Occasional Publication 36

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The Wealth that is Life
Ruskin's Words to Gandhi

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The Occasional Publication series is published for the India International Centre by Cmde. (Retd.) R. Datta.

Designed and produced by FACET Design. Tel.: 91-11-24616720, 24624336.

The Wealth that is Life
Ruskin's Words to Gandhi*

To allow the market mechanism to be the sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment . . . would result in the demolition of society. . . . Nature would be reduced to its elements, neighborhoods and landscapes defiled, rivers polluted, the power to produce food and raw materials destroyed.

–Polanyi, 73

When the 'Reader' in Gandhi's pamphlet *Hind Swaraj* asks the 'Editor' if it's true to assume that he does not consider English education necessary for Home Rule, the answer is yes and no. Yes, replies the Editor—as Gandhi calls himself in the pamphlet—because the English language has enslaved the Indian people. 'We write to each other in faulty English, and from this even our MA's are not free; our best thoughts are expressed in English; the proceedings of our Congress are conducted in English; our best newspapers are printed in English. If this state of things continues for a long time, posterity will . . . condemn and curse us.' But at the same time, 'We are so much beset by the disease of civilization that we cannot altogether do without English education.' The point is to know how and when to use English; for example, 'for the purpose of knowing how disgusted they (the English) have themselves become with their civilization, we may use or learn English as the case may be.' In addition, 'those English books which are valuable' should be translated into the various languages of India (Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj, in Selected Works,* IV, pp. 185–87).

The Editor does not mention John Ruskin by name, but in my English edition of Gandhi's works, *Hind Swaraj* immediately follows Gandhi's translation of Ruskin's

*Lecture originally entitled 'Ruskin and Gandhi : The Wealth that is Life' delivered by Dr. Paul Sawyer on January 12, 2012 at the—India International Centre.

Unto This Last—a book well described as the work of one 'disgusted' with what has become of English civilization. Interestingly, the Editor's begrudging tone gives no hint of the excitement with which Gandhi, in his autobiography, describes his discovery of Ruskin's book—given to him one night in 1904, as he recounts, to read on the train from Johannesburg to Durban. He read it in a single sitting, he recalls, and the experience was 'a turning-point' in his life. As a good imperialist—a benevolent one, for whatever that's worth, but an imperialist nevertheless—Ruskin would have been aghast at the idea of Indian independence; but as you know, Gandhi laboured all his life to conceive of independence not simply as an absence—an absence of the British raj—but as *swaraj,* self-governance or (as he put it) 'self-control,' which in his pamphlet of that name becomes co-extensive with a notion of civilization itself—true civilization, that is, not the sinful and debased civilization represented by the British. What would true civilization look like? That, I suggest, is what Ruskin helped Gandhi to envision.

Sarvodaya, the title of Gandhi's translation, is how he translated the phrase 'unto this last'; his book in fact contains only a part of Ruskin's text, with some paraphrase and a brief conclusion that—as I'll suggest at the end—significantly changes Ruskin's meaning. I'll further suggest that *Hind Swaraj,* which Gandhi wrote at about the same time, in 1909, is our best record of that meeting of minds, a partial blending of Ruskin and Gandhi that gives us a fascinating instance of cross-cultural fertilization and exchange. That book won't be my main subject today; I'll have more to say about Ruskin—a less considerable figure, by far, than Gandhi, but an interesting one nevertheless, whose brilliant and quirky book still deserves to be read and remembered. The Manchester School of Economics, which was Ruskin's prime target, may be considered the forefather of contemporary neo-liberalism, the doctrine that supports what is euphemistically known as 'globalism' with its world centre in America, as an earlier version of liberalism supported the phase of imperialism that had its world centre in Britain. To read the global economy in the light of Ruskin, I will suggest finally, is to glance back at Gandhi's legacy as well.

I'll further suggest that *Hind Swaraj,* which Gandhi wrote at about the same time, in 1909, is our best record of that meeting of minds, a partial blending of Ruskin and Gandhi that gives us a fascinating instance of cross-cultural fertilization and exchange.

At the peak of his fame, Ruskin's reputation rested on his brilliant capacity to describe and respond to art, on his fervent and many-

splendoured style, and on his presence as a platform speaker. But *Unto This Last*, published in 1860 when he was forty-one, was a sally into what many took to be an entirely inappropriate field. Worse than that, by scrutinizing the first principles of laissez-faire economic doctrine and condemning it as injurious, immoral and unscientific, Ruskin was taking on the official ideology of industrial capitalism. He had abandoned his proper subject and forfeited his credibility. 'We will not be preached to death by a mad governess,' cried one reviewer, whose sexist insult says volumes about the Victorian ideology of gender.

But Ruskin believed his radical economics was the logical extension of his work as a critic of art. He had always insisted that great art is moral, and that a nation's art is an index of its moral condition. What, then, could be inferred about the moral condition of industrial England by a glance, not at its art and architecture, but at its slum-ridden cities, its polluted skies, its poisoned streams and ponds, its countryside blighted by coal smoke? So far from producing wealth, the industrial system, in Ruskin's view, had produced impoverishment; as Karl Marx had put it some years before in an unpublished manuscript, capitalism had destroyed man's sensuous relationship to nature. Yet there was a sense in which Britain was 'rich'—in pounds sterling, in manufactures, in machinery and weaponry, in fortunes for a few. Could the economic doctrines that produced such a result truly be called a science of wealth?

So far from producing wealth, the industrial system, in Ruskin's view, had produced impoverishment; as Karl Marx had put it some years before in an unpublished manuscript, capitalism had destroyed man's sensuous relationship to nature.

Ruskin's insight into contradictions like these stemmed from the contradictions embodied in his background. He was born in 1819, the only son of an affluent wine merchant and a pious Evangelical, or what we'd today call a Puritan or a fundamentalist. By the nineteenth century, many British Protestants of the Evangelical variety, noted for its extreme emphasis on ascetic self-discipline, had become prosperous as merchants and manufacturers. The body, the flesh, pleasure, is of the Devil; but worldly prosperity is a sign of Divine favour: Evangelicals held both these beliefs. The contradiction between ascetic religious profession and prosperous business practices became a frequent point of

observation—and the butt of satire for novelists like Dickens and Thackeray. In the Ruskin household, double messages about sensuous pleasure pervaded every aspect of life, including most strikingly the father's interest in collecting art. On weekdays, the Ruskins displayed their new paintings in the well-appointed house in a South London suburb; on Sundays, the same paintings were turned to the wall. Ruskin's mother hoped he would become a bishop; he was expected in any case to become a gentleman; he ended up a critic of art who argued that, as I've indicated, all great art carries a moral sign and ultimately reveals the handiwork of God in the forms of Nature, and the soul of man in the forms of art. But as so often happened in the lives of eminent Victorians, the strict conscience bred into Ruskin at birth developed into a powerful social conscience in the adult. In fact, *Unto This Last* was an attack on the very assumptions that had made the elder Ruskin's financial success—and the younger Ruskin's financial security—possible. In short, the young man who grew up spoiled and pampered became at middle age the impassioned defender of the poor and scolder of the rich. In his iconoclastic political economy, he took the contradictions under which he'd lived and turned them inside out, pitting the gospel of Christ against the gospel of Mammon. In this way, he believed he was being true both to the spirit of Christianity and to the moral potential of his class.

II

According to the Manchester School—to use the common name for orthodox liberal economics in the Victorian period—the poor are always with us, not because Christ said so in an oft-quoted verse from scripture, but because the laws of supply and demand make this condition a certainty in the same sense that Newton's laws of motion are a certainty. The 'iron law of wages' dictated that the greater the level of production the more certain that the level of wages would tend to bare subsistence. Moreover, Thomas Malthus's *Essay on Population* had shown that as the food supply rises arithmetically, the population rises geometrically—which ensures that population will always outrun food supply. Humans, in other words humans and their offspring, are the unwanted effects of prosperity. All humanitarian attempts to mitigate the suffering of the poor during an economic downturn, no matter how well-intentioned, are therefore ultimately destructive, since only the unfettered workings of the market can assure the most efficient allocation of resources and provide the necessary restraint (starvation) on human reproduction. To sell in the dearest market and to buy in the

cheapest is therefore not a form of greed but the only possible rational behaviour; this, of course, is also supposed to produce the best of all possible worlds, since the good of the whole is constituted of the sum of agents acting in their self-interest. Once again, the plausibility of these ideas lay in the strict separation between scientific truth on the one hand and moral considerations on the other. In fact, much of the theory was false. Economists now know that as production increases, the share in the benefits of production tends to accrue to all parties, including labour.

Underlying this conception of economic law is a conception of capitalism as a world of amoral competition—what Marx called the war of all against all. But you didn't have to be a Marxist in mid-nineteenth-century Britain to sense that something was wrong in a nation where workers had little protection against starvation during periods of distress, and where strikes and other forms of unrest forebode a period of increasing class warfare—the war, if not of all against all, the war of rich against poor, of owners against operatives. Industrial unrest reflected the inevitable tendency of capitalism to social anarchy. What's to be done if the doctrines of economics, followed faithfully, lead in the end to anarchy or—worse—to revolution?

In Ruskin's view, liberal economics was a spurious science, a 'so-called' science that could within certain limits advise individuals on how to get rich—but do no more. The science of social wealth, according to Ruskin, does not yet exist because political economy insists that as a science it has no concern with moral questions. The separation between public policy and religion, according to Ruskin, was false and irreligious:

> I know of no previous instance in history of a nation's establishing a systematic disobedience of the first principles of its professed religion. The writings which we (verbally) esteem as divine not only denounce the love of money as the source of all evil . . . but declare Mammon service to be the accurate and irreconcilable opposite of God's service; and whenever they speak of riches absolute, and poverty absolute, declare woe to the rich and blessing to the poor. Whereupon we forthwith investigate a science of becoming rich as the shortest road to national prosperity (Ruskin, pp. 88–89).

The national religion, more accurately, is precisely the separation of two systems of thought, the one secular and 'scientific', the other sacred and other-worldly, with the result that the needs of both body and soul are sacrificed.

The first of Ruskin's four chapters, entitled 'The Roots of Honour', begins by challenging the claim that an economic science is possible that ignores 'the influence of social affection', or what he later calls 'the affections one man owes another'. He invents a grotesque analogy: a science of gymnastics that ignores the skeleton. Such a science, he writes mockingly, might teach us how,

> to roll the students up into pellets, flatten them into cakes, or stretch them into cables; and that when these results were effected, the re-insertion of the skeleton would be attended with various inconveniences to their constitution. The reasoning might be admirable, the conclusions true, and the science deficient only in applicability. Modern political economy stands on a precisely similar basis. Assuming, not that the human being has no skeleton, but that it is all skeleton, it founds an ossifiant theory of progress on the negation of a soul (Ruskin, pp.18–19).

In fact, humans have skeletons; in fact humans as social beings have affections. (You won't be surprised to learn, by the way, that Ruskin had been reading Dickens and in a fascinating footnote, praises Dickens's satirical exaggerations for their essential truth.) What social relationships are based on 'the affections one man owes another'? Ruskin instances a householder and his servants, and an officer and his soldiers—both of whom depend on a loyalty analogous to the love of a father for his sons. Might not a manufacturer and worker be bound by a similar loyalty? This line of thought leads to the explosive question, 'How far [may] the rate of wages be so regulated as not to vary with the demand for labour'? In other words, a question not of economic calculation but of justice: a wage that recognizes the value of the labour and the worker's need for steady employment. No labour that we truly value, he continues, is paid according to the market: the doctor, the clergyman and the soldier, for example, are paid at fixed rates and not according to some sort of lottery or auction. The point is to hire the good workman and pay him well instead of hiring good and bad together and let their wages, by competition, descend to a low common denominator—and then to cement the relation by the bonds of loyalty. In place of the cold-hearted capitalist and the impoverished wage-slave, therefore, Ruskin posits a merchant-manufacturer, as

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honourable in his calling as the soldier or doctor, because he is bound to his workmen as a father to his children.

The second essay, 'The Veins of Wealth', pursues this central question of a just wage. For Ruskin, a 'moral sign' attaches to any accumulation of wealth as strictly as 'a mathematical quantity attends on the algebraic sign attached to it'. If wealth built on slave labour is ruinous, wealth built on a just wage circulates, since the wage can be distributed to another and then another before it is exhausted. Moreover, extremes of wealth and riches sum up to a diminution of social wealth when compared to a more equal share; a just wage, therefore, is the best economics, because wealth is not literally something possessed by an individual—a home, gold, fine paintings—but rather the social relationships lying behind the possessions and in some cases obscured by them. (Marx, as you know, would similarly analyze commodities as fetish objects concealing the contribution of the labourer.) Ruskin's dominant imagery of social wealth is biological: a social body with a healthy circulation, and healthy products valuable because they are produced for the well-being of people. As he puts it at the end of his second chapter, 'Perhaps it may even appear that the persons themselves are the wealth. … In fact, it may be discovered that the true veins of wealth are purple—and not in Rock, but in Flesh—perhaps even that the final outcome and consummation of all wealth is in producing as many as possible full-breathed, bright-eyed, and happy-hearted human creatures' (Ruskin, pp. 60–61). If for Malthus reproduction of the starving is the problem, for Ruskin reproduction of the well-fed is the goal.

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Ruskin's fourth and final essay addresses the ultimate question of value by locating value in life itself. '[T]he prosperity of any nation,' he writes, 'is in exact proportion to the quantity of labour which it spends in obtaining and employing means of life' (Ruskin, p. 117). There are, he says, two kinds of true production: for the Ground and for the Mouth: 'and since production for the Ground is only useful with future hope of harvest, all essential production is for the Mouth; and is fully measured by the Mouth; hence, . . . consumption is the crown of production; and the wealth of a nation is only to be estimated by what it consumes' (Ruskin, p. 121). By uncovering the hidden pun in 'consumption', Ruskin returns the economic term to its primary meaning: eating,

being nourished. The climax of his argument—although it is not the last point made in his book—Ruskin renders in an aphorism all in capitals:

> THERE IS NO WEALTH BUT LIFE. Life, including all its powers of love, of joy, and of admiration. That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man is richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others (Ruskin, pp. 125-26).

In its broadest sense, Ruskin's attack on political economy has evolved into an attack on Puritanism itself—the substitution of the means for the end, a cold abstraction (money) for the pleasure that is an end in itself.

If economic justice can provide the means of abundance for all, the final question to be answered concerns the human relationship to nature. In a remarkable set-piece, he describes the beauty of nature in terms of the human contribution—not the 'sublime' extremes of heat and mountain but the temperate regions that are 'loveliest in habitation':

> The desire of the heart is also the light of the eyes. No scene is continually and untiringly loved, but one rich by joyful human labour; smooth in field, fair in garden; full in orchard; trim, sweet, and frequent in homestead; ringing with voices of vivid existence. . . . As the art of life is learned, it will be found at last that all lovely things are also necessary—the wild flower by the wayside, as well as the tended corn; and the wild birds and creatures of the forest, as well as the tended cattle; because man doth not live by bread only, but also by the desert manna; by every wondrous word and unknowable work of God (Ruskin, p. 134).

As I have mentioned, *Unto This Last* uses bodily imagery to signify a healthy circulation of wealth and an unhealthy one; the latter Ruskin calls 'illth', which equates the meanings of wealth and wellness through a pun. In many of his works, he pictured healthy life as regulated energy, specifically as regulated flow, as in an irrigated countryside or the circulation of the blood; wealth, on the other hand, he depicts in metaphors of golden things (sunshine, treasure, grain). In one of his first published works, the fairy-tale *The King of the Golden River,* he imagined a drought-stricken

valley returned to abundance when the river that nourishes it begins to flow again, once the elfin king who governs it has been appeased by a magical offering. Ruskin understood both images as the reflex of the other: life as a form of energy, wealth as a form of self-possession, or as I called it in my book on Ruskin, 'wealth-life.' The metaphor is also literal, since for him abundance is nothing if not a material condition: adequate food, shelter and clothing, but also, literally, the preservation of nature which, for Ruskin, is always humanized, just as human life is at bottom biological; as we'd say today, the relationship is ecological. Here the art critic and the radical economist, the apparently sundered portions of Ruskin's public career, come together in the celebration of a unified 'art of life'. 'Man does not live by bread alone but also by the desert manna', the food miraculously provided by God for the children of Israel in the desert, traditionally read as the type of God's grace, which Ruskin here allegorizes as the free gift of God, the gift of that which is pleasurable and valuable in itself and what Marx called the full sensuous awareness that would be the final achievement of history. This is the conception that, in years to come, Ruskin would recognize as his essential contribution as a writer.

Can abundance coexist with great fortunes that, Ruskin assumes, have been the goal of political economists up to this point? The answer is: in all likelihood, no, and his final peroration rounds off on the idea of shared abundance by circling back on the Biblical parable that supplied him with his title. He concludes:

> Consider whether, even supposing it guiltless, luxury would be desired by any of us, if we saw clearly at our sides the suffering which accompanies it in the world. Luxury is indeed possible in the future—innocent and exquisite; luxury for all, and by the help of all; but luxury at present can only be enjoyed by the ignorant; the cruelest man living could not sit at his feast, unless he sat blindfold. Raise the veil boldly; face the light; and if, as yet, the light of the eye can only be through tears, and the light of the body through sackcloth, go thou forth weeping, bearing precious seed, until the time come, and the kingdom, when Christ's gift of bread and bequest of peace shall be Unto this last as unto thee. . . (Ruskin, p. 138).

We may hear in these words the guilt of a man who inherited through his father the fruit of anonymous labour in the vineyards of Spain (the elder Ruskin was an importer of sherry); we also see the means of redeeming that guilt. In the parable of

The parable allegorizes Christ's promise of the kingdom of heaven to all his followers, including those who convert at the end of their lives, and who in that sense receive 'pay' equal to that of the first disciples. But part of Ruskin's aim in the book is to give scripture a material meaning, even as he gives economics a moral meaning.

Christ that gives Ruskin his title, the owner of a vineyard hires labourers to complete his harvest; near the end of the day, a labourer signs on who works only for an hour. To the disappointment of those who came first, the master pays everyone the same, including the last to arrive; he justifies his payment in these words: 'Friend, I do thee no wrong. Didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way. I will give unto this last even unto thee.' The parable allegorizes Christ's promise of the kingdom of heaven to all his followers, including those who convert at the end of their lives, and who in that sense receive 'pay' equal to that of the first disciples. But part of Ruskin's aim in the book is to give scripture a material meaning, even as he gives economics a moral meaning. A just wage, we might say, is not just the right thing to do, it's also the only way to create social wealth. At the same time, of course, the three-word extract from the master's speech harkens back to another Christian principle—the equality of all souls before God.

Ruskin's reading of the gospel would seem to make him a deep-dyed socialist, if not a communist; yet he consistently maintained that equality is an impossibility: his aim, he tells us elsewhere, is always 'to show the continual superiority of some men to others', and to insist on the need to appoint 'such person or persons to guide, to lead, and even on occasion to compel and subdue, their inferiors, according to their own better knowledge and wiser will' (p. 87). How, then, does he imagine the radical changes he advocates in *Unto This Last*? I've already pointed out that Ruskin tends to think of the unit of wealth as an individual merchant or employer who supervises labour and pays a just wage, and the object of his address (you, your) is always a person presumed to have the power to hire. His oblique answer to the crisis of industrial strife is therefore a moral reformation beginning with the individual and spreading to the class, primarily of wealth-givers, who, in distributing 'unto this last', may be called to a life of modest sacrifice. In other words, his distributive economics rests on a maintenance of class power, transformed from selfishness to altruism. Like others of his class, he had no way of imagining independent self-motivated action on the part of the working class; for him, the alternative to benevolent rule by the producers was anarchy.

Unto This Last, then, is essentially an attack on the commodification of labour—the insistence that wages must always follow the movement of scarcity enshrined in the 'laws' of supply and demand—that also attacks the alienation of the resultant industrial economy from nature's economy of cyclical reproduction and nourishment. Since true production is for the earth and the mouth, Ruskin is able to oppose the imagery of healthy humans, golden fields and flowing water to the imagery of sick and starving humans, filth, stagnation, bombs and bullets. His book is not, properly speaking, a contribution to economics as a science but an attempt to imagine what one might call a moral economy, a vision of human possibility rooted in specific values and historical conditions.

Ruskin is able to oppose the imagery of healthy humans, golden fields and flowing water to the imagery of sick and starving humans, filth, stagnation, bombs and bullets. His book is not, properly speaking, a contribution to economics as a science but an attempt to imagine what one might call a moral economy, a vision of human possibility rooted in specific values and historical conditions.

But what would happen to the factory system in this ideal economy—the system that, according to Ruskin, thrives upon the commodification of labour?

The answer to the question rests on the third object of attack in Ruskinian economics, which is the alienation of labour in the factory system. Here, I believe, is where he comes closest to Gandhi's thought—not in this book, however, but in an earlier work, the great essay 'The Nature of Gothic'. There, Ruskin depicted the factory worker as a pure extension of machinery, a human whose whole soul is focused on a single, repetitive action. By contrast, he represented unalienated labour in the figure of the medieval stonemason, whose work was not mechanical but expressive, and whose creative identity survives in the sculptures of the great cathedrals. (Characteristic of his style of organization, Ruskin buried his profoundest remarks on capitalist labour relations in the middle of a treatise on Gothic architecture, in the middle of a moral-artistic history of Venice, *The Stones of Venice* [1856].) In other words, art stands at the opposite end of mechanism in the spectrum of unalienated and alienated labour; for him, the model of unalienated labour is the expressivity of art, while art is a form of labour or craft. Thus, his career as a critic of architecture and design prepared him to write about labour, since his conception of labour points inevitably to a form of craft, where a healthy standard of living combines with work that is expressive of the whole person.

But how can handicrafts survive the era of industrial production when labour is but a single repetitive action on an assembly line? Ruskin never squarely faces this problem. If his utopian model of labour relations looks back to an idealized feudal age, and if his imagery is predominantly agricultural and natural, he avoids calling for the abolition of factories. Yet in works like 'The Nature of Gothic', Ruskin inspired among Englishmen of a younger generation a passionate attempt to revive both the practice and the aesthetic standards of a lost era of craft production. I'm referring to his great disciple William Morris, the utopian socialist and designer, among others, who founded the Arts and Crafts movement in England and the US. Morris, you may know, took his inspiration from the handcrafted textiles he'd seen imported from India. It's time to turn our eyes beyond British shores—to Gandhi.

III

In his autobiography, Gandhi noted that *Unto This Last* had taught him three things in particular: '(1) The good of the individual is contained in the good of all. (2) A lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work. (3) A life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is the life worth living' (Gandhi, *Autobiography*, p. 365). It's time now to turn briefly to *Sarvodaya,* or rather, to the English re-translation of *Unto This Last,* which is my source. *Sarvodaya* is subtitled 'a paraphrase', and if my translation is a good indication, that work combined close translations from the English of Ruskin with summaries in Gandhi's own words, along with a brief conclusion addressed to the Indian reader. In other words, Gandhi gave his readers something of what I've just given you today: direct quotations combined with paraphrase and commentary. (To be clear: Ruskin's English *Unto This Last* [1860] was converted by a combination of translation and paraphrase into Gujarati in 1909 under a title that can be translated into English as 'The Welfare of All'; I'm quoting from an English re-transcription of Ruskin combined with a translation of Gandhi's paraphrases and conclusion. I cannot evaluate Gandhi's Gujarati translation.) As Dr. Ganguli points out in his helpful comparison of the two thinkers, Gandhi already knew the first of the three principles he listed; the second he would have found in a footnote;

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the third does not appear directly in Ruskin, and indeed Ruskin does not hold, as Gandhi did, that the life of the farmer and the handicraftsman is the preferred lifestyle for all (Ganguli, chapter 3). How else has Gandhi translated Ruskin's ideas?

As Dr. Ganguli points out in his helpful comparison of the two thinkers, Gandhi already knew the first of the three principles he listed; the second he would have found in a footnote; the third does not appear directly in Ruskin, and indeed Ruskin does not hold, as Gandhi did, that the life of the farmer and the handicraftsman is the preferred lifestyle for all.

His brief introduction to the paraphrase begins: 'People in the West generally hold that the whole duty of man is to promote the happiness of the majority of mankind, and happiness is supposed to mean only physical happiness and economic prosperity. If the laws of morality are broken in the conquest of this happiness, it does not matter very much' (Gandhi, *Selected Works*, IV, p. 41). But to violate morality is 'contrary to divine law', which is the lesson Gandhi attributes to Ruskin. He does not find it necessary to comment more fully on the moral sense, which he calls 'an essential ingredient in all the faiths of the world'; outside of religion, 'our commonsense indicates the necessity of our observing the moral law'. The first sentence paraphrases utilitarianism, the philosophical extension of laissez-faire economics; the goal of that ethical system—'the greatest good of the greatest number'—in fact leaves many poor behind. It will take much more than a free market to ensure the welfare of all, and that at its most succinct is the problem both Ruskin and Gandhi pose for themselves.

And so Ruskin's book, he writes in his conclusion, 'has a lesson for Indians no less than for Englishmen'. 'Our young men who have received Western education are full of spirit,' he continues. 'This spirit should be directed into the right channels, as otherwise it can only do us harm'. 'Let us have swaraj' is one slogan; 'let us industrialize the country' is another. The problem with the first is that independence in itself does not confer virtue, as he shows by instancing Natal and the Transvaal: 'Thus Swaraj is not enough to make a nation happy. What would be the result of Swaraj being conferred on a band of robbers?' The answer appears in the conclusion Gandhi wrote to his own translation:

> Swaraj really means self-control. Only he is capable of self-control who observes the rules of morality, does not cheat or give up truth, and does his duty to his

parents, wife and children, servants and neighbours. Such a man is in enjoyment of Swaraj, no matter where he lives. A state enjoys Swaraj if it can boast of a large number of such good citizens. . . .

If Swaraj cannot be attained by the killing of Englishmen, it cannot be attained either by the erection of huge factories. Gold and silver may be accumulated but they will not lead to the establishment of Swaraj. Ruskin has proved this to the hilt. Western civilization is only a baby a hundred or only fifty years old. And yet it has reduced Europe to a sorry plight. Let us pray that India is saved from the fate that has taken over Europe, where the nations are poised for an attack on one another, and are silent only because of the stockpiling of armaments. Some day there will be an explosion, and then Europe will be a veritable hell on earth. Non-white races are looked upon as legitimate prey by every European state. What else can we expect where covetousness is the ruling passion in the breasts of men? Europeans pounce upon new territories like crows upon a piece of meat. I am inclined to think that this is due to their mass-production factories.

India must indeed have Swaraj but she must have it by righteous methods. Our Swaraj must be real Swaraj, which cannot be attained by either violence or industrialization. India was once a golden land, because Indians then had hearts of gold. The land is still the same but it is a desert because we are corrupt. It can become a land of gold again only if the base metal of our present national character is transmuted into gold. The philosopher's stone which can effect this transformation is a little word of two syllables—Satya (*Truth*). If every Indian sticks to truth, swaraj will come of its own accord (Gandhi, *Selected Works* IV, pp. 78–80).

The intellectual encounter between Ruskin and Gandhi may be summed up in relationship to a crisis in European modernity. In exploiting and finally conquering the greater portion of the non-Western world, Europeans were able to flatter themselves that to the ignorance, superstition and despotism of the East they were bringing true (Christian) civilization. Instead, industrialism had produced a new state of society indistinguishable from war. Ruskin similarly saw the future of England in terms of life against death—either the production of life (happy and healthy human beings) or the production of death (bombs and guns, the figurative or literal sign of internecine warfare). They both advocated a non-violent, spiritual revolution that would transcend class warfare; but Ruskin's

agrarian imagery takes us back to the pre-industrial age, to a utopian image hovering ambiguously between the world of the future and the world of the dreamed-of past. Gandhi draws on Ruskin's imagery of gold to re-imagine an idyllic future in the clothing of the past, but he goes beyond Ruskin, calling for the end of machines, railroads, lawyers, doctors and hospitals, and a return in essence to the agrarian life of the village—a programme, in the strict sense of the word, of reaction. 'We will continue to have millions of poor,' he notes in *Hind Swaraj*. Ruskin's emphasis not just on subsistence but on all the pleasures of life, including beauty, is one element missing from Gandhi's redaction. India too needs a principle of social unity that, as Gandhi puts it, would save her from the suicidal fate Europe was approaching in 1908. His imagining of Swaraj after the exit of the British is as free of class conflict as Ruskin's utopia of Christian benevolence, and the guarantee is moral rather than institutional or structural—that is, based on a moral commonsense that all the great religions share. This moral commonsense results for Gandhi in an egalitarianism far beyond what Ruskin could countenance. 'The good of the individual is contained in the good of all', Gandhi summarizes. Ruskin's actual words are different. The scriptural text represented in his title reads: 'I will give unto this last even unto thee'. He also wrote: 'That man is richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others.' After his father's death, Ruskin spent his entire fortune on travelling, writing, and various philanthropical enterprises, including the agrarian community he called 'St. George's Guild'—not unlike the ashram Gandhi founded at Phoenix, outside of Durban in South Africa.

But Ruskin did not strip down to peasant garb as Gandhi did. After his return to India, the Mahatma's self-identification with the whole took the form of identifying with 'this last', which was always the least: the untouchable, the starving villager, the victim of violence. So Gandhi's sense of identification with 'this last' is immeasurably more profound than Ruskin's—and that's what comes closest, in my reading, to the moral transformation that Ruskin tries to induce in his readers, that will combat the anarchic and murderous tendencies of unbridled greed. The worst of those tendencies, as I've noted, produces the human being as a commodity, exposing him and her to social isolation and bareness hardly sustainable to life. And here, I believe, we come to one place where Ruskin and Gandhi continue to speak to our contemporary economic crisis. In 1944, Karl Polanyi pointed out:

Indian masses in the second half of the nineteenth century did not die of hunger because they were exploited by Lancashire, they perished in large numbers because the Indian village community had been demolished. . .. The three or four large famines that decimated India under British rule since the Rebellion were thus neither a consequence of the elements, nor of exploitation, but simply of the new market organization of labour and land which broke up the old village without actually resolving its problems . . . .Under the rule of the market the people could not be prevented from starving according to the rules of the game (Polanyi, p. 143).

A decade before Polanyi wrote this description, the United States passed into law the legislation known by the nickname 'the New Deal'; in a few more years, Western Europe would elect social democratic governments that would similarly ensure the right of collective bargaining as well as the other guarantees of the welfare state—unemployment insurance, social security, health care, poverty relief. Nehru's India was of course the largest of the world's experiments in social democracy of this sort. A worldwide economic boom brought prosperity, if not to all, then certainly to more than had shared it in previous human history. But that was then. Since that time, the world has been swept by a new doctrine, or an old doctrine in new clothing—a 'neo' liberalism that purports to bring wealth, not just to the greatest number but, if we're patient enough, to all, and not just in a single nation but to the globe. Writing just four years ago, David Harvey notes that the commodification of labour and land are once again the driving mechanism of neo-liberalism, such that a new figure has emerged to symbolize the international economy, the figure of the disposable worker. What has taken the place of the old communities that used to sustain the workforce that is now set loose to wander across borders and regions? Harvey writes: 'Everything from gangs and criminal cartels, narco-trafficking networks, mini-military and favela bosses, through community, grassroots and non-governmental organizations, to secular cults and religious sects proliferate. These are the alternative social forms that fill the void left behind as state powers, political parties, and other institutional forms are actively dismantled or simply wither away as centres of collective endeavour and social bonding' (Harvey, p. 171). In insisting that there is no wealth but life, and that the only economics worth its name is the one that extends the blessings of wealth to all, even the least and the last, Ruskin poses the same challenge to us today that he posed to the Manchester School 150 years ago. And by insisting that the good of the individual

is contained in the good of all—indeed, is bound up with the fate of the poorest, the most despised, the most oppressed—Gandhi brings us an even greater challenge.

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