

Transcript ~ Anarchist Metaphysics

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From the Series: Anarchist Thought Lectures
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA, 1981

The word metaphysics originally and etymologically simply means 'beyond physics'. And actually, more specifically, for Aristotle was the first to use the word after he had written various books on different subjects, then he turned to metaphysics as 'after physics', that is, it was a book he wrote after he had written other books. Now for Aristotle it was possible to find out through logic, through what he regarded as the dialectic of science, a complete picture of the world, and this view of metaphysics subsequently produces the concern for systems, and especially in the modern age among rationalists in the 17th and 18th centuries, those who are concerned with metaphysics try to build up metaphysical systems. And therefore, a great deal of the reaction against metaphysics is a reaction against metaphysical system-building. Now this raises many questions which are interesting, but it is important to notice here that there was always an alternative view, and that goes back to Plato. Plato never used the word metaphysics, and by writing a number of dialogues, he never sought to create a metaphysical system. On the other hand, talking about the dialectic and the dialectical ascent from the realm of particulars to the One, to the One which is beyond all possible conception, he showed that there were degrees of apprehension, and that there was a breakthrough to be made between the realm of becoming, the realm of change, and the realm of pure Being, that which is not affected by external and superficial change. And Plato was therefore very concerned that human beings, in the very act of becoming self-conscious, perfecting the power of choice among alternatives, should be aware both of their fundamental presuppositions and of their unconscious preconceptions. Most of the time we have hang-ups, unconscious preconceptions, and this is mainly derived for Plato from conventional opinion, from what most people say most of the time. And therefore, we typically are not in a position to really rethink and think through a fundamental idea without being initially bombarded or weighted down by these unconscious preconceptions. And therefore, for him the highest activity of thought, *dianoia*, was

thinking things through, thinking to the very core, and this, you might say, was the origin of what has come to be called 'conceptual analysis'.

Now without going any more into this Platonic alternative to Aristotelian system-building, we find that Godwin, in the 18th century, was enormously concerned to insert mind into the total scheme of causation, and here he was very original. Because at the time, and you find this in Hobbes in the 17th century, you find this in other political thinkers, but also on the continent in the *Encyclopédistes*, you find that they were enormously concerned with the emphasis upon universal causation, the search for the laws that govern society, the laws that work through history, and which laws are analogous to laws discovered in the natural sciences. It was one of his main concerns to point out that mind is an integral element in nature, that nature cannot be seen only in terms of invariable connections between causes and consequences on the material plane. What is true on the material plane is even more true in reference to mind, that there is always a necessary connection between ideas, between antecedents and consequences, between what went before and what comes afterwards. And this is really puzzling because typically we isolate a particular act, a particular choice out of a vast and unknown causal chain. And in this, of course, we are engaging in the act of abstraction, we are engaging in that which helps us, helps us to understand ourselves in relation to the world. But in this there is also an illusion, an illusion because everything that we think is affected by everything that we thought before, and if you try to trace back the chain of thinking to what was the original idea that started the chain, Godwin says, we will not be able to do this. In other words, there is something unknown about the entire process of mental causation, and not only that, in this it would be very difficult to separate one mind from all other minds. How does one know that at all points in the chain of thinking that these ideas originated with one particular mind? So it is as if all human beings participate in the realm of mind, in the realm of mental causation, and for human beings it becomes very important to understand this ethically and morally. That is human beings gain maturity and control, deliberation and calm effectiveness, when they gain some recognition of the connection between motives and consequences.

Morality always involves motivation, whether that motivation be unconscious or it is conscious. The more conscious, the better. And the more that motivation is consciously directed towards a general good, as pointed out the previous time, the more we become truly human, the more we become also truly virtuous, the more further we become truly effective. And if this is so, it is important to be able to rely upon the connection between intended, deliberated, deliberated choices, first deliberated in the mind, and results.

But if everything is connected with everything else, we must discard the notion of caprice and the notion of arbitrariness in regard to free will. In a sense, what Godwin was denying, partly under the influence of Spinoza, is that there is some faculty called 'free will'. This to him is an illusion. There is in all acts the influence of all prior thoughts and prior acts, there is universal determination. This determination works on the psychological plane, and therefore a human being once he or she becomes aware of this process of interaction and universal determination is able by the power of contemplation to take the broadest possible perspective upon human affairs. And there is a very fine passage in your assignment from Godwin about taking a view of past, present, and future, looking at all the arrangements in reference to the world, and inserting yourself and your moral activity within the context of the whole. And for Godwin the more you do this the more you will have clarity, and clarity represents correspondence with reality. In other words, if you are moved by confused emotion, which really means by a lot of unconscious factors that you can't sort out, that confusion represents a lack of reality, a lack of correspondence in your thinking with what really is the case. And therefore the test, the test of correspondence between one's own thinking and the structure of the world, in other words, you might say the structure of one's own reasoning and the structure of mind, of mind throughout nature, is the attainment of clarity. And by contemplation upon past, present and future as many links in a chain, by gaining this kind of perspective, gaining detachment, we become clearer in our perception. And when we attain to clarity of perception, Godwin says, we also attain to firmness of judgment. Whatever judgments we come to, we have thought out and therefore there is a firmness in these judgments, we can stand by them. That doesn't mean to say we are

infallible. It is very important that we become aware of lurking errors in our thinking. We are involved in a continuous process of clarification, but the greater the clarification, the greater the firmness, the decisiveness in the realm of judgment, and also the sounder becomes our understanding. And when our understanding is sound, we can then release the will.

In other words, for Godwin as for Plato, you cannot separate the will from understanding, from reason. Now this is a very important point because before Godwin, and indeed since Plato, that is over the long period of philosophical and religious thought between, say, Aristotle and the 18th century, it was generally assumed, especially under the influence of orthodox theology, that human beings have a problem of the will. It goes back especially to Saint Augustine, but also to Aristotle. Aristotle spoke of *akrasia*, 'weakness of will'. Saint Augustine made the statement that very often what I want to do I can't really carry through, despite myself I am propelled in directions that are bad for me. So thereby was generated a view that there is a faculty called 'the will' and this is weak. And this became very important to psychological control by priestcraft, it also became very important in getting people to abdicate responsibility, to look for vicarious atonement. All of this for the 18th century thinkers was very debilitating to the human being. If you grow up in a view of sin and guilt and moral retribution by an arbitrary god, and if you also have the view of vicarious atonement, that you can be saved by proxy, you damage at the very core your sense of responsibility. And therefore, especially in the Protestant tradition there was an enormous concern to rescue this idea that God has given all human beings reason, and having given all human beings reason, it is part of being human and part of, you might say one's status as a creature of God to exercise freely and fully one's reason. In Catholic thought you'll find this also in Saint Thomas Aquinas who took a very different view from Saint Augustine. Now once of course you say that every human being by his or her very nature has reason, has conscience, has a power of choice, there is really no room typically for abdication of responsibility. And yet, of course, if you have a certain view of arbitrariness in regard to

your cosmic picture and your theocratic picture of the world, in practice of course it is very tempting to abdicate from responsibility.

For Godwin all of this was wrong, and all of this was a break upon human progress. The human mind must purge itself of notions of guilt and sin and retribution. And the very idea of punishment for the sake of retribution was anathema, was aberrant to Godwin. There may be room for punishment for the sake of deterrence to assist human beings, but there is no justification for the idea of retribution because this goes with some static view of human beings. And Godwin says there is no meaning to the very idea of human character, to the very idea of discipline, moral discipline, of progress over a period of time, no meaning to the idea of self-correction if we become caught up in resentment, repentance, guilt and sin. So the mind must be purged of all of these notions and must come to understand that it is possible to take a sober view of connections between causes and effects. And the more human beings are able to see how causes connect with effects, and that motives are also causes, and that motivation causes a certain kind of conduct, the more human beings will be able to cooperate with the laws of determination that work in the realm of mind. The more self-conscious a human being, the more aware of the process, the more the human being in a very cool manner without unnecessary self-castigation can truly make a change, and that is because for Godwin understanding acts upon the will. Here he's like Plato. If you really, if you see very clearly then you're moved to act.

Now this of course might be puzzling, and you don't necessarily have to agree with this, but it's important to think about it. What I do know is that in extreme situations, supposing suddenly somebody or something is about to trip over a live wire or is about to get burned, and if any human being sees it, one tends, the moment one sees it, to straightaway move to do something about it. There is no gap between thought and will when we in a crisis see that something needs to be done. But most of the time of course we don't have that kind of response. Most of the time we really are kind of sluggish, and because of our sluggishness we in a sense have gaps in our understanding, we don't see

clearly, and therefore we don't really have strong motivation. So if you want to clarify the confusion in your mind, and have the courage to recognize what are the unconscious factors which are all based upon false ideas, really based upon illusions that are holding you down, to see them clearly and to see them for what they are and to make connections is to be able to release the will, to have a mental breakthrough that comes out of seeing clearly, and then of course, when you truly have a mental breakthrough, you are moved to do something about it. So this is very important for Godwin, that the will is moved by an understanding, and an understanding will not achieve clarity if it escapes from its real task, which is a task of seeing connections by finding excuses. And therefore, Godwin says that mere moral exhortation is really useless, there's no point in somebody exhorting someone else to do something. If one wants to make a difference to what other people do, it is important that they be shown connections between causes and effects, shown that if they do such and such they will over a period become certain types of beings. It is important to recognize you might say the dynamics of growth in human beings, what retards growth and what assists growth. But mere moral exhortation without a clear understanding of laws and connections is really useless.

And therefore, what is really important is that human beings by their own individual and conscious increase of understanding, also what Godwin calls sincerity, because the clearer your understanding, the more straightforward, the more sincere in communication that you become, and the more sincere the more you will be able not only to have credibility with others, but the more you will be able to draw out of them what is latent, their own sincere responses to the world. Human beings of course vary in the amount of knowledge they have in regard to nature as a whole, but also in regard to psychological connections between causes and effects. But this for Godwin merely means that it's very important that human beings interact as rational beings, that human beings engage in meaningful and constructive dialogue, and meaningful and constructive dialogue is really a search for Truth, and that search for Truth involves looking for connections and involves clarifying one's picture of the world. Through this of course human beings can assist each other, and thereby everyone is better off.

In other words, Godwin is really assuming that there is nothing innately perverse in any human being, or perversity is only because a person is confused. In other words, if you have made false assumptions that you can get away with anything, or that you can become a certain kind of person and yet create a façade, that is if you have made some false assumptions about yourself and the world, then no doubt you may engage in a lot of activity which is destructive and unhelpful, but in the end you yourself will be psychologically damaged. And therefore, if one grasps this, and if one can show this to people sufficiently early in life, then people will grow up much more willing to see that what we call vice is really connected with error, that what we call antisocial behavior is really concerned with mental confusion. And if human beings recognize this, then they will also see that all human beings are necessarily in a position of incomplete knowledge in regard to all the possibilities of the mind. The task of understanding is inexhaustible. There can be no limit set upon human possibility. Nobody really knows if the power of mind is infinite, what are all the potentials in the human mind collectively, in the entire species. And if that is so, there can be a certain joy in the exploration of these possibilities, human beings assisting each other and minimizing the language of praise and blame. Godwin doesn't deny that there can be a certain value to praising and blaming, but if we become too preoccupied with especially blaming, then we get an any causal, arbitrary picture of the world. There is a necessity to every human act, there, and if there is a necessity, we have got to look for causes, and these causes lie in the entire environment.

So therefore, if you really want to get the attention again to causality and environment, and environment is not only physical environment or social environment, it is also psychological environment, you will find that really there is much less room for blaming people than you think. You may point out alternatives in reference to acts, and also on the other hand, by commending and encouraging what is truly for the good of all, no doubt human beings can help each other. But the role of praise and blame is vitiated in modern society by external sanctions imposed by external authorities, connected with statutory law, working through reward and punishment. And this I mentioned before, that if human beings become too concerned with external sanctions they will never really

individuate, they will never become truly free human beings. So here you get the paradox, to be a truly free man you have to withdraw your attention, and the word attention is very important for Godwin, from the so called claims of external authorities, and you have to explore the possibilities that you can perceive by becoming clearer about causal connections in your life. Then he says the whole of life goes through many phases, and the more you abstract from the immediate present, and the more you can link up past, present and future the more you can see connections, connections between your reactions now, your reactions say ten years ago, seven years ago, your reactions now and what you'll be like ten years from now, the more you get a cooler view of the entire process. And also you want to do something about it because you will recognize elements in you of which you could be truly proud, elements in you which are really to you commendable and which did good to others and to yourself. And when you become aware of these elements you can strengthen them, but to do this you've got to think away from merely social judgment, external praise and blame, from the responses of authorities to you in the past. So in other words, for Godwin it requires a full acceptance, one might say, of the dignity of mind and the immense possibilities of mental and moral life.

Now, Godwin said in this, if you really do this, you will find that your view of history will be neither optimistic nor pessimistic. By that he meant that if your optimism is based upon a denial of evil, and there's been a lot of evil, there's also a great deal of misery in the world, then you will really fail to see, and then Godwin uses this extraordinary phrase that a lot of history is a series of abortions; the more you look at history you'll find again and again the good was aborted. Many possibilities nearly came to birth, and they were strangled at birth. And therefore, you will see that the story of man is a story of missed opportunities because of mistakes, mistakes in thinking, mistakes in understanding. And if you see that there were many missed opportunities in the past, and they're all connected with the vast amount of misery that exists, you are not going to deny the fact of so much human misery or the fact of so much, you might say, tragedy in the story of man. On the other hand, you will not, because of becoming obsessed with

this, become involved in a pinched negative mentality which makes you want to persecute. So Godwin says that those, on the one hand, who are facile optimists, and those, on the other hand, who are pessimists, who want to persecute, both of them are afraid to look at the facts coolly and calmly. And Godwin recognizes that there is appallingly a tendency in human beings to persecute others, and this is perverse, this is out of ignorance, this is self-defeating, but nonetheless it does go on. And therefore, Godwin says, by trying to look more coolly at all the facts in terms of missed opportunities, but also in terms of possibilities in the future, one can get a much cooler and calmer view of the historical scene, a much sounder understanding, and this can alone make for true strength. Strength of mind is rooted in soundness of understanding. Soundness of understanding is incompatible with emotional overreaction to events, emotional overreaction to the bad as well as to the good. So you can see really that Godwin's view which seems, you might say, very rationalistic and very demanding, is certainly very attractive, worth considering. He never talks explicitly, say of meditation or contemplation, but because he has already associated justice with the role of the impartial spectator, to him it is very important to human life that we find time for contemplation, that we stand apart from ourselves and we try to look at the world as if we are impartial spectators.

Now when we turn from Godwin to Bakunin, we find that Bakunin is also concerned to emphasize universal causation, but he does this in a much more thoroughgoing manner, because Bakunin has come under the influence of Hegel and of Marx, and he's writing early in the 19th century, not the late 18th century, and Bakunin has also come into contact with the new ideas of evolution. And what Bakunin is concerned to point out is that there is universal causation, universal solidarity, and this is compatible with what he calls 'creative dynamics'. What is nature? Nature is a sum total of everything that exists. Well this is true from the very etymology of the word nature, from '*natus*' to be born. Everything that comes into being is part of nature. And this, therefore, includes literally everything, not only physical phenomena, not only biological phenomena, but includes everything, everything conceivable that exists. And if nature is a sum total of

everything that exists, one should also see that everything is interacting with everything else, everything is connected with everything else, but also everything is in a process of continuous change. And therefore, he says that nature is the sum, that mysterious sum total, of all the transformations taking place in what is produced by nature itself. So nature is constantly producing, but also in what it is producing, there is constant change, and in all these transformations which act upon each other, there is some vast universal determination, the sum of which is unknown. And therefore, there will always be limits to human knowledge. It is quite understandable and legitimate for human beings to try to understand the unity of nature as a whole and look for a unified science, a unified science of man and a unified science of nature. But though this is legitimate, there will always be a limit to human understanding of universal causation. There will always be a transcendence of what is knowable by human minds and what exists and what is possible in nature. So therefore, there is true room for agnosticism.

And if one sees nature as a whole in terms of this universal causation, Bakunin says there is no room for the idea of a first cause or of a personal god. Everything that is divine is part of nature, but the moment you separate out from nature, some Being or some first cause, Bakunin says this will be incompatible with the ceaseless process of transformation that is going on all the time in nature. And man is part of nature. Man is part of this eternal process of transformation and change, but whereas it goes on, you might say, unselfconsciously in nature, man is capable of becoming self-conscious about the process, and through self-consciousness, through the power of thought, it is also possible for man to rebel; rebel against what is unacceptable in society, what can be changed. But man cannot rebel against the totality of things. And Bakunin expresses this by making a distinction, a distinction between what he calls external nature and universal nature. It is possible for man to gain control over external nature, but in the very act of gaining control over external nature man is only expressing what is there in the totality of nature, of universal nature, which is the possibility of self-consciousness. This is really Hegelian. That is for Hegel the spirit is working through nature, through a process of eternal becoming, and through a process of differentiation universal spirit is

realizing itself. But Bakunin doesn't talk in terms of universal spirit because that may tend to get you back into theology which he abominates. So it is important really to see that there is meaning to universal consciousness, there is an unconscious process going on throughout nature, and there is meaning and value to self-consciousness. And if we see this, Bakunin said, then we recognize the unity of the natural world with the human world, the unity of nature and society. We recognize that there are universal laws that work in nature that are also reflected in the processes of social change.

So for Bakunin there is a great place for the social sciences; and man, when he becomes more and more concerned to understand these laws that both work in nature and these laws that work in society, is in a position then to cooperate with the processes of change that are inherent in nature and that are also inherent in society. And if this is so, man could see his own progress collectively as a continual replacement of animal tendencies which man shares with the animal, with the brute, by human and humane tendencies. The process of humanization, the process of refinement through self-conscious thought, through intelligent and creative rebellion, that is the basis of human progress. That is Bakunin said man's cousin is the gorilla, and we should recognize that all the tendencies which we find in the brute, in brute nature, are in human beings, but though they are in human beings, human beings over a period of time have learned to handle and cope with animal instinct, and by a process of refinement and humanization become more aware of their universal kinship with the whole of humanity. So that, for Bakunin, is the great thrust of human progress moving towards universal consciousness, the consciousness of all mankind as a single species.

There are such passages in Godwin also, if you read earlier in Godwin, in the chapter 'On Truth' and the chapter 'On Truth and Understanding', you will find Godwin also talks about the human species, about the unity of mankind. But Bakunin made this central to his way of looking at the world. To him the most important thing in history is this burgeoning consciousness, and that was because Bakunin especially felt a

tremendous sense of the latent strength in vast masses of peasants, in vast masses of workers. So Bakunin himself, a self-educated man like Godwin, but was very concerned to be anti-intellectualist, he was very concerned to point out that among vast masses of human beings there is an innate awareness and an increasing consciousness of the possibilities of the human species. And if we don't recognize this we are going to create a very artificial and narrow individualistic conception of the good. Whereas, if we truly understand the whole of nature as working through this vast process of determination, we will come to see that everything that is natural is logical. And this is pure Hegel, everything that is logical is natural, that is there is a logic to natural development, and also if you grasp this logic, whatever you do will be in accordance with the movements of nature itself. And if you see this, Bakunin says, please remember, and here he uses a very great phrase, it's like a mantra, each point acts upon the whole, and the whole acts upon each point. Because each point, each point in space, in matter, acts upon the whole, the whole of nature may be regarded as a universal result—resultant—of this process where every point is acting upon the whole. But because the whole also acts upon each point, nature may also be seen not as a resultant, but as a creative processor, a creator with tending towards universal harmony. So therefore, if every point acts upon the whole, the whole acts upon every point, you might say every human being counts, every thought, every breath, every feeling, every word, every act of every single human being counts. Somewhere it is making a difference to the total process, and at the same time somewhere the total process, which is much vaster than our capacity to comprehend, is affecting each and every individual mind, each and every individual heart, each and every human being.

So in other words, it is mind-blowing. It is mind-blowing because this is a corrective to the arrogance of the human mind which seeks to capture and put in a formula or a box the historical process, and for Bakunin this is presumption. This is a presumption which arises out of a failure to really grasp what nature is. But most of the time it is not this presumption, it is actually one's slavery, one's slavery to sensation; one is so enslaved by sense perceptions, only by what one can see and smell and hear and touch, that one has

a very limited view of the world. And if on top of it one is going to overgeneralize on the basis of one's sensory data, one is not really coming to any understanding of the real world, of the historical process, and this is what is going on all the time. Certainly today it is enormously intensified through the mass media, through mass education, human beings have got distorted images about what is going on all over the world, but what they know shuts out their awareness of what is hidden, of what is potentially present, and what is potentially present in all human beings. So for Bakunin it is very, very important to correct the hubris of reason and to overcome enslavement to sensory perception. And therefore, he could become quite lyrical about the power of thought, the liberating power of thought, and especially thought becomes liberating if it moves us in a universal direction, if it enables us to recognize our kinship and solidarity with all mankind. And for Bakunin then, if this is true, it is very important in society to recognize the limitation of existing institutions, and also to recognize the limitation of human knowledge.

And as we will see later, Bakunin is very concerned that those who are scientists do not speak in the name of science with a capital 'S' and cut themselves off from the vast mass of mankind. That is the same process of elitism, authoritarianism, which he saw in the church, he also saw as a true danger in scientific academies. And therefore, it is very, very important that we continually combat the tendency towards elitism, whether in the name of religion or science. That knowledge is spread, and knowledge is made accessible and available to all, and that all participate and cooperate in the process of the enjoyment, the exploration of knowledge, and also the recognition of the limits of what we know and the relevance of the unknown. So Bakunin's picture then is that of a world in which freedom can be meaningful if it is based upon a notion of universal causation, it generates a sense of responsibility, but not an extreme, excessive sense of responsibility. There's no one person pretending like Atlas, the giant, to hold the world on his shoulders. You must not get involved, infatuated, with some excessive notion of responsibility, that is to deny the process of interaction. It is important that you recognize your relative responsibility.

And similarly, it is important that you recognize the relativity of your will and your judgment.

Because throughout nature there is an *élan vital*, a kind of cosmic will, a kind of universal force. So given this universal force, and you'll find this later on in Schopenhauer, you'll find this in other thinkers, given this universal energy, it is important to see this universal energy as transcending all human plans and human schemes, but human beings can become self-conscious instruments of this universal energy. But in so doing they must have a proper sense of proportion in regard to who they are; they must not absolutize their wills. So human conflicts arise because of the absolutization of one's own will, the false feeling that because in fantasy you can imagine anything, that you can do it. This is dangerous. This is antisocial. In other words human beings must learn to use the power of thought to recognize that by the power of action they can discover their potentials, but at the same time the more they discover their potentials, the more they become aware of the immense potentials of all humanity, and also the more they become aware of the unknown potentials in the whole of nature.

So really you find, in other words, a very noble agnostic element in the thought of Bakunin, while at the same time Bakunin came on very strong and uncompromising in his rejection, in his rejection of theology, but also in his rejection of scientific elitism, in his rejection of anything that separated human beings from the vast mass of humanity. We ourselves of course live at a time when over 300 years we have inherited an educational system which is involved purportedly in giving us a share in the knowledge that is available to modern man, but in practice separates us out from vast numbers of human beings. And this for anarchists like Bakunin is one of the greatest problems, one of the greatest obstacles to real progress in human affairs. We have got to self-consciously correct this alienation that takes place through so-called education from vast masses of human beings. We have to find ways in which we can insert ourselves into the masses, exchange and explore scientific and other kinds of knowledge with vast masses of people, and thereby free ourselves from the appalling consequences of self-alienation.

So Bakunin's view of freedom then was, again, necessarily compatible with solidarity. Free will that is arbitrary and incompatible with the affirmation of universal interdependence is false.

Now when we come to Gandhi, we find that Gandhi, who has thought a great deal about all these matters, also being influenced by classical Indian conceptions, also aware of the historical process of corruption in India and the West, Gandhi is very concerned to find a process of testing, of self-testing. And therefore, he says, if you understand *Satya*, 'Truth', and that word is difficult to translate into English because it has to do with what is real, what is valid, what is true, what is meaningful, that which has life, you will recognize that nothing exists without a core of truth in it. And there is not a human being who is not innately an embodiment of some truth. Without truth, there is no life, there is no vitality. And therefore, if the sum total of all possible truths still is less than the whole of reality, 'SAT', there is room for agnosticism. Whatever be your concept of God there is something beyond it. And therefore, Gandhi said, it is better to say that Truth is God rather than God is Truth. Truth, the sum total of everything that exists, that is the universal reality, and that is unknown, at the same time it is all pervasive, it is involved in everything all the time. And if so, it is very important for a human being to start with his given understanding of his relative truth and grow by a process of self-correction from relative truth towards a fuller and fuller truth, and to engage in an interaction with other human beings on the assumption that every one of them has relative truth.

Now Gandhi knew that on one level many people agree with this. But what is the problem? The problem is human beings become so identified with relative truth, they put their ego so much into it that they hold tight to it, and they won't let go, and thereby they can't correct themselves. Ideally, he said, if you wish to swim on the bosom of the ocean of Truth, you must reduce yourself to a zero. You must be 'no-thing', you must be a cipher. And unless you can achieve this extreme sense of the shrinking, the disappearance of ego, personality, you will not become truly invulnerable, you will not

become totally fearless. And therefore, to assist in this process, Gandhi thought there is great merit for those who are ready to do so to take a vow, a vow of truthfulness in thought and in speech and in conduct. And the more they reaffirm it the more they will become aware that they can never totally carry it out, but though they cannot totally carry it out they will gain the confidence that comes from cleansing themselves, from becoming aware of what is the progress they are making. So the man of truth is both confident and humble, confident in the total process, and humble because of the recognition that the more self-correction becomes part of his life, the more he has to go. And this then creates a certain kind of authenticity, authenticity in his life, in his expression of his own truth.

So this then is very, very important as the basis of what he called making experiments with Truth. Spiritual truths, just as much as scientific truths, are only real to the extent to which you make experiments with them. Therefore, he was obviously recognizing not only the limitations, but the corrosion and danger that comes with true belief. If you really hold a belief, doesn't matter what it is, even a true belief, scientific or religious, all that happens is you become dependent upon something that you have removed from your life, from the challenging task of incarnation of truth in your life. It is more important that you take any truth and make experiments, find out every moment how you can embody it, what difficulties are, and by overcoming difficulties, what real strength or fearlessness is. So it is only through this kind of process of self-correction that you become truly fearless; and a very practical way of training yourself is to see if you can readily recognize and acknowledge to others a mistake. If you try this from very early you're going to save yourself a lot of trouble through pride and regret in old age. Let go. Frankly admit what is it you don't know. Frankly admit some error you have made. And the more you learn to do this, to acknowledge freely your own errors actually the stronger you will become. The less of a fool you will appear to yourself, the cleaner you will be. And it may be quite frightening to keep going on acknowledging your limitations to others because you may think you become vulnerable. But what is the use

of any strength that is really only a façade that is based upon what is false, or that consolidates a lie in the soul.

And furthermore, he says, if you want to engage in this process, you will develop a certain art of magnifying your, you might say, molehills into mountains. That is if you find errors so far from making any concessions you, if necessary, would even inflate them, because you really want to do something about it. But when it comes to other people you will become less judgmental, you will try to see the best, you will put the best interpretation upon events and try even to cut down, you might say, their mountains into molehills. In other words, what this really comes down to is that the more you truly want to gain fearlessness in the quest for Truth, and the more you want to gain strength through the incarnation of Truth, the more nonviolent you will be. And therefore, in the chapter on '*Satya* and *Ahimsa*', I point out how for Gandhi these two are interconnected, *Satya* and *Ahimsa*, truth and nonviolence. The more you recognize the relativity of your truth, and yet the more authentic is your persistence in the search for a fuller truth, the gentler you will become. A lot of the ego tension will go away. You will become happy in the truth of other people. You will become concerned to draw the larger circle, to draw others in. You will loosen your sense of separateness from other beings. You will suffer for the mistakes of others, you will rejoice in the discoveries of others, and the more you can weaken this harsh sense of separateness, the more you will be able to become aware of the solidarity of all mankind.

So for him Truth is of course much more difficult, much more important, you might say, than nonviolence. But because of the remoteness of all human beings from universal absolute Truth, in the real world, in practice, nonviolence is mandated. Nonviolence becomes immediately important. In other words that is the very ground upon which you stand. You can't postpone nonviolence. If you don't begin right now working upon nonviolence, you will not really purge yourself of self-deception, you will not further your apprehension and understanding of Truth. So therefore, if we recognize that though Truth may be even more important than nonviolence, you might say ontologically, but

epistemologically and ethically nonviolence has a certain priority over Truth. So you will really come to discipline yourself, testing yourself by seeing how violent you are or how nonviolent you are becoming. And because of a dynamic view of human nature to him, human nature is such that it is continually soaring or sinking. There is no such thing as a middle position, no lukewarm, Lockean view, partly good, partly bad. Every moment you're either becoming more nonviolent or you're becoming more violent.

And if you recognize this dynamic, continuous process of change, it's rather like what the Buddha said, that the wise man, the enlightened man, cannot let go for one moment. Let go what? Of his hold on wisdom, on universal compassion. So if it's like a view of mountain climbing; you, at any point, could be vulnerable to the ego, to delusion. So if one recognizes this, instead of saying I'm going to do nothing about it, or I can do nothing about it, or I'm going to solve it all immediately, you are more concerned to build into your psychological activity a process of self-correction. Actually all human beings do this instinctively to some extent. To grow up is to learn to withhold, to abstain, to correct. But they do this on the basis of fear, they do this without an ideal, and they do this as separate beings, without a sense of togetherness and collective mutual involvement and solidarity in this enterprise. To do this out of a conscious recognition that this is a way of affirming commonality, this is a way of creating opportunities and seizing opportunities where otherwise they are overlooked. This is then a matter for self-training.

So why Gandhi is so very appealing and very much a man of the 20th century is that once you read Gandhi, you have no excuse for not getting started. You've got to start now. Because the commonest danger that works in the human mind is a kind of moral blackmail working upon oneself. If I can't do it all right now what the hell am I? And people are endlessly thinking about other's successes or failures, what a waste of time. If everybody won't do this, I'm not going to get started. So in this way that which is furtive, that which is cowardly in the human psyche, is enormously enhanced by modern education. Behind a great deal of aggression there is actually cowardliness, fear. And if

that is so, we have to recognize it is possible to counteract it, it is possible to correct it. And it is possible to correct it if you learn to say unconditionally, I recognize the importance and the need for nonviolence. That is I'm going to do this regardless of other people, regardless of what happens in the short run to me. I'm going to do this unconditionally, I'm not going to wait for everybody to change, I'm concerned with self-correction, self-purification right now in my own sphere, in my own life. And when a person really does this, Tolstoy came to see the importance of this around the age of 40, Gandhi started like this very young, in the late twenties in his life and held to it till the very end, the earlier you can really start accepting what you can do with yourself the more actually you can loosen up a lot of the tension that arises out of muddle, out of evasion, out of cowardice. Just as Godwin says that the man who really takes the larger view in contemplating the chains of connection in mind, in universal mind, he becomes more cheerful, he becomes more capable of enjoying human life.

So also in the Gandhian view the more you're able to engage in this self-discipline with which is bound up your very integrity, your very authenticity, and it may be very hard in the beginning, it may be like a razor's edge, but actually the more you do this and the more you let go of the ego and acknowledge publicly and freely your mistakes, and the more you correct, the lighter you will become. After a while, you will really find a certain cheerfulness becomes natural to you, an enjoyment of other human beings, an enjoyment despite all the limitations of the human condition, of the possibilities of growth. And therefore, your concern at all times, in all human relationships, as well as in reference to yourself is, is this on the side of growth, or is this on the side of weakness? Through rationalizing are we going to consolidate weakness, or by fearlessness in self-acknowledgment of mistakes, limitations, deceptions are we going to, by freeing ourselves, become stronger, become lighter? And the stronger and lighter we become the more we can lean back upon the ocean of life and enjoy the life process, recognize what is significant in the historical process, understand the historical moment, and learn to cooperate with the constructive forces that are available at any given time.