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Psychological Reflections on Mahatma Gandhi and the Future of Satyagraha

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Abstract

The article examines the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi from a psychological perspective. Special attention is given to the psychoanalytic study of Gandhi by Erik Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, in 1969. The author notes his personal connection with Erikson's book, which profoundly influenced his thinking (and life). The article alternates between a close psychological reading of Erikson's book and Gandhi's *My Experiments with Truth*. The larger point of the article is to reflect on the future of satyagraha or nonviolence. Gandhi's own meanings of satyagraha are often difficult for many to accept, given the psychological violence that infected his form of nonviolence. His flaws, which must be reluctantly acknowledged, challenge us to formulate our own meanings of nonviolence (given our own flaws), since some form of satyagraha may be the only hope of survival for a world threatened with ultimate destruction.

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The second day of October 2019 marked the 150th anniversary of the birth of Gandhi. Celebrations around the world honored this remarkable and charismatic leader who charted a path of nonviolence that may be our only hope for survival. It is, however, easy to get lost in the fog of idealization that surrounds Gandhi. Doing so makes it hard to see the man underneath and consider the relevance of his form of nonviolence for others steeped in very different religious and political traditions, as well as personal values. Gandhi was a complex man full of contradictions, which he sometimes imposed on those he loved. His form of satyagraha required commitments that may not be relevant for others, though the principle that there is a politics of nonviolence we must articulate remains an immutable tenet of his legacy. He sacralized a political revolution of enduring relevance; to hold onto that in a time of apocalyptic threats to existence challenges all of us. At the same time, his unique experiences and, yes, flaws, complicate our own efforts to adapt satyagraha to a different time and place. I firmly believe a nuanced look at Gandhi from a psychoanalytic perspective deepens our capacity to imagine the difficult task of peacemaking in a violent world. Gandhi would probably not have welcomed my inquiry, though, thankfully, he was his own psychoanalyst. No one more relentlessly examined his own weaknesses and failings in what he calls in his autobiography his “experiments” with truth, his struggles with sexual abstinence, his troubled relationship with his children, his inability to corral his wife, Putali Ba, and whether it was right to embark on fasts as part of his politics.¹ What always saves Gandhi is his humor. He was, he joked, in the saint business, which is a trying occupation.

I came to Gandhi as channeled by Erik Erikson, and it is mostly Erikson’s psychobiography of Gandhi that I want to discuss, though I will add my own reflections on the future of satyagraha.² I run a monthly seminar at The City University of New York titled “Violence and Peacemaking” with some distinguished psychoanalysts and other intellectuals that is into its fourth year. One of our concerns has been how nonviolence can work and what is the psychology of peacemaking. If that is my contemporary experience, my personal journey with Gandhi and Erikson has been long in the making. My first job as an academic in 1972 came because a student had read the newly published *Gandhi’s Truth* in the late 1960s and miraculously convinced the history department at what became my college that no department of history could claim to be self-respecting unless it had someone versed in history and psychoanalysis. I may have killed the goose that lay the golden egg, because that was the first, and the last, time that such a position existed at an American university. But Erikson was already my hero long before that. As a senior at Harvard in 1965, I took his course on the human life cycle. On the recommended reading list was his 1958 book *Young Man Luther*.³ I read it, was transfixed, and said to myself, “That is what I want to do with my life.” And I have.

Erikson’s book on Gandhi also transformed me personally. I was a 1960s radical and felt passionately that the Vietnam War was a moral blot on the United States. I spent many weekends in graduate school at the University of Chicago at one demonstration or another, was one of the student leaders when we took over the administration building in the university where my then-deceased father, a French professor and dean, had worked, was tear-gassed in Grant Park more than once, and placed flowers in the rifles of the National Guard in front of the Hilton hotel during the raucous Democratic Convention of 1968. But until I read Erikson’s *Gandhi’s Truth* I didn’t understand the importance of self-purification in a campaign of nonviolence. Gandhi persuaded me to stop eating meat, which I followed for some thirty years, until I fell off the wagon a couple of decades ago. I discovered in the process, however, as he did, that defining vegetarianism is not straightforward. What is meat? Is it only beef, or does it include fish? Do you not eat animal products like milk? And most of all, What is the point of the project? For Gandhi, vegetarianism

was tied to his religion and especially his vow to his mother, Kasturba, not to eat meat. On that she was adamant. I don't share Gandhi's particular religious concerns, which made explaining to myself what I was doing especially complicated. Eventually, I came to agree with the philosopher Peter Singer that the point is not to kill in order to eat, which for many, especially younger people, has an added significance in an age of the twin apocalyptic dangers of nuclear destruction and global warming that hang over us.⁴ In my more recent reflections on my failed experiment with vegetarianism, I have returned to Gandhi's implicit idea of self-purification as part of a nonviolent struggle. What that means in practice will vary according to personal taste, cultural and political norms, and one's spiritual inclinations. For make no mistake about it: Satyagraha, as the religious scholar James W. Jones has pointed out recently, is a spiritual practice.⁵

It is worth asking what one means by a spiritual practice. The standard and most obvious definition would be a way of carrying out the practices of one's faith. For a Christian, that would require loving one's neighbors as oneself; for a Jew, it might entail an additional involvement in bringing the dictates of the Torah into one's daily life (such as keeping kosher); and for a Hindu, it would mean adopting a practice such as vegetarianism. But a *spiritual* practice extends beyond faith, though the two can be closely linked. The civil rights struggle in the United States was led by a Black Baptist minister who surrounded himself with others from around the country in a movement originally centered in the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta that now abuts the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park. In the civil rights movement, there was singing and praying before political actions and then more singing and praying that culminated in singing and praying. This specifically Christian form of spiritual practice, however, developed an increasingly ecumenical character as it drew in many without any Christian beliefs, including those from other faiths, especially Jewish leaders such as Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and many others, and an often-disparate crowd of idealistic but secular, even atheistic, young people. The Christian hymns never stopped, nor did King's lofty rhetoric calling forth images from the Book of Revelation, but the singing soon merged with the surging new folk music sweeping the land. Pete Seeger leading thousands in "We Shall Overcome" extended the more church-based singing of "Beulah Land." Inspired music itself became part of the spiritual practice of the civil rights movement. What everyone found under the inspired leadership of Martin Luther King Jr. was a form of spirituality that sustained the risks involved in nonviolently facing angry whites throwing bricks, growling German shepherds biting at their legs, and fire hoses turned on them.

Gandhi's particular form of self-purification, as he developed his charisma in leading a revitalization of the Indian masses, included both vegetarianism and sexual abstinence. Those twin commitments, he felt, defined his required path to effective moral and political leadership. Vegetarianism was easy morally, but sex for him was tainted. As was not unusual in his culture at the time, his father, Kaba Gandhi, arranged Mohan's marriage to Putali Ba when he was thirteen. There were ominous signs from the outset. The father rushed a trip to make the elaborate wedding ceremony and his coach overturned on a jagged road, seriously wounding him. He managed to hide how badly he was hurt during the ceremony, but his wounds worsened in time and he would die from complications related to them three years later. The young Gandhi paid scant attention to his father at the wedding ceremony and soon threw himself enthusiastically into sex with his young wife. He thought of her all the time and seemed to have sex with her daily (though there were extended periods of separation). He became furiously jealous and would not let her go anywhere without his permission. Later, he recognized how he constrained her life and how in the process of satisfying his passions he neglected his goal of teaching her to read, which left him feeling guilty for the rest of his life.

But more important, Gandhi's "carnal lust," as he called it, for his wife distracted him from caring adequately for his dying and ambivalently loved father. He was sixteen. In one room, he regularly nursed his father, changed the dressings, and did all he could to relieve his suffering from his infected leg. But even as he nursed his father, Gandhi thought of sex. On the evening his father died, Gandhi had left him to go wake up Putali Ba and have sex with her. She was pregnant at the time and later miscarried.

Sex and death became inextricably intertwined in Gandhi's mind. If he had been there with his father, Kaba Gandhi might have survived. Instead, Mohan was lost in the enjoyment of sex with his wife at the actual moment of his father's death. At some level, it seems, Gandhi felt his lust had killed his father and, it is worth noting, his unborn child. In the often-contradictory way these things work, Gandhi came in time to blame his father for the trauma he suffered. The father should never have married him off at thirteen. Child marriage was a "cruel custom" in India, he says, but still something his father should have had the sense not to inflict on him. The father, furthermore, had his own issues with sex, as he was "given to carnal pleasures," Gandhi says on the very first page of his autobiography. Kaba Gandhi's first two wives died, but his third wife was still alive, just put away as a hopeless invalid, before he married Gandhi's mother, his fourth wife. The oversexed father, in other words, as Gandhi imagined him in his unconscious, cast an intergenerational curse on him. Erikson concludes more generally that a man must "give an account of his conflicts with his father" in order to "make sexuality amenable to mastery."⁶

Gandhi found it extremely difficult to achieve that mastery. He found sticking to the vow of abstinence, or brahmacharya, nearly impossible. Only after he had four children and was thirty-seven years old was he able to commit himself successfully to brahmacharya and feel pure enough spiritually to carry out his political campaigns. We are the beneficiaries of his remarkable journey and his particular path of self-purification that led in time to a fully developed theory of satyagraha. The tainted issues of his desire, however, suffered.

That brings us to the story of Mehtab, Gandhi's Muslim adolescent friend who sorely tested his vows of vegetarianism and fidelity. Gandhi honors the story of Mehtab in two chapters of his autobiography, one titled "A Tragedy" and the other "A Tragedy (Continued)." Mehtab repeatedly urged Gandhi to eat meat. It was the only way to be strong, he said, like the English. After being badgered, Gandhi finally agreed to try some goat meat. He hated it and that night had a horrible nightmare that a live goat was bleating inside of him (*My Experiments*, 19). Mehtab gave up on that project but soon turned to what he considered Gandhi's weakness for his faithfulness to his wife. He insisted they visit prostitutes. Gandhi again protested but eventually gave in. He was a coward, he says. He was "saved" only by his inability to get an erection in what he called this "den of vice" (*My Experiments*, 20–21). The woman lost her patience at his impotence and threw him out of the brothel shouting "abuses and insults." What is not entirely clear from Gandhi's account, however, is whether subsequent visits were more successful. He says there were "four more similar incidents" though in "most" of them he was "saved by good fortune." What happened when fortune failed to intervene?

Gandhi's wife, mother, and larger family all hated Mehtab, yet Gandhi resolutely stuck by what Erikson calls this embodiment of his negative identity (136–140). "By choosing Mehtab as a friend," Erikson says, "he unconsciously tested himself in order to prove to himself that he could sin—and test the limits of that experience, too." Erikson even wonders whether we shouldn't erect a statue somewhere to Mehtab, for a great man must first engage, even embrace, his negative identity before he can find it in himself to discard it. That process, however, can pose great challenges for those intimately caught up in the negativity. Consider Harilal, Gandhi's oldest son,

who grew up with Mehtab on the margins of the family, as his father became a charismatic icon and an impossibly virtuous man. How does a son find anything to correct or complete in a father of such unrelenting goodness and often self-righteous moralizing? “[There was] nothing [for Harilal] to live out [in Gandhi’s life],” Erikson says, “that remained recognizably unlived as a mourned and abandoned potential—except the old man’s negative identity, his ‘murdered self.’” Harilal was able to find a usable identity in Mehtab, and only in Mehtab. It was a sad choice, however, for Harilal became a Muslim, like Mehtab, but also a derelict and a year after Gandhi’s death was found in a coma in an unknown locality (which meant an improper burial).

Erikson divides his book into two parts, *The Past* and *The Event*. *The Past* describes young Gandhi, his childhood, his experiences in England studying law, and his formative years in South Africa. *The Event* then describes Gandhi’s campaign of Satyagraha in Ahmedabad that involved for the first time his use of a fast as part of the political campaign. Erikson argues that the Ahmedabad strike defined the new directions of his ideas about the politics of nonviolence and established his identity as the leader of the national movement of revitalization that aimed to break the bondage with Great Britain. But halfway through his book, Erikson stops his own narrative and writes the Mahatma a twenty-five-page letter (229–254). The letter is a pained but exquisitely powerful cry of despair over what he argues is a form of violence imbedded in Gandhi’s developing sense of satyagraha. The letter itself has a context, because Erikson read it in draft form in the living room of Robert Jay Lifton’s Wellfleet home in Cape Cod in August 1967.⁷ Lifton had recently begun his annual psychohistory meetings that were to last then for fifty years. (I attended forty years of these meetings, but, alas, was not yet in Lifton’s orbit in 1967, though it was my pleasure and honor to get to know Erik Erikson somewhat later.) It is a scene worth pondering. Erikson in front of the fireplace, sitting on the couch facing the ocean in Lifton’s living room, as he read his letter to Gandhi to a small group of leading psychological and politically committed intellectuals that included Dan Ellsberg, Norman Birnbaum, Kenneth Keniston, and others at a moment of intense ferment over the war in Vietnam. The peace movement then risked veering off into violence. Erikson wanted to reassert the significance of satyagraha for Americans, but he felt deeply troubled by a psychological violence that lay at the heart of Gandhi’s truth.

At one point well into his autobiography (*My Experiments*, 234), Gandhi, always given to critical self-assessment, muses about the historical veracity of his story. Has he omitted important parts of the narrative? Would his account stand up in a court of law? Surely, he argues, some “busybody” could “flatter himself” by showing up the “hollowness of many of my pretensions.” Erikson embraces that role of the busybody, because, he says (230–231), “I seemed to sense the presence of a kind of untruth in the very protestation of truth; of something unclean when all the words spelled out an unreal purity; and above all, of displaced violence where nonviolence was the professed issue.”

Gandhi tells the story of family life in Durban, South Africa, at a time he was beginning to assemble a motley bunch of stray individuals whom he would soon forge into followers able to lead the coming nonviolent campaigns for social and political justice (*My Experiments*, 134–137; 231). It seems it never occurred to Gandhi to ask his wife what she felt about turning their house into a political commune. He insisted she accept the changed circumstances of their lives—and most of all to take it all on *cheerfully*. For the most part, she accepted things without question and with a genuine sense of joy. But Gandhi also insisted that he and she cheerfully empty the chamber pots, since there was no inside plumbing in their house at the time. When one such pot contained the waste of a man who was a Christian by religion and an Untouchable by caste, she grimaced.

He became furious and she exclaimed, “Keep your house to yourself and let me go.” At that outburst, he showed her to the gate, at which point she broke down in despair and righteous anger.

They made up and Gandhi acknowledges her “matchless powers of endurance,” though he stops short of fully owning the difficulty for Kasturba of obeying his authoritarian demands to break radically with custom—and do it with a smile on your face. It was the same with his early attempts to educate his wife. He was, as he describes himself (*My Experiments*, 231), a “cruelly kind husband” who “harassed her out of my blind love for her.” There is something missing in this notion of cruel kindness and blind love that involves harassment. Psychologically, Gandhi seems unable to grant that ambivalence lurks in our hearts, even, and maybe most especially, in the deeply committed among us who work for peace. The future of satyagraha is at stake, Erikson argues. A demanding moralism won’t work. Here Erikson calls forth the wisdom of Freud and psychoanalysis (234–235). We cannot pretend to deny “our inner ambiguities, ambivalences, and instinctual conflicts, and only an additional leverage of truth based on self-knowledge promises to give us freedom in the full light of conscious day.” The alternative is a kind of “moralistic terrorism” that drives our worst inclinations and feelings underground, “to remain there until riotous conditions of uncertainty or chaos” encourage their emergence with redoubled and often deadly energy. “Excess and riot follow repression and suppression,” Erikson says at another point (251), “precisely because of the autocratic and blind nature” of moralistic restraint. Ethics must replace moralism, an ethics that is “marked by an insightful assent to human values, whereas moralism is blind obedience.” Ethics is transmitted with “informed persuasion” rather than “absolute interdicts.”

Moralism restrains behavior in an authoritarian way; ethical renunciation is freely chosen and self-imposed. Moralism establishes rigid rules that must be obeyed; ethics seeks to question the personal and spiritual meaning of obedience. Moralism blindly punishes offenders; ethics defines transgression in humane ways that are appropriate to the offense. Moralism is totalistic; ethics remains always relative to the context. Moralism invites abuse from enforcers and too easily victimizes offenders to their rigid codes; ethics diffuses limits and always respects the human. Moralism is self-righteous; ethics honors humility and difference. Moralism imposes a universalist set of demands; ethics embraces nuance, complexity, and contradiction.

Erikson is particularly troubled by Gandhi’s failure ever to recognize that a sexual relationship can be characterized by mutuality. “This is by no means a capacity easily developed or sustained without self-control and sacrifice,” Erikson notes (234), “but as an approximation and a goal, it describes the only kind of sexual relationship in which the other person does not become a mere object either of sexual or aggressive desire.” It is perfectly reasonable, it seems to me, given Gandhi’s particular experiences and sexual traumas, as well as his religious background, that he would find in brahmacharya a resolution of his inner conflicts. Out of that new self, sealed with a vow, he found the strength to forge a new politics of nonviolence that may represent our only hope of survival. But along the way, he had to weaponize phallic desire. Kasturba managed to resist him where she felt she needed to defend the ground of her being. That action has led some intellectuals who like to malign satyagraha to claim her as the real saint, though Erikson sniffs with disdain (232), What do intellectuals know about sainthood? For most of us struggling to find a usable form of nonviolent peacemaking, the point is a tyrannical opposition to desire and ambivalence will restrict the usefulness of satyagraha.

Erikson takes particular note (243) of Gandhi’s fondness for the story of Prahlad, the boy prince who would not accept the claim of his father, the Demon King, to have powers greater than God. The boy is tortured terribly for not acknowledging his father’s claims. The father’s final

challenge to the boy is to embrace a red-hot metal pillar, but as Prahlad embraces that suggestive phallic object, out steps God as a half lion and half man who tears the king to pieces. Gandhi called the boy the first satyagrahi. Perhaps. But what is the message to his own sons whom he repeatedly threatened to disavow and disown when their truth meant rebellion against him? Who is the Demon King?

I would not want to conclude by giving the impression that Erikson, or I, busybodies that we are, question the significance of satyagraha because its founder was flawed. Aren't we all? That is not the question. Satyagraha, as I mentioned, is a spiritual practice. We take on its challenges as Jesus did going into the desert or facing his death with a reluctant calm. Participation in a nonviolent campaign requires self-purification and the willingness to accept unflinchingly the violence of those whose evil practices you are trying to change. It can be a risky business, this nonviolence. The two most important satyagrahis in the twentieth century, Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., were assassinated. There is no question it takes massive self-preparation to take on the dangerous work of confronting entrenched evil in the world.

At the same time, self-purification itself can become dangerously cultic. Self-laceration, prolonged fasting, and radical experiments with food and sex risk pushing boundaries beyond reasonable ethical limits. Communal engagement with offbeat forms of sex, which seems a frequent cultic characteristic, becomes in many cases wildly exploitative and victimizes women and children. Amy Siskind (a former PhD student of mine) has described in great detail the Fourth Wall commune that flourished on the upper westside of Manhattan in the 1960s and 1970s.⁸ A curious blend of psychoanalysis and Marx, the cult mocked traditional psychoanalytic institutes. It insisted on absolute free love and sex with different partners, including adolescent children, on a regular, if not daily, basis. If a woman and her partner wanted to have a child, getting pregnant required consultation with and permission from one's psychoanalyst, and all children were raised communally. All rules of conduct were handed down by the elite training and supervising analysts. Liberation became tyrannical. Many lives were destroyed, especially because the AIDS crisis in the early 1980s suddenly decimated the cult at the same time the leader developed dementia.

Another dramatic example is the huge cult in Japan, Aum Shinrikyo, that Robert Jay Lifton has authoritatively described.⁹ Aum Shinrikyo lasted between the mid-1980s and March 22, 1995, when it released sarin gas on the Tokyo subway. Led by a partially sighted guru, Shoko Asahara, Aum developed an eclectic mix of religious ideas from Buddhism, Hinduism, and the Christian Book of Revelation. Asahara gathered some ten thousand followers in Japan and another twenty thousand in Russia, as it amassed a war chest of half a billion dollars. The elite of the cult became fanatically committed to Asahara's apocalyptic project and murdered nearly seventy outsiders (lawyers, prosecutors, and anyone trying to raise concern) before the final Armageddon as the police closed in. Ordinary members had no idea of these activities. They were typically searchers after truth. They endured tortuous testing of their commitment in blistering hot showers and immersion in ice-cold water (some died). They lived in virtual cages that were unclean and filled with vermin to test their spiritual growth, while Asahara himself would travel to fancy restaurants in the evening and gorge himself while singing karaoke. He explained his increasing corpulence as due to his taking on the bad karma of his followers.¹⁰

So self-purification as a necessary dimension of the engagement in satyagraha is a complicated business. Some experiment with one's own truth may be required to call forth the commitment necessary to sustain creative political action. But any such personal experiment cannot come at the cost of exploiting others, just as no leader can impose his or her own forms of renunciation or asceticism, however seemingly tied to religious and spiritual traditions, on needy

followers. Any restraint must be ethically embraced by the individual and not tyrannically imposed by the leader or the group. Erikson's subtle analysis of Gandhi's failings in this regard is a profound lesson in satyagraha.

Nonviolence is also probably not a politics that is appropriate to all contexts of intractable conflict, such as the Nazis or the Soviets under the brutal and paranoid leadership of Joseph Stalin. But what I feel is the single most important feature of Gandhi's truth, something not really emphasized by Erikson, is that a nonviolent struggle seeks not only to eliminate a demonstrable evil—a salt tax for a country surrounded by ocean or forcing Blacks to sit in the back of the bus—but in the process to make your opponent a better person ethically. The best contexts for such a satyagraha struggle, I think, are when basically good people get caught up in carrying out evil for all kinds of historical reasons. The British in India and whites in the old South were like that. They were good people with a bad theory. I know the South best, since I am from Georgia and my family goes back there over two centuries from well before the Revolutionary War and even includes running a large slave plantation near Atlanta in the first half of the nineteenth century. I was in high school in the South in the 1950s. The barriers that divided Black and white were visible, strong, terrifyingly harsh, and brutally humiliating to Blacks. Some seventy years later and after the civil rights movement, it is amazing how readily the races mix in the South now, politics in a place like Georgia have been transformed, education improved, and so on. One of my sons married an African American woman and two of my male grandchildren, who are now young teens, are able to visit me on vacation in north Florida near the Georgia border. In that setting, they never face any kind of discrimination. In an earlier generation, I could never have taken them to dinner with me, they would have had to wait in the car if I went shopping, I could never have stayed in the same motel driving with them to vacation, if we rode a bus I would have been in the front and they in the back, and on and on and on. Of course, there is a long way to go. But the civil rights movement, which remained remarkably nonviolent, eliminated de jure injustices and changed the most offensive de facto insults of segregation, also made whites in the South better human beings. Satyagraha probably won't work where you have bad people with a bad theory, but hopeless optimist that I am, I would tend to see Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union in the 1930s as historical exceptions.

Gandhi's remarkable legacy is a new theory of politics for a world caught up with a rising tide of global authoritarianism and most of all the ultimate threats to existence we face with nuclear weapons and now with global warming. It is true, as the poet Theodore Roethke says, that in a dark time the eye begins to see, but we also need a theory of nonviolence to guide us as we struggle with peacemaking in situations of seemingly intractable conflict. Gandhi's own human failings identify the specific areas that allow us to reconsider his theories to build a nonviolent practice that is relevant for our own flawed selves.

Notes

¹ M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography; or, The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, trans. Mahadev Desai (Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Publishing House, 1927). Hereafter, page numbers for quotations from this source, identified as *My Experiments*, appear in the text.

² Erik Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence* (New York: Norton, 1969).

³ Erik Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Norton, 1958).

⁴ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: The Definite Classic of the Animal Movement* (Open Road Media, 2015). This is the version of Singer's 1975 book that is currently available on Amazon.

⁵ This crucial point was made by Professor Jones in one of our "Violence and Peacemaking" seminars, September 13, 2019.

⁶ Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 123. Hereafter, page numbers for quotations from this source appear in the text with no title.

⁷ Personal communication from Robert Jay Lifton, August 22, 1998.

⁸ Amy Siskind, *The Sullivan Institute/Fourth Wall Community: The Relationship of Radical Individualism and Authoritarianism* (New York: Praeger, 2003).

⁹ Robert Jay Lifton, *Destroying the World to Save It: Aum Shinrikyo, Apocalyptic Violence, and the New Global Terrorism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999).

¹⁰ In a personal communication on September 14, 2019, after reading a draft of this article, Lifton wondered about the most extreme possible form of purification: the Nazi biological cleansing of the Aryan race by the totalistic killing of all *Lebensunwertes Leben* (life unworthy of life). See Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).