of prayer as communing with the "Higher Self"<sup>21</sup> could be interpreted as a Kantian-like appeal to conscience.

For Gandhi religion is a purely personal matter, and "there are as many religions as there are individuals."<sup>22</sup> One could also say that he is committed to the modernist reduction of religion to ethics. He has his own special version of this reductionist religion: religion is the search for truth, an endeavor even inclusive of atheists. Also modernist is his position that the state should not support religious organizations. But this did not prevent his holding that religion should be integrated into political action as its ethical ground and justification. This was a foundational belief for Gandhi and it was shared by political thinkers of the European Enlightenment. It is only some contemporary American critics who insist on a strict separation of religion and politics.

Gandhi scholar Ronald Tercek is very much committed to a modernist interpretation of Gandhi. In an interesting twist, Tercek offers a decidedly European rendering of what should be Gandhi's most Hindu concept.

Terchek suggests that *advaita* means the unity and equality of human beings, in the fully modernist sense of those terms.<sup>23</sup> Given Gandhi's very eccentric understanding of *advaita*, Terchek's position cannot be rejected outright. Terchek claims that complete moral autonomy, even if it means civil disobedience, was Gandhi's goal and, if this is so, then he is a fully modernist thinker. Terchek also believes that Gandhi's famous warning that "India is in danger of losing her soul" does not express a fear that Indians are losing their ancient premodern traditions; rather, it means that Indians will lose their moral autonomy in a dehumanizing bureaucratic state. Gandhi's principal fear was that people would not have enough self-determination to perform acts of civil disobedience. On each of these points I believe that Terchek has pressed Gandhi too far in a Euro-American and modernist direction. Although he rejects a postmodernist reading of Gandhi,<sup>24</sup> Terchek's qualifications of the traditional idea of autonomy look very much like a constructive postmodernist revision of the idea of self-legislation and the preservation of personal integrity. Indeed, it is this view of autonomy that is wedded to Gandhi's organic view of self, world, and society and Gandhi's view of the self as relational and social. I believe that this is thoroughly constructive postmodern worldview.

Gandhi's commitment to civil disobedience is intimately related to the issue of his professed anarchism. Gandhi called his village republicanism a form of "enlightened anarchy" in which "everyone is [her] own ruler."<sup>25</sup> He agrees with Thoreau that "government is best that governs least," and he believed that government is a necessary evil. (Before the Modern Age people generally followed Aristotle's assumption that human beings were social and political animals and that being ruled was a natural state of affairs.) If Gandhi's anarchism is modernist, then his utopianism is also modernist. Along with nationalism, militarism, and environmental degradation, utopianism is without doubt one of the great failures of modernism. Most utopian experiments have ended in innocuous failure, but some of them, especially the communist states, became, fulfilling the George Orwell's prophecies, totalitarian dystopias. Fortunately, especially for the future generations of these societies, the communist experiments collapsed within a single generation. The central problem with utopianism, the use of calculative reason in a systematic ordering of society, points to a fundamental flaw in the modern worldview.

One could also argue that even though he differed with other Indian nationalists, his own nationalism was modernist in its main points, especially if it is seen in connection with his anarchism and his utopianism. There is much truth in Huiyun Wang's claim that "Gandhi was...anti-modern subjectively and...a political modernizer objectively."<sup>26</sup> In the short text of *Hind Swaraj* the word "nation" is mentioned seventy-five times, and Gandhi

believed that India, as a vast federation of village republics, could join the great family of nation states as an equal partner. The Gujarati text of *Hind Swaraj*, as Anthony J. Parel has pointed out, makes a significant difference between a genuine nation formed as community (*praja*) and a nation of individuals merely held together by state power (*rashtra*).<sup>27</sup> As opposed to the received view that it was British administration and British railways that made India a nation, Gandhi claimed that “India has been one country right from ancient times.”<sup>28</sup> Pilgrim saints, who walked the length and breadth of the Indian subcontinent, unified India centuries before it was linked by iron rails. Today millions of Indians still ply these British-built railways, not only to do business and visit relatives, but to continue the age-old pilgrimage to the sacred sites of Mother India.

The fact that Gandhi claims a premodern origin for the Indian nation does not necessarily mean that his political views are premodern. His views on nationhood are not modernist either, for the modern state, as we have seen, is viewed as analogous to the individual social atom magnified on the international level. As Parel states, “[*Hind Swaraj*] does not propound the *modern* concept of nation in so far as the latter is based on the notions of brute force, the priority of national interest, and a principle of exclusiveness based on either religion, or language, or race.”<sup>29</sup> Even the relatively innocuous state apparatus of liberal democracy does not escape Gandhi’s critical eye. Although it is theoretically designed to do so, liberal democracies do not empower individuals; rather, as Parekh so aptly phrases it, they abstract “power from the people, concentrate it in the state and then return it to them in their new [abstract roles] as citizens.”<sup>30</sup>

Parel’s and Parekh’s views of Gandhi’s political philosophy allow us to get our first glimpse of a postmodern Gandhi. His view of the nation state is arguably postmodern in that it offers India as a model for a new type of polity, one which has already proved itself, with some unfortunate exceptions, to be a success in bringing sixteen different major language groups and six world religions together, not by brute force, but by the rule of law and representative democracy. Gandhi’s postmodern vision of nationhood is one based on decentralized local control, assimilation and tolerance of cultural differences, and above all, nonviolence. As we will see, “decentering” the self and national analogues of the self is the crux of all postmodern philosophy. Gandhi’s position, however, definitely does not go as far as Derrida’s view, which has been described as a “radical form of democracy, one without representation, and therefore one in which even individuals’ representations of themselves would be drawn constantly into question.”<sup>31</sup>

Returning to the issues of anarchism and utopianism, we can now see that some qualification is in order. Gandhi spoke fervently of his village communities as ideal states, but he was keenly aware of human fallibility



and the limits of reason, especially the calculative reason of modern mass political organization. Joan Bondurant has also taken issue with those commentators who have interpreted Gandhi's anarchism along traditional lines. Most anarchist theories are based on the idea of mutual self-interest and a rejection of all external sanctions. But Gandhi's practice of nonviolence and self-suffering discourages self-interest and reintroduces constraint and coercion in a way unlike any other previous political theory. In addition to the two anarchist positions—violent overthrow of the authoritarian state or passive withdrawal from society altogether—Gandhi adds a third solution, which Bondurant believes solves the anarchist dilemma.

Anarchists have always opposed the state because they believe that the only way it could assert its authority was through violence. Gandhi's technique of *satyāgraha* offers a nonviolent way of restraining and persuading people to work for the common good. As Bondurant states, "Anarchists may claim a positive philosophy, but they, like other political theorists, have rarely sought a positive *technique* whereby a system could be realized."<sup>32</sup> Instead of using the term "anarchist," one could call Gandhi a "communitarian," a term that is commonly used by today's postmodern political thinkers. Gandhi's statement that Indians should "study [their] Eastern institutions in [a] spirit of scientific inquiry...[to] evolve a truer socialism and a truer communism,"<sup>33</sup> might be the synthesis of premodern and modern that we find in constructive postmodernism.

Gandhi's appeal to reason and scientific method also ties him to the modern worldview. Although he rejected scientism, the ideology that makes science the source of all truth, he was firmly committed to the method of rational inquiry and experimental testing. He said that we must reject truth claims, even those of scripture, that are "repugnant to reason or moral sense."<sup>34</sup> In his autobiography he is even more specific about the requirements of his scientific method: the scientist "conducts his experiments with the utmost accuracy, forethought and minuteness, [and] never claims any finality about his conclusions."<sup>35</sup> Richard B. Gregg states that Gandhi "is a social scientist because he follows social truth by the scientific method of observation, intuitional and intellectual hypothesis and experimental test."<sup>36</sup>

There is no sign in Gandhi, however, of the atomism and reductionism that characterizes much of the scientific mentality. The Cartesian method of reducing to clear and distinct simples to understand the whole is also missing from Gandhi. Furthermore, there is no evidence of a method of Cartesian doubt, which declared that there is only one subject of experience of which we are certain—namely, the human thinking subject. All other things in the world, including persons and other sentient beings, have now become objects of thought, not subjects in their own right. Cartesian

subjectivism, therefore, gave birth simultaneously to modern objectivism as well. With the influence of the new mechanical cosmology the stage was set for uniquely modern forms of otherness and alienation. Gandhi would have been very sympathetic to the idea of the “reenchantment of science” proposed by today’s constructive postmodernist thinkers.<sup>37</sup> In their view both teleology and an animate nature are revived in ways compatible with contemporary physics and with Gandhi’s tendency to equate nature and life.

Gandhi’s principal problem with modernism is its separation of fact and value. Ramashray Roy is the Gandhi scholar who, because of his vast knowledge of modern European philosophy, has been able to diagnose this problem most successfully. By separating the “ought” from the “is,” human life loses its moral focus. The goal of modern life, especially in its most utilitarian forms, is simply the satisfaction of one desire after the other. Self-gratification is not only accepted but encouraged, and gradually higher purposes are replaced by lower ordinary ones.<sup>38</sup> In *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi equates modernism with sensual self-gratification, and condemns it primarily for this reason. The modern world view not only alienates us from nature, but also alienates our desires from any moral end. The teleology of the ancients, that which gave their life its ultimate meaning and purpose, has been eliminated in modernism.

Roy claims that “modernism attributes to man godly powers,”<sup>39</sup> which he has used to conquer nature and build weapons of mass destruction. In my other book in this series I have called this Titanism, a form of extreme humanism in which human beings have taken on divine prerogatives and, as a result of their hubris, have lost sight of their proper place in the world. The Faustian bargain of modernism has come at a great price: unlivable cities, devastation of the natural world, and the constant threat of deadly weapons everywhere. Ironically, the power promised by modernism has in many instances turned to impotence—either in complete hedonistic dissipation or the clash and mutual cancellation of personal and national power.

In his excellent book on Gandhi’s political philosophy Bhikhu Parekh lists five “distinctively human powers”—self-determination, autonomy, self-knowledge, self-discipline, and social cooperation—that Gandhi would have required for any great civilization.<sup>40</sup> According to Gandhi, all five of these capacities are threatened by modern civilization, with the last three as the weakest and most vulnerable. Today’s emphasis on the first two qualities is distinctively modern and Euro-American, but all five qualities are part of the European tradition beginning with the Greek and Christian philosophers. A lack of balance among the qualities makes contemporary culture especially unstable and violence prone. Except for the spiritual self-determination and autonomy of the yogis, which ultimately does not have a political or even a moral goal, these two characteristics have not been strong in Asian thought as well.

We can now see what Gandhi meant when he said that his attack on modern civilization was not an attack on the West, because each of his basic human powers is part of the European tradition. Europe and America can regain the moral ground that they lost by recognizing the importance of self-knowledge, self-discipline, and social cooperation. (Gandhi's concept of self-knowledge will be analyzed in chapter 5 and the virtues requiring self-discipline will be discussed in chapter 8.) The great irony is that Gandhi was initially inspired to recapture this lost ground by European thinkers (Socrates, Tolstoy, Ruskin, and Thoreau) and by English translations and expressions (theosophy as an example) of his own Indian tradition. By this analysis we can see once again how modernist and Western Gandhi really was. One could say that Socrates's and Thoreau's "soul-force" was stronger in an activist sense than the more passive "soul-force" of his Hindu tradition. Gandhi's own Vaiṣṇava tradition is known for its dynamic spirituality, but not for political confrontation, so Western activism must be an important key to Gandhi's idea of *satyāgraha* and progressive nonviolence.

We have already seen the possibility of a postmodern political philosophy in Gandhi, so let us see if we can take him beyond modernism to a more comprehensive and constructive postmodern philosophy. When Vivek Pinto calls Gandhi's work "critical traditionalism" and when Madhuri Sondhi suggests that Gandhi integrates Hindu *dharma* into modernism and that *Hind Swaraj* represents both a critique and an appropriation of modern ideas, both these authors are moving towards a constructive postmodern Gandhi.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, Thomas Pantham has already arrived at this interpretation: "[Gandhi's] project...is one of overcoming modernism without regressing to traditionalism. In his approach, there is a merging of the reconstruction of Indian tradition and the reconstruction of Western modernity."<sup>42</sup>

## Two Forms of Postmodernism

The stage for a postmodern interpretation of Gandhi has been set, but we need better definitions of postmodernism than have been offered thus far in the Gandhian literature. We who embrace constructive postmodernism must also double our efforts to emphasize the fact that there is more to postmodernism than French deconstruction. (We are also confident that we can alleviate Richard Rorty's confusion expressed in the epigraph that heads this chapter.) Madhuri Wadhwa defines postmodernism as "the adoption or adaptation of Western developmental models to indigenous systems"; or alternatively a "synthesis of old and new which is qualitatively new from the old and the new."<sup>43</sup> First, Wadhwa's first definition does hint at elements of constructive postmodernism. Second, we have already seen that modernism

is not new, and that its roots go back at least 2,500 years. Third, modernism is not necessarily Western, because Jainism and Sāṃkhya-Yoga have views of moral and spiritual autonomy that are even more extreme than European views. One must remember that the Jain saint and the yogi do not merge with Brahman, as in the premodernist totality of the Upaniṣads and Vedānta, but are liberated to live a perfect life of total isolation from the world and from each other. Their liberated states are beyond good and evil and apart from all society and politics. Gandhi's this-worldly asceticism and political activism stands in stark contrast to this yogic tradition.

In his book *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies* Karl H. Potter focuses not only on conceptual similarities between the Indian ascetics and the Sophists' *homo mensura*, but also on the hubris of the Indian yogis. Agreeing with Heinrich Zimmer that asceticism is "an expression of an extreme will for power,"<sup>44</sup> Potter states, "Indian philosophy *does* in fact elevate power, control or freedom to a supereminent position. ... The ultimate value...is not morality but freedom...complete control over one's environment...even control of the physical sources of power in the universe."<sup>45</sup> Potter even suggests that Europeans have better understood their limitations than their Indian counterparts. The modern scientific view of nature as "impersonal, neither in our control nor controlling us" is alien to the Indian mind, which has no doubt about "the power of the yogi to control not only his body but the bodies of others—indeed, the whole universe. ..."<sup>46</sup> There is, as I have argued in my other book in this series, an Indian Titanism as well as the technological Titanism of the West. The former is a benign form of Titanism, but it is nonetheless important to see the conceptual parallels. One might see Titanism as the culmination of all the negative implications of the modernist worldview.

What, then, is the postmodern response to Asian and European Titanism, and how do we define it correctly? Susanne Rudolph and Lloyd Rudolph point us towards an answer: we will find the postmodern Gandhi in the "contesting discourse" of the "counter-culture" voices against modernism that he found in Tolstoy, Ruskin, and Thoreau. (In the Indian tradition the most constructive countercultural force was Gautama Buddha, although not as successful as Gandhi claimed as bringing "an arrogant priesthood" to its knees.)<sup>47</sup> According to the Rudolphs, the use of "contesting discourse" allowed Gandhi to give truth a "contextual and experimental form."<sup>48</sup> The Rudolphs' contesting discourse might very well be conceived of as deconstructive discourse, which fragments and decenters the entrenched structures of the modern state and culture. In the jargon of French deconstruction, it is the "spacing" or distancing from a logocentric modern culture. Gandhi's experiments with truth can be seen as his way to dislodge and discredit the authority structures of British India and, therefore, to deconstruct the

modernist, imperialist assumptions of British rule. Gandhi does this without falling back uncritically onto tradition, for he was also, at the same time, dismantling the brahmin-centered caste system of ancient India.

In his book *Gandhian Utopia: Experiments with Culture*, Richard G. Fox explicitly rejects the postmodernist approach to his discipline of anthropology. Some of his initial conclusions about Gandhi's method, however, sound like French deconstruction. For example, Fox acknowledges the fact that Gandhi is not the sole "author" of the Gandhian movement, just as Derrida claims that writers are never the sole authors of their own texts. Fox observes that Gandhi had many personal identities and that his experiments with truth intensified this fragmentation of self. If Fox is correct, it is on this very point that Gandhi stands furthest from his own Vedāntist tradition where there is only one true Self. The goal of Hindu philosophy might be seen as a radical recentering of the soul rather than its fragmentation. (This makes Vedānta premodern rather than postmodern.) Reviewing Fox's book, Douglas Allen states, "[Gandhi's] sense of discontinuous personhoods...[and] his different constructions of his identity as a person and of Indian culture, of his utopian ideals and practices and struggles, all must be understood as emerging from his experiments with truth—his ever-changing contingent confrontations with existing structures of domination."<sup>49</sup> Many commentators have despaired of Gandhi's inconsistencies and have concluded that Gandhi was either confused or unwilling to reconcile the various strands of his worldview. Fox, however, takes Gandhi's eclecticism as integral to his lifelong struggle to dismantle British rule in India. More fundamentally, we must see this phenomenon as a manifestation of Gandhi's experiments with truth, in which he was willing to give up even his own views if they did not test out in experience.

Although Fox asserts that Gandhi rejects integral personhood in favor of "discontinuous personhood," he does not give any evidence for this claim.<sup>50</sup> Even though he may be correct about Gandhi's changing identities throughout his career, we have seen that Gandhi's own view of self ranges from a Vedāntist *ātman* through a social, relational self to a modernist autonomous self. Fox's choice of the phrase "discontinuous personhood" is misleading, because Gandhi does believe, contrary to Derrida, in authorial intention, except that the locus of this intention is more social and collective. The theory of authorial intention has usually been connected to the "Great Person" theory of human creativity, but Fox wishes to establish a middle position between singular authorship and cultural determinism. Fox believes that great persons are "always authorized by little people" and that persons are "culturally defined" and not determined.<sup>51</sup> Fox is drawing on Paul Ricoeur and Ralph Mannheim for theoretical guidance and these moderate continental voices dovetail nicely with the American school of constructive

postmodernism. My continental preference for the construction of social meanings is Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who offers a striking image of centripetal *Sinngebung* meeting the centrifugal forces of personal intention.

Although he is not aware of a postmodern alternative to the French school, Fox's position is clearly compatible with constructive postmodernism, a theoretical framework much more suitable to Gandhi as well. I just mentioned possible continental sources for this position, but it is usually connected with American pragmatism and contemporary process philosophy. This view attempts to reestablish the premodern harmony of humans, society, and God but without losing the integrity of the individual, the possibility of meaning, and the intrinsic value of nature. Constructive postmodernists believe that the French deconstructionists are throwing out the proverbial baby with the bath water. The latter wish to reject not only the modern worldview but any worldview whatsoever. The constructive postmodernist wants to preserve the concept of a worldview and proposes to reconstruct one that avoids the liabilities of both premodernism and modernism.

The ancient cosmology that most closely approximates the constructive postmodern view is the one found in Chinese philosophy. In their doctrine of the Cosmic Triad the Chinese gave equal value and integrity to human beings, earth and heaven. All have their own job to perform and none competes with the other with respect to these duties. Only rarely did the Chinese deify humans and humanize heaven in the way that Indian and Christian incarnational theologies have done. The deification of humans leads to spiritual Titanism, and in these views nature is usually left with little or no value. With regard to human nature Confucian philosophers do not consider reason to be the essence of persons and never describe the self as autonomous. Furthermore, Confucian thinkers do not conceive of substance or essence in the typical Indian or Greek way. When we interpret Gandhian cosmology as an organic holism rather than a Vedāntist monism, the two traditions become eminently more comparable. This connection between Confucianism and Gandhi is discussed in greater detail in chapter 7.

The other ancient philosopher who anticipates constructive postmodernism is Gautama Buddha. The Buddha's contribution to postmodernism comes primarily in his brilliant criticism of the substance metaphysics of Jainism and Hinduism. The Buddha rejected the idea of a permanent soul substance as a metaphysical fiction that has no basis in experience. As the ultimate point of craving and attachment, he also found it practically damaging to the spiritual life. The spiritual substance of the autonomous soul and the inert substance of the Newtonian atom constitute the ontological foundations of the modern worldview. The rejection of a spiritual self by many materialists has not lessened their commitment to human autonomy, although in some minds it may weaken their arguments for a moral basis for action.

When Gandhi says that we must reject “the theory of the permanent inelasticity of human nature,”<sup>52</sup> he seems to join the Buddha in the latter’s critique of Indian philosophy. (This one passage is of course not enough to establish the antiessentialist credentials of Gandhi as a postmodern philosopher.) A consistently antiessentialist Gandhi would have rejected the *ātman* of the Upaniṣads, and all other Indian views of the self, because none of them, except the Buddhist, offers either the agency or elasticity that Gandhi requires in this particular passage. (When Gandhi states that “God is continuously in action without resting for a single moment,” he affirms a process deity as well as a process self.<sup>53</sup>) Instead of aligning Gandhi with Derrida’s complete decentering of the self, I propose that we associate him with the reconstruction of the self that we find in Buddhism, American pragmatism, and process philosophy. (I have defended the Buddha against nihilism and the complete deconstruction of the self elsewhere, and this work is summarized in chapter 4.<sup>54</sup>) If Gandhi had continued his study of American philosophy, he would have found American pragmatism much to his liking.<sup>55</sup>

### A Postmodern Gandhi

We have seen that Gandhi wants to protect the individual from dissolution either in a premodern totality or the modern bureaucratic state. By some readings of French postmodernist literature, we should be equally anxious about the loss of individuality in its constant decentering and fragmentation of the self. Whereas the premodern view was that human beings are determined by a transcendent Other or dissolve into an immanent One, some modernist claims of autonomy demand that humans be fully self-defined and self-contained. Modernist ethics culminates in Immanuel Kant’s strict provision that no heteronomous acts can have moral worth and even the “Holy One of the Gospels must be compared with our ideal of moral perfection before he is recognized as such.”<sup>56</sup>

Ironically, although a different goal is reached, it appears that French postmodernism agrees with the idea of “other” constitution. For the French deconstructionists, the self does not make its own life any more than the author writes his own book. The constructive postmodernist, following Whitehead, Merleau-Ponty, or George Herbert Mead, combines self-and other-constitution and recreates a relational, social self that revives the best aspects of the relational self found in Buddhism, Hebrew religion, and Confucianism.<sup>57</sup> Gandhi also qualifies his individualism with other-constitution, and he definitely joins in this postmodern reconstruction of the self. As he once reminded a correspondent, “I value individual freedom, but you must not forget that man is essentially a social being.”<sup>58</sup>

Also disconcerting is the possibility of a total loss of meaning that comes with a thorough application of Derrida's method.<sup>59</sup> The constructive postmodernists are also concerned about a logocentric society and the dominance of calculative and analytic reason, but instead of the elimination of reason altogether, they call for a reconstruction of reason. A working formula would be the following triad: *mythos* > *logos* as analytic reason > *logos* as synthetic, aesthetic, dynamic reason, (more on this in chapter 6). The best example of a reconstructed *logos* is found in the new "logic" of European art since the late nineteenth century. Cezanne rejected the classical (that is, logocentric) perspective and initiated a revolution that opened up new ways of looking at the world. Drawing on Japanese, African, and other non-European themes, these artistic revolutionaries synthesized the premodern and modern in the same way that Gandhi did in his social and political experiments. In a chapter entitled "The Reenchantment of Art: Reflections on the Two Postmodernisms," Suzi Gablick presents both deconstructive and reconstructive examples of contemporary art and finds that the latter movement is a continuation of the artistic revolution just described. Gablick states that "Reconstructionists...are trying to make the transition from Eurocentric, patriarchal thinking and the 'dominator' model of culture to a more participatory aesthetics of interconnectedness, aimed toward social responsibility, psychospiritual empowerment, deep ecological commitment, good human relations, and a new sense of the sacred...."<sup>60</sup> This view of art reintegrates premodern elements but emphatically rejects the modernist view of art for art's sake, which is yet another result of the alienation of the private and public that we find in modern culture. In chapter 7 we will see that Gandhi's aesthetic is in significant agreement with Gablick's position and that his aesthetics of virtue is part and parcel of the best ethics for constructive postmodernism.

While the theology of deconstruction calls for the "death of God" and the demise of meaning that definitely goes with it, constructive postmodern theology insists that religion and spirituality must recover their positive roles in society. It is again clear that Gandhi belongs with the constructive postmodernists rather than with the French school. (The only problem is Gandhi's unfortunate dualism of spirit and beast in human nature.) One could perhaps see the beginnings of Gandhi's postmodern theology in his adaptation of Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*. One could also say that the proposition that "Truth is God" is an attempt to overcome the modernist critique of religion. Gandhi's postmodern religion is all-encompassing, because it includes truth-and virtue-seeking atheists as well as other religious people. Without using the term "postmodern," Huiyun Wang defines Gandhi's religion as "truth and non-violence rather than sacrament and priestcraft."<sup>61</sup> As such Gandhi's religion could be integrated nicely



with his postmodern communitarianism. As we have seen above, such a polity would be based on “soul-force” not brute force. In Gandhi’s village republicanism “there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles...an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individuals...[and] the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle.”<sup>62</sup>

Gandhi’s reasons for rejecting other Indian nationalists’ programs can best be interpreted as constructive postmodern. Both the liberal constitutionalist Shri Gokhale and radicals such as Shri Tilak and B. B. Pal, who recommended violent means to the end of Indian independence, were thoroughly modernist in their worldviews. Both separated the inner from the outer, both proposed a rationalist methodology, and both ridiculed Gandhi’s belief that legitimate political action must have a spiritual foundation. Answering questions at the 1930 Round Table Conference in London, Gandhi explained why he had to stand apart from these other nationalists. In South Africa he found that he was very good at marshaling facts and presenting a convincing case to his fellow Indians. He was dismayed, however, at their usual response: many quickly proposed violent solutions to their grievances. Gandhi concluded that his follower’s minds were in the right place but their hearts were not prepared for the nonviolent action that was required. It was here that Gandhi discovered his most important philosophical principle: that good ends must always be matched with good means. This principle will be the key to distinguishing utilitarianism, where means are independent from ends, and character consequentialism, the theory that is wedded to the virtue of nonviolence in chapter 9.

Gandhi’s fusion of means and ends, the inner and the outer, of religion and politics is neither premodern nor modern, but distinctively postmodern in the constructive sense. Tilak declared that “the ways of the Sadhu do not pay in politics” and that personal virtue was not necessary for successful political action.<sup>63</sup> Breaking with both the premodern Indian tradition of the isolated yogi and thoroughly modern nationalism, Gandhi ingeniously integrated the best of both. Constructive postmodernism can be seen as the result of a dialectical triad in which modernism negates premodernism, and then the constructive postmodernist, in a third stage of reintegration, gleans value from both. In stark contrast is the French postmodernist solution, which essentially intensifies the negation of the second moment of the triad. There is much truth in David Griffin’s suggestion that deconstructive postmodernism can best be described as an “ultramodernism,” implying as it does both extreme relativism and even nihilism.<sup>64</sup>

In the last section of chapter 3 we will analyze in some depth the various analogies that Gandhi uses to express the self-world relationship. The analogies that seem to place him in the premodernist camp are the drops-in-the-ocean, threads-in-the-cloth, and rays-of-the sun models. In each of these

images I argue that the integrity of the individual, a fundamental axiom for Gandhi, is compromised. None of these models meets Gandhi's criterion that "corporate growth is therefore entirely dependent upon individual growth."<sup>65</sup> Only Gandhi's organic analogies offer sufficient protection for the individual while at the same time grounding the self's social relations. On the other hand, organic analogies have hierarchical implications that are problematic. For example, the dominance of brain over other bodily organs serves Gandhi's reformed caste system well, but it does not support his equally strong egalitarianism. Central to the postmodern vision of process philosophy is Whitehead's "analogy of organism," in which every element of the universe is internally related and in which a noncoercive deity attempts to harmonize these elements into an aesthetic whole. If we focus the organic analogy at the cellular level, as some process philosophers do, it is much more amenable to egalitarian values. Again, if Gandhi is a postmodern thinker, Gandhi stands with Rāmānuja and Whitehead and not with Śāṅkara and Derrida.

One of the major moral theories of the Modern Age is utilitarianism and Jeremy Bentham was one of its principal proponents. Bentham declared that "pushpin is as good as poetry" and a utilitarian could conclude that the hedons of a vice such as gambling (especially if it brings in great state revenue) may outweigh the hedons of the traditional virtues. Both the Greek and Indian traditions held, however, that the good life of virtue and self-discipline was higher than the accumulation of material goods and gratification of desires. Traditional theories of value are deconstructed by the French postmodernist school, while the constructive postmodernists seek a reconstruction of traditional values. Here again we can see the operation of Gandhi's principle that good ends always require good means, and this is the reason why he always rejected utilitarian solutions.

I believe the most promising program for a postmodern view of ethics is the revival of virtue ethics. Earlier leaders of this movement, such as Alasdair MacIntyre, have criticized the dismal state of contemporary moral theory, and they propose what appears to be a return to premodern forms of human society. (Ironically, MacIntyre appears very modern, perhaps even postmodern or more precisely Gandhian, in his view that people should fashion their own truths within the narrative flow of their own lives.) This book will propose that Confucius and the Buddha could be seen as the ancient forerunners of constructive postmodern virtue ethics. Such a view would allow us to reconstruct the truth of Socrates' dictum that knowledge is virtue and use this as an answer to the modernist claim that knowledge is power—yogic as well as technological. In *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi said, "Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms.

To observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and our passion. So doing, we know ourselves. The Gujarati equivalent for civilization means ‘good conduct.’”<sup>66</sup> In Anthony Parel’s critical edition of *Hind Swaraj*, he notes that in discussion with Gandhi he said that what the Gujarati actually means is “a good way of life,”<sup>67</sup> phrasing that is even closer to virtue ethics. One could say that Gandhi’s ethical program was to replace Vedic and Purāṇic ritual with the traditional virtues of courage, justice, and compassion. As Gandhi states, “Morality means acquisition of virtues such as fearlessness, truth, chastity, etc. Service is automatically rendered to the country in this process of cultivating morality.”<sup>68</sup> Gandhi’s virtues, including the virtue of nonviolence, will be the subject of chapters 8 and 9.

One of the great advantages of the revival of virtue ethics is that it offers a way out of the entrenched dichotomies of modern moral theory. As it does not address the issue of the origin of moral rules, it does not have to choose between ethical objectivism and ethical subjectivism. Nor does it have to choose between intentions and consequences. Philippa Foot, for example, believes that both are essential for her formulation of virtue theory.<sup>69</sup> The Kantian or Thomist who insists on intentions alone or the utilitarian who looks only to consequences generates strong counterintuitive, even absurd examples. The conflict between moral rationalism and moral voluntarism is also not an issue, especially with Confucians who never thought of making the distinction. Even Aristotle’s difference between intellectual and moral virtue has been challenged, at least in Foot’s attempts to demonstrate that wisdom is both. Contemporary virtue theorists have proved to be strong allies with those who wish to reconcile the unnecessary and destructive rift between reason and the passions. Ethics should preserve the unity of heart-mind and not perpetuate the conflict between the two.

Virtue ethics has unfortunately been viewed as premodern, conservative, even reactionary. With its focus on individual character development it has also been criticized for its lack of social concern. (When one notes the thoroughly social context of the Confucian self and its obligations, this objection loses much of its force.) Classical liberalism, one of the greatest achievements of modernism, is under increasing criticism for its social atomism and its indifference to cultural values. While the premodern agent is limited by prescribed roles, the modern selves are encouraged to free themselves from them. Conservative critics have rightly pointed out the high personal and social costs that this freedom has exacted on society as a whole. Some liberal theorists, such as William Galston, have responded to this criticism and they believe that liberalism can meet the challenge. They are calling for a socially engaged self and a rededication to the liberal virtues.<sup>70</sup> Although conservative politicians and theologians have tried to capture virtue ethics as their own, there is nothing in a reconstructed theory that

would support either sectarian politics or religion. The proposal that all of us dedicate ourselves to a common ensemble of virtues within the boundaries of the liberal state is well worth our serious consideration.

The modernist ethics of Kant and Mill have become philosophical dead ends, and the deconstructionist critique of these logocentric, dichotomized views offers no moral direction. It is time to think of virtue ethics as a constructive postmodern alternative, and work has already been done on Confucius and the Buddha as anticipating such an ethic. In *Thinking Through Confucius* Hall and Ames have done this for Confucius, and David Kalupahana has alluded to a constructive postmodern interpretation of Buddha ethics. The unity of fact, value, and the aesthetic is a premodern assumption that modern philosophy has torn asunder, but Whitehead's aesthetic cosmology shows that it can be brought back in a constructive postmodern form. With his balance of order and beauty and a strong social self, Whitehead's position is definitely not the anarchic aestheticism that we find in Oscar Wilde or French deconstruction.

Let us now summarize our conclusions. Although his mind-body dualism is a holdover from premodernism, Gandhi is not a premodern primarily because he firmly believes that no individual or culture can take on the *dharma* of another age. Gandhi's modernist sentiments regarding the inviolability of the individual are tempered by an equally strong sense of the unity of humanity and the social construction of personal identity. Most important, however, is Gandhi's rejection of all of modernism's famous distinctions, especially the ones between fact and value and means as separate from ends. Although some evidence of a deconstructive postmodernism may be discerned, Gandhi is best allied with the constructive school of postmodernism.