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## UNIT 6 MEANS AND ENDS

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### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

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One of the major concerns of Gandhi's discourse on the relationship between ends and means flows from its centrality of his entire edifice which means that it is not merely a question of an instrument. An interesting postulate of social action is the ultimate elimination of conflict which means eliminating the factors that create a conflict situation. Since, in the process of resolution of conflict, there is neither a winner nor a loser as in the case of a war or a settlement arrived at by use of brutal force, this framework provides the blueprint for lasting peace. This also means that peace is intrinsically linked to non-violent action and a commitment of resolution of conflict only by peaceful means. As such, non-violence ceases to be a negative concept and has a positive dimension in the context of peaceful evolution of society. This leads to the exposition of the emergence of a compassionate individual which tries to bridge the gulf between two important factors: compassion and non-violence. This synthesis eliminates any need for revolutionary violence and creates a situation of continuous co-relationship between means and ends. Bringing the question of morality and ethics as the core to understand the importance of this crucial relationship between a particular activity, to lead to a particular redress ultimately has a larger ramification in the context of the universal ethical content of any such local act. This also means that the moral force by itself will make it totally redundant the issue of a conflict between ends and means as the unfoldment of the non-violent mass struggle will itself lead to the logical culmination of reaching a larger ethical point. Gandhi's experiments with truth in itself is an indication of this kind of an activity which is conducive to the larger framework of an ethical code. This also leads to another interesting innovation in Gandhi with his doctrine of relative truth and suspicion of any kind of determinism. For him non-violence is a method and not merely a rule book or prescription. This was a deliberate act on the part of Gandhi because when he was requested to prepare a manual of non-violence being a guide to action he refused as he laid emphasis on the primacy of the method being a technique in its rudimentary and tentative sense and could not be reduced to a doctrine or a set of rules. It is because of the initiation of a major change in the mechanism of resolution of conflict from wars to non-violent resolutions he was categorical that the ethical content can never be diluted.

## Aims and Objectives

After reading this unit, you would be able to:

- Understand the meaning of the concept of ends and means.
- Discuss how Ahimsa can be a tool towards Swaraj.
- Examine Gandhi's views on the importance of ends and means.

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## 6.2 CONFLICT AND ITS RESOLUTION

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The concept of ends-means relationship is the core of Gandhi's social philosophy and conflict resolution. For Gandhi, means and ends are inextricably linked that ends justifies the means and that "an end which requires unjust means is not a just end". In the *Hind Swaraj* (1909) the Editor tells the Reader, who argues in favour of the forcible overthrow of the British rule in India: "Your belief that there is no connection between the means and the end is a great mistake. Through that mistake even men who have been considered religious have committed grievous crimes. Your reasoning is the same as saying that we can get a rose through planting a noxious weed. If I want to cross the ocean, I can do so only by means of a vessel; if I were to use a cart for that purpose, both the cart and I would soon find the bottom.... The means may be likened to a seed, the end of a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree. I am not likely to obtain the result flowing from the worship of God by laying myself prostrate before Satan....We reap exactly as we sow". Impure means would result in impure end. Justice could not be secured through unjust means; freedom could not be obtained through unfair means and peace could not be realised by war. Gandhi also stresses on the close link between the notions of right and duty; to insist on one and forget the other is a redundant argument.

Gandhi rejects the idea that ends justify the means, a notion which Kautilya and Machiavelli endorsed in the context of self-preservation and of the *raison d'etat*'. To restrict the choice of means on grounds of expediency rather than principle would be unacceptable to Gandhi. Any means is fine for the attainment of power, which in turn is employed for higher ends, is an argument which Machiavelli espouses but what Machiavelli forgets is that attainment and maintenance of power becomes an end in itself.

Marxism too is not rigid on the notion of ends and means as it rejects supra-historic morality and categorical imperatives, both religious and secular. Engels and Lenin justify the use of any means to realise the desired end. In his pamphlet *Socialism and War*, Lenin points out that the Marxists differ from the pacifists and anarchists in their belief that the justification of each war must be seen individually in relation to its historical role and its consequences<sup>1</sup>. Means could be justified with reference to the historical end it serves. Trotsky, unlike Engels and Lenin, emphasises on the dialectical interdependence of means and ends and underlines that the means chosen are those that are likely to lead to human liberation<sup>2</sup>. For Trotsky, ends do not justify the means but that means could be justified only by its end, which for him, is the increase of the power of man over nature and the end of the power of one over the other. For Gandhi, the end is *satya* or truth which requires no justification and the means- *ahimsa* or non-violence must be justified not only with reference to the end but also in itself. Every act must be justified with reference to *satya* and *ahimsa*.

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### 6.3 PURITY OF ENDS AND MEANS

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Iyer notes that Gandhi not only completely rejects the dichotomy which is established between ends and means but also insists on the use of right and/or moral means to the extent that they, rather than the ends provide the standard of reference. The relationship between means and ends is not a technical one but an ethical one, one that involves choice which requires an initial decision about the desired end and the obligatory acceptance of whatever steps are necessary to secure it or most likely to do so. He constantly emphasises that evil means could never lead to good ends. Noble and good ends could never be attained by evil and/or immoral means. Guided by his belief in the law of *Karma* he underlines the organic interdependence between means and ends. He also stresses on the fact that individuals have control over the means but not over the end.

Gandhi's conception of ends and means ought to be also understood in the context of his insistence that all of us are bearers of relative truth and none can stake a claim to know absolute truth or *sat*. As bearers of relative truth we know our version and that *satya* or truth would appear differently to different people, in the same manner as the five blind persons who held to different parts of an elephant; each knew his version but far removed from the totality of reality. If there are disagreements about ends it is because human beings are creatures of relative truth. The concept of relative truth and the factual have a common concern for truth that led Gandhi to insist on *ahimsa* or non-violence towards one another. A seeker of truth or *satya* is a practitioner of non-violence or *ahimsa*. Iyer also observes that Gandhi's "concept of *satya*, with *ahimsa* as the means, determined his doctrine of *satyagraha* or active resistance to authority, while the concept of *ahimsa*, with *satya* as the common end, enabled him to formulate his doctrine of *sarvodaya* or non violent socialism". Iyer's further explanation deserves to be quoted as follows: Writing an introduction to Ruskin's *Unto This Last* Gandhi states that "the *polis* is nothing more or less than the domain in which all men are free to gain skill in the art of action and learn how to exemplify *satya* and *ahimsa*; the means in which both the individual quest could be furthered and social virtues displayed among the masses of citizens in a climate of tolerance and civility; a morally progressive society in which neither the State nor any social organisation is allowed to flout with impunity the sacred principle that every man is entitled to his relative truth and no one can claim the right to coerce another, to treat him as a means to his own end" (cited in Iyer, *Ibid*, p.371).

Gandhi's view on the close link between means and ends is also influenced by the idea of dispassionate action which the *Bhagavad Gita* advocates. Unless one's action is performed with a degree of detachment one would not be free from the anxiety of its future consequences. He contends "if we are sure of the 'purity' of the means we employ, we shall be led on by the faith, before which any fear and trembling melt away". Non-attachment does not mean lack of clarity about the ends one desires to achieve.

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### 6.4 AHIMSA AS THE MEANS TO REALISE SWARAJ

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Gandhi places the end of *swaraj* and points out that its realisation would depend on the adoption of the right means. He insists on the need to focus on the selection of means keeping in view only a broad image and a sense of direction regarding the end, the attainment of *swaraj*. Like Aldous Huxley, Gandhi believes that a corrupt means does not fail to corrupt the end. Like Tolstoy, Gandhi observes that once violence is injected into non-violence, the latter would become superfluous and cease to be a guide for life.

Regarding the means of non-violence, Gandhi says 'if we seek it first everything else shall be added unto us'. Both are convinced that with non-violence it is possible to overwhelm all governments resting on violence, all wars and all coercive institutions, as non-violence works as a dynamic force. Gene Sharp identifies 125 methods of non-violent action and classifies them into three categories: non-violent protest, non-cooperation and non-violent intervention. "Non violent resistance and direct action", according to Sharp, "refers to those methods of resistance and direct action without physical violence in which members of the non violent group perform either: (1) *acts of omission* that is, they refuse to perform acts which they usually perform, and are expected by custom, or are required by law or regulation to perform; or (2) *acts of commission-* that is, they insist on performing acts which they usually do not perform, or not expected by custom to perform, or are forbidden by law or regulation from performing, or (3) both". These methods are extra-constitutional as they do not rely upon established procedures of the state for achieving their objectives.

Gandhi considers non-violence as an all-pervasive and eternal Principle "applicable to every situation in life without any exception'. The practice of non-violence requires moral discipline that would control passions and emotions. Non-violence consists in allowing others the 'maximum of convenience at the maximum of inconvenience' to the self and therefore a *satyagrahi* must be ready to embrace self-suffering and self-effacement. Gandhi pleads for voluntary poverty, voluntary simplicity and voluntary suffering as that would free the soul from the bondage of the material body. He insists that real endurance comes from physical discipline and suffering. He stresses on voluntary poverty and set a personal example as he endeavoured to identify himself with the most vulnerable, marginalised and the poorest. He considers it as necessary for fostering the welfare of the soul and the happiness of the mass of people. He regards voluntary poverty as a moral and patriotic duty. Voluntary simplicity is needed to minimise the greed that exists among human beings and sees greed as the 'root of most of the major political problems. Voluntary suffering would purify the soul and intellect. There are no limits to non-violence'.

Like Newman, Gandhi insists that one step is enough for him. He insists that if rightful means are used, the attainment of the end is assured and he considers non-violence as opposed to violence as the rightful means to winning India's freedom. He prefers non-violence to violence and violence to non-violent act born of cowardice which he regards as negative violence. Mere absence of force is not non-violence. He regarded violence as the outcome of weakness, moral impotence and intolerance to views and opinions of others. He considers non-violence as a value and that society must actively seek elimination of conflict. Peace is possible only with non-violence. This implies that non-violence has no instrumental value as it has a positive content, namely a non-acquisitive, non-exploitative and an egalitarian society. For Gandhi, non-violence represents heightened compassion. It is the bridge between means and ends; as a means it prepares the way for the realisation of non-violence as a comprehensive end that ends all conflict.

Gandhi is concerned with the ethical purity of means. He contrasts between his conception of non-violent resistance and pacifism. Merely not offering to perform military service is not enough. It is superficial and different from non-cooperation with the system which supports the state. This proves that Gandhi is not interested in symbolic protest or an action which is purely transitory without resolving the basic question of the basis of the state which is intrinsically linked with coercive powers. Gandhi, as a philosophical anarchist, is sceptical of the very existence of the state as a repressive apparatus. He is looking not merely at the philosophy of resistance of a localised and sporadic nature but rather he wants a more lasting framework to emerge on building a non-violent model of resistance and social

change. A state can be effectively demilitarised by non-payment of taxes than pacifist courting of imprisonment. The latter would be effective if it is done on a mass basis. He considers non-violence as the most active force, as the 'supreme law', 'omnipotent', 'infinite and synonymous with God'. Non-violence as means affects and elevates the end. He rejects passive resistance as a policy as it hides weakness and potential violence is not the right means to achieve the desired end. He opposes supine helplessness involved in non-resistance to evil.

This position is of fundamental nature in understanding Gandhi's conception as being committed to a large majoritarian perception of social change he knew that its success is linked to the adherence of its principles by the active participants who, by their acts of sacrifice, courage and determination, would become the role models to motivate others to join the emancipatory collectivist stand. He knew the task itself was a stupendous one and reflected on it in 1922 when violence erupted during a mass civil disobedience which he was spearheading at that time. Even the towering presence of the Mahatma proved insufficient to control the violent elements. He was well aware of the fact that the cyclical order of violence leading to more violence had to be contained and was categorical in his assertion that "civil disobedience is never followed by anarchy. Criminal disobedience can lead to it. Every state puts down criminal disobedience with force. It perishes, if it does not. But to put down civil disobedience is an attempt to imprison conscience". This motivated Gandhi to move away from his large-scale mobilisation of people terming it as a 'Himalayan blunder' and advised that in a situation like this, "aggressive civil disobedience should be confined to the vindication of the right of free speech and right of free association".

For Gandhi, the important thing is to get the people to do what they ought to do without offering inducements or threats or theological sanctions. Human beings acquire moral precepts only by acting on it or reflecting on it through their actions. "A person often becomes what he believes himself to be. A man who broods on evil is as bad as a man who does evil if he is not worse.... He who is not prepared to order his life in unquestioning obedience to the laws of morality cannot be said to be a man in the full sense of the word". At the same time Gandhi also believes in the indomitable nature of the human spirit and that no person could be made to do something against one's will. For a person to become irresistible and for his actions to have all-pervasive influence it is important that a person reduces himself to a zero.

Writing in 1947, Gandhi says: "passive resistance as a policy is the second best alternative. At least it minimises loss of life, disruption and demoralisation when it is an unequal battle. At least it limits the chain reaction of violence and preserves the humane character of society as a concept and as an assumption". He is categorical that non-violence can succeed only when (a) the participants practice non-violence strictly; otherwise the combination of violence and non-violence, even tactically speaking fails, because the entire weight of repression comes down on everyone, in the name of averting anarchy; (b) repression and suffering alienate an increasing number of people who join the group of non-violent resisters; (c) the methods of non-violent action are chosen in such a way that the economic or civil disruption caused by it do not alienate large numbers of people from non-violent action.

Alinsky<sup>3</sup> points that the Mahatma's "use of passive resistance in India presents a striking example of the selection of means". As an activist the most important consideration for Gandhi is the means that are available. Asserting that "if he (Gandhi) had the guns he might well have used them" he quotes from Gandhi's autobiography *My Experiments with Truth* to prove his point. Giving the example from Punjab, Gandhi writes "as I proceeded further

and further with my enquiry into the atrocities that had been committed on the people, I came across tales of government tyranny and the arbitrary despotism of its officers such as I was hardly prepared for, and they filled me with deep pain. What surprised me then, and what still continues to fill me with surprise was the fact that the province that had furnished the largest number of soldiers to the British government during the war, should have taken all the brutal excesses lying down". The other example is Gandhi's severe indictment of the British to what he considered "the four fold disaster of our country". This included compulsory disarmament which "spiritually... has made us unmanly and the presence of an alien army of occupation, employed with deadly effect to crush in us the spirit of resistance, had made us think we cannot look after ourselves or put up a defence against foreign aggression or even defend our homes and families".

Gandhi was merely making an assessment of the Indian situation and in this there was a great deal of affinity between his views with the other nationalist leaders. The many reasons that were given included general weakness, non-availability of arms and general submissiveness which Gandhi mentions in the *Hind Swaraj* (1909). Nehru describes the Hindus of that period as "a demoralized, timid, and hopeless mass bullied and crushed by every dominant interest and incapable of resistance". Gandhi himself charged the British for making the Indians unmanly. As such, Alinsky argues that "if Gandhi had the guns form violent resistance and the people to use them this means would not have been unreservedly rejected as the world would like to think".

To reinforce his argument, Alinsky quotes Nehru after India's independence. When Nehru had to use military power in Kashmir against Pakistan, he had lot of worries about the possible opposition from the Mahatma but he did not and Nehru wrote that "it strengthened my view, that Gandhi could be adaptable". In fact Gandhi himself acknowledged that majority of his followers accepted his leadership and principles more out of convenience rather than conviction. However, all great leaders invoke higher moral principles because "all effective actions require the passport of morality". This also means that the end must be expressed in a generalised manner like liberty, equality and fraternity. But the fact remains that in the context of means and ends there are no well laid out universal principles about the means and ends, but only an analysis of the important dictum that a particular end justifies a particular means.

Alinsky quotes from Orwell to justify his claim that Gandhi's method of non-violent mass action was time and country-specific and has no chance of succeeding in totalitarian regimes. This view is endorsed by Mandela. However, what Alinsky ignores is the fact that for Gandhi, the non-violent mass action was a substitute for war for ending human conflict. Gandhi never perceived a conflict-free world but only envisaged a world where the conflict between the haves and the have-nots would be resolved much more amicably than at the present. His favourite example was the British Suffragists who, through a protracted struggle for more than a century, achieved universal adult suffrage in Britain which slowly changed the elite view of democracy being a bad thing till the nineteenth century to becoming good in the twentieth century. Gandhi, through his life's work, was trying to demonstrate that a co-relationship between the means and ends may be achieved at a distant future. As a practical idealist, he reminded the world that he was a believer in the maxim of one step at a time.

Alinsky misses this larger framework of Gandhi which will always remain the ideal type, whereas, all other considerations of particular means for particular ends will be locally and

narrowly based, reflecting aberrations and fault lines, rather than moving towards an optimistic and also realistic framework of resolving conflicts anywhere in the world peacefully.

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## 6.5 CONCLUSION

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Gandhi sees the relationship between ends and means as between a seed and the tree and consistently underlines the close and intimate link between the two. The end lies in the means just as the tree is within the seed. He regards 'means and end as convertible terms in my philosophy of life. We have always control over the means but not over the end'. Means are everything. Gandhi does not segregate means and ends and insists that in all spheres of life, including politics, we reap exactly as we sow.

Gandhi also emphasises that for achieving one's ends there is a need for dispassionate action and a degree of detachment. If the means employed are pure then the fear and anxiety about the result would evaporate. Unconcern about the result does not mean lack of clarity about the end. While the cause has to be just and clear, so must the means and also the recognition that impure means would lead to impure ends; truth cannot be attained through untruthful means; justice cannot be secured through unjust measures; freedom cannot be obtained through tyrannical methods, socialism cannot be realised through enmity and coercion and war cannot lead to enduring peace. Gandhi categorically rejects the notion of ends justify the means and asserts that moral means is an end in itself because virtue is its own reward.

For means to be pure, Gandhi also insists that the human soul has to be devoid of all impurities and for attaining purity he recommends fasting and prayer. Gandhi stresses on the purity of means as he finds God in the whole world. He chooses non-violence and *satyagraha* as the means for realising *swaraj* and categorically rules out its realisation through bloodshed and violence. He desires a social transformation through change in the character of individuals. In 1942 Gandhi reminded that 'country's will to freedom must not be paralysed by the 'dread of violence'. I am convinced that we are living today in a state of ordered anarchy.... This should go.... I should like to believe, that 20 years of continuous effort at educating India along the lines of non violence will not have gone in vain and the people will evolve order out of chaos'. Gandhi is the lone voice among the social and political thinkers to firmly reject the rigid dichotomy between the ends and means and in his extreme preoccupation with the means, to the extent that they, rather than the ends become the benchmark for judging action.

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## 6.6 SUMMARY

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A major concern of Gandhi's discourse on the relationship between ends and means flows from its centrality of his entire edifice which means that it is not merely a question of an instrument. An interesting postulate of social action is the ultimate elimination of conflict which means eliminating the factors that create a conflict situation. Since in the process of the resolution of conflict, there is neither a winner nor a loser as in the case of a war or a settlement arrived at by use of brutal force, this framework provides the blueprint for lasting peace. This also means that peace is intrinsically linked to non-violent action and a commitment of resolution of conflict only by peaceful means. As such, non-violence ceases to be a negative concept and has a positive dimension in the context of peaceful evolution of society. For Gandhi, means and ends are inextricably linked. Gandhi's conception of ends and means ought to be understood also in the context of his insistence that all of us are

bearers of relative truth and none can stake a claim to know the absolute truth. Gandhi places the end of *swaraj* and points out that its realisation would depend on the adoption of the right means, the adoption of *ahimsa*. Gandhi considers non-violence as an all-pervasive and eternal principle and the practice of non-violence requires moral discipline that would control passions and emotions. He emphasises self-suffering and moral discipline to become a non-violent *satyagrahi* and recommends voluntary poverty, voluntary simplicity and voluntary suffering as the key to attain this moral discipline. He also stresses on purity of means for realising the end.

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## 6.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

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1. How does Gandhi understand conflict and what are the means to resolve conflict?
2. Why does Gandhi insist on purity of means for realising the end?
3. What is the link between *ahimsa* and *swaraj*?

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## SUGGESTED READINGS

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**(Endnotes)**

<sup>1</sup> Lenin writes in the pamphlet: There have been many wars in history which, notwithstanding all the horrors, cruelties, miseries and tortures, inevitably connected with every war, had a progressive character, i.e. they served in the development of mankind, aiding in the destruction of extremely pernicious and reactionary institutions... or helping to remove the most barbarous despotism in Europe.

<sup>2</sup> "...not all means are permissible. When we say that the end justifies the means then for us the conclusion follows that the great revolutionary end spurns those bad means and ways which set one part of the working class against other parts, or attempt to make the masses happy without their participation, or lower the faith of the masses in themselves and their organisation, replacing it by the worship of the leaders".

<sup>3</sup> Saul D. Alinsky (1909-72), a social activist of the United States organised the poor and the underprivileged as citizens, to get their social and political rights, mainly in and around Chicago to begin with, and then spreading the movement to the rest of the US and was jailed many times during his long years of struggle, analyses the problems of the relationship between ends and means both from a pragmatic and strategic terms. He links it to the resources available and the various choices one has in a given situation. In this choice the important consideration is the achievability and the cost involved and the question of means arises in the context of if it could be pursued successfully. In the context of means and ends, Alinsky is flexible enough to argue that the process of life and social strife is complicated, corrupt and violent and in this context, a practical revolutionary is to ask the question as to what particular kind of means will bring about salvation in a particular situation. To discuss the entire ethics of means and ends without linking it to real life experience would be sterile. Such discussions are by and large onlookers and are not faced with the actual organisational problems of real action. Their debate centres around a hypothetical and non-existent situation and the entire end result that "the means-and-end moralists, are non-doers always wind up on their ends without any means". The ethics of the means normally leads to a situation where such moralists stand with the haves and not with the have-nots. Alinsky places them along with the allies of the haves. Remarkably succinctly, he says "the most unethical of all means is the non-use of any means". On the basis of this action-oriented philosophy, Alinsky provides a number of rules to resolve the apparent conflict between the ethics of ends and means. One important consideration is one's involvement and interest and also the presence and absence of the debater from the scene of action. The second depends on the political position of all those who sit on judgement. The example that he provides in the context of the supporters and opponents of Nazi resistance and whether they were selfless or patriotic or courageous persons depended on which side of the conflict they were. The third rule in a war situation, where the end virtually justifies any means and here he argues that the Geneva conventions of treatment of prisoners or nuclear weapons are observed only because there is probability of retaliation. The fourth aspect that judgement made must be in the context of the time of the event and the action required is elasticity, as flexibility is one of the basic requirements of decision making at a particular time of crisis. Alinsky gives the example of Lincoln's suspension of Habeas Corpus which meant defying a directive of the Chief Justice of the United States and the illegal use of military commissions to try civilians, which was in total variance, to what Lincoln did in a similar situation earlier on where he categorically said laws must be religiously observed. Another example is of Jefferson who was critical of Washington for basing his policies only on national self-interest instead of world interest. But when he assumed the office of the President his policies were solely decided on national interest. The fifth rule is where there is a large number of means available in that situation use the method which is the most effective. The cardinal principle here is "ethics is doing what is best for the most". The sixth rule revolves around the importance of the desired end and less is the importance of such an end more one can debate about the ethical dimensions of means. Seventh, is related to the possibility of success and failure as Alinsky remarks the judgement of history leans heavily on the outcome of success or failure. It spells the difference between the traitor and the patriotic hero. There can be no such thing as a successful traitor or if succeeds, he becomes the founding father. The eighth rule of the ethics of means and ends depends on the situation of timing of imminent defeat or imminent victory. Morality or immorality depends on circumstances as "from the beginning of time killing has always been regarded as justifiable if committed in self-defence". The ninth rule is effective means are normally considered unethical by the opponents. The tenth rule depends on the means at one's disposal and one's capacity to present it in as much moralistic terms as possible. For an activist, the most important consideration is the means that are available for reaching a particular goal. The question is not what weapon to use, but what is the most appropriate means available for action?