CHAPTER 4

Rationality and Alienation: Themes from Gandhi

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Introduction

This is not intended as a scholarly paper on Gandhi's philosophical ideas on rationality and alienation. What I will seek to do instead is to construct an argument from a range of philosophical claims that Gandhi made and through that argument, I will explore conclusions that entirely square with Gandhi's thinking on ethics, politics, and political economy.

I'll begin simply by briefly listing in no particular order four of these philosophical claims in his writing and then proceed in the rest of the paper with the construction of the argument, invoking these claims as and when the stages of the constructed argument require them.

First, Gandhi took ethics to be a primarily *perceptual* discipline. In his view, the world, the perceptible world we inhabit over and above containing the properties that the natural sciences study, contains properties of *value* and meaning that make *normative* demands on us to which our practical agency responds. Such a view has recently been attributed to Aristotle by the contemporary philosopher John McDowell, contesting

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the view of Hume and Adam Smith[1] that values derive entirely from our states of mind (our desires and moral sentiments); rather such states of mind are instead merely our affective responses to the perceived value properties in the world around us. Aristotle is certainly not the source of Gandhi's perceptualist meta-ethics. His sources are the Vaishnavite traditions that he grew up in as well as the Bhakti and Sufi influences on his thinking which took the world (including nature) to be sacralized and thus suffused with value, as did a centuries long tradition of popular (if not always high) Christianity.[2] On this view, values are *not* all made up by us and our states of mind such as our desires and moral sentiments as they were for Hume and Adam Smith. Instead, our states of mind are responses to a world around us that contains values. Thus, for instance, desires themselves are responses to *desirabilities* (or values) *in the world* that we perceive around us. In other words, the world consists not just of the properties that natural science studies but also *normatively* described properties, desirabilities and undesirabilities such as, for instance, kindness and cruelty, well-being or poverty, and our states of mind, our desires and moral sentiments, are not the source of value but are merely responses to these values that we perceive in the world.

[1] For Hume, see *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 1751. Online version may be found at https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4320/4320-h/4320-h.htm. For Smith, see *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 1759. Online version may be found at https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/smith1759.pdf.

[2] References to this sort of understanding of value as having its source in a sacralized conception of the world are peppered all over a very vast corpus of Gandhi's writings in letters, speeches, and dispatches to magazines such as *Harijan* and *Young India*. He refuses to distinguish between animist traditions (or for that matter mystical Bhakti and Sufi traditions) and Hinduism, and he dismissed such classificatory distinctions as a late British taxonomizing that simply did not apply to India's religious life. In response to a question by a Dr. Chesterman, the medical secretary of the English Baptist mission, he says, "…in spite of being described as animists these tribes have from time immemorial been absorbed in Hinduism. They are, like the indigenous medicine, of the soil, and their roots lie deep there" (*Harijan*, February 25, 1939). This sort of thing is equally true of popular Christianity. It is frequently continuous with a variety of mystical, Gnostic, and Neo-Platonist elements filled with references to a sacralized nature shot through with value properties, and it is only a high Christianity of the seventeenth century that very deliberately dismissed these popular Christian ideas as 'dangerous enthusiasm'. For a good discussion of this, see J.R. Jacob's *Robert Boyle and the English Revolution* (Burt Franklin and Company, 1977) and Simon Schaffer's essay, "The Earth's Fertility as a Social Fact in Early Modern England," in Mikulas Teich, Roy Porter and Bo Gustafsson (eds.), *Nature and Society in Historical Context* (Princeton University Press, 1997).

It is not as if Gandhi, in claiming this primacy of perception, denied that there is ethical deliberation. Rather he thought that deliberation is a secondary sophistication, it occurs either when we have *conflicting perceptions* of what the value-laden layout of the world demands of our practical agency (or when we find that our initial or instinctive agentive responses to those perceived normative demands are not adequate). It is only then that the usual deliberative cogitations of ranking and weighing (or self-critical reflection) are made necessary.

A second philosophical claim needs to be negatively formulated, a point really about what is conspicuously *missing* in Gandhi's philosophical outlook. It is remarkable that though he thought long and hard about the nature of politics, he never took the ideals of liberty and equality, as they were theoretically developed in the political Enlightenment, to be very central in his understanding of the polity. And in this, though he never deployed the analytical category 'bourgeois' in his writings, he shared an attitude of indifference towards these concepts with Marx who, as we know, dismissed them both as bourgeois ideals.[3]

And so—this is the third philosophical claim—to the extent that he wrote about liberty at all, his conception of individual liberty was that it was a form of *self-governance*. Individual liberty, for him, lay in each one of us making decisions that shape our material and spiritual lives and democracies are substantially (as opposed to merely formally) in place only when individual liberty, so understood as self-governance, does in fact translate into our shaping the world to be in accord with these decisions.

Finally, a fourth and large philosophical claim that was close to his heart was to make the chief goal of politics and social life, the overcoming of an increasing alienation that he thought was pervasively present in modern societies, an alienation that owed chiefly, in his view, to an increasing attitude of *detachment* in our relations and our perspectives on each other and the world—where the opposite of detachment is not attachment so much as engagement. He often expressed what he had in mind by such detachment by asking the question: How is it that we have transformed the idea of the world as not merely a place to live in but a place to master and control? Realizing that this was too general and omnibus a way of expressing the notion of alienation, he broke down that question into more tractable questions, such as the following in particular: How is it

[3] See Karl Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, in Robert Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader* (Norton, 1978).

that we have transformed the concept of nature into the concept of natural resources? How is it that we have transformed the concept of people into the concept of populations? How is it that we have transformed the concept of knowledges to live by into the concept of expertise to rule by? And even, and this is startling for us who have been brought up on liberal doctrine: How is it that we have transformed the concept of human beings into the concept of citizens. Gandhi tries to dig deep here to show that all these transformations are really, at bottom, the same transformation, in that they all reflect an increasing alienation and disengagement in our outlook on the world—in our understanding of nature, human subjects, and human knowledge. Though he was not a socialist, like Marx he thought much of this disengagement of modernity owed to capitalist economic formations and he thought at the time of his writing that India was at the crossroads that Europe was in during the Early Modern period and he was anxious that India not go down what he thought was a lamentable path that Europe had from Early to Late modernity. It is striking, then, that for all their large and well-known differences, in stressing alienation and not stressing liberty and equality, he was Marx's intellectual partner.

With these four claims in place, I'll proceed now to the main body of the paper and the construction of the promised philosophical argument which will eventually *integrate* these *seemingly miscellaneous* Gandhian claims.

A Counterargument Against the Lockean Contract

In India recently there was widespread protest against the government's promotion of corporate projects via an 'eminent domain' form of dispossession both of the poor peasantry in various parts of the countryside as well as of the foresters from the extensive commons which they inhabited and which was their only source of sustenance. Against this protest, even so humane an economist as Amartya Sen declared that 'England went through its pain to create its Londons and Manchesters, India will have to do so too'.[4] Sen's remark, which appeals to history, surprisingly fails to notice how historically imperfect his analogy is. When vast numbers of

[4] Amartya Sen, "Prohibiting the Use of Agricultural Land for Industry Is Ultimately Self-Defeating." *The Telegraph* (Kolkata), 23 July 2010.

people who eked out an agrarian life were displaced in England in order to create its Londons and Manchesters, they moved in hardly less vast numbers to other temperate regions of the world, mostly in fact to North America, and set up life there as settler colonists. There is nowhere for the poor of rural Bengal and other parts of India to go, except to its already glutted metropoles where they have no future but to squat illegally in vast unlivable slums ridden with poverty and disease, their drinking water polluted, their children prey to mafia gangster recruitment, and where most will be unemployed while some, if they are lucky, will get casual, part time, and chronically impermanent employment. History apart, Sen's analogy may have had a point today, if the mobility of labour had some parity with the mobility of capital. But in a time (ever since the dismantling or remantling of the Bretton Woods institutions), when capital can fly out of a nation at the press of a button while national immigration laws severely restrict the mobility of labour, Sen's analogy comes off as callously off beam.

But it is not this failed analogy that I want to pursue so much as the assumption that underlies his remark. In making that remark, Sen was not just expressing a considered view that is widely held among economists and social scientists, he was also revealing an instinct and assumption widely taken for granted among the lay intelligentsia. What underlies this assumption?

It may seem, at first sight, that what underlies it is a commitment to some sort of 'iron laws' of history and political economy, whereby what happened in Europe in the Early Modern period *will* happen everywhere else, including Europe's erstwhile colonies. It is sometimes said that a certain rigid stagial reading of Marx had proposed something like these laws. That is a vexed interpretative issue in the study of Marx. But in liberal political doctrine, which is much more the framework within which Sen writes, it is not any such determinism that motivates the assumption. Rather, liberalism with its normative claims about rationality, presents the underlying thought as not (or not merely) descriptive, but prescriptive: 'What happened in Europe in the Early Modern Period must happen elsewhere because what happened in Europe was *rational*.'

Let us explore this claim to rationality.

What social theory can be said to have established that it was rational for Europe?

In the Early Modern period, one particular social theory argued with clarity and with the force of the great intellect of its propounder for the

political rationality and therefore the historically progressive necessity of the very incipient forms of capitalism that can be located in the privatization of land out of the commons. This theory was contractualist in conception, in particular the contractualist strand that owes to John Locke.[5]

The point of all social contract theory, whether Lockean or any other, is to establish that in an originary scenario described as a 'state of nature' (or an 'original position') which is a pre-political condition, *freely chosen consent* by a people to certain principles or arrangements to live by immediately transforms those people into citizens, and the state of nature into a polity—but it only does so, if the consent to those principles and arrangements is demonstrated to be rational in a very specific way: the principles and arrangements must first be *freely consented to* and second they must make these people *better off* as citizens than they hitherto were as mere people, prior to polities, in a state of nature.

In the contractualist strand I am concerned with the canonical scenario has it that were someone in a state of nature to come upon a stretch of land in the common and fence it and register it at an elementary form of bureau that they set up for this kind of registry, then the land becomes *his*. Suppose then that this is done by some of the people and they each keep faith with the general requirement I mentioned above that this can only be done if no one is made worse off and at least some are made better off than they were in the state of nature, a requirement which they then elaborate further by adding the following crucial clause: if those who had done this were then to hire others at wages which enable them to live better, then this too would be an arrangement that is rationally justified since they too were in fact better off than they were in the state of nature.

Such was the explicit claim of the Lockean ideal of the social contract (roughly an argument from Pareto-improvement) which went on to became the cornerstone for certain political principles and arrangements that came to be called liberalism in which among other things such as free speech (except for atheists, heretics, and Catholics,…), private property and wage labour were seen as progressive advances justified by the mutual advantage or amelioration of *all* concerned (or in the limiting case, amelioration for some and no resulting *dis*advantaging of anyone else).

[5] John Locke, The chapter on property in the *Second Treatise on Government* (Mass Market Paperback Publishing, 2008) is the *locus classicus*.

When one asks the question, what in the historical context was motivating the articulation of such a contractualist theory, the answer is that the theory philosophically consolidated the system of enclosures which had been practised by brute force for many decades earlier, and in doing so it prepared the ground for it to become a form of right with law and governance to back it up. The point was to present the political principles and arrangements which justified the system of enclosures as a moral and political achievement since it was implicitly based on a form of rational and freely chosen consent.

Marx's 27th chapter of *Capital*, which presented in detail the predatory nature of such primitive accumulation in general, but also of the enclosures in England in particular, had its premonitional anticipation in the widespread protest against the enclosures among some of the radical groups during the English revolution who pre-dated Locke but whose protest on behalf of a quite different ideal of the collective cultivation of the existing commons could be seen as seeking to preempt the claim to rationality in Locke of such an implicit consent that he had attributed to all in the originary scenario of a state of nature. Let me, then, construct a specific counterargument against the Lockean contract and attribute it implicitly (and, of course, anachronistically) to these dissenters as the theoretical source of their protest and as proposing instead an *alternative notion of consent*. Thus someone like Winstanley could have been heard as anachronistically saying to Locke: 'The entire contractualist scenario as you have presented it generates an opportunity cost. An opportunity cost is the cost of an avoided benefit paid for making a certain choice. That avoided benefit is the collective cultivation of the commons that is prevented by the choice to privatize the land in your initial step in the scenario. Once the step is taken, it is true what you say that those who were hired for wages are better off than they were in *the state of nature* but they are not better off than they *would have been* if the land had not been privatized in the first place and if there was a collective cultivation of the commons instead'.

The criticism is based on a relatively simple counterfactual. But despite its simplicity, its theoretical effect is more complex and interesting because, as I said, it proposes a quite different notion of consent than the one that Locke assumes. Consent must now be viewed as a more complicated act than Locke understands, it should be viewed as follows: Whether someone can be said to have consented is not necessarily to be viewed as this tradition proposes but rather viewed as what he or she

would choose in antecedently specified sorts of conditions that did not obtain—in which case the entire Lockean tradition of thought may be assuming that we have implicitly rationally consented to something which we in fact have not.

If, in this way, we shift the focus of this imagined dispute between the preemptive Winstanley and Locke to which notion of implicit consent is at stake in the social contract, a further issue opens up about the nature of freedom and coercion of the consent. Suppose that Locke were to respond by saying: 'I have offered a perfectly good notion of implicit consent and I see no reason to accept yours'. Winstanley's response would then presumably have to be: 'If you ignore my counterfactual and insist that the sense of consent you have on offer suffices in the contractarian scenario and that everyone has indeed implicitly consented in that sense, then I will have to point out that the implicit consent you have attributed in particular to those who are hired to work for wages, was *coerced* by a condition that they could not avoid: their non-possession of the land in the face of others' possession of it. *My* alternative notion of consent was articulated with the view to establishing that that condition of non-possession in the midst of possession by others, should be seen as avoidable. So, your insistence on your notion of consent, even despite the assertion of my counterfactual, brings out in the open that possession of the land by some and not others is a coercive condition in which the latter has to "consent" in *your sense* of the term. And so the contractualist tradition presents a *coerced* implicit consent fraudulently as a *freely chosen* implicit consent'.

I had said earlier that a great deal of social theory presented the developments in political economy in the Early Modern period as advances in political *rationality*; and it is their rationality which was invoked as the basis for later claims that the rest of the world, including Europe's erstwhile colonized lands, would have to inevitably adopt these rational political and economic arrangements as a historically progressive and therefore *necessary* form of development. But, if I am right, the entire claim to the premise of the argument, i.e., to the rationality of the contractual ideal that philosophically rationalizes historical developments in England, depends on two things: (a) on what is consented to making one better off and (b) the consent being freely made. However if the criticism attributed as implicit in Winstanley's dissenting stances is correct, *these two conditions cannot be satisfied jointly*. The counterfactual notion of consent offered by Winstanley's implicit criticism makes clear that the first requirement has

not been met, and if you simply deny the counterfactual notion of consent, the other notion of consent fails to meet the second requirement that the consent be freely chosen.

That, therefore, leaves these social theorists without their premise, to say nothing of their conclusion.

But it would be too quick and premature to rest the counterargument here. Why? Because Locke in the Early Modern period only *began* an argument that I have been countering on behalf of the radical dissenters. His argument, it might rightly be said by way of reply to my counterargument, has been updated and fortified by more recent theoretical developments within the framework of liberal political thought that he initially generated. Any counterargument against Locke would have to address this subsequent fortification as well. What are these theoretical developments that provide the fortification of Locke?

The riposte to Locke that I put in the mouth of the preemptive dissenting voices in Early Modern England made counterfactual use of the ideal of a *collective cultivation of the commons*. But liberal theory more recently has deployed further conceptual resources to try and undermine this ideal. So, let me now very briefly address one central strand of such resources, which will allow me also to come to my Gandhian themes of alienation and human subjectivity.

The Tragedy of the Commons

Perhaps the most standard resource that liberal theory relies on is the idea and argument behind what has come to be called the 'tragedy of the commons'. Following Garret Hardin,[6] who wrote the seminal paper making this argument (summarizing a long tradition of economic thinking), the idea, roughly, is to raise as an intractable problem for any ideal of cooperative life, such as collective cultivation of the commons. The intractable problem that is supposed to arise is that individual human psychology at its most rational is required to behave in ways that undermine the collective by failing of the cooperation needed to keep it going. This is because the collective ideal asks the individual to contribute resources (sometimes restraint may be a negative form of contribution of resources, when the goal is, say, to prevent overuse or over-cultivation of the common) that

[6] Garret Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons." *Science*, 13 December 1968.

produce a benefit that is shared by and therefore divided over the whole collective over the long run while the cost is borne immediately by each commoner. If everybody does what is required of him or her, of course everyone gains. But since one is in the [epistemic] dark about whether others are contributing their bit of the resources demanded of them, one is constantly stricken with the qualm that one's contribution would be wasted if others don't do their bit. In such an understanding of the collective ideal—which is extensively present in many liberal frameworks of social thought—some individual commoner who decides not to cooperate therefore is always at an advantage since the gains of non-cooperation will be immediate and all for oneself and completely assured whereas the gains from cooperating are long-term, dispersed over the whole group and, above all as just said, *always uncertain*. Non-cooperation for him, as an individual, would thus be rational. But the commons cannot survive if each individual does this individually rational thing. It is doomed. Thus the tragedy. So privatization is a better bet.

It is often said in critical response to this liberal argument that the tragedy of the commons idea can be developed not in the direction of providing a rational basis for privatization but rather to argue for the regulation of the commons and its collective use by detection and policing and punishment of non-cooperation. In fact, Elinor Ostrom's[7] fine analytical and extensive empirical study presents the principles for such regulation after a scrutiny of various commons and their governance in four continents. Now, who can be opposed to such regulation? It is obviously a good thing. There is no gainsaying that. But *given the kind of thinking that frameworks the liberal argument of the tragedy of the commons*, this criticism and reinterpretation of it is not getting at what is fundamental in it because the idea of policing and regulation is susceptible to the same considerations of the tragedy of the commons, one step up. Even if we ignore the well-known difficulties of detecting many non-obvious forms of non-cooperation, the fact is that mechanisms of policing and punishment to prevent non-cooperation are also susceptible to the argument that underlies the tragedy since the *same* dilemma can be raised for *why anyone should cooperate with policing and detection and punishment* if he can get away with *not* cooperating—by offering bribes, for instance, or making mafia style threats against those who detect and police or those

[7] Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

who cooperate with the policing and detecting (such as witnesses), or by [loopholing] the laws to make non-cooperation legal after all…all familiar and pervasive phenomena in a wide range of societies, with the last of these strategies most operative in societies that congratulate themselves on have transcended political corruption exemplified by the other more blatant strategies of bribes and threats. As a result, though we must obviously accept the idea of regulation as something we should certainly strive to put in place, it may be worth probing whether the problem does not lie much more fundamentally in its basic way of thinking and that can't be rectified by solutions like 'regulation' and policing, solutions which, as I said, are in any case vulnerable to this thinking and therefore vulnerable to the same strategy of argument that generated the 'tragedy of the commons'.

Short of a more fundamental critique, it may rightly be said that Locke, anticipating these later arguments in favour of privatization, was correct to see his version of the implicit consent of all contractors (possessors and non-possessors of land) as rational, indeed *even freely chosen* if the contractors had an implicit or tacit understanding of the looming threat of the 'tragedy of the commons'. The counterfactual-based notion of implicit consent presupposed by the dissenters, by contrast, is precisely doomed to such a 'tragedy', unless a more fundamental critique is provided of the thinking involved in the very statement of the argument that there is a tragedy that looms. Actually, I don't even *have* to take a stand on whether or not there are constraints internal to this way of thinking that will ensure the rationality of cooperation. What I do *want* to do, however, is to step back and present, from a more external perspective—and this is really Gandhi's perspective—what I think is revealingly wrong about the whole way of thinking that underlies the argument of the tragedy of the commons and thereby hint at an alternative outlook on the possibilities for our political ideals. To provide this more fundamental scrutiny of this line of defence of the Lockean social contract, I will have to, as I said, step back first and setup a dialectic that looks to another very central line of development in liberal political philosophy.

Liberty and Equality

It is a large and familiar curiosity that liberal doctrine, as soon as it articulated its two great ideals of liberty and equality, went on over the next two centuries to theoretically develop them in a way that put them in

indissoluble tension with one another. The cold war rhetoric with one side claiming to pursue liberty but damned by the other as pursuing it at the cost of equality and vice versa by the other side, is only the crudest and most publicly familiar symptom of this perverse development. The tension was charted in far more sophisticated theoretical work for well over a century before the cold war.

What generated the tension? The fault line lay in certain familiar features of liberty that generated inequalities. There are a number of such features but I just mention two. The most well-known and well-studied feature is that the possession of property bestows a particular form of liberty on its possessors (something justified by arguments such as the one I just presented above from the social contract and fortified by tragedy of the commons arguments) putting it structurally at odds with equality in ways that are so widely studied that I need not say anything more about it just here. Marx was only its most well-known critic but a wide range of other political traditions have linked the unconstrained right to the accumulation and possession of property and wealth with the chronic inequalities in our societies.[8] Another less studied and more interesting and perhaps even (psychologically) deeper feature is what I will call 'the incentivization of talent', also pervasive in liberal ways of thought and taken for granted by virtually everyone within its orbit, and not necessarily only theorists and intellectuals. Talent, in liberal theory, was initially distinguished from the capacity for labour, which it claimed was evenly distributed among people while talent was not. But with notions of liberty as individual *self-governance* emerging in liberal thought, it was said to be wrong to exclude talent as a source of individual liberty. Notions of dessert, the right to reap the praise and reward for the productions of one's talent, became central to one's exercise of self-governance. If one did not allow praise and reward to the talent responsible for these productions, it would mean that one instead praised the zeitgeist for the productions, and that would be to deny the very place of individuals, seeing them as mere symptoms of the zeitgeist in embodied human form, a deprivation of the liberty and rights of individuals. Moreover, this liberty and right via notions of dessert also generated the liberty and right of *all others to enjoy* the productions of given individuals' talents, productions which were *incentivized* by the liberty attaching to their individual talent, to be

[8] For non-Marxist traditions, to name just three, see the anarchism of Proudhon, the work of John Ruskin or of William Morris.

as excellent as they could be. And all this generated inequalities in ways that are too obvious to elaborate—since talent is not equally distributed, making the reward of talent a right of individuals would inevitably lead to inequalities.

Since these features and their effects on the two chief ideals of liberal doctrine are so entrenched in defining what those ideals are, there is no way to make the two ideals compatible without substantially revising the meanings of the terms 'liberty' and 'equality' as they have come to be theoretically elaborated in liberal theory. I am assuming here an inseparability of theory and meaning of the sort plausibly argued by Thomas Kuhn.[9] So, except as is sometimes done in shallow taxonomical exercises, meanings in general cannot just be changed stipulatively and by fiat. The terms or concepts to be transformed need to be embedded in doctrinal or theoretical reformulations first (shifts of paradigm, as Kuhn called them) before the revisions to meaning are plausibly made and if the new meanings are to be non-arbitrary. How might this be done? It is here that some of Gandhi's ideas that I listed at the outset suggest one path on which one might proceed.

So, here is how I've allowed myself to think of it.

A natural way of reading Gandhi is this: Because of the irresoluble tension between them in our inherited understanding of them, let's remove the ideals of liberty and equality from centre stage, where liberalism had placed them, and put on centre stage instead *an even more basic ideal*, never very central to liberal thought, and then, usher liberty and equality back in later (from the backdoor, as it were), but now *not* as central—rather *merely as necessary conditions* for this other more primitive idea that is on centre stage. So understood, liberty may have some serious chance of no longer being understood in the previous terms that put it in tension with equality. And, looking to traditions outside of the mainstream of liberalism, whether it be Marx or Gandhi, an ideal that might be on offer to take centre stage as being even more fundamental than liberty and equality, is the ideal of an *unalienated life*.

What is this ideal of an unalienated life? Let me now try and spell that out along lines that Gandhi instinctively formulated—keeping in mind the eventual task I have set myself: that of defending the counterfactual-based notion of consent of the dissenters against the particular way of thinking

[9] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press, 2012).

that generates the tragedy of the commons that would sustain and fortify Locke's idea of a consent to a privatized economy.

An Unalienated Life

The first thing to note is that the term 'an unalienated life' is ambiguous. One sense of it is the unalienatedness that came with the sense of *belonging* that was made possible by the social frameworks of a period prior to modernity. All political and social theorists—Marx and Rousseau are only the most prominent—have tended to agree that whatever the defects of societies prior to modernity were, alienation was not among the defects. It is a malaise of modernity in particular. But the point remains that, as is well known and widely acknowledged by the very same theorists, the unalienated life of those earlier times was indeed marred by the oppressive defects in those societies frameworks. (To say 'feudal' to describe that oppression would be merely to use a *vastly* summarizing and somewhat misleading category that we have all been brought up on.) It is precisely those defects that the sloganized ideals of liberalism, Liberty and Equality, were intended as *directly* addressing. And I have argued that since the methodological and theoretical framework within which those two concepts were then developed made it impossible to so much as conceive how they could be jointly implemented, we should no longer see them as something to be *directly* deployed but rather as indirectly deployed—merely as necessary conditions for the achievement of a quite different (directly deployed) ideal—thereby transforming the concepts of liberty and equality. Now, if the achievement of an ideal of an unalienated life were to bring, in its wake—*indirectly*—conditions of liberty and equality (however transformed), it is bound to be very different from the unalienated life which is acknowledged to have existed in times prior to modernity because the conditions in which it existed then were also acknowledged to be acutely *lacking* in, precisely, liberty and equality. Thus, given this rudimentary conceptual dialectic, what we need to show is how a new framework that breaks out of the dialectic would solve [for] *three* things at once—a transformed notion of liberty and equality, as I have said from the outset, *but also it would now seem a transformed notion of the unalienated life*. So, this is to be conceived as a holistically triangular transformation—we overcome a certain conceptual-historical dialectic and in doing so *together and at once transform all* ***three*** *concepts* that feature in the dialectic.

If this triangulated bootstrapping transformation of the notions of liberty and equality and the ideal of an unalienated life in concert, all at once, is the ambitious challenge to be addressed, a very general further question is suggested. We have to ask, first, what can be retained of the general idea of social 'belonging' of an earlier time in any revision of the idea of an unalienated life for our own time? We know from the other elements of the dialectic that the social belonging of an earlier time was marred by the defects of a lack of liberty and equality, but we also know from what I have said that the attempts to directly overcome those defects were, in turn, marred by the fact that liberty and equality flowered in conception within a social framework in which a highly *individualized* notion of individual liberty that attached to talent and property made for liberty's conceptual incoherence with equality. *That* was the fundamental source of the shortcoming of the liberalism that emerged out of the standard political Enlightenment. So it would seem to follow, then, given this entire dialectic, to conclude that a concerted and triangulated transformation of all three notions would have to find its first hook, find its initial root, in *individual* liberty being conceived of in *non*-individualistic terms. It is really its failure to be so conceived that led Gandhi to ignore it in his understanding of politics, but if we were to find a way of thinking of it in *non*-individualistic terms it would be quite of a piece with the ideal of an unalienated life that Gandhi thought central to politics.

Liberty for Gandhi, I have said, is the idea of self-governance, the power to make the decisions that shape the material and spiritual aspects of our lives. If so, it would seem then that to transform the notion of liberty in the way that we have just seen as being required, we would have to envisage each individual as approaching these decisions not primarily with her own interests in mind but the interests of others as well. Now, the last few words of that last sentence express something utterly familiar, a cliché, a piety. The critique of self-interest has long been with us. Moreover, since my goal is to show the shortcomings of the argument from the tragedy of the commons which is manifestly based on individual rationality as conceived in terms of individual self-interest, it is not all that interesting to just *say* that one is opposed to self-interest. But Gandhi was *not* merely saying that one should be opposed to self-interest. He was saying something more interesting for two reasons. First, he is saying something that has not, so far as I know, been said very much at all and certainly not been theorized very much. He is saying that what any such

critique of self-interest amounts to *is the construction of a notion of* ***liberty***. And second, he is saying, as I will very briefly expound below, that the transcending of self-interest is not just a matter of putting aside one's interests, but of *seeing* the world right because for Gandhi ethics (and our relation to values) is essentially a *perceptual* discipline. The point for him was not really ethical, then, so much as cognitive, though unlike us in our time, he did not see these as separate subjects.

Why is the first of these points so little known and developed? I repeat: Because individual self-governance (i.e., liberty) has for so long been viewed in individualistic terms. But what is it to have a *non*-individualistic conception of *individual* self-governance? It is *not* group or collective self-governance, which is a different notion (interesting in a different way) but not relevant to liberty which is felt and exercised by individuals (and indeed so is alienation undergone and felt by individuals). Rather, putting together two of the philosophical claims in Gandhi that I began with, it is something like this.

When we exercise our individual liberty in this new sense that is being proposed, when we make the relevant decisions that amount to such self-governance, we respond to the perceptually given normative demands that the *world* (both the natural and the social world) around us presents us with and to which our agency must respond. If this is right, then when we make the decisions that contribute to our self-governance, we have to *see* the world right, to *see* correctly what its normative demands are and respond to those demands. So the point is in a sense quite literally phenomenological. And now. if we add to this the demand that these perceptions and responses to perceptions must be of a piece with the ideal of an unalienated life, a further crucial insight is allowed—that to *see* these demands of the *world* for what they are in an unalienated social life, *each one of our individual orientations on the world* in *perceiving* the normative demands of its value-laden layout, has to be to something that goes beyond the orientation in which our *individual* perspective is primary. Consider a physical analogy that needs to be extrapolated to the social—consider how when one is driving a car on the road (as opposed to say when one is walking on the road) we orient ourselves perceptually to the demands of the world ahead not from the point of view of *one's own individual body* (as one does when one is walking on the road) but from the point of view something larger than one's individual body, from the point of view of the *whole car*. That orientation when extrapolated from this physical or bodily example of the car to the *social*, should have a significant

outcome. Even though it may involve the mentality and agency of individuals, because they each exercise their *liberty* in perceiving and responding from the point of view something larger, this non-individualistic orientation of each individual to the world (seeing the world's demands from the point of view of the collective), is bound to *internally* cohere with equality in its outcomes. For equality would on this picture not be seen as something *extra* or *further* that is conceptually configured as something to be navigated in terms of a trade-off with liberty, but rather as potentially *built-into* the deliverances of the exercise of *liberty itself*, when the exercise of liberty is the exercise of a mentality in this form of unalienated agentive responsiveness to the normative demands of the 'world'. The point is not that liberty, so conceived, will actually deliver equality. It cannot be a *sufficient* condition in that way. The claim was never one of sufficiency. Other conditions are bound to be necessary to suffice for equality. The point rather is that it is no longer defined such that it needs to be in trade-off relations with equality, which was the conception of liberty that my dialectic invoking Gandhian considerations of alienation was devised to transform.

If all three notions, liberty, equality, and the unalienated life are triangulated in this way together, we have a notion of unalienatedness that is not the same as the one of pre-modernity with its absence of liberty and equality, and we have a notion of liberty that is not itself generative of inequalities unlike in the liberal framework where it is individualistically conceived (in the form that attaches to individual talent and property) but rather non-individualistically conceived in the way that I have just very briefly outlined.

An Unalienated Way of Thinking

With the centrality given to the ideal of an unalienated life, a crucial thing that such a revised framework yields is that it is now quite impossible *to even so much as raise the difficulties that lead to the tragedy of the commons.* If what I have just drawn together from Gandhi's seemingly miscellaneous strands of philosophical claims are right, to even so much as have the qualm and raise the question, 'Would my efforts and contributions to the collective cultivation (or restraint from over-cultivation) be wasted if others don't also contribute?' *is already to be thoroughly alienated*, by the lights I have set up in the ideal of the unalienated life I have just presented. When the society is unalienated in this sense, it does not occur

to one to question that others may not be like one in seeing the world's demands in the requisite way I mentioned above.

Spare me the indulgence of relating an anecdote of an experience with my father in my pre-teen youth that I have recounted in an early essay of mine on Gandhi.[10] He would sometimes ask that I go for walks with him in the early morning on the beach near our home in Bombay. One day while walking we came across a wallet with some rupees sticking out of it. My father stopped me and said somewhat dramatically, 'Akeel, why shouldn't we take this?' And I said sheepishly though honestly, 'I think we should take it'. He looked irritated and said in response, 'Why do you think we should take it?' And I said, what is surely a classic response, 'because if we don't take it, somebody else will'. I expected a denunciation, but his irritation passed and he said: 'If we don't take it, nobody else will'. I thought then that this remark had no logic to it at all. Only decades later when I was thinking of questions of alienation did I realize that what he might have had in mind is the assumption of an unalienated framework of thinking. It is the assumption behind the thought 'If we don't take it, nobody else will' that expresses that unalienatedness.

I want to stress the relevance here of the remarks I began with in Gandhi about how alienation is reflected in the *detachment* or disengagement in our social relations. Because that is so, it becomes clear that the expression, 'nobody else will' in my father's response cannot be expressive of unalienatedness if it is interpreted as a prediction of what others will do. When we predict what others will do we relate to them from a disengaged perspective. That is the perspective that pervades alienated social relations. In fact it is only when we view others from this perspective that we are prompted to ask the question that drives the tragedy of the commons, 'What if I paid the cost of cooperation and others didn't?' And my invoking my father's remark was precisely to point to something in it that is quite different from this perspective. From a detached perspective, what my father said might seem like naïve optimism about what others will do. But even to raise the question of optimism (or realism) is to view his remark ('nobody else will') as a prediction made from a detached perspective on others. That misses the point I am making in invoking it. The assumption that others will not take the wallet if we don't is *not* made

[10] Akeel Bilgrami, "Gandhi, the Philosopher," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 38, No. 39, 27 September 2003.

from that detached point of view. It is an assumption of a quite different sort, more in the spirit of 'let's see ourselves this way', an assumption that is unselfconsciously expressive of our unalienatedness, engaged with others and the world, rather than assessing the prospects of how they will behave in a disengaged mode.

To return to the perceptual understanding of our normative responses, if each commoner in exercising his liberty or self-governance is *seeing* the world's normative demands right, seeing it from the non-individualistic perspective, a perspective larger than her own, the question that leads eventually to the tragedy, ('Should I contribute the costs of cooperation if others don't?') is simply silenced or preempted. Or, to approach it from the other side and invoke the analogy I gave earlier, to ask that question is analogous to seeing the road ahead from the point of view of your own body rather than from the point of view of the car. The tragedy of the commons is, then, like the tragedy of a car crash, something you land in when you have an alienated (motor-unworthy) perspective on the world. And something like the conceptual shift of the kind that radically revises what is central among our political ideals and places the unalienated life on centre stage is what allows you to see self-governance and liberty along these lines which will help preempt the tragedy.

To be unalienated is to be free of a certain malaise, but since that malaise gets a rather abstract description, to be 'unalienated' itself must be understood in relatively abstract terms. It is not to have sympathy for or feel fraternity (that is why I did not choose 'fraternity' and chose the 'unalienated life' as my central ideal) with others or to show solidarity towards others, good though it is to have and do that—not all good things are the same good thing! Rather, it is to be free of a way of thought in which, when we make the decisions we make in governing ourselves as individuals in the exercise of our liberty, we do not so much find it wrong as we find it *never occurring to us* to have the qualm in question that leads to the tragedy—suggesting that game-theory itself may be a higher-order symptom of our alienation. And to be free of that way of thought is simply (well, 'simply' is an ostentatious bit of rhetoric here) the other side of a fitting phenomenology of value. To *see* the world and its value properties that make normative demands on us aright and to overcome alienation are not two things but one.

I have spent a long time in presenting a no doubt unnecessarily elaborate set of considerations to establish the case against a liberal political and economic point of view (from Locke's contractualism through to

contemporary defences of it via arguments regarding the tragedy of the commons) that seeks to establish both the rationality and therefore the historically progressive necessity of a deeply set privatized form of capital that Amartya Sen's remark, with which I began, invokes. One answer to the updating of Locke by this tragedy of the commons argument for the rationality of privatization, I have argued, is via a proper understanding of the centrality of the ideal of unalienated life that is on offer in Gandhi's political philosophy. Such an answer, if right, may have the merit of showing the entire set of assumptions that are expressed in Sen's remark to be uncompulsory.

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