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*Between Bodies and Borders: The place of the natural in the thought of M. K. Gandhi and V. D. Savarkar**

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Abstract

This article investigates the relationship between ideas of nature and those of politics in the thought of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. In particular, it seeks to elucidate the connection between conceptions of nature and the use of violence as a means of revolutionary action in the philosophies of both thinkers, locating the point of their divergence on the question of violence in their respective understandings of the natural world. For Savarkar, such a relationship manifests itself in the ways in which he understands the notion of borders, both geographic and political. In contrast, Gandhi places his focuses on the individual's use of their body. Both understandings, this article holds, depend on a view of nature *as* politics.

Introduction

What precisely does one reference when one speaks of nature? Is it the physical reality of one's environment, the biological and ecological facts of one's surroundings? Or, rather, does the term refer to something more fundamental, something akin to the primordial connection man retains to his surroundings, even under the conditions of mechanization imposed by modernity? In other words: the natural—what is it?

This definition, like so many others, is not one easily settled. For the purposes of this article, we shall consider nature as a concept that refers

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to the entirety of the non-human world, encompassing both its physical and metaphysical aspects. Granted, this definition is a capacious one, allowing us some leeway in the comparisons we will make; nonetheless, such breadth is justified, given the range of connotations bequeathed to nature by its various interpreters. Our interest lies precisely in this spectrum of meanings and, as a result, how we define nature must be open to the extents of wherever these interpreters lead us.

Within the expanse of Indian political thought, two such decipherers of nature were Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. These men, arguably among the most influential figures in modern Indian history, are generally believed to represent opposite ends of the ideological spectrum of the Indian Independence movement, with Gandhi espousing a philosophy of *satyagraha* (firmness or holding onto the truth) and Savarkar endorsing violent Hindu nationalism. From their very first meeting, the two were engaged in (among other things) a contentious debate regarding man's proper relationship with nature.

The first iteration of this debate centred on the question of food. Legend has it that Savarkar and Gandhi met in a London kitchen in 1906. Though both were young men at the time, their respective paths within the Indian Independence movement were, in some sense, already determined. During his time in London, Gandhi laid the foundation of his doctrine of non-violence; by the early years of the twentieth century, Savarkar had begun in earnest his involvement in violent Indian nationalism. The development of their later antagonism was now only a matter of time. Indeed, as the story goes, Savarkar was frying shrimp when Gandhi entered the kitchen. Out of courtesy, Savarkar asked Gandhi if he would join him in eating the seafood. Gandhi, a resumed vegetarian, demurred. In response, Savarkar commented on the impossibility of defeating the British without partaking in their habit of gaining strength through animal protein.[1] Thus was the tone set for Savarkar and Gandhi's relationship over the next half-century.

It is with an eye on this stormy bond that this article embarks on an investigation of Savarkar and Gandhi's environmental understandings. First, it presents an interpretation of Savarkar's understanding of nature with respect to his political ideology through an examination of his treatment of the borders and boundaries of the Hindu nation in

[1] Ashis Nandy, 'A Disowned Father of the Nation in India: Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and the Demonic and the Seductive in Indian Nationalism', *Inter-Asian Cultural Studies* vol. 15 (2014), pp. 91–112.

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Hindutva. As a contrast, the second part of this article seeks to investigate the very same relationship between nature and politics in Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*, finding it manifest in Gandhi's view of the body. Finally, this article ends with a return to the issue of borders, presenting a consonance between Gandhi and Savarkar.

The texts with which this article engages primarily are Savarkar's *Hindutva*, published in 1923, and Gandhi's pamphlet *Hind Swaraj*, published in 1909. Despite the differences in their respective author's philosophies, these works share intellectual and material connections. Both were written while their respective authors were in states of near isolation: Gandhi on a ship, Savarkar imprisoned. Each text also serves as a distillation of their authors' near opposite political theories, allowing one to infer the central themes of their respective philosophies from their contents. And, most importantly, both Gandhi and Savarkar wrote their pamphlets as a response to—and refutation of—the ideas of the other thinker. Thus, *Hindutva* and *Hind Swaraj* can be read as counterparts, a pair of writings that think with and against each other.

The aim of the contrast presented here is to demonstrate the ways in which both Gandhi and Savarkar understood nature as politics. By arguing for the primacy of understandings of the natural in the respective philosophies of Gandhi and Savarkar, this article seeks to recast our understanding of the broader debate between them. The conflict between the two thinkers has been primarily understood through the lens of the religious.[2] Such a perspective, while obviously illuminating and important, circumscribes the full range of disagreement between Gandhi and Savarkar, limiting the scope of our understanding of Indian anti-colonial nationalism. Utilizing the interpretive framework of nature as politics allows us to glimpse the architecture of Savarkar and Gandhi's thought—the structural framework which gave rise to their roles in the Indian Independence movement—thereby offering a mode of disagreement in addition to that of religious preoccupation. Furthermore, the relationship constructed by way of understanding nature *as* politics is a commutative one. Its directionality attains both ways. The natural becomes the political, and the political becomes the natural.

[2] Rudolf Heredia, 'Gandhi's Hinduism and Savarkar's Hindutva', *Economic and Political Weekly* vol. 44 no. 29 (2009), pp. 62–67. For a particular focus on the role of the Gita in the disagreement between Gandhi and Savarkar, see Vinayak Chaturvedi, 'Rethinking Knowledge with Action: V. D. Savarkar, the Bhagavad Gita, and Histories of Warfare', *Modern Intellectual History* vol. 7 no. 2 (2010), pp. 417–435.

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Ultimately, what this phrase signifies is the telluric character of their philosophies—that cues regarding the correct ordering of human elements of society and the state are taken from the explicitly non-human. Gunnel Cederlöf and K. Sivaramakrishnan write, 'To argue a specific relationship to nature—to the ecology and landscape and to the place of origin, whether still living on this land or having been displaced from there—means to legitimize a right to this place by asserting specified close links between humanity and nature.'[3] Politics arises from the ecological, revealing itself through geographical features and symbols, and yet also demands changes in nature, and the development of new and different modes of understanding and action. These 'close links' are simultaneously referenced and made anew. The environment is neither an object within their broader ideologies, nor a *tabula rasa*, primed for human inscription via the political. Rather, both Gandhi and Savarkar received constitutive elements of their political theories from nature while simultaneously arguing for a shift in Indians' interactions with nature so as to further their respective political projects.

Just as importantly, through their writings, we glimpse the structural integrity of the 'nature as politics' lens itself. Doing so allows us a greater set of means through which to understand the relationship between one's political thought and one's physical surroundings.[4] Such a view bears on both our understanding of the past and the future, prompting us to interrogate both how we—in our own and previous moments—have understood the intersection of the environment and politics, and how we might yet do so. In recasting the conceptual apparatus upon which we rely, we arrive at new possibilities, seeing now what might have been obscured.

Borders

The central theoretical text of the Hindutva movement, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*, proceeds via outline.[5] What Savarkar provides for his readers is not an account of those specific factors that render Hindusthan a

[3] Gunnel Cederlöf and K. Sivaramakrishnan, *Ecological Nationalisms: Nature, Livelihoods, and Identities in South Asia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), p. 3.

[4] For a distinct but related study of the relationship between nature and political thought, see Katrina Forrester and Sophie Smith (eds), *Nature, Action, and the Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[5] Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (Bombay: S. S. Savarkar, 1969).

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nation, but a description of what constitutes a nation in general. He builds his case first in abstract definitions, subsequently demonstrating that the Hindu nation (as he constructs it) satisfies these conditions.[6] Importantly, the actual construction of these definitions occurs via appeal to characteristics of the Hindu nation as conceived of by Savarkar.[7] The justificatory chain is rendered circular—the Hindu nation is decreed a nation because it conforms to a definition that is built via inferences drawn from the characteristics of the Hindu nation.[8] Thus, Savarkar tasks himself with concurrent projects of definition and distinction, both of which rely on an understanding of nature as politics.

Such reliance can be seen clearly in Savarkar's comments on the nation's moment of self-recognition. As he describes in the text, the idea of the self cannot exist without its opposite. It is only through the process of rejecting foreign aspects that one's native aspects are understood. The definition of the nation and its self-identification are simultaneous, both wrought by dispelling elements innately known to be other from within themselves. In his words, 'hatred separates as well as unites'.[9]

Savarkar describes this process in explicitly naturalistic terms. He writes:

When the nation grew intensely self-conscious as an organism would do and was in direct conflict with the non-self it instinctively turned to draw the line of

[6] Savarkar returns to this rhetorical mode at the end of his text as well, remarking that 'the actual essentials of Hindutva are … also the ideal essentials of Hindutva': ibid., p. 136.

[7] Shortly before Savarkar offers the pronouncement quoted in footnote 6, he writes, 'The Hindus are about the only people who are blessed with these ideal conditions that are at the same incentives to national solidarity, cohesion, and greatness': ibid., p. 136.

[8] That Savarkar begins his text with general terms and then turns his analytic attention to the specific case of Hindusthan seems to have been largely ignored by previous scholarship on *Hindutva*. For instance, in his masterwork on Hindu nationalism in the twentieth century, Christophe Jaffrelot instead characterizes the pamphlet as explicitly focused on the unique territoriality of the Hindu nation: see Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics: 1925 to the 1990s* (London: Hurst, 1996) esp. pp. 25–32. However, this misses the importance of the sequence in which Savarkar's arguments appear in his text, for he takes care to begin in generalities before moving to the specific case of India, as evidenced by his own words at the text's beginning and end. Such a recognition of the importance of the text's structure is missing from Janaki Bakhle's close reading of *Hindutva* as well: see Janaki Bakhle, 'Country First? Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883–1966) and the Writing of *Essentials of Hindutva*', *Public Culture* vol. 22 no. 1 (2010), pp. 149–186. Chetan Bhatt comments briefly on Savarkar's 'obsession with taxonomies, definitions, and nominal reasoning': see Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), p. 88.

[9] Savarkar, *Hindutva*, p. 42.

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division and mark well the position it occupied so as to make it clear to themselves where they exactly stood and to the world how they were unmistakably a people by themselves—not only a racial and national, but even geographical and political unit.[10]

Exceeding the biological connotation of the word 'organism', Savarkar comes to understand Hindusthan as an organism containing cultural, political, and ethnic dimensions.[11] These dimensions represent not properties, but characteristics of the nation, constituting and bequeathing identity. Such a distinction is an important one, for it underscores the dependence of the Hindu nation's very existence on the possession of these qualities. The enlivening of the nation occurs precisely because of the confluence of territory, culture, and race.[12] The Hindu nation, for Savarkar, would not exist without the presence of each of these features. The intersection of the three allows for the crucial recognition of alien elements to occur, a process that occurs intrinsically and without external prompting. By virtue of this instinct, there exists neither the need for nor the possibility of explicitly demarcating those individuals or aspects that constitute the nation's 'non-self'. The national organism knows a priori the calculus by which this recognition transpires.

The animation of the national organism is crucial to Savarkar's project, giving rise to a conjoined sense of indivisibility and vitality. An organism cannot split apart, either forcibly or of its own volition, without some form of pain or suffering. The same holds for Hindusthan. To establish this, Savarkar endows the nation with a sense of internal agency, separate from that of its constituent elements. When describing the nation, he moves between the pronouns 'it' and 'they'. This slippage prompts Hindusthan seemingly to adopt a consciousness of its own, existing independently of the people within its borders.[13]

[10] Ibid., p. 28.

[11] The word 'organism' is an important one for Savarkar—it appears three times in the text, each time to signal the conjunction of existence and consciousness: see ibid., pp. 2, 28, 39. He also uses its adjectival form—'organic'—12 times in the text.

[12] Savarkar addresses this directly in his consideration of the hypothetical possibility of an American becoming an Indian citizen—'the term Hindu has come to mean much more than its geographical significance': ibid., p. 84. The analytic frameworks of Jaffrelot and others, which place an outsized emphasis on territoriality, cannot capture that it is the precise combination of all the elements identified above that yield a nation, in Savarkar's understanding, and not any one element taken in isolation.

[13] Savarkar writes of the 'national self-consciousness', which acts as a safeguard against the 'ferociousness and brutal egoism of other nations': ibid., p. 25.

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Such a unity and consciousness are further derived from two more properties Savarkar ties to the natural world. In a chapter entitled, 'Stupid Notions Must Go', he writes:

> The most important factor that contributes to the cohesion, strength, and the sense of unity of a people is that they should possess an internally well-connected and externally well-demarcated 'local habitation' and a 'name' that could, by its very mention, rouse the cherished images of their motherland as well as the loved memories of their past. We are happily blessed with both these important requisites for a strong and united nation.[14]

A unified homeland and a name—this is what, according to Savarkar, makes a nation. And, in his account of the origins of these 'requisites', the natural world is that which provides the primary content.

Savarkar begins his tract with an exposition on the importance of naming. Invoking Shakespeare and the 'fair Maid of Verona', he writes that although the object signified by a name is indeed more important than the name of the object, some 'names … are the very soul of man. They become the idea itself and live longer than generations of men do.'[15] A name is central to the nationalist project by virtue of its homogenizing potential—a name is associated with an object that exists in some state of wholeness and unification.[16] Given the contested status of the Hindu nation as conceived of by Savarkar, both the facts of existence and unity were important to him.[17]

[14] Ibid., p. 82.

[15] Ibid., p. 2.

[16] On the issue of names in particular, see Arvind Sharma, 'On Hindu, Hindustān, Hinduism and Hindutva', *Numen* vol. 49 no. 1 (2002), pp. 1–36. Sharma's central argument—that the concern motivating Savarkar's definition of Hindutva was the avoidance of 'the political fall-out of an excessively narrow definition of Hinduism'—reinforces the primacy of the natural in Savarkar's thought, for (as is discussed later in this article) the river Sindhu is found to be that entity which commands neither too broad nor too narrow an allegiance.

[17] Savarkar, *Hindutva*, p. 1. On Savarkar and the invention of a unified Hindu identity, see Pratap Bhanu Mehta, 'Hinduism and Self-Rule', *Journal of Democracy* vol. 15 no. 3 (2004), pp. 108–121; Ashis Nandy, 'The Demonic and the Seductive in Religious Nationalism: Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and the Rites of Exorcism in Secularizing South Asia', *Heidelberg Papers in South Asian and Comparative Politics* no. 44, February 2009, hpsacp.uni-hd.de, [accessed 18 February 2020]. Additionally, there is a vast literature on the problem of the construction of a unified Hindu identity for Hindu nationalism more generally. For a perceptive discussion of this topic and some of the secondary literature, see Tapan Raychaudhuri, 'Shadows of the Swastika: Historical Perspectives on the Politics of Hindu Communalism', *Modern Asian Studies* vol. 34 no. 2 (2000), pp. 259–279;

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Thus, when Savarkar attributes the origin of the word 'Hindu' and, by extension, the origin of the word 'Hindutva', to the river Sindhu, this attribution impresses upon the reader the importance of the geographical to Savarkar's project.[18] Though the name itself is that which is explicitly acknowledged as feeding centrally into the existence of a nation, by extension, the source of this name, too, is a matter of import. He writes,

> The Emperor Bharat is gone and gone also is many an emperor as great!—but the Sindhu goes on for ever; for ever inspiring and fertilizing our sense of gratitude, vivifying our sense of pride, renovating the ancient memories of our race—a sentinal (*sic*) keeping watch over the destinies of our people. It is the vital spinal cord that connects the remotest past to the remotest future. The name that associates and identifies our nation with a river like that, enlists nature on our side, and bases our national life on a foundation that is, so [far] as human calculation are concerned, as lasting as eternity.[19]

The river Sindhu is the 'spinal cord' that enlivens India, as it links the nation across temporal and physical spectra. Previous scholars have emphasized the territorial aspect of Savarkar's construction of the nation, taking the role of the Sindhu as the sole marker of the extent of the Hindu nation's land-based presence. Such an analysis, however, misses the important role played by the Sindhu river itself, independent of its relationship to strictly terrestrial boundaries. The implication of the metaphor is that without the river's binding function, the identity of India would fissure along historical fault lines, cracking into different eras and periods. Because the Sindhu transcends time, it is able to bear the task of transporting India's identity throughout its borders as well as throughout time. That Savarkar allocates responsibility as such is no coincidence. Perhaps the text's most famous line—'Hindutva is not a

see also James G. Lochtefeld, 'New Wine, Old Skins: The Sangh Parivār and the Transformation of Hinduism', *Religion* vol. 26 (1996), pp. 101–118.

[18] Vinayak Chaturvedi has also demonstrated the importance of the practice of naming within the doctrine of Hindutva, specifically the giving of the name 'Vinayak' to children. Such a 'desire to give names', according to his argument, signifies a 'return to the basic principles outlined by Savarkar in *Hindutva*': see Vinayak Chaturvedi, 'Vinayak and Me: "Hindutva" and the Politics of Naming', *Social History* vol. 28 no. 2 (2003), pp. 155–173. Consequently, it seems that the centrality of naming and the name itself cannot be overstated within the construction of Hindutva. Indeed, Savarkar wrote, 'the name seems to matter as much as the thing itself': Savarkar, *Hindutva*, p. 2. See also Janaki Bakhle on the politics of naming as a rhetorical strategy used by Savarkar: Bakhle, 'Country First?', pp. 158–160.

[19] Savarkar, *Hindutva*, p. 31.

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word, but a history'—reveals, among other things, that Savarkar is deeply attuned to the temporal dimensions of his ideology.[20] No human is entrusted with such a responsibility, despite the anthropomorphic metaphor.

The only other occurrence of the metaphor of the 'vital spinal cord' in the text is in a description of Hindutva itself: 'This one word Hindutva, ran like a vital spinal cord through our whole body politic and made the Nayars of Malabar weep over the sufferings of the Brahmins of Kashmir.'[21] Again, the image of the spinal cord serves to indicate the beginning of a national life, here in the birth of political consciousness. And again, the control of issues relating to humans is ceded to a non-human entity.

The overlapping metaphor indicates the melding of the Sindhu and Hindutva. The river that gave rise to the ideology has become enveloped by it, taken in by its ever-expanding grasp. The Sindhu is Hindutva; Hindutva is the Sindhu. The two fold into each other and, in the process, combine their qualities and meaning. Thus, it is not the Sindhu that brings life to India, but Hindutva.

As with the discussion of naming, the geographical anchoring of the ideology of Hindutva happens almost immediately in the development of Savarkar's text.[22] He remarks that the geographic wholeness of India was achieved when 'the valorous Prince of Ayodhya made a triumphant entry in Ceylon and actually brought the whole land from the Himalayas to the Seas under sovereign sway'.[23] From this early assertion on, the importance of this integrity is continuously emphasized through its recurrent invocation in the pamphlet. Land—contiguous and clearly bounded—is key to the political unity of India.

Christophe Jaffrelot writes, 'In Savarkar's mind, territory and ethnic unity are inseparable.'[24] There cannot be one without the other. It is India's land that allows for the creation of national identity; it is national identity that necessitates geographical wholeness. A

[20] Ibid., p. 3.

[21] Ibid., p. 46.

[22] For that matter, nearly every study of Savarkar and the ideology of Hindutva has commented on the territorial grounding of Hindutva. As examples, see Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics*, pp. 26–28; Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, p. 94; and Bakhle, 'Country First?', p. 53. While no doubt important, this author holds that territory is only one aspect of a broader reliance on the concept of nature as politics in the text.

[23] Savarkar, *Hindutva*, p. 11.

[24] Christophe Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 87.

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compromise of either would lead to the destruction of both. Nature itself is a constituent aspect of the political, and the ideology of Hindutva inheres in India's environment.

This equivalence between territorial and political cohesion arises in part from what Chetan Bhatt terms Savarkar's 'strategic primordialization of Hindu identity'.[25] Savarkar speaks of the process of self-recognition for the Hindu nation in the past tense—in his definition of Hindutva, he repeatedly invokes those elements of Hindu culture and history he deems ancient. The events and individuals he cites are situated so far back in the past that they approach the appearance of the eternal, simultaneous with the creation of the Earth itself; one cannot imagine a time before their existence.[26]

This is a legitimizing move, as well as an animating one. The apparent goal of his project is to revert India to its authentic state, that which was dictated by its creators. It is precisely this genuine form of national life (supposedly found deep in the nation's past) that defines India as a nation populated solely by Hindus and which labels Muslims and other minorities as intruders.[27] As a result, the movement of his text is largely annular—it is an attempt to persuade Hindus to return to a prior state of being, creating a closed circle with what, he argues, was their past.

As a result, Savarkar treats the natural as a wellspring of the markers of Hindu identity. Because Savarkar conflates change in the distant past with the static, the distinctions that bequeath India its national identity must be those that he perceives are situated outside the realm of the temporal.[28] Just as the identity of India as a nation that is meant for Hindus has been a constant, despite the centuries-old existence of Muslim communities within its borders, the identifiers of this nation must be similarly fixed through the course of time. And so enters the realm of the natural. That Savarkar asserts the ability of the Indus river

[25] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, p. 86.

[26] Additionally, in his account of the history of the name 'Sindhu', Savarkar writes, 'Hindu would be the name that this land and the people that inhabited it bore from time so immemorial even the Vedic name Sindhu is but a later and secondary form of it': Savarkar, *Hindutva*, p. 10.

[27] Ibid., p. 42; Amalendu Misra, 'Savarkar and the Discourse on Islam in Pre-Independent India', *Journal of Asian History* vol. 33 no. 2 (1999), pp. 142–184.

[28] An oft-remarked-upon quality of Hindutva ideology as a whole is its appeal to the antediluvian, most notably through the use of archaeology. For a discussion of this as it relates specifically to Hindu nationalist interpretations of the archaeological, see Cynthia Ann Humes, 'Hindutva, Mythistory, and Pseudoarchaeology', *Numen* vol. 59 no. 2 (2012), pp. 178–201.

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to connect 'the remotest past to the remotest future' indicates precisely this symmetrical relationship between the ahistoricism of Hindutva and that of India's nature. For him, India's geography exists outside of time, pulled from the historical narrative and endowed with a sense of permanence and immutability. And it is by virtue of this property that Savarkar populates his vision of Hindu identity with content of the natural.[29]

This equivalence between the natural and the political also presents itself in the functioning of the concept of Hindu identity within Savarkar's larger schema. Echoing the dictum that 'hatred separates as well as unites', the previous incarnation of India to which Savarkar seeks to return is one premised on the idea of enmity.[30] As a result, the martial valence of the previously quoted passage is more than coincidence.[31] Like a soldier in an army, nature is 'enlist[ed]'. The river Sindhu serves as a sentinel, 'keeping watch over the destinies' of the Hindus. This language not only gestures towards the primacy of conflict

[29] P. B. Mehta notes this desperate search for identity markers in Savarkar, but neglects to register Savarkar's solution in his use of nature: see Mehta, 'Hinduism and Self-Rule', pp. 117–120.

[30] Such an approach extends to Savarkar's other texts as well—for a brief discussion of the role of enmity in V. D. Savarkar, *The War of Independence of 1857* (London: s.n., 1909), see Jyotirmaya Sharma, 'History as Revenge and Retaliation: Rereading Savarkar's "The War of Independence of 1857"', *Economic and Political Weekly* vol. 42 no. 19 (2007), pp. 1717–1719.

[31] The necessity of a violent, militant outlook on politics appears in both the theory and practice of Hindutva. On the theoretical grounding of this warlike approach, see Chaturvedi, 'Rethinking Knowledge with Action'; and Chetan Bhatt and Parita Mukta, 'Hindutva in the West: Mapping the Antinomies of Diasporic Nationalism', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* vol. 23 no. 3 (2000), pp. 430–431. Quite importantly, Savarkar's emphasis on the pursuit of physical strength through martial arts training has remained a cornerstone of Hindutva practices, appearing as a prominent feature of the ideology's enactment: see Thomas Blom Hansen, 'Recuperating Masculinity: Hindu Nationalism, Violence and the Exorcism of the Muslim "Other"', *Critique of Anthropology* vol. 16 no. 2 (1996), pp. 137–172. Appearing concurrently with Savarkar's commitment to martial arts is the deeply gendered disposition of Hindutva ideology. There is considerable secondary literature on the role of gender in the structure of Hindutva thought: see Nandy, 'A Disowned Father of the Nation in India', p. 95; and Bhatt and Mukta, 'Hindutva in the West', pp. 426–431. On the role of gender in Savarkar's thought specifically, see Megha Kumar, 'History and Gender in Savarkar's Nationalist Writings', *Social Scientist* vol. 34 nos. 11–12 (2006), pp. 33–50. The Sindhu poses a peculiar problem for this form of analysis, however, for while Savarkar does not apply a specific gender to the Sindhu, he very clearly genders violence and militant action as masculine. That the Sindhu exists in both spheres shows these divisions to be sometimes curiously porous in Savarkar's thought.

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in Savarkar's thought, but also inextricably links nature to this violence—under Savarkar's model, conflict is one of nature's inescapable laws.

It is by way of this law of nature that Savarkar launches his attack on rival attempts to resist British colonization within India. Foremost among these was Gandhi's vision of *swaraj* and *satyagraha*. However, Savarkar's insistence on constructing the ideology of Hindutva entirely within the context of India's ancient past prevented him from directly confronting Gandhian ideals. Instead, he critiqued Gandhi obliquely, through discussions of the history of Buddhism in India.

Savarkar labels Buddhism as 'the first and yet the greatest attempt to propagate a universal religion'.[32] He is generous in his praise of its ideals, acknowledging that Buddhism's principles of non-violence and universalism represented a 'law of Righteousness'.[33] He even goes so far as to claim Buddhism as part of Hindu culture: 'We yield to none in our love, admiration, and respect for the Buddha-the Dharma-the Sangha … Their glories are ours and ours their failures.'[34]

Yet, its intent to deny the inherent aggression of humans rendered Buddhism, quite literally, an unnatural philosophy. The failure of non-violence as a principle adequate for guiding political community was naturally ordained, moving the logic of Savarkar's historical narrative from that of possible cause and effect to the much stronger notion of necessity.[35] The universalism of Buddhism meant that 'Buddhism had its geographical centre of gravity nowhere'.[36] Non-violence lacked the ability to 'eradicate the seeds of animal passions'[37] and 'India … under the opiates of Universalism and non-violence lost the faculty even of resisting sin and crime and aggression.'[38] In the face of bloodshed and aggression, Buddhism amounted to little more than 'the mumbos and jumbos of universal brotherhood'.[39] In contrast, Hinduism's 'centre of gravity [was] the Gangetic Delta'.[40]

[32] Savarkar, *Hindutva*, p. 22.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., p. 20.
[35] Ibid., p. 28.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., p. 22.
[38] Ibid., p. 24.
[39] Ibid., p. 23.
[40] Ibid., p. 3.

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That Savarkar chooses to anchor Buddhism and Hinduism with a 'centre of gravity' indicates the quasi-scientific leanings of his pamphlet.[41] In the same way that a scientist observes the natural world and infers facts about it from those observations, Savarkar records supposed 'facts' of the world and infers his theory of the political from these data. The phrase 'centre of gravity' gestures to the physical sciences, as does the project of *Hindutva* taken as a whole—an attempt to create a clear taxonomy of a natural occurring object, Hindutva.

Thus, from Savarkar's vision of nature, one receives the image of a reflective environment, which both produces and receives signs related to the political. At times, this image is one fraught with self-contradiction, straining under the weight of Hindutva's unacknowledged commitments, such as the exclusion of Muslim and Christian populations. Still, however, the environment is consistently treated as part of the realm of politics, not relegated to a different sphere of understanding. All that is natural is political. It becomes synonymous with Hindutva: all of nature, politics, culture, religion, and ethnicity collapsed to form a unified whole.

As insisted upon earlier in this article, the relationship between nature and politics is commutative. This congruence of meanings allows us to insist that, for Savarkar, nature *is* politics. Thus, we are left asking the question: how did Savarkar understand the use of the natural within the political realm?

Simply put, for Savarkar, India's environment determines its political destiny. His vision of politics is one stripped of individual agency, inhabited instead by actors whose sole function is to fulfil preordained destinies. Indeed, in his short essay, 'Suicide and Self-Dedication', published at the very end of his lifetime, Savarkar openly endorses ending one's life once one has 'largely perfected one's life-mission', promoting it as a desirable alternative to letting '[one's] body become a burden to self and society'.[42] The individual lacks autonomy to the

[41] On Herbert Spencer's influence on the development of the ideology of Hindutva, see Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, p. 81; Shruti Kapila, 'Self, Spencer, and Swaraj: Nationalist Thought and Critiques of Liberalism 1890–1920', *Modern Intellectual History* vol. 4 no. 1 (2007), pp. 109–127.

[42] Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, 'Suicide and Self-Dedication', savarkar.org, [accessed 18 February 2020]. The existing secondary literature on this essay is quite thin; however, it seems that among Savarkar's writings, the pamphlet presents some of the most daring (and perhaps representative arguments) crafted by the thinker, given the circumstances of his own death.

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extent that their life lacks all purpose once they have discharged their national duty.

Savarkar's writing in this pamphlet underscores the importance of nature to his political thought more broadly. By placing agency beyond the realm of the human, Savarkar commits himself to a reliance on the non-human as the wellspring of political substance. He lacks any another option. The natural exists in a state of intentionality incongruent with that of human agency. Whatever sort of will one identifies with the natural—with the geographical and territorial—it cannot be said to be of the same kind as that which one identifies with human action. Humans are compelled by natural forces, such as through biological necessity, just as the natural can be altered physically through human action. However, the constituent components of the natural realm, in their respective existence, structure, and form, subsist entirely outside the bounds of human influence. Savarkar wrote at a time when humans were not understood to be an ecological force.[43]

Collectively, this renders the value of freedom as a political concept a complicated one for Savarkar. Contrary to previous understandings of Savarkar's view of freedom, his commitment to the natural as political means that freedom—understood as the unbounded potential of the collective agency of political communities—ceases to exist under Hindutva.[44] Rather, the actions of political communities are precisely determined by the configuration of the natural world. The conceptual space normally occupied by freedom is instead replaced by one of predestination, as understood through signs and signals received through the conduit of nature. For Savarkar, the project of politics leaves no room for individual or collective self-determination. Instead, it is akin to that of transcription, the straightforward rendering of the

[43] Of course, this raises the interesting question of what Savarkar's politics might have looked like if he witnessed, perhaps even participated in, contemporary discussions of the Anthropocene. Although some scholars place the temporal markers of the Anthropocene to include the period in which Savarkar lived, the idea that humans could be the dominant force in shaping the environment was clearly a unfamiliar one to him.

[44] Manjari Katju has offered a view of freedom's function in Hindutva ideology as functioning solely for Hindus—while this is perhaps true at the level of individual (namely, that, on Savarkar's construal of the idea, only individual Hindus living in India might have a legitimate claim to the utilization of freedom and its fruits), this can hardly be seen to be true at the level of the collective. Furthermore, this view, as it applies to the freedom of individuals, cannot account for Savarkar's stance on suicide or his own actions on this matter. For Katju's argument, see Manjari Katju, 'The Meaning of Freedom', *Social Scientist* vol. 39 no. 3 (2011), pp. 3–22.

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natural as political—and the political as natural. One simply has to recognize the correct mode of transliteration in order to realize the full ends of Hindutva.

At its basis, the implication of Savarkar's view of nature as politics is this: there is no room for becoming in his political philosophy; there is room alone for being.

Bodies

Unlike Savarkar, Gandhi was uninterested in classification and categorization. Instead, his attention was directed at the structure and form of the ethical, which he believed was cast in the interactions of everyday life.[45] As a result, while Savarkar's *Hindutva* was engaged in a project of definition and taxonomy, Gandhi's 1909 *Hind Swaraj* is primarily concerned with investigations into issues of morality. Labelled as the 'moral compass' of his writings, this short text outlines Gandhi's complaints against the British colonial government, his doctrine of *satyagraha*, and his vision of *swaraj* for India.[46]

At the centre of our concern with *Hind Swaraj* is the question: what were Gandhi's ethics of nature?[47] Answering this question has proven more difficult than anticipated. Gandhi himself was not prone to systematic disquisitions on his philosophy, and (unsurprisingly) efforts to connect Gandhi to contemporary environmental movements have 'generated a small industry'.[48] His vegetarianism, idealization of agricultural life, and monastic aesthetic all appear amiable to the aims and practices of

[45] Uday Mehta eloquently describes this preoccupation of Gandhi's in his article on the subject; here we offer the additional interpretations as a complementary lens through which to understand Gandhi's view of the ethical. See Uday Singh Mehta, 'Gandhi on Democracy, Politics and the Ethics of Everyday Life', *Modern Intellectual History* vol. 7 (2010), pp. 355–371.

[46] Anthony Parel, 'The Political Theory of Gandhi's Hind Swaraj', *Asian Studies* vol. 7 no. 3 (1969), pp. 279–301. On the importance of *Hind Swaraj* to the interpretation of Gandhi's philosophy, see also Akeel Bilgrami, 'Gandhi's Radicalism: An Interpretation', in his *Beyond the Secular West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

[47] I define 'ethics of nature' in line with K. Sivaramakrishnan, who describes it as 'a set of abiding concerns and guiding principles that humans ponder, articulate, and deploy in their interactions with the non-human world': see K. Sivaramakrishnan, 'Ethics of Nature in Indian Environmental History: A Review Article', *Modern Asian Studies* vol. 49 no. 4 (2015), pp. 1261–1310.

[48] Ibid., p. 263.

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environmentalists. Indeed, his dislike and mistrust of machinery as well as India's increasing reliance on industrial technology seem to be taken directly from an anti-pollution pamphlet. However, scholars such as Ramchandra Guha and Vinay Lal have argued that an unambiguous connection to the Green movement sought by environmental activists fails to exist, and that Gandhi's relationship to nature is more complex than a straightforward advocacy of conservation.[49] Furthermore, on the specific topic of *Hind Swaraj*'s demonstration of Gandhi's view on the environment, Guha writes, 'Despite its eloquent denunciation of modern Western culture, the book has nothing to say about man's relationship with nature.'[50]

I contest this analysis of *Hind Swaraj*. In their studies, neither Guha nor Lal attends specifically to the connection between morality and nature in the Gandhian programme. As a result, their views of Gandhi's thought are truncated ones, missing the underlying connections he makes between his ideas of ethics, politics, and nature. Instead, I hold that in this short pamphlet, Gandhi's thoughts are deeply concerned with the natural, such that concerns regarding the association between the human and the non-human pervade the text. Furthermore, these writings on nature and the body are deeply ethical in their focus. They are precisely preoccupied with that which is inherent about morality, as it can be ascertained from man's relationship with nature.

Alternatively, one might ask: why *Hind Swaraj*? Gandhi's corpus provides a wealth of musings on the body and its relationship with nature. The subject occupied him from childhood to his very last years of life; he produced a range of writings and pamphlets dealing squarely with these issues.[51] Why, then, choose the oblique path? Why attend primarily to *Hind Swaraj*, in which mentions of the body are both relatively sparse and seemingly inconsistent with Gandhi's later views?

[49] Vinay Lal, 'Gandhi and the Ecological Vision of Life: Thinking beyond Deep Ecology', *Environmental Ethics* vol. 22 (2000), pp. 149–168.

[50] Ramachandra Guha, 'Mahatma Gandhi and the Environmental Movement in India', *Capitalism Nature Socialism* vol. 6 (1995), pp. 47–61. However, Guha does acknowledge that *Hind Swaraj*, more so than any other piece of writing produced by Gandhi, is taken as evidence of his connection to the environmental movement by those seeking to establish as much. See also Ramachandra Guha, 'Ideological Trends in Indian Environmentalism', *Economic and Political Weekly* vol. 23 no. 49 (1988), pp. 2578–2581.

[51] For instance, see Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Key to Health* [pamphlet] (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1948).

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First, it must be conceded that part of the contention of this article is that *Hind Swaraj* has been misunderstood on exactly this point. The text is saturated with Gandhi's views on nature, and we risk eliding what appears to be an important component of Gandhi's political thought if we fail to acknowledge as much. Even in light of this charge, however, it certainly would be a mistake to ignore Gandhi's other writings on the subject of nature and isolate *Hind Swaraj* as the sole site of his engagement with the topic. That is not the claim of our interpretive project. Instead, in this article, we are concerned with reading Gandhi's and Savarkar's thought with an eye to the political; this is the effect of the construction—'nature as politics'—offered at the outset. On the matter of Gandhi's politics and political theory, *Hind Swaraj* offers the sharpest view.[52]

Our interest in *Hind Swaraj* grows upon the recognition that the timeframe of its creation corresponds with that of Gandhi's deepest exchange with Savarkar. Though the two remained adversaries throughout their lives, the early decades of the twentieth century saw the pair's closest and most sustained period of interaction. As mentioned earlier, it is generally surmised that Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj* in response to Savarkar and the rise in influence of his strain of violent revolutionary thought, a conjecture strengthened by the temporal proximity between Gandhi's writing of *Hind Swaraj* and

[52] Parel, 'The Political Theory of Gandhi's Hind Swaraj', p. 280. See also Anthony Parel, 'Editor's Introduction', in Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, (ed.) Anthony Parel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. xiii (hereafter *HS*). In his brilliant essay, Ramachandra Guha disputes the long-standing primacy of *Hind Swaraj* in the construction of a full understanding of Gandhi's thought: see Ramachandra Guha, 'A prophet announces himself', *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 September 2009. His central reason for doing so is that 'Gandhi was not principally a thinker … as he liked to say, his life was his message.' Thus, Guha finds, we must focus on his later writings, for it is here that he offers a mature philosophy, one that is worthy of deep study. I believe this to be a misstep. Though Gandhi undoubtedly evolved as a thinker over the course of his lifetime, he was always more than just a philosopher—we cannot count this as a reason for not taking his early work seriously. We are right to see his life as a message itself, but the novelty and clarity of his thought should not be ignored simply by virtue of his engagement with actual politics (or the later lack thereof). If we are to take this view of philosophy and philosophers, then we must remove the title of 'thinker' from whole swathes of the canon, including Plato himself. On this point, see Danielle Allen, *Why Plato Wrote* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). Viewing Gandhi as a thinker as well as a political actor allows us to see the depth and philosophical consistency in his thought across his lifetime, pointing to the place of *Hind Swaraj* in our analyses.

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Madan Lal Dhingra's assassination of Sir William Curzon Wylie, as well as the mention of this event in the text.[53] Although Gandhi later appears to change his mind about some of the views regarding medicine and the body he offers in *Hind Swaraj*, owing to both its content and literary structure, sustained engagement with the text offers readers a glimpse of something akin to a direct conversation between Gandhi and Savarkar. The combination of *Hind Swaraj*'s stridently political stance with its headlong confrontation of Savarkar's philosophy motivates our focus on *Hind Swaraj*.

Unravelling exactly how Gandhi articulates and theorizes his view of the body and nature in *Hind Swaraj* will guide our inquiry for the remainder of this section. It is here that our embrace of a generous definition of nature is of most use, in a large part due to Gandhi's preoccupation with the immaterial—those items not considered part of the physical world. As a result, an understanding of Gandhi's ethics of nature cannot be gained from his writings on the issues of wildlife conservation or the killing of cows. Instead, Gandhi's writings on the body—concerning medicine, labour, and, indeed, *satyagraha* itself—provide the fullest perspective of his view of nature: for Gandhi the body is the most deeply natural of objects within the sphere of human functioning. On these points, *Hind Swaraj* speaks volumes.

Gandhi's overall preoccupation with the body is evident in *Hind Swaraj*. One of the text's most famous—and, indeed, controversial lines—is his characterization of the British parliament as a 'sterile woman and a prostitute'.[54] The crux of the metaphor lies in its gesture to bodily functions, carried in both the designation of 'sterile' as well as the reference to prostitution. The improper functioning and use of the body

[53] Parel holds that it was common knowledge in the social circles in which Gandhi moved at that time that Savarkar was the one who urged on Dhingra. Parel also cites an article of Gandhi's in the *Indian Opinion* in August of 1909 which argues, 'He was egged on to do this act by ill-digested reading of worthless writings … It is those who incited him to this that deserve to be punished. In my view, Mr. Dhingra himself is innocent': Parel, 'Editor's Introduction', in *HS*, p. xxvii; and *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (hereafter *CWMG*), Vol. 9, p. 245, https://www.mkgandhi.org/cwmg.htm, [accessed 18 February 2020]. See also Chaturvedi, 'Rethinking Knowledge with Action', pp. 427–428.

[54] *HS*, p. 30. Ajay Skaria explicates the boundary between proper and improper, and Gandhi's use of the prostitute/*veshya* metaphor in: Ajay Skaria, 'Only One Word, Properly Altered: Gandhi and the Question of the Prostitute', *Postcolonial Studies* vol. 10 no. 2 (2007), pp. 219–237.

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(in Gandhi's eyes) determine the negative connotation of the comparison.[55]

Through the body, nature acquires a central role in *Hind Swaraj* and in the entirety of Gandhi's political philosophy. A close reading of the text reveals the ways in which Gandhi was preoccupied by the natural—oftentimes, biological—limits of the body. For Gandhi, the body is not simply connected to nature—it is its most essential component.

To witness this fixation in effect, we turn to the text. The centre of *Hind Swaraj* presents the reader with a curious chapter, entitled 'The Condition of India (contd.): Doctors'. It comes at the end of an argumentative arc delineating the specific factors Gandhi believes have caused and sustained India's colonization, namely railways, doctors, and lawyers. In this section, Gandhi denounces the profession of medicine, labelling hospitals as 'institutions for propagating sin'.[56] He writes:

> Doctors have almost unhinged us. Sometimes I think that quacks are better than highly qualified doctors. Let us consider: the business of a doctor is to take care of the body, or, properly speaking, not even that. Their business is really to rid the body of diseases that may afflict it. How do these diseases arise? Surely by our negligence or indulgence. I over-eat, I have indigestion, I go to a doctor, he gives me medicine, I am cured, I over-eat again, and I take his pills again. Had I not taken the pills in the first instances, I would have suffered the punishment deserved by me, and I would not have over-eaten again. The doctor intervened and helped me to indulge myself. My body thereby certainly felt more at ease, but my mind became weakened. A continuance of a course of a medicine must, therefore result in loss of control over the mind.[57]

One's body and mind are connected, but they are not equal.[58] From the above paragraph, it is clear that the functioning of one has consequences for the functioning of the other. However, what is also clear is that, for Gandhi, the body must occupy a subsidiary position to the mind, such that it is to be directed by the mind and never the reverse. Such a dictum follows from the frailty of the body. Our daily experiences of

[55] As discussed later in this article, Gandhi also used the language of impropriety to characterize the violent use of one's body as a means of anticolonial resistance.

[56] *HS*, p. 63.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Gandhi returns repeatedly to the fundamental asymmetry between the body and the mind. In 1925, he writes, 'It is only in a lean body that a strong *atman* lives. As the *atman* grows in strength, the body becomes leaner. A perfectly healthy body can be very lean. A strong body usually suffers from some disease. Even if it has no disease, it is quick to catch infection or contract a disease, whereas a perfectly healthy body will never catch an infection': see 'Brahmacharya', in *CWMG*, Vol. 28, p. 14.

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illness and physical pain show the body to be an unreliable interlocutor, at times a 'glass bangle' or a 'broken weed'.[59] It is an entity whose presence is continuously subject to contestation, one that may 'slip out of our hands at any time', a result of the twin unpredictability and inescapability of death. The impermanence of the body is a guarantee. Bodily experience is a function of mirage: the knowledge produced is not a legitimate claimant to the label of truth. As a result, ceding any sort of decision-making power to the body necessarily results in 'loss of control over the mind'.[60] As the mind is the facility that allows one to exist as an ethical agent—to seek out truth—such a loss marks the forfeiture of one's own ethical substance, perhaps irrevocably.

The passage continues in the same vein, with Gandhi further remarking, 'I have indulged in vice, I contract a disease, a doctor cures me, the odds are that I shall repeat the vice. Had the doctor not intervened, nature would have done its work, and I would have acquired mastery over myself, would have been freed from vice and would have become happy.'[61] The body's jump to the non-human occurs precisely in the conflation between biological processes and 'nature [doing] its work'.[62] This is no slip of the tongue. For Gandhi,

[59] 'God or Nature to Blame?', in ibid., p. 127; 'Speech in Reply to Students' Address, Trivandrum', in *CWMG*, Vol. 30, p. 244.

[60] The relationship between mental weakness and illness holds firm for Gandhi throughout his writings. He later writes (concerning his views on medicine), 'I have not *Indian Home Rule* before me, but I recollect sufficient to be able to say that I have nothing to revise about the views set forth there … As I hold that appendicitis was a result of infirmity of thought or mind, so do I concede that my submission to the surgical operation was an additional infirmity of mind. If I was absolutely free of egoism, I would have resigned myself to the inevitable; but I wanted to live in the present body': see 'My Mission', in *CWMG*, Vol. 27, p. 162.

[61] This passage also presents strong resonances with Gandhi's engagement with the idea of the nature cure, to which he remained committed until his death. The nature cure, in Gandhi's estimation, both cured one of one's current illness as well as prevented future sickness, through 'right living' and in the absence of drugs: see 'Talk with a Casual Visitor', in *CWMG*, Vol. 90, p. 119. Gandhi's focus on the nature cure is complementary to the idea of 'nature as politics' presented here, for it underscores Gandhi's view of the body as an entity functioning in accordance with influences beyond the reach of an individual's control. The thrust of the nature cure is that one must yield to the force of nature, that illness is brought on by disregarding nature's fundamental rules and that the only way to correct such a misstep is to cede all power to nature's machinations. We see the same line of thinking appear in Gandhi's views on fasting as a form of *satyagraha*.

[62] This view underwrites Gandhi's faith in the nature cure, for it is the same sort of intentionality on behalf of the individual that both allows for the contraction of an

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they are the same, symbolizing the way the body is alienated from the Gandhian conception of the self. This conflation signals that the body exists outside the reaches of intention, which forms the core of Gandhi's moral and political thinking.[63] Such a view is compounded by the reasoning cited in the previous paragraph, in which the body was pinned as the cause for one's mental failings. The instability of the body meant it could never serve as an adequate site in which to vest one's intentions. The non-conscious source of bodily intention, alongside its frailty, thereby renders the body foreign. Thus, in a strange twist of terminology, the body—ostensibly the most human of entities—joins the realm of the non-human within the Gandhian outlook.

Returning to Guha's remarks mentioned earlier, we see that Gandhi's 'denunciation of modern Western culture' is premised on his specific view of the body.[64] Without this, the critique as a whole fails to register. As the passage quoted above demonstrates, in the privileging of bodily comfort over spiritual well-being, Gandhi saw the great evil of modern civilization.[65] The body's reliance on medicine and machinery to avoid the pains of illness and labour are evidence of this.[66] Individuals were beholden to the needs of the physical.

illness and for nature to do 'its work'. What is needed is for the individual to recognize such a form of agency on the part of the natural and to heed to it.

[63] Intention, both in reference to justification for actions and as the site of bare agency, is of central concern to Gandhi: see Akeel Bilgrami, 'Gandhi's Integrity: The Philosophy behind the Politics', *Postcolonial Studies* vol. 5 no. 1 (2002), pp. 79–93; first published as 'Gandhi's Integrity', *Raritan* vol. 21 no. 1 (2001), pp. 48–67.

[64] The *locus classicus* of this argument is Joseph Alter's extensive work on Gandhi's body: see Joseph Alter, *Gandhi's Body: Sex, Diet, and the Politics of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

[65] Gandhi's critique of Western civilization as it relates to issues of medicine is often read as a criticism of modern science itself. For a rejection of this characterization of his views in his own words, see *CWMG*, Vol. 30, p. 244. Akeel Bilgrami takes up this issue as well, sketching Gandhi's position as one that critiques a particular form of scientific rationality (and not science per se) and as view that has antecedents in Western intellectual history: see Akeel Bilgrami, 'Gandhi, Newton, and the Enlightenment', *Social Scientist* vol. 34 no. 5/6 (2006), pp. 17–35. Bilgrami, an astute reader of Gandhi, briefly addresses his view of nature, too, in his essay—however, he leaves open the question of the normative implications of Gandhi's thought, focusing instead on a line of thinking in Gandhi, similar to Max Weber's, that argues against the 'disenchantment' of nature brought on by a particular viewpoint of the modern sciences. Our central question thus remains: on the issue of nature, in what specific ways did Gandhi's political and moral theory overlap?

[66] Though Gandhi later softened his rejection of Western medicine, he maintained his insistence that one must reject Western civilization's, and, by extension, Western

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Those who are enlightened, among whom the *satyagrahis* are numbered, recognize the sensory experience as an inherently devalued one, tainted by the mark of the material world. By distinguishing the body and the mind, Gandhi allows bodily ethics to become a part of his ethics of nature—really, the foundation of his ethics of nature—by denying identification with one's body.

This turn in Gandhian non-violence, in some sense, reflects a Hindu view of the relationship between the mind, body, and physical world.[67] Hindu theology, as evidenced by scriptures such as the Gita, separated an individual into three parts: mind, body, and *atman*, rather like the division between mind, body, and soul found in contemporary culture.[68] This division is stressed in canonical Hindu texts, such as the Bhagavad Gita.[69]

To read Gandhi as a strictly Hindu thinker, however, would be to ignore the radical reinterpretation of Hindu tradition that takes place alongside the invocation of Hindu theology within his thought. Throughout the development of his philosophy, Gandhi was engaged in a project to refocus Hinduism on practices and attitudes formerly at its edges.[70] He rejected the customs of Brahmanic Hinduism in favour of

medicine's, compulsion to '[prolong] man's earthly existence'. Keeping this in mind, we see that Gandhi continues to hold the same attitude towards the body and its alienation from one's self that already we find present in *Hind Swaraj*. His shift on the issue of medicine is to acknowledge that both modern medicine and homeopathic (such as ayurvedic) remedies can fall prey to the mindless preservation of bodily health (though not necessarily so), while also rejecting his previous view that Western medicine must necessarily be directed at the unthinking continuance of physical life (which we find in *Hind Swaraj*). However, he never wavers in his stance that medicine's immediate impulse towards bodily preservation is fundamentally mistaken. See *CWMG*, Vol. 71, p. 439; also Ramachandra Guha, 'Cures from East and West', *The Telegraph*, 14 May 2016.

[67] For more on Gandhi's relationship to the Bhagavad Gita in particular (and his transformation of the terms found therein), see Faisal Devji, 'Morality in the Shadow of Politics', *Modern Intellectual History* vol. 7 (2010), pp. 373–390; see also Bhikhu Parekh's article situating Gandhi's view of *ahimsā* (non-violence) within a broader Indian tradition of non-violence, while also highlighting Gandhi's distinct deviations from the same: Bhikhu Parekh, 'Gandhi's Concept of Ahimsā', *Alternatives* vol. 13 no. 2 (1988), pp. 195–217.

[68] For the role of the body in Hindu theology, see Barbara A. Holdrege, 'Body Connections: Hindu Discourses of the Body and the Study of Religion', *International Journal of Hindu Studies* vol. 2 no. 3 (1998), pp. 341–386.

[69] Eknath Easwaran (trans.), *The Bhagavad Gita* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000).

[70] Ashis Nandy, 'Final Encounter: The Politics of the Assassination of Gandhi', in his *At the Edge of Psychology: Essays in Politics and Culture* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 72; for another discussion of Gandhi's project of reinterpreting Hindu concepts, see

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the beliefs and traditions of the marginalized, particularly those of the poor as well as those practised by members of lower castes. Concurrently during this process of relocating authentic Hinduism, he inserted his own principles—ideas that were completely novel to the Hindu tradition. In the same breath, Gandhi cites Hindu texts, reinterprets situated practices, and offers his own philosophy. The result is a revolutionary philosophy formulated in ostensibly Hindu terms.

Such an example of this redefinition presents itself in Gandhi's views on fasting, a technique he used as a tool of *satyagraha*. While the practice of fasting, linked to the practice of sitting *dhurna* or *dharna* (the practice of obtaining justice by sitting at the door of the wrongdoer and fasting until justice is obtained), was one with Hindu roots, the version used as a mode of *satyagraha*, one of fasting until death, was of a strictly Gandhian essence.[71]

The English translation of *Hind Swaraj* does not mention fasting as an implement of *satyagraha*; in the Gujarati text, it is referenced once, during a discussion of resistance to unjust laws.[72] Still, as Joseph Alter notes in his monograph, *Gandhi's Body*, fasting played a large role in Gandhi's execution of *satyagraha*.[73] Through the course of his lifetime, he undertook 13 major fasts, each crucial in driving the respective conflict at which it was directed towards resolution.[74]

Fasts were among the most powerful tools available to the *satyagrahi*. Gandhi recognized as much, stating:

A *hartal* … is a powerful means of showing popular disapproval, but fasting is even more so. When people fast … it receives a certain response. Hardest hearts are impressed by it. Fasting is regarded by all religions as a great discipline. Those

T. N. Madan, 'Whither Indian Secularism?', *Modern Asian Studies* vol. 27 no. 3 (1993), pp. 667–697, particularly pp. 674–677.

71 Raghavan Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 304.

72 *HS*, p. 95, n. 191.

73 It seems worthwhile mentioning that the question of whether or not Gandhi viewed fasting as a mode of *satyagraha* can sometimes be seen as an open one. See, for instance, Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), p. 59. However, a close reading of Gandhi's writings on fasting—particularly the ethics of fasting—demonstrates that the fast is very much part of the doctrine of *satyagraha* in Gandhi's mind. For instance, he labelled (both publicly and privately) his September 1932 fast as a means of resistance: see 'Letter to Ramsay MacDonald', in *CWMG*, Vol. 56, p. 372; and 'Diary, 1932', in ibid., p. 480; see also 'Fasting in Non-Violent Action', in *CWMG*, Vol. 83, p. 132.

74 Alter, *Gandhi's Body*, p. 28.

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> who voluntarily fast become gentle and purified by it. A pure fast is a very powerful prayer. It is no small thing for lakhs of people voluntarily to abstain from food and such a fast is a *satyagrahi* fast. It ennobles individuals and nations.[75]

Nearly coercive in their force, fasts enabled Gandhi to direct the attention and actions of others via his own bodily conduct. If one of the ways we understand *satyagraha* is as a series of efforts to influence events concerning a collective through the mediation of one's relation with one's own self, the fast is the culmination of these efforts. By mediating his relationship with his own body, the terms of which are set by the demands of nature, Gandhi was able to exert control over external affairs, in a manner more effective than a strike.[76] This protest via personal bodily conduct had a lasting effect. In his later writings, Gandhi comments, 'Fasting is never intended to affect another's body. It must affect his heart. Hence it is related to the soul. And in this sense the effect, such as it is, cannot be described as temporary. It is of permanent character.'[77] Though the actual act of a fast may end, its effects are enduring.

Importantly, by locating the site of this form of *satyagraha* within the body, Gandhi also gave it an existence independent of the state. Though they may be directed at governmental conduct, fasts are not necessarily so—neither those fasting nor the desired outcome must have an explicitly political context. A fast's only implement—the body—exists independently of government intervention, and although the colonial government exerted control over the bodies of its subjects, such control was neither uncontested nor unrivalled. A fast enabled *satyagrahis* to regain control over their own bodies by explicitly violating the tenets of Western medicine and scientific knowledge, the primary means through which the colonial state governed the bodies of Indians.[78]

This reversion of control occurred in the smallest unit of revolution—the individual—and could not be prevented or forcibly directed by the

[75] Gandhi, quoted in Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 204.

[76] Gandhi makes explicit this link between influencing the consequences of one's actions, fasting, and nature in 'God or Nature to Blame?', in *CWMG*, Vol. 28, p. 127. Here, he offers that '[O]ne who knows the laws of Nature can also, by fasting, prevent the harmful consequences of his actions.' Gandhi also comments on the effectiveness of fasting in 'Ethics of Fasting', in *CWMG*, Vol. 61, p. 385.

[77] Gandhi, quoted in Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 207.

[78] David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

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state.[79] Given Gandhi's aforementioned views on medicine in *Hind Swaraj*, the fast thus became the most universally accessible method by which an individual could both renounce Western culture and defy the colonial state. Linking *satyagraha* to the body allows Gandhi to ascribe its universality and ordinariness to his doctrine.[80]

The commonness of the body also meant, however, that one might use it in ways other than those prescribed by *satyagraha*. Indeed, the relationship of alienation between one's body and one's self that underlies acts of fasting might just as easily be turned towards acts of violence. Gandhi recognized as much, and in *Hind Swaraj*, he situates *satyagraha* as explicitly counter to other methods of utilizing the body within the revolutionary project:

> Do you not tremble to think of freeing India by assassinations? What we need to do is to sacrifice ourselves. It is a cowardly thought, that of killing others. Whom do you suppose to free by assassination? The millions of India do not desire it. Those who are intoxicated by the wretched modern civilization think these things. Those who will rise to power by murder will certainly not make the nation happy. Those who believe that India has gained by Dhingra's act and other similar acts in India make a serious mistake. Dhingra was a patriot, but his love was blind. He gave his body in a wrong way; its ultimate result can only be mischievous.[81]

That Gandhi labels Dhingra as having given 'his body in a wrong way' places the body at the centre of the debate concerning the nature of the independence struggle in India. Gandhi denies neither Dhingra's patriotism nor his love of India; rather, it is in *how* Dhingra has chosen to use his body to demonstrate such patriotism and love that he is mistaken. Such a choice stands indicative of Dhingra's cowardice and his 'intoxicat[ion] by the wretched modern civilization'—echoing Gandhi's comments on doctors. The specific evil of modernity lies in the ways in which it distorts the relationship between one's body and one's self, not through the inciting of a state of alienation, but through the sanctioning of violence as an expression of such alienation in conjunction with one's other political or moral commitments.

[79] Particularly telling on this point is the use of fasting by individuals incarcerated by the British colonial regime: see 'My Jail Experience—VI: Ethics of Fasting', in *CWMG*, Vol. 28, p. 01.

[80] *HS*, p. 89.

[81] Ibid., p. 77.

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To surmise from its view of medicine and use of fasting a total disregard for the body by the Gandhian programme, however, would be a mistake. Gandhi's mistrust of the material realm did not lead to disdain for the body. Despite his efforts to dissuade Indians from embracing a culture focused on the preservation and cultivation of the body, Gandhi also possessed a deep respect for the integrity of the body. He recognized and revelled in its constraints, criticizing technology that attempted to circumvent these bounds. For instance, during a discussion of India's railroads in *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi, through the voice of the editor, states,

> I should like to add that man is so made by nature as to require him to restrict his movements as far as his hands and feet will take him. If we do not rush about from place to place by means of railways and such other maddening conveniences, much of the confusion that arises would be obviated. Our difficulties are of our own creation. God set a limit to a man's locomotive ambition in the construction of his body. Man immediately proceeded to discover means of overriding the limit. God gifted man with intellect that he might know his Maker. Man abused it, so that he might forget his Maker. I am so constructed that I can only serve my immediate neighbours, but, in my conceit, I pretend to have discovered that I must with my body serve every individual in the Universe.[82]

The natural abilities of one's body form the necessary limits of the conduct appropriate for human action. Without such limits, human activity would escalate without end, ultimately engulfing the entire world in conflict. It is exactly this possibility for boundless escalation that allows machinery to hold such destructive potential for society; the implements produced by technology invariably possess the possibility of conversion to weaponry. Indeed, the end of the passage quoted reads, 'In thus attempting the impossible, man comes in contact with different natures, different religions, and is utterly confounded.'[83] By defying the natural restrictions of one's body, individuals inevitably invite strife. Approaching the claim from the reverse direction, the normative implications of the body's limitations arise only by virtue of their common genesis in the natural world. It is because nature so constructed human beings that one must respect the limits of one's hands and feet (rather than seeking out the entirety of the world via railway). If it had not been nature but rather some other agent responsible for the restraints of the human body, the moral imperative to heed these bounds would not follow.

[82] Ibid., p. 51.
[83] Ibid.

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This reasoning around limits is what lays the foundation for what Karuna Mantena describes as the 'self-limiting' character of *satyagraha*.[84] Here such a character is exemplified in Gandhi's claim 'I am so constructed that I can *only* serve my immediate neighbors' (emphasis mine). Taken by itself, the body cannot be expanded or enlarged beyond its natural limits, and thereby resists the possibility of exceeding its present scale.[85] As a consequence, the actions of the *satyagrahi* were bound to the present, unlike violent conflict, which Gandhi saw as deferring action to remote time.[86] Moreover, understood at the level of the political community, this self-limiting aspect of *satyagraha* implies that any action undertaken in accordance of its principles has fundamentally limited reach. Although Gandhi sees the results of human action as indeterminate, he limits the scope of this indeterminacy by grounding his philosophy in the body.[87] While the body, as remarked upon earlier, is a fundamentally unreliable entity for Gandhi, it is also a necessarily limited one. These limits, if respected, restrict the consequences of the fickleness of the body (and, by extension, human action).

One might think that this view regarding the indeterminacy of the effects of *satyagraha* stands in contradiction with the earlier stated view of Gandhi's, which holds the effects of a fast to be 'enduring'. One's scepticism about the compatibility of these claims heightens when one remembers Gandhi's view of the body as an ephemeral—and thus unreliable—entity. If one knows neither what the outcome of a given act of *satyagraha* will be nor whether or not the primary means through which such *satyagraha* is enacted can be trusted, how can one possibly think its mark will be permanent, much less purifying? Has Gandhi offered us a view of ethics that is, at base, contradictory?

[84] Karuna Mantena, 'Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Nonviolence', *American Political Science Review* vol. 106 (2012), pp. 455–470.

[85] Gandhi is very clear to make note of this fact, drawing a direct contrast to this view of the body from one that promotes strength and physical fitness with the aim of joining a violent army. See 'Physical Training and Ahimsā', in *CWMG*, Vol. 79, p. 255.

[86] Mehta, 'Gandhi on Democracy, Politics and the Ethics of Everyday Life', p. 357. Closely tied to this view of time is Gandhi's view of instrumentality; for more on this, see Faisal Devji, *The Impossible Indian* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), particularly pp. 98–102.

[87] In a later reflection on the ethics of fasting, Gandhi himself offers the language of limitation and prevention, writing that, 'What the fast does is to prevent repetition of evil.' Such an inhibiting character comes from the fast's curtailing of bodily functions, as Gandhi's next line holds that, 'Most, if not all, evil comes from attachment to the flesh': see *CWMG*, Vol. 61, p. 385.

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However, the positions sketched only appear to be in tension with one another, for Gandhi's remark as to the lasting nature of the consequences of a fast makes a claim concerning a second-order property of these consequences, rather than anything directly related to their substantive content. Whatever the effects of a fast may be, one can know that its effects can be irreversible—which is precisely why such acts must have a self-limited scope. This is also why fasting plays a central (if purposefully infrequent) role in the functioning of Gandhi's ashrams, for it is the only mode through which interpersonal conflict can be resolved fully and ethically in Gandhi's view.[88] The body is unreliable, but when one fasts—when one stops one's bodily functions to the greatest extent possible—one limits the harm propagated by the body's actions. A fast purifies oneself and, under the correct circumstances, one's community as a whole.[89]

Thus, rather than a position of disdain or rejection, the body is placed at the centre of Gandhi's *satyagraha*. It is the site of necessary suffering, the point at which the doctrine of *satyagraha* crosses from the abstract to the concrete. It is only within the corporeal that acts of non-violence take on positive existences, becoming something further than rejections of violence.[90] A fast can pre-empt violence as well as respond to it, whereas other forms of *satyagraha* may only fulfil in the latter role. It is through bodily action and practices that *satyagrahis* allow the doctrine of Gandhian non-violence to take on tangible form, by bearing the marks of physical violence and enabling *hartals* and fasts.[91]

[88] Alter, *Gandhi's Body*, pp. 46–47. Gandhi believes that bodily penance, of which a fast is the most extreme version, is the 'only' remedy to get rid of untruth: see 'History of the Satyagraha Ashram', in *CWMG*, Vol. 56, p. 170.

[89] That the purification of oneself may lead to the purification of one's surroundings if undertaken correctly is particularly important for Gandhi's concept of the fast, for it is precisely this enactment of nature's laws of purification that lends the fast its potency in Gandhi's view. This is why fasts hold such importance for Gandhi in both theory and practice, especially in the functioning of Satyagraha Ashram. The ashram is a community constructed so as to abide by the rules of nature, meaning that the fast is the only means through which one can address particularly pervasive or serious forms of wrongdoing. One sees this in Gandhi's comments on the fast in 'History of Satyagraha Ashram', in *CWMG*, Vol. 56, p. 170, and in his own 1933 fast undertaken for 'self-purification': Alter, *Gandhi's Body*, pp. 46–47.

[90] On Gandhi's insistence that adherence to the doctrine of non-violence (understood as *ahimsā*) requires more than a refusal to kill, see Parekh, 'Gandhi's Concept of Ahimsā', pp. 199–208.

[91] In her work on Gandhi, Farah Godrej has emphasized the public nature of self-suffering for Gandhi, arguing that the possibility of the instantiation of bodily harm in public fora, as brought about by the practice of *satyagraha*, is what rendered the

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This veneration of nature functions as the motivation behind the criticism of machinery that Gandhi launches in *Hind Swaraj*. He declares,

> It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre. They therefore, after due deliberation, decided that we should only do what we could with our hands and feet. They saw that our real happiness and health consisted in a proper use of our hands and feet.[92]

The sustenance of one's morality is inherent in the act of the physical work.[93] The ethically fit course of action is that which abides by the limits of one's hands and feet, echoing the wording of the previously quoted passage in which Gandhi denounces the railroads for 'overriding the limit' nature set for human hands and feet.

Part of Gandhi's condemnation of machinery arises from his concern for the fate of India's labourers. Gandhi saw machinery as rendering human labour redundant, and factories as 'enslaving' the population of India. On the condition of factory workers, he commented, 'Their condition is worse than that of beasts. They are obliged to work, at the risk of their lives, at most dangerous occupations, for the sake of millionaires.'[94] Machines turn human beings into means themselves, reducing them to tools used to increase the wealth of factory owners.

An important caveat to note is that not all machinery is implicated in Gandhi's criticism—Gandhi's spinning wheel might, after all, be deemed a piece of machinery. Rather, it is only that machinery used to direct workers away from their own self-reliance and towards the

doctrine politically practicable in Gandhi's view: see Farah Godrej, *Cosmopolitan Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 73–97. In contrast, I hold that it is not so much the public character of this suffering as its concreteness that is important for Gandhi. The body stands as the closest approximation of the direct perception of one's commitments sans intermediary. The difference between publicity and tangibility resides in the latter's private existences. The body permits of the realization of inwardness, for one to become cognizant of one's own commitments—without an audience. To see the body as important to Gandhi only insofar as it allows for one to engage in forms of moral communication with others is to miss the overwhelming importance of self-knowledge in Gandhi's thought. On the role of self-knowledge in *Hind Swaraj*, see Uday Singh Mehta, 'Patience, Inwardness, and Self-Knowledge in Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*', *Public Culture* vol. 23 no. 2 (2011), pp. 417–429.

[92] *HS*, p. 69.

[93] Gandhi repeats this connection between moral and mental fortitude and physical labour: '[W]e have shunned body-labour to the detriment of our brains': 'Speech at Public Meeting, Indore', in *CWMG*, Vol. 66, p. 685.

[94] *HS*, p. 36.

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creation of wealth that earns Gandhi's rebuke. Consequently, Gandhi excludes technology such as his spinning wheel or the Singer sewing machine from this category of destructive machinery. These forms of benign technology are those that aid an individual in their labour, rather than reducing the act of work to a form of 'mere drudgery'.[95]

Physical labour, and by extension the body, was part of that which gave life meaning for Gandhi. However, this also produces a puzzle as to the actual character of the body within Gandhi's thought. At once, it was both an article of nature, whose limits were to be respected and whose use was necessary for a moral life, and 'a broken weed to rely upon'.[96] Simultaneously, the body was both venerated and disparaged, a building block of *satyagraha* as well as an object of suspicion. Attention to the body via physical labour sustains 'moral fibre' yet morality itself can never depend on the physical for its substance.

[95] Gandhi, quoted in ibid., p. 66. This qualified view of machinery is what some scholars have taken as a concession or mediation by Gandhi of his view of machinery over time. See, for instance, Shri Krishan, 'Discourses on Modernity: Gandhi and Savarkar', *Studies in History* vol. 29 no. 1 (2013), pp. 61–85. However, it is also possible to read Gandhi's earlier and later views as compatible: all machinery is not of the same type. The 1924 letter to which Krishan and others refer reads, '[E]ven this body is a most delicate piece of machinery. What I object to, is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such. The craze is for what they call labour-saving machinery. Men go on "saving labour" till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation. I want to save time and labour, not for a fraction of mankind, but for all … The supreme consideration is man. The machine should not tend to make atrophied the limbs of man': *CWMG*, Vol. 29, p. 229. This is the same sort of reluctant reliance on machinery, guided by a focus on human needs and good, that we already find present in *Hind Swaraj*. Thus, there are at least two categories of machines in Gandhi's view—those that further 'the machinery craze' and those that curtail and ameliorate the same. The text of *Hind Swaraj* shows us this. When the editor says, 'sometimes poison is used to kill poison', in response to the reader's question as to whether or not 'it is a good point or a bad point that all [the editor is] saying will be printed through machinery', we are to know that these poisons, while belonging to the same category of object, are of a different kind: *HS*, pp. 110–111. That is the only way such a metaphor can be squared. Gandhi continues in this vein, writing, 'As it expires, the machinery … says to us: "Beware and avoid me. You will derive no benefit from me, and the benefit that may accrue from printing will avail only those who are infected with the machinery craze": *HS*, p. 11. Here, too, we see that Gandhi is in line with his later self, taking his primary target as the machinery craze and evaluating all machinery by this measure. Thus, if we read Gandhi's later writings on machinery as a change in stance, we inadvertently mistake a difference in kind as a difference in degree.

[96] Gandhi, quoted in Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 311.

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A possible resolution to this puzzle lies in Gandhi's understanding of ends and means. One of the overarching themes of his philosophy was a rejection of instrumentality—it is the division between ends and means that paves the way towards violent conflict. Justifying violence in the present depends on the sacrifice of the wellbeing of one's own self or (as is more often the case) another's for a possible improved state of being in the future.[97] In contrast, to Gandhi the body was both an end and a means. Its limits necessarily meant the body defied the separation between ends and means common in the political sphere. In the context of violence, one cannot justify the preservation of the body by advocating for any sort of involvement in bloodshed.

By extension, nature too adopts this double character. The body is an inherently moral, and thereby sacred, entity, as well as a tool to achieve a fully moral life—a means and an end in itself. It is this view of the body and nature that accounts for Gandhi's rigid vegetarianism as well as his lack of concern for straightforward environmental conservation efforts. One's interactions with nature are inherently moral (because they form a portion of one's interactions with God), but one has no ethical obligation to protect nature solely on the grounds of preservation alone.

In the course of solving one theoretical puzzle, this appeal to nature's spiritual dimensions creates another. One might point to the deeply metaphysical undertones of Gandhi's invocation of nature and argue that it is not really the idea of nature at all that plays a determinative role in Gandhi's thought, but rather it is nature understood as an extension of God that is at work in the passages highlighted previously. As a result, what is characterized here as Gandhi's vision of 'nature as politics' is really the familiar argument that Gandhi's politics was a fundamentally spiritual one.

But, such an argument misunderstands the importance of that which is specifically natural to the construction of Gandhi's thought. Nature—understood as an extension of God—holds a place of particular importance for Gandhi, for it was at once immutable, universal, and easily cognizable. The limits of one's body, for instance, form the brute facts of the world—the basis upon which one builds a knowledge of the self. Nature's laws could be understood. Through the fostering of such an understanding, one might even progress to productive interaction with such laws, just as one might utilize one's knowledge of the laws of

[97] For more on this point, see Devji, *Impossible Indian*, particularly Chapter 4.

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a given state to one's advantage.[98] However, in general, 'God's laws are so subtle and their observance so difficult', nearing the Kafkaesque.[99] Even in attempting to abide by them, one risks running afoul of the very same.[100] Among the entirety of God's laws, Nature's laws stood as uniquely legible, making them the foundation of politics and collective action for Gandhi.

Conclusion: a dialogue

Explicitly placing *Hindutva* and *Hind Swaraj* in dialogue with each other produces curious results: *Hind Swaraj* appears to present the same argument concerning geographical and political unity as *Hindutva*—that is, an argument regarding the congruence between natural and political borders.

Gandhi responds to the claim that the 'new spirit of nationalism' in India was due to the increased mobility afforded by empire-built railroads by appealing to notions of territorial integrity. He remarks:

> We were one nation before [the British] came to India. One thought inspired us. Our mode of life was the same … What do you think could have been the intention of those far-seeing ancestor of ours who established Shevetbindu Rameshwar in the South, Juggernaut in the South-East, and Hardwar in the North as places of pilgrimage … [T]hey saw that India was one undivided land so made by nature. They, therefore, argued that it must be one nation. Arguing thus, they established hold [in] places in various parts of India, and fired the people with an idea of nationality in a manner unknown in other parts of the world.[101]

Such a demarcation of India reads as remarkably close to Savarkar's, one determined by the physical boundaries given by India's geography. Gandhi's declaration that 'India was one undivided land so made by nature', mirrors the reasoning present in *Hindutva*, similarly appealing to notions of ecological destiny to further a sense of political unity. In Gandhi's claims of a single thought inspiring all of India and the same

[98] We point again to Gandhi's claim that, 'One who knows the laws of Nature can also, by fasting, prevent the harmful consequences of his action': *CWMG*, Vol. 28, p. 127.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Gandhi continues, '[I]n saving ourselves from even unwitting transgressions lies the health and well-being of the self. If, in thus trying to save oneself, one falls a prey to bodily illness, one need not lament over it: ibid.

[101] *HS*, pp. 48–49.

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mode of life practised by all those within the nation, one finds a partner for Savarkar's claims about geographical unity giving way to cultural homogeneity.

Moreover, Savarkar (ostensibly) exhibits Gandhi's reverence for the constitutive relationship between the natural and spiritual. He writes, 'Down to this day, a Sindhu—a Hindu—wherever he may happen to be, will gratefully remember and symbolically invoke the presence of these rivers that they may refresh and purify his soul.'[102] Here, Savarkar echoes Gandhi's belief that nature reflected some aspect of the divine, some feature of the 'soul'.

This similarity is, at once, unsettling and thought-provoking. Normally conceived of as diametric opposites, that Gandhi and Savarkar appear to converge in their understandings of how the natural informs the political indicates that such a conception may need revision. Could it be that the conceptual distance between Savarkar and Gandhi is not quite so far as first imagined?

Unlike Savarkar's boundaries of India, however, Gandhi's are deeply metaphysical. The locations he chooses for India's borders are not solely geographical—they are sites of pilgrimage. This choice indicates Gandhi's emphasis on the centrality of religion in political and moral life; consequently, the assertion that nature made India a single, undivided land must be read as both a religious and ecological claim. And, while these claims exist independently, they form a dialogue, each a reflection of the other. By tying India's borders to sites of pilgrimage, Gandhi imbues India's borders with a sense of malleability, leaving open the possibility of expansion, contraction, or even collapse. Alongside this notion is also a sort of permanence, owing to the borders' metaphysical nature, which appeals to something more fundamental than the physical. These borders become eternal because they are of God, and by virtue of this, they *are* God. So too is nature.

This diverges from Savarkar's understanding of borders, which, as mentioned previously, is one that strives to minimize the religious. Unlike Gandhi's, Savarkar's anfractuous doctrine of nationalism seeks no conjoining of the metaphysical with the ethical and political. Rather, it actively abjures this kind of interaction, for such an implication would be disastrous for the image of a unified Hindu identity. Instead, Savarkar situates the existence of nationalism in that which is tangible and resists universalization, as seen by his use of the river Sindhu.

[102] Savarkar, *Hindutva*, p. 6.

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Furthermore, in *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi explicitly identifies nature with God: both 'nature' and 'God' are responsible for the design of the human body.[103] It is here that nature and god are taken to be one and the same, and where Gandhi veers away from the thinking of environmental conservancy: conservationists advocate the preservation of nature for the sake of nature—Gandhi advocates the preservation of nature for the sake of the religious, or rather, because nature constitutes the religious.

For Savarkar, in contrast, religion exists in the background. Its absence exerts a skewing force over his ideology, shaping ideas and forcing stances through his simultaneous need and disavowal of it. Importantly, Savarkar himself was an atheist and, owing to opposing religious practices among differing Hinduism sects, Hindutva was constructed to appeal to more than the religious aspects of Hindu nationality, with the intent of creating a unified sense of Hindu identity between these divergent groups. Thus, while Savarkar acknowledges Hinduism as an element of Hindutva, he asserts forcefully, 'Hinduism is only a derivative, a fraction, a part of Hindutva.'[104]

However, the doctrine of Hindutva was also meant to establish Muslims and Christians as outsiders, which ostensibly could only happen through foregrounding the religious. In order to circumvent religion, Savarkar attempts to draw on commonalities supposedly possessed by all Hindus, such as civilization and shared blood. Nevertheless, he concedes that India's Muslims and Christians share a culture with their Hindu counterparts and that 'there is … so far as man is concerned but a single race—the human race kept alive by one common blood, the human blood'.[105]

Thus, we see that Savarkar's turn to the natural is not a move made out of convenience, but of conceptual necessity. Hindutva is premised on the demonstration of difference. This is the conceptual foundation for both his projects of definition and distinction. This difference is argued for precisely through recourse to—as Cederlöf and Sivaramakrishnan describe—close links between humanity and nature.[106] In contrast to Hindutva's contested relationship to Hinduism, Hindutva enjoys an

[103] *HS*, p. 51.
[104] Savarkar, *Hindutva*, p. 3.
[105] Ibid., p. 90.
[106] Cederlöf and Sivaramakrishnan, *Ecological Nationalisms*.

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unqualified relationship to the Sindhu. Only in the natural does Savarkar find the mode of difference he desires.

Given this dependence, the apparent similarity between Gandhi and Savarkar on the concept of borders dissipates. Gandhi's vision of nationalism resists the terms of Savarkar's political world; where Gandhi seeks conceptual unification, Savarkar seeks distinction. And Gandhi's words in the cited passage, though apparently Savarkar-esque in tone, actually point to the fallacies of Hindutva, for Savarkar's doctrine foregrounds the physical, at the expense of the religious. One can breathe easier: a central tenet of modern Indian intellectual history has continued to hold.

Nevertheless, what can one make of this brief concurrence, even if it occurs in appearance only?

Importantly, in this seeming convergence, the primacy of nature itself to both Savarkar and Gandhi is revealed. The surprise comes not just from their mutual dependence on interpretations of the natural: taking their intellectual surroundings into account, such a dependence might be expected—or is at least not a cause for disquiet. Given the broader historical context in which they both thought, acted, and wrote, this seems to be less of a surprise and more a product of historical circumstance.[107]

What gives one reason for pause, however, is the prominence given to interpretations of the natural world in the respective philosophies of both thinkers. The role of natural figures is a major premise in Savarkar's vision of Hindu nationalism as well as Gandhi's doctrine of *satyagraha*. It is not nature understood as a manifestation of religious or political motivations, nor is it ecology read through the lens of economics. Rather, both Savarkar and Gandhi engage with the physical facts of nature without the intervention of any mediating lens or force. Granted, this takes place within the context of a broader political project; nonetheless, each thinker directly encounters India's geography.

[107] Herbert Spencer's influence is clear on this point and is discussed in-depth in Kapila, 'Self, Spencer, and Swaraj'. On the relationship between the development of nationalist ideology and the turn to ideas of nature as the justificatory grounds of nationalism, see Daniel Pick, 'The Politics of Nature', in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, (eds) Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 673; Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

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This mode of direct engagement prompts a deep insight concerning the revision of the conceptual tools with which we began this enterprise: we are shown that we must shift our view of the ethical. Sivaramakrishnan's definition of the ethics of nature depends on a construction of the ethical as a solely positive product—he argues that we stake our claims on nature as a means of establishing some kind of independent right to the natural.[108] But this view adheres too closely to the view of nature as a form of property, over which one can assert one's full dominance. For both Savarkar and Gandhi, an ethics of nature depended not on the assertion of ownership or right, but rather on the recognition of limits. For Savarkar, these limitations were found in the idea of citizenship and belonging, for the natural was taken to limit who could legitimately belong to the national community. Nature shows one exactly where one stands. For Gandhi, this focus on limits renders his ethical view as one cast via absence—to live morally is to live within the bounds of one's naturally determined limits. An ethics of nature sets boundaries of conduct, both collective and individual, as much as it asserts ownership.

Such a convergence also points to the difficulties of the interpretive position both Savarkar and Gandhi seek to occupy. In one way or another, both thinkers sought to gain insight into the desirable and necessary orderings of the social and political worlds through interpretations of the natural world. To construct such interpretations of nature, however, one must remove oneself from the world, occupying a position separate and above it, so as to observe it. This is something akin to the interpretive position occupied by the modern scientist. Politics, however, is something decidedly of the world. To remove it, to situate its rationale on a plane above the sphere of its actual functioning, is to risk the development of a politics that ceases to be a politics at all. Rather, it becomes something so far removed from its site of application that it ceases to have practical relevance. We can see moments of precisely this phenomenon in both Gandhi and Savarkar: in Gandhi's baffling rejection of doctors and Savarkar's self-contradicting arguments on blood. And so we are left with a slightly different question to that with which we began, one that beckons far beyond the dialogue between Gandhi and Savarkar alone. The history of political thought shows that we can understand nature as politics. A further question now stands: should we?

[108] Sivaramakrishnan, 'Ethics of Nature in Indian Environmental History'.

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