

Translation of revised excerpts from:

Fuchs, Albert (1999): **Satyagraha – Challenges for the empirical sciences.**  
gewaltfreie aktion, 121, 116-121.

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### Functional principles and boundary conditions

Gandhi's writings are a rich source for assumptions, on different generalization levels, about the dynamics of social conflicts and the functioning of Satyagraha. At times these functional principles come along in the guise of scientific language, as if-then, the-the or similar sentences. E.g.: "... experience has led me to the unshakable conclusion that *our success has been mathematically proportional to the extent to which we have adhered to truth and non-violence.*" (Gandhi, 1944 - acc. Nagler, 1990, p. 135). Consequently, you "only" need to specify operationally the respective variables, in order to submit such statements to scientific examination.

However, often descriptive principles and normative statements concerning the settlement of social conflicts are interlocked very closely. In a remarkable attempt to systematize Gandhi's ethics of conflict behavior, the philosopher A. Naess (1958) isolated descriptive and normative principles and reconstructed the pattern of derivation. Figure 2 shows a modified, easily understandable part of the resulting derivation tree. (N marks normative, H descriptive principles (hypotheses); the left bottom

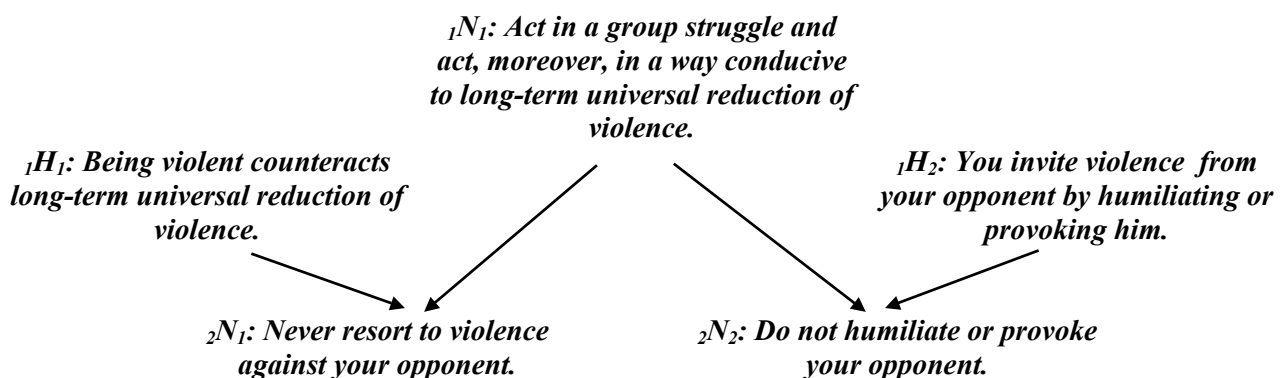


Figure 2: Interlocking of normative (N) and descriptive (H) principles in Gandhi's ethics of conflict resolution (modified acc. Naess, 1958)

indices stand for the general level of a norm or hypothesis, the right ones serve to differentiate the given level; arrows symbolize derivative relationships.) According to Naess (1958) all norms, except for the top one,  $1N_1$ , are only valid provided that certain hypotheses apply, so that the whole system (except for  $1N_1$ ) has to be examined by means of (social) scientific methods and can claim acceptance only in the measure as these hypotheses withstand scientific examination.

... From the perspective of basic research, however, to penetrate theoretically this field of problems constitutes a special challenge; coping successfully with this challenge could also be of benefit to driving practical interests.

The issue of the boundary conditions of Satyagraha seems no less demanding. So e.g. it has been pointed out again and again that Gandhi worked within a cultural reference system that "respected fundamental humanitarian rules" in spite of all of Britain's brutal claims for power and its imperial

greed (Ullerich, 1983, p. 276). Thus, it may be concluded "that his tactics (sic!) were only meaningful and possible within a certain, humanely oriented social system" (ibid., p. 257). On the other hand the political-cultural situation of India during Gandhi's time, which would have made fail an ordinary revolutionary while it met Gandhi's approach, can be regarded as a basis of the social and political changes initiated by him (ibid., p. 278). An finally, limits, hard to overcome for Gandhi's person-oriented approach with its explicit and distinct respect for the opponent's vital interests, are to be expected for institutional and structural changes "behind" the individuals (cf. ibid., p. 279 f). Questions concerning the importance of these boundary conditions, after all, will have to be clarified **empirically** - instead of resigning oneself to plausibility considerations -, may it be ever so difficult to realize such a research program.

### **Effect evaluation**

Of course, the question of boundary conditions is also of immediate relevance in the case Satyagraha is at stake as a strategy of social change and conflict resolution.

In this context, in addition, Gandhi's congeniality to action research must be emphasized... Studies attendant on three non-violent actions of the anti nuclear and peace movement in the US at the end of die 70ties and at the beginning of the 80ties, reported by Katz (1990), are committed to the action research approach. By this report one may become acquainted with the performance of this approach in the given context.

Finally, specified actions or measures inspired by Satyagraha can be examined and evaluated for their effectiveness. In doing so one has to answer three main questions: (1) Did any change of the phenomena in question take place during the period defined by the intervention? (2) Can this change, in that case, be clearly attributed to the intervention under consideration? (3) Which components of this intervention provoked which sides of the change? Evaluation research emphasizes the standards of basic research and has at its disposal an elaborated methodology (cf. Cook & Shadish, 1986). I do not have any knowledge about any work in the context of Satyagraha decidedly aligned to this approach.

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