



Gandhi on 'Ends and Means'

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Abstract

The concepts of “ends” and “means” and their interrelationship have long been a central debate in moral philosophy, both in Indian and Western traditions. Philosophers have persistently questioned whether the ends justify the means or whether the moral worth of actions lies primarily in the purity of the means. In Indian philosophy, this debate finds a distinctive formulation in the thought of Mahatma Gandhi, who treats ends and means not as separable entities but as convertible and inseparable, comparable to the two sides of a coin. Gandhi's philosophy is founded on the concepts of Ahimsa (non-violence) and Satya (truth), where truth is the ultimate aim or purpose and non-violence is the essential method. Since means must always be within human reach, non-violence is the ultimate obligation even while truth is the highest commandment. Gandhi illustrates the intimate connection between ends and means through the correlation of a seed and a tree: just as the seed inherently determines the nature of the tree, the means necessarily shape the end. The tree represents the unity of the potential and the actual, the latent and the manifest, as the seed contains the tree potentially and the tree manifests the seed. Thus, in formation, means are the ideal; in process, they are the end. This article seeks to highlight Gandhi's unique contribution to the ends – means controversy and compares his position with other thinkers, while emphasizing the ethical relevance and enduring significance of the Gandhian perspective.

Keywords: Ends, Means, Gandhian Ethics, Satya and Ahimsa, Pragmatism and Marxism

Introduction

The term ‘means’ is generally understood as the selection of a subject with the intention of bringing about certain ‘ends’. ‘Ends’ is used to signify intended or proposed purpose, goal or aim of a person or group of persons. The word ‘means’ convey source or process of something by the agent and it appears to be appropriate to achieve an ‘end’. ‘Means’ may include instruments, things or persons which are usually used for reaching an ‘end’. Hence, the term ‘ends’ is a situation or condition which is intended as a purpose and ‘means’ is the technique, method or way by which that ‘end’ is achieved.

The distinction between objectives and means is based on the notion that they are two distinct categories of activity and that their relationship is primarily a technical concern that must be resolved by considering what will work and what is practicable in a given context. The moral and ethical dilemma of choice requires a primary judgement about the desired outcome and the obligatory acceptance of any action that is necessary to achieve it^[1].

Gandhi an View

According to Gandhi, ends and means are inseparable. It highlights Gandhi's view that “Means and end are convertible terms in my philosophy of life^[2].” According to Gandhi, “ahimsa, or non-violence, is the means and truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so ahimsa is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later^[3].” He argues that since ahimsa, or non-violence, is always within our reach rather than the ends, the concept of means implies that it must be something that the Creator has made available to us. Ahimsa, or non-violence, should be our approach if we wish to find the truth.

Gandhi makes advantage of the seed-tree relationship to highlight the connection between ends and means. Accordingly he says, “The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree^[4].” The tree may grow from the seed, and the seeds become the trees. As a result, this relationship exists between the idea and the realised, the latent and the evident, and the potential and the reality. Thus, means are “the ideal in the making and the end in process^[5].” Gandhi argues, “They say ‘means are after all means’; I would say ‘means are after all everything. As the means so the end. The creator has given us control and that too very limited) over means, none over the end. Realization of the goal is in exact proportion to that of the means. This is a proposition that admits of no exception^[6].”

Gandhi states, “We always have control over the means but not over the end^[7].” Gandhi asserts that while we are always in control of the means, we are not in control of the outcome. But, our advancement toward the objective will be precisely proportionate to the purity of our resources or means. However, our advancement toward the objective will be precisely proportionate to the purity of our resources^[8]. Gandhi goes on to emphasise by adding that for me it is enough to know the means. Gandhi emphasises further by saying, ‘It is sufficient for me to know the means^[9].’ Gandhian philosophy treats means as end-creating and emphasises the continuity of means and ends.

From Gandhian standpoint, Bondurant writes, “Means and ends in...Satyagraha is distinguishable only temporally. Both means and ends partake of a continuous process. The means precede the end in time; but there can be no question of moral priority. Truth is inseparable from non-violence, the method of achieving and clinging to the truth is non-

violence. Non-violence becomes both the means and the end, and the terms become convertible ^[10].”

Gandhi believed that Satyagraha was a way to clash evil and alters an evil-based system. Gandhi feels that objectives and means are inextricably linked, and he is adamant that the morality of an end should never be compromised by the methods employed. His suggestion that we should take a moral position on the methods we use is the reason for this. The goal of Gandhi's Satyagraha is to provide a clear illustration of the moral knowledge of the ends and the means ^[11].

From a Gandhian standpoint, we may assume that Marxists maintain the adage "end justifies the means" and distinguish between methods and ends, but Gandhi thought that there were many different goals and ways to achieve them. The means employed have a direct impact on the results obtained. As Dewey noted, there is an unending series of means-ends-means. Similar to this, Gandhi saw political freedom as merely a tentative goal that will eventually be used to achieve a variety of other social, moral, and spiritual purposes ^[12].

Gandhi opposes and condemns the use of violence in every area of life. He underlines that, as we previously stated, means should be both non-violent and pure. According to him, the main characteristic of means is purity. He says that if a guy loses his character, he loses everything, and if procedures are not pure, they become wicked and useless. Gandhi, who is regarded as the truth-promoter, claimed that using unethical methods would never result in the truth since they would destroy it in the name of deceit and violence. Gandhi's foundation was the moral purity of means, particularly the purity of intent behind non-violent action.

Gandhi claimed to be the most ardent opponent of Marxists' use of violence, intrigues, emphasis on class warfare, and other tactics, even if he acknowledged their goal of a classless society free from human exploitation. Gandhi makes a distinction between 'truth', which is an absolute, and 'truth'. Gandhi believes that nonviolence is an absolute method and that truth is an absolute aim, but he insisted on no cooperation on this under any circumstances and held to 'reasonableness' as absolute in practice.

Gandhi's inclination for no-violent methods has both practical and ethical justifications. Moral disapproval of violent methods is predicated on the knowledge that violence breeds more violence. According to him, using aggressive methods degrades both a person and a country and creates an unending cycle of future destruction and death. Gandhi emphasises that the best way to achieve a desired goal is by non-violence. He claims that using violence subjugates and sometimes destroys the opponent. Gandhi insisted that man should not destroy things that he is unable to produce. Nevertheless, he did not condemn violence in every case or setting. In exceptional instances, he believes that using aggressive methods to protect human dignity and morals is justified. The goals of improving opportunity and restoring human dignity are shared by both Marx and Gandhi.

Gandhi's practical and pragmatic outlook makes him cautious regarding the employment of violent tactics because to the difficulties they create in practice. A violent end leads to another violent end in a never-ending cycle. Gandhi therefore maintained that non-violent strategies are

better fitted than violent ones for a long-lasting and significant influence on social life. Therefore, he thinks that non-violent tactics—like persuasion, compromise, etc., are more effective and durable than aggressive ones. Singh notes as, "Gandhi rejects the maxim that 'end justifies the means' and asserts that moral means are almost an end in itself because virtue is its own reward. He opposes this maxim and emphasises that our end itself must be high and pure but the means that we employ to achieve that end must be equally high and pure" ^[13].

Gandhi defined ethical truth as moksa, emancipation, perfection; in politics, it manifests as freedom, or Swaraj. In this regard, he states, "For me...Ahimsa comes before Swaraj" ^[14]. Gandhi argues that Swaraj or self-rule is achieved or attained by non-violent means, which is as opposed to that which was founded by violent opposition. Gandhi is fully aware that the ends are influenced by the means. In his explanations, Gandhi makes the assumption that all people may demonstrate harmony and balance in the current social, economic, political, and moral contexts. As a result, his support for nonviolence came seen as 'utopian' and 'romanticist.' Gandhi opposes the strict division between aims and methods and is so morally fixated on the means that the ends serve as the yardstick for evaluation. In this sense, Louis Fischer remarks, "Means were all to him. Ends never arrive, for all ends are means to further ends which are again means" ^[15].

Marxists believe that the objective situation, that is, the purpose (end) itself – gives or implies the means. Marxism has a stability of ends and means; however dialectical materialism does not have dualism or severability between ends and means. Gandhi is adamant about the connection between ends and means and argues, "There is no wall of separation between means and ends" ^[16]. Marx employed the power of "ends" to defend the "means" because he thought that a classless society free from exploitation, alienation, and fragmentation was essential. Gandhi advocated for a society devoid of exploitation and emphasized the significance of prioritizing the purity of means over other factors.

Gandhi's viewpoint on the matter of objectives and means, on the one hand, relies on inflexibility with respect to the notion of social progress, as the dynamics of social change periodically call for unconventional techniques; in these situations, the correctness of the ends is all that matters. However, under the pretext that 'end justifies the means,' any forms of violence and hostility are justified. Gandhi attempted to demonstrate that if all acts of violence and aggression are justified by the saying "end justifies the means," then the very survival of mankind as a whole is in trouble and the spiritual underpinnings of human life are being and will be destroyed.

Gandhi and other humanists, such as Aldous Huxley and Gilbert Murray, believed that an objective or aim, regardless of its commendable nature, for example, freedom, equality, peace that either demands or justifies an unworthy means - that is, if it calls for violence or deceit – cannot be good because the process has spoiled it. As Naravane says, "...the dust that soils the means also soils the end" ^[17]. Gandhi emphasises that the most crucial tool for social construction is moral discipline. Every aspect of life, including politics, will be shaped by the ethical discipline's substance. The pursuit for truth, argues Gandhi, is continual

struggle for advancement and refinement in all realms of life. Gandhi believed that the only way to realise this reality is through ahimsa; without non-violence, any truth is untruth.

Gandhi argues that using violent methods causes us to view people as means rather than ends rather than as a way of achieving our goals. Gandhi claims that we may achieve sustainable peace and advancement via good means alone [18]. Gandhi charges that the morality of the bourgeoisie justifies the elite's use of force and bloodshed. Gandhi believed that the impact on human character and individuality should be used to determine the morality of the methods used. He maintained that if honourable methods are employed, there will be a rise in solidarity and fraternity as well as the liberation of the human spirit's repressed potential for spontaneity and creative freedom.

Gandhi believed that although the content of truth cannot be known beforehand, it is the ultimate common goal for all people. Like the ancient Greeks, he acknowledges that the truth does not refer to an imposed and planned objective, but rather to the finest human activity. Gandhi bases his explanation of social and political ethics on a theory of action that holds that truth, which is an end in and of itself, may be used to rectify and justify all human behaviour and thought.

According to Gandhi, the claim that any means or strategies may be justified by the goal attained is untenable from an ethical stance. Gandhi contends that, based on moral approximation, there is a need to reconcile the internal conflict of the relationship between goals or ends and means. However, his approach to morally approximating ends and argument is significant from a theoretical standpoint that may be applied to human behaviour and action.

Gandhi rejects the proverb "end justifies the means" because he emphasises high and pure means and demands that the means used to reach them be as high and pure. He contends that clean and moral means should be used to support any end, emphasising means above ends. Gandhi opposes the use of violence or immoral means to achieve this goal or objective and supports Marxist ideas of a society free from class dominance and exploitation. Without delving into specifics, it is stimulating to see that Gandhi advocates using violent methods or means and defends them in extremely rare circumstances to protect human dignity and the majesty of morality.

Gandhi does not agree with the saying "end justifies the means," although he does occasionally, or in extremely rare or exceptional situations, embrace the Marxist viewpoint. The emergence of ideological disagreements between Marxists and Liberals is known as the "ends and means" controversy. The former's perspective supports the maxim "end justifies the means," but only in situations of societal oppression - a fact that passionate Liberals seem to completely overlook. Gandhi's arguments against this maxim and his acceptance of it under certain conditions are the best illustration of this liberal conflict.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Gandhian philosophy profoundly reshapes ethical discourse by claiming that the purity of means is not only a choice but a prerequisite for a good outcome. By rejecting the "end justifies the means" theory, Gandhi proved that Satyagraha and Ahimsa are inseparable from the

attainment of Truth. His "seed and tree" metaphor is a compelling warning that immoral techniques always taint the final purpose, regardless matter how noble that objective may seem. Gandhi's legacy, which frames the ends-means relationship as the ultimate measure of human character and social progress, ultimately teaches that moral integrity in the present is the only trustworthy assurance of a virtuous future.

Gandhi does not hold the slogan 'end justifies the means,' yet he occasionally accepts the Marxist viewpoint in extremely rare or exceptional situations. The coming out of ideological disagreements between Marxists and liberals is known as the "ends and means" controversy in the context of morality. The former's perspective supports the maxim "end justifies the means," but only in situations of societal oppression – a fact that dedicated liberals seem to completely overlook. Gandhi's arguments against this maxim and his acceptance of it under certain conditions are the best illustration of this liberal conflict.

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